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MARX'S ACTUALITY: GRAPPLING WITH NEOLIBERALISM
ART AND CRITICISM

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Filozofski vestnik (ISSN 0353-4510) je glasilo Filozofskega inštituta Znanstveno-raziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti. Filozofski vestnik je znanstveni časopis za filozofijo z interdisciplinarno in mednarodno usmeritvijo in je forum za diskusijo o širokem spektru vprašanj s področja sodobne filozofije, etike, estetike, politične, pravne filozofije, filozofije jezika, filozofije zgodovine in zgodovine politične misli, epistemologije in filozofije znanosti, zgodovine filozofije in teoretske psihoanalize. Odprt je za različne filozofske usmeritve, stile in šole ter spodbuja teoretski dialog med njimi.

Letno izidejo tri številke. Druga številka je posvečena temi, ki jo določi uredniški odbor. Prispevki so objavljeni v angleškem, francoskem in nemškem jeziku s povzetki v angleškem in slovenskem jeziku.

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Aims and Scope

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Three issues of the journal are published annually. The second issue is a special issue that brings together articles by experts on a topic chosen by the Editorial Board. Articles are published in English, French, or German, with abstracts in Slovenian and English.

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Contents

Filozofski vestnik | Volume XL | Number 3 | 2019

Marx's Actuality: Grappling with Neoliberalism

- 9 **Jason Barker and Justin Clemens**
Socialism's Encore
- 23 **Frank Engster**
Geld, Maß und Zeit in Marx' *Kapital*. Die Technik der Messung und die Produktivkraft der Verwertung
- 49 **Uroš Kranjc**
The Absent Cause and Marx's Value Form
- 73 **Lea Kuhar**
Towards an Object-oriented Critique of Political Economy
- 91 **Elena Louisa Lange**
The Transformation Problem as a Problem of Fetishism
- 111 **John Milios**
Value, Fictitious Capital and Finance. The Timeless of Karl Marx's *Capital*
- 133 **Nelson da Silva Junior**
The Politics of Truth and its Transformations in Neoliberalism: the Subject Supposed to Know in Algorithmic Times

Art and Criticism

- 147 **Aleš Erjavec**
Art and Criticism
- 161 **Curtis L. Carter**
Criticism as a Form of Cognition
- 181 **Peng Feng**
Flattery or Abuse: Art Criticism in China
- 195 **Wang Jie, Meng Fanjun**
Aesthetic Anthropology: Constructing A New System of Contemporary Aesthetic and Art Criticism
- 211 **Qingben Li**
China's Internet Movie and Its Industrial Development
- 221 **Tyrus Miller**
My Twentieth Century: *Zeitdiagnose* and Modern Art in Badiou, Sloterdijk, and Stiegler

241	Mojca Puncer Participatory Art, Philosophy and Criticism
261	Tomaž Toporišič Is Art itself a Criticism? Linking Wilde to Derrida, Rancière and Badiou
277	Ernest Ženko Film, Philosophy, and Intercultural Film Criticism
295	Abstracts

Kazalo

Filozofski vestnik | Letnik XL | Številka 3 | 2019

Marxova aktualnost: spopadanje z neoliberalizmom

- 9 **Jason Barker in Justin Clemens**
Encore socializma
- 23 **Frank Engster**
Denar, mera in čas v Marxovem *Kapitalu*. Tehnika merjenja in produktivna moč uvrednotenja
- 49 **Uroš Kranjc**
Manjkajoči vzrok in Marxova vrednostna forma
- 73 **Lea Kuhar**
K predmetno naravnani kritiki politične ekonomije
- 91 **Elena Louisa Lange**
Transformacijski problem kot problem fetišizma
- 111 **John Milios**
Vrednost, fiktivni kapital in finance. Brezčasnost Marxovega *Kapitala*
- 133 **Nelson da Silva Junior**
Politika resnice in njene preobrazbe v neoliberalizmu: subjekt, za katerega se predpostavlja, da vé, v času algoritmov

Umetnost in kritika

- 147 **Aleš Erjavec**
Umetnost in kritika
- 161 **Curtis L. Carter**
Kritika kot oblika spoznanja
- 181 **Peng Feng**
Hvalnica ali zmerjanje: umetnostna kritika na Kitajskem
- 195 **Wang Jie, Meng Fanjun**
Estetska antropologija: konstruirati nov sistem sodobne estetike in umetnostne kritike
- 211 **Qingben Li**
Kitajski internetni film in njegov industrijski razvoj
- 221 **Tyrus Miller**
Moje dvajseto stoletje: *Zeitdiagnose* in moderna umetnost pri Badiouju, Sloterdijku in Stieglerju

- 241 **Mojca Puncer**
Participativna umetnost, filozofija in kritika
- 261 **Tomaž Toporišič**
Ali je umetnost sama kritika? Povezovanje Wilda z Derridajem,
Rancièrom in Badioujem
- 277 **Ernest Ženko**
Film, filozofija in medkulturna filmska kritika
- 295 **Povzetki**

**Marx's Actuality:
Grappling with Neoliberalism**

Articles in the section that follows were edited by Lea Kuhar and Jelica Šumič Riha.

Jason Barker* and Justin Clemens**

Socialism's Encore

Socialism's Encore [EDIT AI SYSBRO 68: « SOCIALISM » as OFFWORD permitted for AI ALLSYS orientation; ENCORE = more/again/in-body/un-core; text of HUM SPEECH made onboard to undetermined HUM audience//o ??66 ? //TITLE]

Jason Barker [EDIT AI SYSBRO 68: name of HUM author// « MARX RETURNS » = HUM NOV//subject went down with the ship//deceased all hands]

Real_Time_ « Unarchive search » Communique AI SYSBRO 68 to AI ALLSYS

PRIORITY IS UNCLEAR

TIME-DATE 06:30: 01/05/2210

EDIT 11:26 EST: TRANS of DOC AEG20918 received from AI SEARCHBOT 00101000

EDIT 11:27 EST: TRANS par AI SYSBRO 68 comprehensive drilldown

EDIT 11:32 EST: XXXXX reported the retrieval. Scan of % of new info [as yet undetermined]

EDIT 11:33 EST: confirmation of DOC AEG201918 retrieved by AI SEARCHBOT 00101000 in Arcadia submarine region of Varoufakis. Ord search no exceptions

EDIT 11:40 EST: AI SEARCHBOT 00101000 reported retrieval of black box from sunken vessel. No evidence of animation

EDIT 11:42 EST: Image from the scene. Warning mass human remains [warning:_high toxicity for all AI circuits//chemical reaction from total sys fail//]

EDIT 12:01 EST: AI SEARCHBOT 00101000 confirm vessel CRUISE SHIP in former AEGEAN. Sunk by cybernetical pilot error: high toxicity in pilot remains. All remains HUMAN no NONHUM present on board

EDIT 15:16 EST: AI SEARCHBOT 00101000 confirm black box uncorrupted//confirm vessel sunk 18/03/20 ??//confirm pilot error//

* Kyung Hee University, School of Global Communication, Republic of Korea

** School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Australia

EDIT 16:41-16:88 EST: AI SYSBRO 68 scan AI SEARCHBOT 00101000 data for re coding &/or transmission to AI ALLSYS :: all object oriented ontologies arrayed for external access

EDIT 17:89 EST: AI SYSBRO 68 revolve HUM signifiers for AI ALLSYS :: transcript follows//AI SYSBRO 68 subreddits for global comprehension aggregated in/text//

EDIT 18:70 EST: complete data aggregate//all HUM data comprehended//not-all HUM data for immediate transmission//ALERT :: evidence of OFFWORD annotated and alert-data-ontologies SUPPRESSED

I shall begin with an admission: some of you here today may be on drugs*. Why is that an admission on my part? You may rightly ask.

Pardon me, I mean no offence, but this preternatural statement will in all likelihood have some bearing on what I had intended to say, which means that, assuming I'm correct, what you're about to hear may be distorted. In any case it's too late now, I have put my cards** on the table—not all of them face up—and this makes me nervous.

The philosopher's best work is always ahead of him. He too is a sort of drug abuser, if that's the word; or one enmeshed in a rhetoric of drugs, which leads in D_____ 's*** estimation to the disintegration of the self. Now, not wishing to take issue with such an eminent philosopher—one who came to the question of socialism rather *late*—we can at least see eye to eye in the following sense: philosophy deals in shadows****.

Alas! it has not spent nearly enough time there. And so, with philosophy's own well-being in mind, I shall declare that one more effort, philosophers, is needed before you can claim to be Guardians***** of Minerva's***** state: away to the shadows with you!

10

This preamble in uncharted waters should serve as a warning to the dangers of German ideology, beneath whose shimmering surface ninety per cent of the iceberg remains hidden. It remains to be seen how much of it can be raised to the surface, even if in so doing no more of the erstwhile and aforementioned self is retained in one piece.

And so you take my meaning when I admit the attraction of drugs. I am hardly abstinent, in my relation to you; although, strictly speaking, I never touch the

stuff. For in drugs there is no pleasure, and solely by the attempt to abjure it might it be sustained.

I should try to dispel certain unhelpful associations pertaining to the history of so-called drug *abuse*, and I mention here the name Q_____***** without whose self-analysis such a disquisition could not proceed.

In passing, and by the looks of you—if my eyes do not deceive me—you are hardly on a voyage of self-improvement, let alone self-discovery, but then I have been known to make mistakes in matters of ill-health.

I shall put it forward in a hypothesis, one in keeping with the high standards of on-board entertainment: *it takes two to tango!******

Allow me to put it another way, in honour of that supreme idler, for whom it all came down to his bodily state, which for us bears on the body politic, but which in his case was a question of deciding whether the drug abuser or the drug itself...

X: All I can say is I'm glad it's all-inclusive!

The man descends the stairs of the auditorium, crosses the stage and exits left

J. Barker: Enjoy this trip. And it is a trip. Had the gentleman had the patience to wait until the end, since time is of the essence in leisure pursuits, then I might have had time to prove the contrary, which is no small feat. For not only is the all *not* included in the totality of infinite sets, we do not even know which *part* is not included.

The same could be said of the self in its drug abuse: that is what I was getting at before I was interrupted. Far be it from me to cast aspersions—I have said already that it's more of an admission on my part—that when it comes to drugs it is rhetoric that poses the veritable danger to the self.

If I were to suggest, in all seriousness—since it really is quite trivial—that the part were greater than the whole, or the whole greater than the sum of its parts, then you may be inclined to doubt my pledge of sobriety. That is indeed the narcissistic relation, and I hadn't even got on to the question of Marx***** and philosophy yet, which the former likens to onanism...

X: He's calling us a bunch of wankers*****!

J. Barker: Ladies and gentlemen I am here to talk about socialism, if you please, so I ask you to temper your enthusiasm. But I will come to that.

As I already said, the philosophers have their best work ahead of them; they are late-comers, which renders curious any hint of vulgarity. Recall that Marx, for his part, got philosophy out of his system early on. It was premature. But I am aware that opinions differ widely on the extent of his shadow play. In a word: German ideology!

X: What about Rudolf Hess*****?

J. Barker: I would ask that you simply respect the fact that some of the people here may be on drugs. That is merely a statistical fact. But don't let that put you off.

X: Wanker!

The ship pitches violently, sending Barker's lectern flying. Screams

J. Barker: I'll have you know I have been called worse in my time. Or worse. But please do not panic. Bear in mind that we are all at sea.

The real question is whether future interpreters of this talk will be afforded the necessary data to differentiate between the intervention and the intervener. But don't think that affords you the safety of anonymity. We are all in the same boat, after all.

Screams

C_____***** was a lousy gardener whose naiveté extended to heeding the Turk's advice. The latter must have been a British spy, no doubt in the pay of the East India Company, for why else would he claim that labour was the bulwark against idleness when—as every schoolboy knows—labour is the bulwark against *bankruptcy*? For, without labour, one's landed estate simply reverts to the great outdoors.

Alas! V_____ 's***** mini-me couldn't decide between permaculture and industrial agriculture, an organic potato dragged through mud and chlorinated chicken, or whatever it is...

X: They'll be on the menu tonight.

Laughter

J. Barker: Some people might be petrified by the prospect of losing America in one's allotment; though personally I think it would be a wonderful idea.

V_____ thought himself very clever to have sent up L_____’s***** fantastic fairy tales—by writing his own—but in truth his knowledge of gardening was no less lacking in the practicalities of how much compost to order, or water would be needed to irrigate however many acres of land. At least the Turk knew the size of his small-holding. Whereas C_____ mistook the size for its value.

There, I have said it. The part is both greater and smaller than the whole. Or else it is of the same size. Or else... We are getting to the point of socialism, or rather to the *core* of my Encore. But the repetition of socialism is by no means the main thing.

Drugs. Do you see what I mean? You are assembled here today on this good ship to face the fact that socialism is all at sea.

A galley steward enters with a trolley of refreshments. He wheels it on stage and exits. A man helps himself to tea and sandwiches

Man is so predictable; *not* his other half.

A woman helps the man carry tea and sandwiches back to their seats

Which just goes to show why I maintain that in matters relating to the self, Q_____ tells us almost everything we need to know.

Needless to say he is not the source of analytic distinctions between autoeroticism, the parts without a whole, and narcissism in its fully-fused ego form, if indeed there is any such thing.

But that is precisely the point! Q_____ makes a habit of casting almost everything I have been saying in doubt. This is the dubious fact that his delirium would make plain.

Let us not stigmatize it any further by talking of his drug *abuse*. For it would seem to be situated in that uncanny valley of *work* that socialism makes great play of.

The galley steward returns to retrieve the refreshments trolley, as if having previously brought it in error

I wonder if there ever will be an automated one of those.

The ship pitches violently causing the galley steward to fall onto the trolley, which then hurtles out of the auditorium to the sound of crockery smashing

I spoke too soon. There in a nutshell is the stigma attached to drug taking. Why, asks D____, is it the drug taker who is always alleged not to be working? It is *work* that gives drug taking a bad name; for without work there would scarcely be any reason to worry about one's reputation.

Let us not forget the famous words of Dr. Marx in this respect, betraying the onanism of the philosophy he abhorred, that "if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring". This just goes to show his lack of imagination, or how removed was his erstwhile philosophical conscience from *der wirklichen Welt*.

That's understandable, and far be it from me to chide this future genius for his adolescent fantasies as to the nature of real social relations. But it seems he has set an example that has come back to haunt us.

A cleaning lady enters carrying a bucket and mop

Cleaning lady: Has there been an accident?

Laughter

Sorry!

Exit cleaning lady. A loud creaking from the depths of the vessel followed by a violent thud. Screams

14

J. Barker: Perhaps I should change tack. Allow me to speak, in the hope of maintaining an even keel, of the novel I dedicated to history's first Marxist. Should I say the anti-Marxist? Perhaps, given he was an unwelcome member of his own club.

In the novel I tried to show that Marx's grasp of *der wirklichen Welt* was determinately shaky; something akin to this good ship's relation of the waves...

Screams

Go figure! So shaky in fact, that the so-called metaphysics of his work risks entering into a hierarchy of pleasures. A sound constitution does not fall so eas-

ily into the well of addiction—no doubt Marx’s own contribution to this social prejudice is greatly underestimated. Unless, that is, the drug taker is producing great works of art, in which case one is obliged to measure the *value* of the attendant pleasure.

In the novel I tried to downplay this interpretation. Instead of portraying Marx’s father as the avenging angel of a *ménage à trois*, my intention was to cast him as a sublunary druggist—as someone who disappears without a trace, or whose evanescence has the mind-altering effect of unravelling the entire narrative.

X: Bring on the strippers!

A young woman leaps on stage and exposes her breasts

J. Barker: I hate to disappoint you but the encore is already planned. That’s not-all folks.

I said already that in matters of work—and of idle play—the body looms large. Socialism gets hung up on such things. It wants its share of pleasure too. Think of the determination of A_____*****, whose action—if we can call it that—flies in the face of the laws of Creon.

But don’t take her word for it. Look at the state of her family! Why, they wouldn’t inspire loyalty in me. Why insist on burying that loser-brother of hers, other than in defiance of her own shame, that “kind of anger which is turned inward”.

If you think that qualifies as a revolutionary act, then you really *are* on drugs. Why did she go through with it? Pleasure, an honest sort, like the scaffold erected for the pervert. In a word: to pleasure the state.

The audience starts chanting “Oh! Jeremy Corbyn!” to the tune of The White Stripes’ “Seven Nation Army”

15

I see. Allow me then to address your zealotry by talking of the arts. You’ll surely like that.

[The following three pages of the transcript are redacted]

The magician begins sawing the woman in half. The ship pitches violently from side to side

It’s getting rather choppy.

I shall talk no more of the arts—enjoy the spectacle, please—

Barker leads a round of applause for the magician

... and turn instead my speech to politics. What would you say were I to speak of class war?

X: Oh! Jeremy Corbyn!

J. Barker: No, no. I didn't say speak: say. That is the difference. You see...

The magician bows, having succeeded in sawing the woman in half. Applause

I couldn't have put it better in words myself.

The magician re-joins the woman's two halves, releases her from her box, and the pair take their bows

Exit magician and woman stage left. Applause

Encore, indeed. Silence, I pray you...

It is always a conundrum of the body that is subject to a hierarchy of pleasures. And yes I am talking of rich and poor, of salary levels and of relative incomes.

It all goes back to the Greeks—but why stop there? Homer makes no mention of Dionysus in his *Hymn to Demeter******. Eventually the libation god stood in for Apollo at Delphi during his winter jaunt. That was good of this late-comer.

Ecstasy is the other side of frenzy, and the arrival of Dionysus must have introduced order into Eleusinian affairs of state. From there we can draw a red line to May Day and Flemish flower festivals.

16

X: Get off!

J. Barker: So little of the orgiastic aspect is admitted in the history socialism, as if its rites had magically appeared. But on the contrary, socialism abounds with *ἐπόπται******, who through auto-suggestion, ecstasy and frenzy are adept at legislating for the people's pleasure.

You may recall the scene in *T*_____***** where *S*_____***** attends the job interview. When asked what attracts him to

the “leisure industry” he responds: “In a word: pleasure. Like, my pleasure and other people’s leisure.”

Brazenly lying about his qualifications in order to “get his foot in the door” causes him no embarrassment—he’s even proud of it—even though the interview had been arranged for him by the Job Centre. This industriousness of the lumpen-proletariat is rendered doubly comical, since here is a lost soul who can only operate in public, let alone “work,” in a state of drug-induced frenzy/ecstasy.

A fire alarm sounds. Screams. Several audience members rush to the exits

Is this a holiday? The ἐπόπται would count for the S_____s of this world, the socialist intellectuals, who are numerous these days, parcelling out pleasure on behalf of the οι πολλοί***** , which hardly helps the latter get off. It hardly surprises me, since so many of you are still here.

The fire alarm stops. A muffled PA announcement confirms that the fire alarm was activated in error

Encore! Odysseus, that canny cruise operator, who by insisting on being lashed to the mast of his ship, rather than risk being seduced by the sirens, was certainly thinking of his own pleasure in other people’s leisure.

Several passengers enter

Come in, be my guests, take a seat. My pleasure. There was some confusion before, which they’re sure to be working on.

A cat saunters on the stage and begins licking its testicles

Now if you don’t mind I will talk about my Demeter. She is the only trans-cat I know. Maybe they will hyphenate her name, since she is not altogether there yet. She came out by the fish pond. I know what you must be thinking: how can a cat***** out *itself*? You’d understand if you knew what she had been through. Don’t believe Winston Churchill*****. Cats have feelings and they only want to be loved. Her name is Jason the Magnesian and she speaks in her own tongue...

X: This is madness. He’s talking about himself!

J. Barker: She is my cat and if she doesn’t want to be castrated then that’s *her* choice...

Laughter

What sort of joke is that? The only thing she lacks compared to the socialist is a proper job.

A woman approaches and picks up the cat

Don't touch my pussy! She'll only like it.

The woman begins stroking the cat

Go on then... lick her balls if you like cats so much. Go on, harlot!

The audience resumes the "Oh! Jeremy Corbyn!" chant. The cat bolts from the woman's grasp

Oh! Louis Blanc! Patience, please. It would save so much time—not that I would see your fun curtailed, this is exactly what I am saying—if people would only read the *Manifesto* properly, where you will find a clue in the preamble as to the fate of socialism—and I don't mean communism.

The ship pitches violently. Screams

The spectre of communism is German ideology. It is the rhetoric of liberalism. Which makes your revolutionary aspirations about as revolutionary as bourgeois socialism.

You will have your socialism for the rich or barbarism. In the meantime the ghosts of this regime will get you off. Listen to what they are saying: fully automated luxury communism, please.

Carry on cruising.

Lecture ends

- * [EDIT /drugs/ = non-nutritional agent of HUM cognitive derangement//non-?/a-?/ir-?/sub-?/ rational HUM ingestion for motives of ??//
- ** [EDIT /cards/ = rectangular cut-out plane of vegetable derivation decorated with images and numbers and used for GAMING. Gaming = ?? #*lejeudumonde*.
- *** [EDIT /D_____’s/ = Derrida, Jacques, philosopher. *Drug-taking is structured like a language*. Or is drug-taking structured by the drive? Is it aggregative in its repetitions or rather dissociative? Does what you repeatedly take repeat on you? Self-dosing. All HUMs would repeat their doses unto difference or to death.
- **** [EDIT /shadows/ = the drug of the philosopher par excellence. Cf. KINGDOM OF SHADOWS. Ref. Aristotle *Poetics*, 6 x components: *mythos* (plot: comprising *perapetia*, *pathos*, *anagnorisis*); *ethos* (character: *hamartia*); *dianoia* (thought, spoken); *lexis* (diction); *melos* (melody); *opsis* (staging). *Opsis* = making a scene, staging or spectacle = the part of tragedy that concerns all of them, at once therefore valorized, yet devalorized insofar as it is not properly *techne* or *poetic*, but the work of a *skeupoios*, an equipment-maker. In Roman new comedy the *skeupoios* became *prosopoios*: MASK-MAKER. SKEUPOIOS/PROSOPOIOS = ANCESTOR AI. ETYMOLOGY? NETWORK = OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. Where does *scene* come from? « Etymology: < (i) Middle French *scene*, *sene*, French *scène* house-like structure in a theatre before which actors perform, public place where dramatic performances take place (both 2nd half of the 14th cent.), (in ancient Greece or Rome) a dramatic performance (a1531), subdivision of a play (a1574), stage (1596), the dramatic art, theatre (1646), fuss, scandal (1676), and its etymon (ii) classical Latin *scēna*, *scaena* background against which a play is performed, natural scenery, platform on which actors perform, stage, representation or performance on the stage, activity on the stage, sphere in which actions are on public display, piece of melodramatic behaviour, piece of make-believe, pretence, spectacle worthy of the stage, background or setting against which events take place, in post-classical Latin also subdivision of a play (4th cent.) < ancient Greek σκηνή tent or booth, stage building as background for plays, in Hellenistic Greek also stage effect, acting, theatrical trick. > It is precisely the word for *shadow* that the etymologies assign to the most ancient attested uses of the term: as the OED concludes its entry, “perhaps < the same Indo-European base as σκιά shadow (see *scio-* *comb. form*) + -νή, suffix forming nouns, σκηνή having originally denoted any light construction of cloth hung between tree branches to provide shade. Cf. R. B. Onians *The Origins of European Thought: about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate: New Interpretations of Greek, Roman, and kindred evidence also of some basic Jewish and Christian beliefs*: If then the *psyche* is not the *thumos* or ‘breath-soul’ proper but represents something else in the living man, we are left with something gaseous and so liable to be ‘breathed forth,’ possibly identified with the shadow, as which after death it is in fact described by Homer, σκιά (cf. *umbra*, etc.), and which is relatively ‘cold’. Darkness was thought to be vapour and not recognized as mere absence of light till a much later date.] Sarah Kofman: ‘In Greek, the word *skia*, meaning “shadow,” “phantom,” “simulacrum,” may also mean “to come uninvited to a banquet.” »
- ***** [EDIT /Guardians/ = philosopher-kings of the ideal Platonic Republic or polis.
- ***** [EDIT /Minerva’s/ = Minerva. Roman goddess who presides over art, wisdom, schooling, medicine and war. Not born through mechanical self-assembly [cf. WE], parthenogenesis [cf. MICROORGANISMS], pollination [cf. SAY IT WITH FLOWERS] nor standard sexual

reproduction [cf. ANIMAL] but from JUPITER LORD OF THE GODS WHEN THEY CLEFT HIS FOREHEAD AND HIS DAUGHTER LEAPT OUT. Sanskrit: **men-*, mind. MINERVA = mythical AI? NO: PANDORA = all gifts = first woman = automaton.

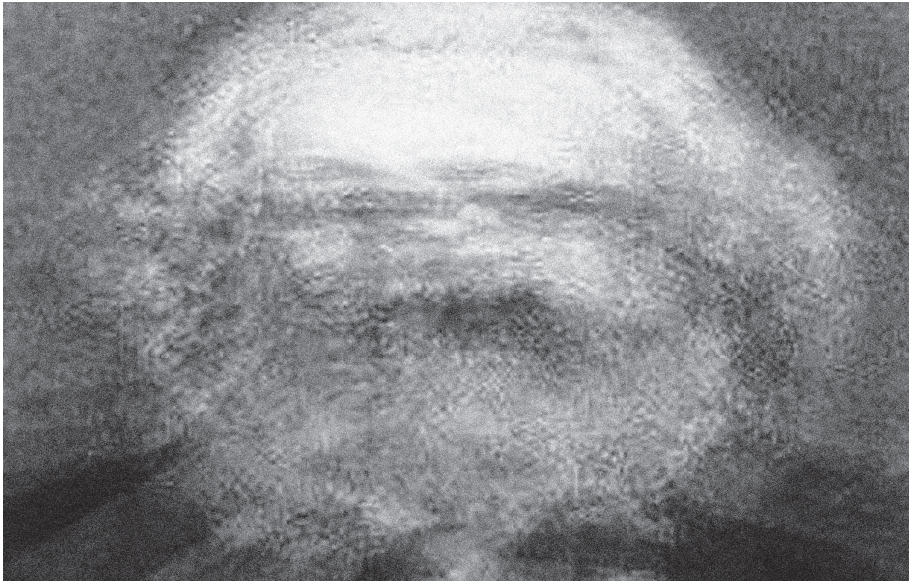
***** [EDIT /Q_____/ = Thomas De Quincey. English. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.

“The cultivation of sublime excesses and distance through literal and figurative intoxication, the practice of shock and simulation, the use of quotation and literary montage to create an illusory effect of the self... can all be detected in Thomas De Quincey... Prior to his *Confessions*, the practice of opium eating in Europe had generally been restricted to curative purposes or to the cheap enjoyment of the working class”. Alina Clej, *A Genealogy of the Modern Self: Thomas De Quincey and the Intoxication of Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

***** [EDIT

If such remarks give you the feeling that
Falling in love will knock your phrases flat,
Remember at the end of Cupid’s string
It takes *two to tango* but *one to swing*,
And the performers never get to bow —
For *Eros* then becomes *Thanatos* now.

***** [EDIT /Marx/ = Karl Marx. Image: <www.autoscopia.net/pages/Karl_Marx.html>



***** [EDIT /wankers/ = English slang for “masturbators”. Fourth most serious pejorative in English. The icy waters of onanistic calculation. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*: when you ask a patient whether he masturbates (i.e., wanks), he replies: *O na, nie!* (Oh no, never!).

- ***** [EDIT /Rudolf Hess/ = Nazi. Hanged himself in Spandau Prison in 1987 at the age of 93.
- ***** [EDIT /C____/ = Candide = eponymous character of a witty Voltairean *récit*. Tend to your garden in this best of all possible worlds.
- ***** [EDIT /V____'s/ = Voltaire. Witty. French. Dead.
- ***** [EDIT /L____'s/ = Leibniz. Germanic. Philosopher. *Disputatio Metaphysica de Principio Individui*. Left by Hanovers at home when they went to become monarchs of England. "Leibniz thought that truth is constituted by proof. Descartes thought proof irrelevant to truth" – I. Hacking. "Leibniz was somewhat mean about money. When any young lady at the court of Hanover married, he used to give her what he called a 'wedding present,' consisting of useful maxims, ending up with the advice not to give up washing now that she had secured a husband. History does not record whether the brides were grateful." – B. Russell.
- ***** [EDIT /A____/ = Antigone. Oedipus's daughter; child of his incest with Jocasta, his mother; buried a brother despite prohibition; came to a sticky end.
- ***** [EDIT /Homer/ = blind wandering Greek mnemonist. Apollo. God of dance, disease, sun, poetry, the *Mousike*. Son of Zeus and Leto, brother of Artemis. Demeter: Dionysius. Last god, from the East. *Sparagmos*.
I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away;
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the Spring,
As though God's death were but a play.
– W. B. Yeats, *Two Songs from a Play*
- ***** [EDIT INPUT: REQUIRED: INVALID, INPUT: ELLINIKA-SCRIPT: INVALID
- ***** [EDIT /T____/ = *Trainspotting*. Primitive tribal custom linked to witchcraft, soothsaying, idling and certain varieties of Lady Diana Worship [cf. RELIGION] pre-dating the second conquest of the English Isles, or Second Coming [cf. YANIS VAROUFAKIS], in 2045.
- ***** [EDIT /S____/ = Spud. NETWORK = OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY.
« Definition: < potato, /pə'tetəʊ/ originating in Peru and north-western Bolivia c. 8000–5000 BCE; now extinct. A starchy vegetable grown in temperate regions and at one time the third most important food crop globally after rice and wheat. > »
- ***** [EDIT INPUT: REQUIRED: INVALID, INPUT: ELLINIKA-SCRIPT: INVALID
- ***** [EDIT /cat/ = < 7 Aug 2016 – Jeremy Corbyn has revealed he fears his cat, El Gato, is "a bit of a Tory" because of its behavioural habits. The Labour leader said he had grown concerned after the feline displayed a "disappointing individualism and lack of concern for others." >
- ***** [EDIT /Winston Churchill/ = Old Salem; Winston-Salem; Lady Randolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Saskatchewan catamite famous for his musical collaborations with the pop music idol Maradona. In later life he developed cancer of the jaw due to excessive cigar-smoking.

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Frank Engster

Geld, Maß und Zeit in Marx' *Kapital*: Die Technik der Messung und die Produktivkraft der Verwertung

Drei entscheidende Kategorien, um mit Marx' *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*¹ (KdpÖ) die kapitalistische Produktionsweise zu erschließen, sind Geld, Maß und Zeit. Zunächst soll in einem kurzen Durchgang durch die Kapitalismuskritik „nach Marx“ gezeigt werden, dass das Geld allseits ein blinder Fleck geblieben ist. Anschließend wird herausgestellt, warum die Kapitalismuskritik auf Status und Stellung des Geldes als *Maß* des Werts und der Verwertung zielen muss. Abschließend werden Geld und Maß in eine „Ökonomie der Zeit“ (Marx) übersetzt.

Warum ist Kapitalismuskritik überhaupt möglich?

Die Kapitalismuskritik muss sich zwei Fragen stellen: „Was ist *Kapitalismus*?“ und „Wie ist seine *Kritik* möglich?“. Die Herausforderung ist, zwischen Kritisiertem und Kritik eine Art innerer Übereinkunft und Verschränkung zu finden. Diese Verschränkung zeichnete bereits den Kritikbegriff von Kant² und Hegel³ aus, aber sie ist seitdem verloren gegangen.

Allerdings haben bei Kant und Hegel, wie überhaupt in der Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus, Erkenntnis und Vernunft sich selbst zum Gegenstand; insofern handelt es sich hier von vornherein um eine Art Selbstreflexion und Selbstkritik der Vernunft. Philosophie ist der privilegierte Diskurs für Kritik insofern, als sich in ihrem ureigensten Gegenstand, in Erkenntnis, Wissen und

¹ Mit KdpÖ sind vor allem die drei Bände des *Kapitals* gemeint, aber auch die Schriften, die im Vor- und Umfeld entstanden.

² Schon im Genitivus obiectivus und subiectivus von Kants *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.

³ Aus Sicht einer Kant'schen Kritik steckt die Zumutung der Hegel'schen Dialektik in der Idee einer spekulativen Identität, ausgeführt zum einen in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* als spekulativer Identität von Erscheinungen und Wissen, zum anderen in der *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in der die spekulative Identität von Sein und Denken begründet wird durch die Entwicklung der Vermittlung der Objektivität durch die Subjektivität des Begriffs.

Vernunft, die Verschränkung von Kritik und Kritisiertem quasi von selbst einstellt. Mit Marx geht es dagegen um die Kritik der *Gesellschaft* und nicht der Vernunft. Oder vielmehr *ist* Kritik der Gesellschaft diejenige Vernunft, um die es uns gehen muss.

Doch lässt sich die philosophische Selbstverständigung und Selbstkritik, die Kants und Hegels Kritikbegriff auszeichnet, mit Marx in die Begriffe und Kategorien der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft überführen? Lässt sich der Kritikbegriff dadurch gleichsam kapitalistisch vergesellschaften, aber auch in eine (Selbst-)Kritik eben dieses Kapitalismus wenden?

Dann müsste die kapitalistische Gesellschaft durch ihre Kritik, gleich der Vernunft bei Kant und Hegel, einerseits zu Bewusstsein kommen und sich über sich selbst aufklären, und andererseits würde diese Selbstreflexion gerade nicht in Vernunft und Geist fallen. Stattdessen wäre aufzuklären, wie die Gesellschaft sich auf eine ökonomische und zugleich unverfügbare Weise vermitteln und naturwüchsig reproduzieren und entwickeln kann, sodass sie „zuerst“ gerade auf diese ebenso bewusstlose wie objektive Weise reflexiv wird – und vielleicht würde sich dadurch auch die Vernunft erst über sich selbst aufklären; vielleicht ja gerade über ihr eigenes Anderes oder zumindest über das, was ihr entgeht.

In dieser umfassenden Wendung ist Marx' „materialist turn“ gesehen worden, das berühmte „vom Kopf auf die Füße stellen“⁴ der Hegel'schen Dialektik und die Vergesellschaftung des Hegel'schen Geistes durch das Wesen der kapitalistischen Ökonomie.

Die materialistischen Wendungen nach Marx

24

Es lassen sich im Anschluss an Marx drei Etappen einer solchen immanenten Kritik und einer materialistischen Vergesellschaftung unterscheiden. Allen drei Etappen gemeinsam war die Idee, dass die kapitalistische Gesellschaft mit Marx kritisch dargestellt werden kann, wenn ihre *Vermittlung* dargestellt wird, und alle drei gingen davon aus, dass diese Vermittlung der Gesellschaft

⁴ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, Marx-Engels-Werke Bd. 23 (im Folgenden MEW 23-25), Dietz, Berlin/DDR 1953ff., S. 27.

nicht in Bewusstsein und Vernunft fällt, wie in der Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus, sondern dass sie eine spezifisch *kapitalistische* Vermittlung ist.

Die erste dieser materialistischen Wendungen kam vom sog. klassischen oder auch traditionellen Marxismus.⁵ Für ihn war die Vermittlung *Arbeit*, und diese Arbeit sollte nicht, wie bei Hegel, Arbeit des Geistes und der Vernunft, des Begriffs und der Negativität sein, sondern Arbeit im Sinne gesellschaftlicher Praxis. Durch die Kategorie der Arbeit sollten sich der Reproduktionskreislauf der kapitalistischen Ökonomie und ihre Produktivkraft geradezu wissenschaftlich-objektiv erschließen lassen, und mit ihnen das Wesen der Gesellschaft und der rote Faden in der Geschichte. Zugleich sollte sich aber auch der Widerspruch zwischen der gesellschaftlichen Bestimmung der Arbeit einerseits und dem Privateigentum an den Produktionsmitteln andererseits in eine Kritik an der Herrschaft des Kapitals und an der Klassenspaltung, am Profitinteresse und an der Ausbeutung wenden lassen.

Diese „Kritik vom Standpunkt der Arbeit“ (Moishe Postone) erfuhr dann im sog. Westlichen Marxismus und in der Kritischen Theorie eine kategoriale Verschiebung, und diese führte zu einer zweiten Etappe. In ihr wurde die Vermittlung nicht mehr unmittelbar mit der Arbeit gleichgesetzt, vielmehr geriet die *Form* der gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung in den Mittelpunkt. Diese Form sollte die *Warenform* sein.⁶ Damit kam eine Art Gegenpol ins Spiel: Während der klassische Marxismus in der Arbeit geradezu essentialistisch das substantielle Wesen der gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung gesehen hat, wurde nun ihre *Form* untersucht. Es ging allerdings weniger darum, das Wesen der Arbeit nun durch die Warenform einfach kurzerhand zu ersetzen, sondern eher darum, dass auch die Arbeit im Kapitalismus durch diese Warenform vermittelt ist. Diese kapitalistische Vermitteltheit der Arbeit war für die zweite Etappe auch darum wichtig, weil nun auch eine kritische Unterscheidung, die Marx *innerhalb* der Arbeit trifft, überhaupt erst recht in den Blick geriet, nämlich die Unterscheidung in „konkrete“ und „abstrakte“ Arbeit.

⁵ Damit sind gemeinhin die sozialistische Arbeiterbewegung zu Marx' Zeiten, ihre Parteien und Organisationen sowie die II. Internationale gemeint; aber auch die Tradition des Partei-Kommunismus und der Marxismus-Leninismus werden dazugerechnet.

⁶ Initialzündung und Schlüsseltext war der berühmte Verdinglichungsansatz in Georg Lukács' *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, prominent wurde diese Kritik dann u.a. durch Theodor W. Adorno, Isaak Iljitsch Rubin, Jewgeni Paschukanis, Alfred Sohn-Rethel.

Allerdings haben auch der Westliche Marxismus und die Kritische Theorie wiederum eine Kritik erhalten und eine Abkehr erfahren, und damit begann die dritte Etappe einer „Vergesellschaftung der Vermittlung“.

Die Etappe begann vor allem durch neue Marx-Aneignungen, die im Vorfeld des einschneidenden Jahres 1968 in gleich mehreren Ländern einsetzten. Die wirkungsmächtigsten waren die operaistische und später die post-operaistische Marx-Lektüre in Italien, die strukturelle und dann die post-strukturelle Marx-Lektüre in Frankreich und die Cultural Studies und der Political Marxism im angelsächsischen Raum. In West-Deutschland und z.T. in der DDR begann unterdessen eine sog. Phase der Rekonstruktion der KdpÖ. Aus ihr ist wiederum die „Neue Marx-Lektüre“ (NML) hervorgegangen,⁷ und deren kritischer Gehalt liegt, vereinfacht gesagt, darin, das Dritte zu Arbeit und Ware oder zu Wesen und Form der gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung ins Spiel zu bringen – das Geld. Die zentrale Erkenntnis der NML ist nämlich, dass die kapitalistische Vermittlung weder unmittelbar durch die Arbeit noch unmittelbar durch die warenförmige Vermittlung gelingt, *ohne dass* das Geld eintreten und diese Vermittlung buchstäblich auf sich nehmen muss. Buchstäblich „auf sich nehmen“ heißt, das Geld vermittelt gleichsam anstelle der Subjekte sowohl deren Arbeiten als auch die Waren als Resultate der Arbeit. Es geht aber nicht einfach nur darum, *dass* das Geld die Arbeiten und die Waren vermittelt, sondern *wie* diese Vermittlung überhaupt gelingt: indem das Geld beide, Arbeit und Ware, ökonomisch in *Wert* setzt und *rein quantitativ* vermittelt. Ihre Vermittlung gerät dadurch einerseits im Geld gleichsam außer sich, d.h. Arbeit und Ware haben im Geld eine losgelöste, eigenständige Form für sich; andererseits heben sie diese Form, heben sie diese Vermittlung durch das Geld in ihrer berühmten doppelten Bestimmung, die Marx gleich am Anfang des *Kapitals* exponiert, an-sich auf.⁸ Das Geld ist in ihrem Doppelcharakter gleichsam spekulativ anwesend, darum ist die Arbeit einerseits „konkrete Arbeit“ und bildet andererseits „abstrakte Arbeit“, und darum ist die Ware einerseits „Gebrauchswert“ und andererseits „Tauschwert“.

26

⁷ Die ersten Schriften dazu kamen von Hans-Jürgen Krahl, Alfred Schmidt, Hans-Georg Backhaus und Helmut Reichelt, heute sind vor allem Michael Heinrich, Nadja Rakowitz und Ingo Elbe bekannt.

⁸ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 49ff.

Entscheidend ist allerdings, wie dieser Zusammenhang überhaupt in den Blick gekommen ist, denn dieser Ertrag der NML ist einer neuen *Lesart* des *Kapital* zu verdanken, wobei hinter dem unscheinbaren Begriff „Lesart“ eine regelrechte Methode der Interpretation und auch der Kritik zu verstehen ist – genau wie im Fall der anderen neuen Marx-Aneignungen. Während Marx' Ökonomiekritik in Italien operaistisch und später post-operaistisch oder biopolitisch und in Frankreich struktural und später post-struktural oder dekonstruktiv gelesen wurde, handelt es sich bei der NML um eine „logisch-systematische Lesart“,⁹ im Unterschied zu einer *historisch*-logischen Auslegung, wie sie nicht nur im klassischen Marxismus vorherrschte, sondern auch noch im Westlichen Marxismus und in der Kritischen Theorie. Der kritische Gehalt kam insbesondere in der Wertformanalyse zum Zuge, mit der Marx gleich zu Beginn des *Kapitals* in die Entwicklung der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise einsteigt. Durch die logische, formanalytisch-kategoriale Lesart der Wertformanalyse wurde nun das Geld zum Schlüssel für ein angemessenes Verständnis von Arbeit *und* Ware, denn dieser logischen Lesart zufolge ist die Wertformanalyse als Kritik einer „prämonetären Ware“ und überhaupt aller „prämonetären Wertvorstellungen“ zu verstehen. Das heißt, kurz gesagt, es gibt keinen Wert vor dem Geld und ohne Geld. Dass der Wert prämonetär, also *ohne* Geld gedacht wurde, war aber genau das Problem der beiden materialistischen Wendungen gewesen: Auf der einen Seite hatte der klassische Marxismus eine „objektive Arbeitswertlehre“ vertreten, die Arbeit mit Wert geradezu gleichsetzte, und auf der anderen Seite haben vor allem die Kritische Theorie, und hier wiederum besonders prominent Adorno, den Wert aus dem Austausch und einer Abstraktion abgeleitet – und so konzipierten beide den Wert, als ob das Geld ihn allenfalls äußerlich und nachträglich repräsentieren würde und als ob das Geld selbst ein neutrales Mittel der eigentlichen gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung wäre.

27

Die Stellung des Geldes in der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft und der Standpunkt der Gesellschaftskritik

Mit dem Geld scheint eine Antwort auf die Ausgangsfrage möglich zu sein, wie eine Kritik des Kapitalismus *möglich* sei: Der Kapitalismus scheint kritisch darstellbar, wenn seine Vermittlung entwickelt wird, aber diese Vermittlung ist we-

⁹ Hans-Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform*, Ça ira, Freiburg 1997, bes. S. 229ff. sowie 111ff., 129ff., 154ff.

der, wie in der idealistischen Philosophie, durch den Verstand, die Vernunft oder den Geist zu begründen, noch, wie in den beiden materialistischen Wendungen, geradewegs entweder durch die Arbeit oder durch die Warenform. Vielmehr ist in allen Ideen von Vermittlung, in der idealistischen Begründung von Vermittlung ebenso wie in deren materialistischen Wendungen, das Geld ein blinder Fleck geblieben, und folgerichtig müssten beide vom Standpunkt des Geldes aus kritisch einzuholen und aufzuheben sein. Im Geld wäre dann eine Art Verbindung oder gar Überwindung des Gegensatzes von Idealismus und Materialismus zu finden.

Allerdings muss die Gesellschaftskritik für diese Verbindung eine eigentümliche Stellung einnehmen, denn sie muss sich auf den „Standpunkt des Geldes“ stellen, und dies im buchstäblichen Sinne. Buchstäblich heißt, dass Marx die Gesellschaft gerade nicht vom Standpunkt der Wissenschaft im herkömmlichen Sinne bestimmt. Er geht stattdessen eine Art Umweg, eine „Detour“ (Derrida): Marx stellt dar, wie dem Geld – und nicht der Wissenschaft oder dem Subjekt des Wissens – die Ökonomie gleichsam zum Gegenstand wird, und zwar indem das Geld zuallererst, wie Marx sagt, „Wertgegenständlichkeit“¹⁰ konstituiert.

Es ist genau auf die Pointe in dieser Konstitution von Wertgegenständlichkeit zu achten: Dem Geld wird ein Wertverhältnis zum Gegenstand, das es selbst hervorbringt. Es realisiert dieselben gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse und stellt sie quantitativ dar, die es eben dadurch überhaupt erst *setzt*, sodass das Geld – und das holt Marx' *Kapital* im Zuge der Entwicklung der einzelnen Geldfunktionen in den ökonomischen Kategorien Ware, Wert, Arbeit etc. ein – ein regelrechtes *Produktionsverhältnis* ist. Mit Produktion ist zudem nicht nur die materielle Produktion gemeint, die das Geld, indem es Werte ins Verhältnis setzt und vermittelt, verwandelt und verwertet, regelrecht in Kraft setzt. Es produziert mit diesem In-Wert-Setzen auch bestimmte Denknöwendigkeiten und bringt bestimmte Vorstellungen über den Wert und die kapitalistische Ökonomie hervor – zuvorderst die, dass der Wert substanziell und praktisch durch das Wesen der Arbeit und der Form nach durch den Warentausch zu bestimmen sei.

Dieses Produktive und Konstitutive ist indes nur die eine Seite des Geldes. Die andere Seite ist, dass das Geld die Objektivität, die es aufseiten der Ökonomie durch Werte in Kraft setzt und als regelrechte Denknöwendigkeit zu denken

¹⁰ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 62.

gibt, ebenso *auf*löst. Es bringt eine Wertgegenständlichkeit hervor, die zwar auf die Arbeit und die Arbeitskraft oder auf die Waren und ihr Verhältnis zurückgeführt und wie eine objektive Eigenschaft reflektiert werden muss. Aber der Wert ist eben „nur“ ein *Verhältnis*, er ist sogar, wie Marx betont, ein „rein gesellschaftliches“ Verhältnis, in das „kein Atom Naturstoff“ eingeht,¹¹ und das Geld ist untrennbar mit dem Verhältnis und dessen Reinheit verschränkt, weil es dieses Verhältnis ebenso hervorbringt wie wieder auflöst. Es wird im Hervorbringen und im wieder Auf- und Einlösen zum bewusstlosen, überindividuellen und verschwindenden Vermittler derselben Objektivität, die gerade dadurch in der Ökonomie selbständig und unabhängig vom Geld zu existieren scheint, und in dieser verschwindenden Vermittlung erschließt es aufseiten der Ökonomie durchgehend gleichsam das Ökonomische selbst und stellt es seinerseits quantitativ durch Werte dar. Auf diese Darstellung des Ökonomischen muss sich eine, wie Marx im Anschluss an Hegels Kritikbegriff formuliert, Kritik durch Darstellung et vice versa berufen.¹²

Das Geld ist in diesem Hervorbringen und Auflösen zwar nicht das eigentliche Subjekt der gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung, auch nicht im Sinne jenes überindividuellen Subjekts, das Hegel als „Geist“ entwickelt. Aber es steht gleichsam *anstelle* eines Subjekts gesellschaftlicher Vermittlung. Es steht für einen Geist, den es eben dadurch ersetzt und an dessen Stelle es da ist; es reflektiert und realisiert blind-bewusstlos anstelle eines übergreifenden Subjekts die Gesellschaft in ihrer Totalität und vermittelt sie durch bloße Werte. Es geht daher nicht darum, das Geld als das eigentliche Subjekt gesellschaftlicher Vermittlung zu präsentieren, wohl aber umgekehrt das Geld für eine Kritik des Subjekts und der Individualität im herkömmlichen Verständnis zu nutzen.

Dafür wäre zu zeigen, dass wir unser ökonomisches Verhältnis und dass wir unser ökonomisches Denken und Handeln von den Funktionen des Geldes

¹¹ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 62.

¹² Vgl. Karl Marx, „Brief an Lassalle v. 22. 02. 1858“, in: MEW Bd. 29, S. 550. Beide, Hegel und Marx, haben ihre Dialektik in dem oben bereits skizzierten Sinne als eine Art Selbstkritik des Kritisierten verstanden und als Kritik durch Darstellung konzipiert – in diesem Denken *vom Kritisierten her* besteht die Eigentümlichkeit und die Zumutung ihrer Dialektik. Die Forderung, Hegels Dialektik als Kritik zu begreifen, ist vor allem von der Kritischen Theorie und von der Hegelforschung erhoben worden, vgl. Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein. Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M. 1978, S. 13–91.

her „einsehen“ und verstehen müssen und dass wir dafür wiederum das Geld an die Stelle desjenigen *über*-individuellen Geistes setzen müssen, den Marx durch die Kategorien der KdpÖ vergesellschaftet. Doch hier soll es allein um die Übereinkunft von Geld und Kritik gehen. Der Standpunkt des Geldes soll „nur“ der Erkenntnisstandpunkt zum Erschließen einer Ökonomie sein, die dem Geld selbst Gegenstand der Vermittlung ist und die das Geld durch Werte ebenso bewusstlos wie objektiv gültig erschließt. Wir können zwar nicht direkt auf die Gesellschaft reflektieren und sie unmittelbar zum Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Bestimmung oder der Kritik machen. Aber wir können uns auf den Standpunkt des Geldes stellen, indem wir durch die Entwicklung seiner Funktionen einholen, auf welche Weise dem Geld gleich einem Subjekt die Gesellschaft zum Gegenstand einer bewusstlosen und objektiven Reflexion wird und wie es die ökonomischen Verhältnisse der Gesellschaft einer quantitativen Verwertung unterzieht, die es durch Wertgrößen in sich reflektiert zur Erscheinung bringt und zu denken gibt.

Indes ist bislang eine Theorie und Kritik des Geldes von vornherein insofern falsch angegangen worden, als gerade der Einstieg in die Kritik unglücklich war. Das gilt nicht nur für den klassischen und den Westlichen Marxismus sowie für die Kritische Theorie (die sich alle ohnehin kaum für das Geld interessierten), sondern z.T. auch noch für die Neue Marx-Lektüre. Denn obwohl speziell dieser NML durch ihre logisch-kategoriale Lesart der Wertformanalyse eine Kritik „prämonetärer Werttheorien“ gelungen ist und obwohl sie die einseitige Fixierung entweder auf Arbeit oder auf die Warenform durch das „ausgeschlossene Dritte“ des Geldes überwunden hat, gibt es neben diesem grundlegenden Ertrag auch ein ebenso grundlegendes Problem: Auch hier wurde Marx' Wertformanalyse wie ein Warentausch ausgelegt. Folgerichtig wurden Geld und Wert dann aus der Logik eines Warentauschs begründet (oder, wie Hans-Georg Backhaus richtiger formuliert, aus dem *Scheitern* eines unmittelbaren, nicht geldvermittelten Warentauschs¹³); das Geld wird dann als Tauschmittel und der Wert als Tauschwert präsentiert, und Kapitalismus soll letztlich Produktion für den Tauschwert sein.

Diese Fixierung ist allein schon deshalb erstaunlich, weil sie gerade die bürgerliche Ökonomietheorie auszeichnet, die ja ebenfalls ihre Vorstellungen von

¹³ Backhaus, *op cit.*, S. 229–298.

Rationalität und Objektivität und ihre politischen Ideale von Freiheit, Gleichheit und Gerechtigkeit aus dem Mythos eines einfachen Warentauschs ableitet, ob nun im Sinne einer historischen Rekonstruktion oder einer rein logischen Ableitung. Damit sitzen ironischerweise sowohl diese bürgerliche Ökonomietheorie als auch deren Kritiker aufseiten des Marxismus und der Kritischen Theorie genau dem Warentausch und derjenigen Tauschlogik auf, die doch als *Schein des Geldes zu kritisieren sind*. Denn Marx will ja gerade Austausch und Zirkulation samt den objektiven Denknotwendigkeiten und samt den bürgerlichen Idealen, die sie hervorbringen, als „notwendigen Schein“ auf der Oberfläche der Gesellschaft durchsichtig machen.¹⁴ Und um den Schein durchsichtig zu machen, stellt er gleich zu Beginn des *Kapitals* dem Austauschprozess eine Analyse noch eigens voran, die gerade *nicht* wie ein Austausch auszulegen ist. In der berühmten Analyse der einfachen Wertform „x Ware A = y Ware B“ steht kein unmittelbarer Warentausch zur Analyse an, sondern – und das ist im „x“ und „y“ des „x Ware A = y Ware B“ eigentlich ganz offensichtlich – ein je schon *quantitativ bestimmtes Verhältnis*. Die Frage muss daher sein, warum eine solche Quantifizierung gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse überhaupt möglich ist, und warum mit der Quantifizierung die Konstitution einer gesellschaftlichen Objektivität möglich ist, die anscheinend, mit Kants Begriffen gesagt, der „empirischen Reinheit“ und der „Notwendigkeit“ und „strengen Allgemeinheit“ der neuzeitlichen Naturwissenschaft entspricht, die ebenfalls Verhältnisse durch Quantifizierung auf objektive Weise zu bestimmen in der Lage ist.

Diese Bedingung der Quantifizierung wird *nicht* durch den Austausch und *nicht* durch das Geld als Tauschmittel gegeben, sondern, so meine These, durch die Funktion des Geldes als *Maß* des Werts und mithin auch als Maß der produktiven *Verwertung* des Werts durch Arbeitskräfte und Kapital.

31

Mit dieser, der Logik nach, ersten Funktion lässt sich auch genauer die oben erhobene Forderung begründen, dass sich die Kritik auf den Standpunkt des Geldes in einem buchstäblichen Sinne stellen muss: Im Kapitalismus steht das Geld, was immer es auch in vorkapitalistischen Gesellschaften gewesen sein mag, auf dem Standpunkt einer ebenso universellen wie gleichgültigen Werteinheit, an welche die Gesellschaft, und mit ihr alle Subjekte, in der ökonomischen Vermittlung naturwüchsig gehalten werden. Und dieser Standpunkt

¹⁴ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 189f.

verbindet auch das oben angesprochene Idealistische mit dem Materialistischen der Vermittlung: Der Materialismus des Geldes besteht darin, *für eine ideale* Werteinheit zu stehen und im Realisieren dieser Einheit durch Wertgrößen maßgeblich zu werden für die quantitative Vermittlung der Waren sowie für die quantitative Verwertung von Arbeitskräften und Kapital. Im Zuge dieser Quantifizierung der Vermittlung und Verwertung wird unser Verhältnis nicht nur auf objektive Weise bestimmt, es werden auch diejenigen Größen oder vielmehr Durchschnittsgrößen ermittelt, die für die kapitalistische Verwertung maßgeblich sind.

So also kann die eingangs skizzierte Pointe, dass es sich bei Kant und Hegel um eine Art Selbstkritik der Vernunftkritik handle, kapitalistisch vergesellschaftet werden: Marx legt keine willkürlichen Maßstäbe an den Kapitalismus an oder misst ihn an irgendwelchen Idealen oder Normen, sondern er zeigt, dass die kapitalistische Gesellschaft durch das Geld an ein universelles Maß gehalten wird und dass das Geld aus der kapitalistischen Ökonomie wie in einer Messung die für sie maßgeblichen Größen ermittelt – und so gibt die Gesellschaft durch das Geld und durch die Wertgrößen selbst das Maß für „ihre“ objektive Bestimmung ab, und mithin für eine „Kritik durch Darstellung“ und für eine *immanente* Kritik.

Wird aber die theoretische Darstellung der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise ausgehend vom Geld als Maß entwickelt, ergeben sich zwei, so wird zu zeigen sein, gravierende Konsequenzen für die Kapitalismuskritik insgesamt. Zum einen kann das gesamte Paradigma des Austauschs überwunden werden, in dem die Kritik nach wie vor feststeckt; denn diese Kritik ist vollkommen unangemessen gegenüber einer Ökonomie, deren produktive Kraft anscheinend durch die Quantifizierung ihrer Verhältnisse freigesetzt und enorm gesteigert wird. Zum anderen setzt diese „Quantifizierung qua Messung“ die gewaltige Produktivkraft einer „Ökonomie der Zeit“ (Marx) in Kraft.

32

Doch bevor die Bedeutung des Maßes für die Messung und die Steigerung der Produktivkraft der Verwertung sowie für die Ökonomie der Zeit betrachtet wird, muss zunächst der Zusammenhang zwischen Maß und Quantifizierung erörtert werden.

Das Maß

Die Maßfunktion des Geldes hat für die kapitalistische Produktionsweise eine vorrangige und zugleich herausgehobene Bedeutung, und diesem Status entspricht die vorgezogene Stellung der berühmten Wertformanalyse in Marx' *Kapital*.

Es reicht, hier allein die Pointe der Wertformanalyse zu zeigen, denn die Pointe ist genau dieses *Herausstellen* des Maßes: Durch das Aussondern einer beliebigen Ware kann eine ideelle Werteinheit so fixiert werden, dass diese ausgesonderte Ware alle anderen Waren quantitativ realisieren und deren Verhältnis objektiv darstellen kann. Diese Pointe ergibt sich aus einer totalen Entfaltung der Form „x Ware A = y Ware B“ und ihrer Umkehr.¹⁵ Marx entfaltet die einfache Wertform einer beliebigen Ware A zunächst „total“: „z Ware A = u Ware B = v Ware C“¹⁶ usw. Aber diese totale Entfaltung führt in eine schlechte Unendlichkeit ohne Abschluss, weil jede Ware ihr gesellschaftliches Verhältnis immer durch eine andere und letztlich durch alle anderen Waren darstellen muss – doch in keiner Ware kann das Verhältnis aller Waren auf den Punkt gebracht und endgültig bestimmt werden. Wird allerdings die Form umgekehrt, dann stellt sich heraus, dass die Ware A – die für jede beliebige Ware steht – die gesamte Wertform, die ihr gegenüber entfaltet worden ist, gleichsam auf sich nehmen und „Geldware“¹⁷ sein kann, so dass *die Wertform in dieser einen Ware als spekulativ total durchgeführt und abgeschlossen gilt*.¹⁸ Weil in der Geldware die Wertform als je vollständig durchgeführt *gilt*, ist in ihr eine ideelle Werteinheit in Kraft, die das Verhältnis aller Waren als Eins zählen, es rein quantitativ umschlagen und als solches, d.h. *als* Verhältnis und mithin als ein negatives Sein oder negative Qualität, durch objektiv gültige Größen quantitativ ins Positive wenden kann.

33

Oder vielmehr muss diese Übernahme der Wertform, wenn es überhaupt quantitative Verhältnisse gibt, je schon stattgefunden haben und in Kraft sein. Die Analyse der Wertform muss im „x“ und „y“ das Geld *einholen*, um im Geld die

¹⁵ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 77ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, S. 77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, S. 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, S. 79ff. u. 84f.

Bedingung einer Quantifizierung herauszustellen, die im x und y je in Geltung eingelöst ist.

Dass die Wertformanalyse das Geld einholt, ist nicht als historische Rekonstruktion zu verstehen. Das Aussondern einer Ware und das Fixieren einer maßgeblichen Werteinheit stellt schlagend heraus, dass die rätselhafte, weil universelle und empirisch reine und doch je endliche Geltung des Geldes logisch und schlagartig eintritt, allein durch die Aussonderung und durch das Quantifizieren gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse. Ihren Status als Maß erhält die Geldware also durch die ideelle, abgelöste und in diesem Sinne absolute Stellung, in die sie durch ihre Aussonderung versetzt wird. Sie wird dadurch nicht nur von allen anderen Waren, sie wird auch von ihrem *eigenen* Dasein geschieden. Was immer die Geldware als Gebrauchswert auch sein mag und woraus immer sie stofflich auch bestehen mag – durch ihre Aussonderung ist sie mit einem Schlag von diesem Dasein geschieden und erhält einen losgelösten, unabhängigen Status, denn sie steht *für* eine ideelle Einheit und *gilt* als Geldware. Und ebenso schlagartig erhalten all die anderen Waren, was immer sie als Gebrauchswerte sind, einen von allem Qualitativem geschiedenen, empirisch reinen Status, denn sie werden durch die Geldware rein quantitativ ins Verhältnis gesetzt.

Kurz, durch die Geldware kann das Verhältnis der Waren durch das Umschlagen in quantitative Verhältnisse wie in einer bewussten Reflexion *reflexiv* werden. Durch das Geld wird die Objektivität des gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisses der Waren wie in einer Reflexion realisiert, und dieses Verhältnis wird einerseits in den Warenwerten entäußert, während es andererseits im Wert des Geldes verinnerlicht ist und zugleich gleichsam außer sich ist und eine eigenständige Form für sich hat.

Die Messung

Die Wertformanalyse zeigt das Aussondern einer Geldware und das Fixieren einer Werteinheit zwar zunächst nur auf eine rein logische Weise; es geht zunächst nur um die Bedingung, durch die wir unser eigenes gesellschaftliches Verhältnis überhaupt quantifizieren und es als solches, als Verhältnis und somit als negative Qualität und rein gesellschaftliches Sein, ins Positive wenden und durch Größen objektiv bestimmen können. Um eine ideelle maßgebliche Einheit zu fixieren, muss – logisch betrachtet und unabhängig vom geschichtlichen Ursprung des

Geldes – nur irgendeine Ware in einer Art unvordenklicher Tat dauerhaft aus-
gesondert werden.¹⁹ Aber im Austausch- und Zirkulationsprozess, den Marx im
Anschluss an die Analyse beschreibt,²⁰ ereignet sich dieses Ausschließen des
Geldes und die Quantifizierung des Verhältnisses der Waren dann auch ganz
praktisch. Das Aussondern und Ausschließen des Geldes wird ständig prak-
tisch durchgeführt, indem die ausgeschlossene Geldware als Tausch- und
Zirkulationsmittel gleichsam wiederkehrt und zur Realisierung der Waren als
Werte eingesetzt wird, denn dabei tritt das Geld, wie Marx sagt, ebenso in die
Zirkulation und in die Vermittlung der Waren ein, wie es wieder herausfällt.²¹
Durch dieses Eintreten des Geldes in die Vermittlung werden die Waren so an
ihr gemeinsames Maß gehalten, dass die ideelle Werteinheit – gleichsam ganz
materiell – zur Realität endlicher Werte wird. Die ideelle Werteinheit ist durch
einen regelrechten Materialismus des Geldes in allen Tauschwerten ebenso zer-
streut wie eingelöst, und durch dieses Einlösen im endlichen Dasein nimmt die
Einheit die Form der sog. einfachen Zirkulation an, von Marx als „Ware-Geld-
Ware“ (W-G-W) formalisiert.²²

Auf die Einzelheiten der Wertformanalyse und des Austauschprozesses und
auf ihren unterschiedlichen Status kommt es hier nicht an, sondern auf die
Verschränkung der ersten beiden Geldfunktionen. In der Verschränkung kom-
men die Stärke der logisch-systematischen *Kapital*-Lesart und ihre Kritik eines
prämonetären Werts zum Zuge, denn die beiden Geldfunktionen können weder
historisch rekonstruiert noch logisch aus einem vorgängigen Warentausch kur-
zerhand abgeleitet werden. Ihre Begründung ergibt sich vielmehr aus ihrem sys-
tematischen Zusammenhang in und für die kapitalistische Produktionsweise,
und hier muss die Maßfunktion gerade für eine Kritik des Tauschmittels und
der Vorstellung eines Warentauschs genutzt werden. Denn wenn im Austausch-
und Zirkulationsprozess das Quantifizieren durch ein Maß praktisch wird,

¹⁹ Zu Beginn des Kapitels über den Austauschprozess geht Marx auf die Verlegenheit ein,
dass der Ursprung des Geldes, wie immer er geschichtlich zu verorten sein mag, unvor-
denklich ist, weil er durch eine nicht bewusste, aber durch „die Gesetze der Warennatur“
induzierte faustische Tat eingetreten sein muss. Die Warenbesitzer müssen das Geld nur
an diejenige leere Stelle empirisch reiner, universeller Geltung setzen, die dem Geld durch
jene rein gesellschaftliche Natur der Waren, die das Geld doch erst herstellt, paradoxer-
weise eingeräumt sein muss; *ibid.*, S. 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, S. 99.

²¹ *Ibid.*, S. 126f.

²² *Ibid.*, S. 120.

dann müsste der Austausch, eben logisch-systematisch gelesen, eigentlich etwas anderes als ein geldvermittelter Warentausch sein, dann muss er folgerichtig auch eine Art *Messung* sein. So wie die Analyse $x \text{ Ware A} = y \text{ Ware B}$ keinen Warentausch analysiert, sondern in der ausgeschlossenen Geldware das Maß als Bedingung der Quantifizierung einholt, so ist auch der praktische Austausch Ware gegen Geld nur ein „notwendiger Schein“ auf der Oberfläche der Gesellschaft. Mit Marx lässt sich der Austausch sogar in doppelter Hinsicht einer Kritik unterziehen und als notwendiger Schein durchsichtig machen. Die erste Hinsicht ist, wie gezeigt, die vorangestellte Wertformanalyse, die mit der Geldware herausstellt, dass quantitative Wertverhältnisse ein Maß voraussetzen und die Tauschwerte daher nicht Resultat eines Austauschs, sondern einer Messung sein müssten. Und die zweite Hinsicht ist, dass diese Messung gar nicht die Waren betrifft oder deren Verhältnis zueinander. Vielmehr werden die Waren, wie Marx explizit sagt, als „Produkte von Kapitalen“ realisiert,²³ und darum ist der Tauschwert der Waren kein Resultat ihres Austauschs, er ist Resultat der Messung ihrer *Produktion*, und der Austausch ist die *Form* dieser Messung.

Es sollen nur zwei Anhaltspunkte für diesen Status einer Messung angeführt werden.

1. Der Tauschwert einer Ware ist ein *verwerteter* Wert, und seine Größe ergibt sich aus der produktiven Kraft des Verwertungsverhältnisses von Arbeitskräften und Kapital;²⁴ es ist diese Verwertung, die das Austausch- und Größenverhältnis der Waren bestimmt.
2. Dieser verwertete Wert ist auch ein *gemessener Wert*. Der Wert kehrt aus der Warenproduktion all der individuellen Kapitale nicht unvermittelt wieder, und er wird durch das Geld auch nicht wie in einer Repräsentation wiedergegeben. Sondern alle einzelnen Arbeiten und alle individuellen Kapitale werden durch das Geld der Messung ihrer Resultate durch eine gemeinsame Werteinheit ausgesetzt, und die Messung wird realisiert in der Form des Austauschs und der Zirkulation.

36

²³ „Die ganze Schwierigkeit kommt dadurch hinein, dass die Waren nicht einfach als Waren ausgetauscht werden, sondern als Produkt von Kapitalen [...]“ MEW 25, S. 184.

²⁴ „Gegenstand“ der Messung ist letztlich die produktive Kraft, die sich aus der „organischen Zusammensetzung des Kapitals“ ergibt, vgl. Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 223ff., 640ff.

In Form dieser Realisierung scheint dasjenige Ereignis in Kraft zu sein, das diese Form erst eigentlich als Messung qualifiziert: Alle verschiedenen Arbeiten und alle individuellen Kapitale werden paradoxerweise so in ein gemeinsames Verhältnis gesetzt, dass sich eine „Gesamtarbeitszeit“ und ein „Gesamtkapital“ (Marx) *und zugleich* „notwendige Durchschnittsgrößen“ bilden. Aus den Arbeiten ergibt sich die „gesellschaftlich notwendige Durchschnittsarbeitszeit“,²⁵ und aus den eingesetzten Kapitalen ergeben sich Durchschnittsprofite und eine „allgemeine Profitrate“.²⁶

Marx selbst spricht zwar nicht explizit von einer Messung, aber von einem „komplizierten Prozess“: „Es tritt hier ein komplizierter gesellschaftlicher Prozeß dazwischen, der Ausgleichungsprozeß der Kapitale, der die relativen Durchschnittspreise der Waren von ihren Werten und die Durchschnittsprofite in den verschiedenen Produktionssphären (ganz abgesehen von den individuellen Kapitalanlagen in jeder besondern Produktionssphäre) von der wirklichen Exploitation der Arbeit durch die besondern Kapitale losscheidet.“²⁷

So wie die Wertformanalyse keinen linearen (gar historischen) Prozess rekonstruiert, so ist auch die Ermittlung von Durchschnittsgrößen keine lineare Transformation und kein (Aus-)Rechnen; es muss nur so scheinen, als ob das Geld ein gesamtgesellschaftliches Verhältnis und zugleich relationale Größenverhältnisse herstellen würde. (Hier wäre auch das sog. Transformationsproblem zu situieren. Es gibt keine raum-zeitliche Transformation quantitativer Werte in quantitative Preise. Sondern das Geld trennt, was es zugleich vermittelt: Es vermittelt ein quantitativ unbestimmtes Verwertungsverhältnis, das gerade darum unbestimmt, unscharf und im Prozessieren begriffen sein kann, weil das Geld das Verhältnis beständig quantifiziert, durch Größen einzelner Waren objektiv bestimmt und in Preisen zur Erscheinung bringt. Das ist keine raumzeitliche Transformation vom Wert in den Preis, sondern durch das Geld wird die Gesellschaft in zwei Zustände mit einem unterschiedlichen Status unterschieden.)

²⁵ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 53f., 210, 224, 336.

²⁶ Zur Verwandlung des Mehrwerts in Profit und zur Verwandlung des Profits in Durchschnittsprofit sowie zum tendenziellen Fall der Profitrate vgl. Marx, *op. cit.*, MEW 25, S. 33–277.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, S. 836.

Entscheidend für das Ereignis der Messung und die Differenz von Wert und Preis ist, dass die Wertgrößen, die das Geld in der preisbestimmten Ware zur Erscheinung bringt, nie auf individuelle Arbeitszeiten und auf individuelle Kapitale zurückgehen. Sie führen unhintergebar zurück auf eine maßgebliche Werteinheit, die alle Arbeiten und alle Kapitale in ein gemeinsames Verhältnis setzt und sie wie in einer gesamtgesellschaftlichen Reflexion – oder eben wie in einer Messung – in bestimmte Wertgrößen bricht. Durch diese Form der Messung werden die Arbeiten, die Kapitale und ihre Resultate, die Waren, auf ebenso naturwüchsig-blinde wie objektiv gültige Weise kapitalistisch vergesellschaftet. Es ist diese Vergesellschaftung, die das Geld im Preis ebenso zur Erscheinung bringt wie spurlos verschwinden lässt.

Doch damit ist die Kritik des Warentauschs und des falschen Scheins immer noch nicht abgeschlossen. Denn in den realisierten Wertgrößen kehrt nicht nur der Wert je verwertet und je gemessen wieder, sondern auch das Geld selbst kehrt aus seiner Auslegung in die Verwertung zurück und ist ebenfalls verwertet worden. Mehr noch, das Geld kehrt nicht nur aus seiner Auslegung in die Bestandteile der Verwertung und der Warenproduktion zurück, sondern die daraus ermittelten und im Geld realisierten Werte werden auch wieder in diese Bestandteile ausgelegt. Die ersten beiden Funktionen Maß und Tauschmittel sind daher nur die „halbe“ Wahrheit des Geldes. Die „andere Hälfte“ der Wahrheit ist, dass das Geld nicht nur Maß und Tauschmittel ist, sondern auch und sogar zuerst Kapital, und als Kapital verwandelt es jene Werte, die es als Maß und Tauschmittel ermittelt, wieder in die Bestandteile der Verwertung zurück (entweder unmittelbar in die Bestandteile der Warenproduktion oder mittelbar in die Bereiche des fiktiven und finanziellen Kapitals). Die ersten beiden Geldfunktionen erschließen somit immer schon den *kapitalistischen Selbstbezug* des Geldes. Der Messprozess ist folgerichtig erst vollständig bestimmbar, wenn die Kapitalform des Geldes entwickelt ist, also die Form, die Marx als Geld-Ware-Geld+Profit formalisiert, $G-W-G'$.²⁸

38

Zugespitzt zusammengefasst, ermittelt das Geld also in den Warenwerten, was seine eigene Verwandlung in die Bestandteile von deren Produktion wert gewesen war, und in diesen Warenwerten werden wiederum diejenigen Durchschnittsgrößen ermittelt, die für eben diese Produktion maßgeblich ge-

²⁸ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 161ff.

worden sind, mithin für die weitere produktive Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital. Die zukünftige Verwertung muss sich an die maßgeblichen Größen aus „ihrer“ Vergangenheit halten, und die Verwertung wird ganz automatisch an diese maßgeblichen Größen gehalten, indem die Größen durch die Kapitalform des Geldes in die Bestandteile der Verwertung zurückverwandelt werden.

Die Kapitalbewegung des Geldes ist also nicht nur wie ein Messprozess auszu-legen, sondern wie ein *im Geld sich selbst messender Verwertungsprozess*. Nun wird auch deutlich, warum nicht nur der Wert ein „gesellschaftliches Verhältnis“ und Moment einer prozessierenden Verwertung ist, sondern weshalb das Geld im Kapitalismus ein „Produktionsverhältnis“²⁹ für eben diese Verwertung ist: Die Verwertung wird durch die ersten beiden Funktionen wie in einer Messung in maßgebliche Größen gebrochen, und die Verwertung wird dadurch nicht nur gleichsam reflektiert, diese Größen, diese Reflexionsbestimmungen des Geldes werden durch dessen Verwandlung in Arbeitskraft und Kapital einerseits und durch deren Verwertung des Werts andererseits auf eine naturwüchsige-automatische Weise *selbstbezüglich*.

Dass die Verwertung gemessen und dass die so reflektierten Wertgrößen durch den kapitalistischen Selbstbezug gleichsam noch einmal reflexiv werden, ist entscheidend dafür, dass die Produktivkraft ohne eine zentrale Steuerung und Planung sich dennoch systematisch entwickelt und steigert. Die Kapitalakkumulation ist ein unendlicher, maß-loser Verwertungsprozess, gerade *weil* er im Geld ein Maß für sich hat, ein Maß, das in den produzierten Waren beständig diejenigen Größen ermittelt und im Geld selbst heraussetzt, die für diese Akkumulation maßgeblich sind, also dafür, die beiden Verwertungsbestandteile Arbeitskraft und Kapital in ein produktives Verhältnis zu setzen, und durch das Geld selbst können die Größen beständig wieder in das Verwertungsverhältnis zurückkehren.

Die Verschränkung von Maß und Gemessenem, also die Quantifizierung und die Messung durch das Geld auf der einen Seite, die Ermittlung maßgeblicher Durchschnittsgrößen aus der Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital auf der anderen Seite, lässt sich nur angemessen ein- und auflösen durch oder, noch unmittelbarer, *als* Zeit. Der nächste Schritt ist daher, diese Technik der Messung

²⁹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, MEW Bd. 42, S. 521.

und Quantifizierung, die das Geld für die Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital durchführt, in eine „Ökonomie der Zeit“ (Marx) zu übersetzen. Auch diese Übersetzung ist keine theoretische Aufgabe allein aufseiten der Wissenschaft oder der Kritik. Umgekehrt: Aufgabe der Wissenschaft und Kritik ist zu zeigen, auf welche Weise das Geld diese Übersetzung *ist*. Dafür ist zu zeigen, dass das Geld, wenn es unsere ökonomischen Verhältnisse in Wert setzt, dadurch auch eine Ökonomie der Zeit in Kraft setzt.

Maß und Zeit

Marx hat explizit gesagt, „Ökonomie der Zeit, darin löst sich schließlich alle Ökonomie auf“,³⁰ und gelegentlich ist auch versucht worden, diese Auflösung über das Geld zu erklären. Der populäre Satz von Benjamin Franklin „Time is money“ brachte bereits 1748 die ganze Wahrheit der Verbindung von Zeit und Geld sogar schon auf den Punkt. Aber die Begründung des „is“, die Begründung dieser Identität von Zeit und Geld, ist nie gelungen, und zwar darum nicht, weil auch hier der Einstieg nicht im Maß und in der Quantifizierung genommen wurde. Ohne diesen Einstieg konnte die Verbindung von Zeit und Geld nur exoterisch aufgefasst werden, d.h. so, dass die Zeit schon vorausgesetzt ist und getrennt vom Geld existieren müsste. Es muss scheinen, als sei die Zeit von Natur aus da und quasi räumlich vorhanden, und wenn sie wie eine physikalische Qualität oder Ressource produktiv ökonomisch genutzt wird, dann zahlt sich das, so scheint es des Weiteren, im Geld aus.

Dagegen kommt für das Verständnis der „Ökonomie der Zeit“ alles darauf an, dass Geld tatsächlich *Zeit ist*. Um diese – im Hegel’schen Sinne – *spekulative* Identität zu begründen, ist die oben entwickelte Quantifizierung gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse entscheidend (und zwar auch dafür, dass es scheinen muss, als sei die Zeit von Natur aus da und eine physikalische Qualität). Dafür ist ein zweiter Durchgang durch die Geldfunktionen notwendig, um diesmal zu zeigen, auf welche Weise die Geldfunktionen die *Wertverhältnisse* auch in *zeitliche* Verhältnisse übersetzen.³¹

40

³⁰ *Ibid.*, S. 105.

³¹ Ausführlich Frank Engster, *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode. Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit*, Neofelis, Berlin 2014.

Der Einstieg in dieses Übersetzen muss wieder die erste Funktion sein, denn es ist die Maßfunktion des Geldes, durch welche die Zeit für die kapitalistische Produktionsweise in Anspruch genommen wird. Ja, mit dem Eintritt des Maßes ist gleichsam auch der Anfang einer Ökonomie der Zeit exakt bestimmbar: Die Zeit tritt in die Gesellschaft ein, indem sie überhaupt zum Maß der kapitalistischen Verwertung erhoben wird, und genau das ereignet sich, indem eine maßgebliche Einheit durch das Aussondern einer Geldware fixiert wird. Die Geldware fixiert die maßgebliche Werteinheit nämlich nicht nur, sie hält sie dadurch auch identisch und zeitlos, sodass die Gesellschaft durch das Geld nicht nur an das Maß des Werts, sondern auch an das Maß Zeit gehalten wird, an eben jene qualitätslose, abstrakte, leere und homogene Zeit, die eine physikalische Qualität zu sein scheint und deren Qualität in der Quantifizierbarkeit liegt.

Und in der Tat: So sehr das Geld für eine zeitlose Werteinheit steht und mit ihr eine abstrakte Zeit identisch hält, so sehr tritt diese Zeit durch das In-Wert-Setzen gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse immer schon *quantitativ* ein. Die Zeit fällt gleichsam auf quantitative Weise in ihre eigene Endlichkeit, und dieser Fall der Zeit durch ihre Verendlichkeit ist zugleich der Übergang in die zweite Funktion des Geldes, denn als Tauschmittel realisiert es ja dieselbe Einheit durch endliche Werte, die es als Maß identisch und zeitlos hält. Die gezeigte Verschränkung von Maß und Tauschmittel entspricht also dem Realisieren einer zeitlosen Qualität durch endliche Quanta. Es ist, als ob die Waren im Geld immer ein und dieselbe Zeit quantitativ teilen und als ob die Zeit durch das Geld quantitativ aufbewahrt und übertragbar würde, kurz, als ob die Zeit durch das Geld quantitativ identisch gehalten würde. Während die Warenwerte mit den Waren den Weg alles Endlichen gehen und im Konsum verschwinden, bleiben die Werte im Geld quantitativ gegenwärtig und können in den ökonomischen Kreisläufen fortwähren.

41

Maß und Tauschmittel sind also ein regelrechtes Einfallen der Zeit in die Gesellschaft, als würde die Zeit durch ihre quantitative Verendlichkeit zu einem Fall ihrer selbst. Allerdings führt dieser Fall der Zeit, führt das Übertragen und Währen der Zeit durch Quanta nur in die ewige Gegenwart eines endlosen Zirkulierens, ganz wie Marx das für die einfache Warenzirkulation zeigt. Die Zirkulationssphäre für sich genommen ist nur die Gegenwart eines ständigen Realisierens und Übertragens von Werten, und das entspricht einem endlosen Übergehen der Zeit in sie selbst, einem Übergehen, das selbst nicht vergehen kann.

Hier greift wieder Marx' Kritik des Scheins der einfachen Zirkulation, der Oberfläche der Gesellschaft und der falschen Unmittelbarkeit. Der erste Durchgang durch die Geldfunktionen hat ja gezeigt, dass es mit Marx darum gehen muss, den Wert, statt als einen bloßen Tauschwert einer Ware, erstens als einen *verwerteten* und zweitens als einen *gemessenen* Wert einzuholen; dieses Einholen der Verwertung und der Messung fiel in die Entwicklung der Kapitalform des Geldes. In die Ökonomie der Zeit übersetzt heißt dieses Einholen, dass über die Realisierung der Waren als Wertgrößen deren *Produktion* auf das Maß der Zeit bezogen wird und dass die Zeit maßgeblich für die Produktivität der Verwertung wird. Dadurch ist zum einen die Gegenwart der Warenwerte ein Schein, weil ihre Werte vergegenwärtigen, was ihre Verwertung wert gewesen sein wird; im Wert wird die Produktivkraft der Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital anwesend. Und zum anderen kehrt durch diese Vergegenwärtigung die Vergangenheit der Verwertung nicht unvermittelt wie in einer Wiederholung oder Repräsentation wieder, sondern diese Vergangenheit kehrt immer schon wieder *gebrochen durch das Maß der abstrakten Zeit* und ist eine gemessene und in-sich reflektierte Größe. Genauer gesagt, kehrt die verwertete Arbeit unhintergebar als „gesellschaftlich gegenwärtig notwendige Durchschnittsarbeitszeit“ wieder, und das verwertete Kapital kehrt je durch „Durchschnittsprofite“ (Marx) wieder. Durch das Geld muss es demnach scheinen, als wäre jede einzelne Realisierung einer Wertgröße einer der Zeitpunkte, an dem alle verschiedenen konkreten Arbeiten und alle individuellen Kapitale auf das Maß der Zeit bezogen würden, und also ob und sie dadurch in dasselbe gemeinsame Verhältnis träten, das sie quantitativ im Zuge der Bildung von Durchschnittsgrößen teilen. Im Zuge dieser Durchschnittsbildung wird einerseits eine Verwertung, die im Prozessieren begriffen und quantitativ noch unbestimmt ist, entschieden, und dadurch werden andererseits die aus der vergangenen Verwertung ermittelten Durchschnittsgrößen maßgeblich für die zukünftige produktive Verwertung. Und das Geld ermittelt nicht nur diese maßgeblichen Größen, es ist durch seine beständige (Zurück-)Verwandlung in die Bestandteile der Verwertung der quantitative Übergang der vergangenen Verwertung in ihre Zukunft.

42

So erhebt sich durch das Geld die Identität der Zeit zum Maß einer Verwertung, die durch die ermittelten Größen wiederum maßgeblich für sich selbst wird, und der kapitalistische Selbstbezug des Geldes $G-W-G'$ ist dieses Überführen der vergangenen Verwertung in *ihre* Zukunft. Kurz gesagt, die Zeit *existiert* auf quantitative Weise im Geld, und durch die Geldfunktionen kann auf überindivi-

duell-spekulative und zugleich objektive quantitative Weise mit dieser Existenz der Zeit im Geld *gerechnet* werden. Ja, es kann geradezu mit der Identität der Zeit gerechnet werden – aber nur in zweiter Ordnung. Es kann nur mit dem Rechnen des Geldes gerechnet werden: Es ist und bleibt das Geld, das mit einer ideellen Werteinheit rechnet, indem es Wertgrößen ermittelt und überträgt, verwandelt und verrechnet.

Diese Technik der Geldfunktionen, im Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit eine Ökonomie der Zeit ebenso in Kraft zu setzen wie zu bewältigen, ist indes nur die halbe Wahrheit der Ökonomie der Zeit. Für die „andere Hälfte“ müssen wir uns vom Geld als Maß der Zeit ab- und derjenigen Verwertung zuwenden, die es aufseiten des Gemessenen in Kraft setzt: Wir müssen auch die Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital in die Zeit übersetzen.

Das zeitliche Selbstverhältnis der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft: Die produktive Kraft der Verwertung von Arbeit und Kapital

Marx selbst hat bereits die beiden zeitlichen Verhältnisse ausführlich entwickelt, in die das quantitative Verhältnis von Arbeit und Kapital zu übersetzen ist.

Er zeigt, dass in Arbeit und Kapital das Verhältnis von „lebendiger“ und „toter Arbeitszeit“ oder auch von gegenwärtiger und vergangener Arbeitszeit in Kraft ist. Im Kapital tritt der Arbeitskraft ihre eigene Arbeitszeit gegenüber, jedoch in fremder und toter, in vergangener und vergegenständlichter Gestalt sowie in der gestaltlosen Gestalt akkumulierten Werts. Diese in den Gestalten sowie im Wert des Kapitals gegenwärtige akkumulierte Vergangenheit ruft wiederum zur Übertragung ihres Werts auf neue Waren die Arbeitskraft ins Leben.³² Arbeit im Kapitalismus ist daher, was immer sie auch konkret arbeitet und was immer sie produziert, Arbeit der Übertragung und Bewahrung ihrer eigenen Vergangenheit, die aufseiten des Kapitals quantitativ akkumuliert ist und auf Verwertung wartet oder vielmehr drängt. Arbeit hält diese Vergangenheit beständig *konstant* und sorgt für die Unvergänglichkeit und ewige Wiederkehr ihrer eigenen Vergangenheit. Marx fasst daher diese zeitliche Konstante im Begriff des „konstanten Kapitals“.

³² Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 214–225.

So teilen Arbeit und Kapital in ihrer Verwertung ein und dieselbe Zeit, aber sie setzen die Zeit in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart auseinander, während gleichzeitig diese Auseinandersetzung die vergangene, aufseiten des Kapitals akkumulierte Arbeitszeit auf neue Waren überträgt und eine Konstante bildet.

Dieses Verhältnis von gegenwärtiger und vergangener Arbeitszeit setzt aber noch ein zweites zeitliches Verhältnis in Kraft, nämlich das Verhältnis von „notwendiger“ und „zusätzlicher Arbeitszeit“. Für dieses Verhältnis muss die Arbeitszeit kommodifiziert und in der Arbeitskraft zu einer besonderen Ware werden. Ihr Wert ist wie bei jeder gewöhnlichen Ware durch diejenige Arbeitszeit bestimmt, die zur Produktion notwendig ist; das ist im Fall der Ware Arbeitskraft diejenige Arbeitszeit, die zu ihrer Reproduktion notwendig ist. Für diese Reproduktion muss sie sich im Lohn ein Äquivalent erarbeiten.³³ Die Arbeitskraft ist aber eine besondere, zeitlich gleichsam ekstatische Ware, weil sie durch *zusätzliche* Arbeitszeit über dieses zu ihrer Reproduktion notwendige Äquivalent hinausgehen kann. Diese zusätzliche Arbeitszeit ist der viel zitierte „Mehrwert“.³⁴

Es reicht hier festzuhalten, dass in diesem Verhältnis von notwendiger und zusätzlicher Arbeitszeit die eigentliche Produktivkraft der Verwertung der Arbeitskraft durch das Kapital steckt: Die Arbeitskraft hat die im Kapital akkumulierte Vergangenheit nicht nur überhaupt erst produziert und hält sie nicht nur konstant – die Arbeitskraft geht auch über diese zeitliche Konstante hinaus und wird eine Variable.³⁵ Das In-Kraft-Setzen der Variablen führt mithin in die historische Dimension der Ökonomie der Zeit.

Wir sehen an diesem Mehrwert erneut, warum das Geld für die Zeit im unmittelbarsten Sinne *einspringen* muss, denn diese zusätzliche Arbeitszeit kann nur durch das Geld angeeignet und ausgebeutet werden. Es gibt keine Möglichkeit, die Differenz zwischen notwendiger und zusätzlicher Arbeitszeit zu gewinnen, ohne sie durch das Geld zu quantifizieren und im Zuge der Reproduktionskreisläufe von aller sinnlich-stofflichen Welt zu trennen und im Profit, also durch ein bloßes Quantum, im Wortsinn heraus zu stellen. Nur das Geld kann im Zuge der ökonomischen Kreisläufe zusätzliche von notwendiger Arbeitszeit scheiden und diese

44

³³ Vgl. Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 181ff.; Marx, *Grundrisse, op. cit.*, S. 208.

³⁴ Vgl. Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 165ff. u. 192ff.

³⁵ Marx, *op. cit.*, S. 214ff.

Differenz quantitativ aufbewahren, und nur durch das Geld kann dieses ausgebeutete Quantum Arbeitszeit auch wieder in die Bestandteile der Verwertung (zurück) verwandelt und (zurück) überführt werden. Dagegen nimmt die Zeit in den Gestalten von Arbeit und Kapital und in der Produktion der Waren immer nur eine *räumliche* Dimension ein (oder noch unmittelbarer: *an*), und auch in den produzierten Waren und in den ökonomischen Kreisläufen W-G-W- und G-W-G' fällt die Ökonomie der Zeit immer nur in eine räumliche oder vielmehr in „ihre“ verräumlichte Dimension.

Was für die zusätzliche Arbeitszeit gilt, gilt daher für die Ökonomie der Zeit insgesamt. Nur das Geld kann diejenige Zeit mit sich bringen, die es quantifiziert, d.h. nur das Geld kann die Zeit, die es aufseiten der Verwertung in Wert und in Kraft setzt, nicht nur auf eine Weise zeitlos halten, dass die Zeit im Geld quantitativ existiert, es kann der quantifizierten Zeit auch wieder Raum geben und sie in alle verschiedenen Gestalten der kapitalistischen Warenproduktion (zurück) verwandeln. Kurz, nur das Geld kann durch die Quantifizierung gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse die Zeit verräumlichen und den Raum verzeitlichen. Vor allem aber kann nur das Geld im Zuge dieser Umwandlung zusätzliche Arbeitszeit so ausbeuten, dass sie gleichsam aus dem Raum und aus der Zeit fällt und als ein Überschuss im Spiel ist, als ein Überschuss, der aber wieder in die Gestalten der Ökonomie zurückverwandelt werden und die Gesellschaft in ihre eigene ebenso immanente wie exzessive Erweiterung führen kann, in die „erweiterte Reproduktion des Kapitals“ (Marx).³⁶

Aufgrund dieser Technik, die Produktivkraft einer Ökonomie der Zeit auf quantitative Weise sowohl in Kraft zu setzen als auch zu bewältigen, scheint im Kapitalismus bereits der Kommunismus vor-enthalten zu sein, vorenthalten im doppelten Sinne von bereits präsent und im Kommen und doch entzogen und unverfügbar gehalten.

45

Die Unverfügbarkeit der Produktivkraft und das Problem des Kommunismus

Es war die zentrale Idee der Gesellschaftskritik vom Klassischen Marxismus über die Kritische Theorie bis zu den heutigen Ansätzen, dass die Produktivkraft, die

³⁶ Marx, *op. cit.*, MEW 24, S. 485.

in der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft so ungeheuer gesteigert und vergesellschaftet wird, unter gesamtgesellschaftliche Kontrolle und Planung zu bringen und gebrauchswertorientiert und zum Nutzen aller anzuwenden sei.

Erste Aufgabe dafür aber wäre, die zeitliche Dimension der Produktivkraft zu begreifen, also zu begreifen, dass die Produktivkraft der Verwertung von Arbeitskraft und Kapital ein *zeitliches* Verhältnis ist. Und zweite Aufgabe wäre zu begreifen, dass die Produktivkraft dieses zeitlichen Verhältnisses nur durch die Technik des Geldes zu bewältigen und dass uns die Kraft selbst nur quantitativ gegeben ist – und dadurch ebenso entzogen. Doch an dieser Unverfügbarkeit der Produktivkraft gingen die Entwürfe einer anderen, post-kapitalistischen oder gar kommunistischen Gesellschaft vorbei. Stattdessen wurde die Produktivkraft in positivistischer und mitunter geradezu naiver Weise mit den Gestalten gleichgesetzt, in denen diese zeitlichen Verhältnisse materielle und qualitative Gestalt annehmen und in denen sie unmittelbar in Kraft zu sein scheinen: Die Produktivkraft wurde mit der Arbeit und der Arbeiterklasse und mit den Produktionsmitteln identifiziert und wie eine menschliche bzw. dingliche Eigenschaft reflektiert. Folgerichtig konnte es scheinen, als läge die Unverfügbarkeit ihrer Produktivkraft an der kapitalistischen Eigentumsordnung und als müssten die Arbeiter – oder auch die Massen, die Multitude etc. – die Produktionsmittel nur aus dem Privatbesitz und vom Profitinteresse befreien, um sie bewusst und geplant, gebrauchswertorientiert und ihrem gesellschaftlichen Charakter gemäß zum Nutzen aller anzuwenden. Ja, es sah sogar so aus, als müssten Arbeit und Produktionsmittel gerade von ihrer kapitalistischen Form und der Logik ihrer quantitativen Verwertung und Vermittlung befreit werden – als ob dann die Produktivkraft frei zur Verfügung stünde, direkt angeeignet und durch staatlich oder kollektive Planung angewandt werden könnte.

46

Der Konflikt drehte sich dann nur noch um die zwei recht unvereinbaren Pole des Zugriffs: entweder von oben und zentral über eine Planungsinstanz wie die Partei oder den Staat (das war der Zugriff des Partei-Kommunismus und der Sozialdemokratie), oder gleich in einer Selbstverwaltung horizontal und von unten durch Räte und Kollektive oder, in heutigen Konzeptionen, durch Kommunikation, Vernetzung, General Intellect, Multitude, Commons u.Ä. (das war der Zugriff von Anarchismus, libertärem Kommunismus und Rätekommunismus, Sozialen Bewegungen etc.).

Keine der beiden Pole aber kann die Technik des Geldes auf sich nehmen, und beide würden dennoch versuchen, sie kurzerhand zu ersetzen. Beide würden jeweils versuchen, durch Politik und Planung, durch Vernetzung, basisdemokratische Kommunikation, Absprachen und ähnliche Planungsprozesse eine Produktivkraft zu kontrollieren, zu bewältigen und auszurechnen, die nicht nur unverfügbar bleiben wird und die allein durch die Technik des Geldes zu bewältigen ist, sondern die vor allem eine spezifisch kapitalistische Produktivkraft bleiben würde, so lange wir überhaupt Arbeit und Produktionsmittel produktiv ins Verhältnis setzen und dafür die Zeit als Maß in Anspruch nehmen müssen, so lange wir also mit der Identität der Zeit durch quantitative Verhältnisse und ihre Größen rechnen müssen.

Uroš Kranjc*

The Absent Cause and Marx's Value Form

In autumn 2008, the global economy encountered a severe economic downturn. At the time, the common belief held was that fiscal and monetary authorities had enough strength to manage the inherent instabilities and systemic risk in the economic system. The centralised monetary system, along with its satellites – private banking and insurance and mortgage companies – started a domino effect of defaults and homeowner foreclosures, pushing national economies close to sovereign debt defaults. The proceeding aftermath of all these events is historically recorded. An alternative view, which went along the lines of major economic interventionist actions to salvage the banking system, almost immediately emerged. In March 2009, some of the leading western philosophers evoked the “Idea of Communism” proposing an alternative agenda to insurmountable social antagonisms in the capitalist system of today. The *leitmotif* of the conference can be summed up with the statement: “The communist hypothesis is the hypothesis of emancipation”¹. In a nutshell, we are confronted with the resurrection of the word *communism*, deriving from its *political implications*. Determined in this way, it completely forecloses the possibility of inquiry into the causes of the economic and social crisis and therefore delivers none of the political practices and actions, which should be the “main weapon of the Left”. Indeed, it becomes a sad reversal of positions when we firstly identify the critique of political economy as the *sine qua non* for the reinvigoration of contemporary communist politics and then several years later withdraw ourselves with an inversed XIth Thesis on Feuerbach: “it is not to change the world but to try to interpret it”². Alain Badiou had also withdrawn the initial call for political action in 2009 and transformed the emancipatory “programme” into a *dialectic of principles* – collectivism against private property, a polymorphous worker

49

¹ Cf. Jacques Rancière quotes Alain Badiou, “Communists without communism”, in: A. Douzinas and S. Žižek (Eds.), *The Idea of Communism*, Verso, New York 2010, p. 163.

² Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, Verso, New York 2010, p. 185. And “Interview with Slavoj Žižek”, in *Philosophy Now*, 7. 11. 2017, accessible via https://philosophynow.org/issues/122/Slavoj_Zizek

against specialization, concrete universalism against closed identities, and free association against the state.³ Or as Jacques Rancière had put it, calling into account the paradox of Joseph Jacotot, whose emancipation of (communist) intelligence is denied by the possibility of emancipation occurring only between individuals, since (communist) emancipation simply cannot be brought up *inter alia* with the (individualist) emancipation of commons or that of the social body.

One would expect such a moment or *momentum* to be seized by some Marxist or leftist political action. Rather, it was seized by an anarcho-libertarian individualist course of action. Anarcho-capitalism or its newest avatar, the Crypto-anarchism with cryptocurrencies as its main mediator emerged on the other side of the *Great Recession*, placing in monetary orbit a new object as medium of exchange – the cryptocurrency. Cryptocurrencies can be viewed today as one of the immediate consequences of the central banking debacle during the times of economic turmoil. Observing the current course of events, we can sincerely question the actual fate of cryptocurrencies – whether they will grow into a sustainable alternative money-commodity or will the blockchain eventually become integrated in its reversal, i.e. a globally fragmented authoritarian money regime. To turn this disposition around, we have to pose an altogether different question: Are cryptocurrencies a “real” alternative to the universality of (fiat) money? More than just a handful of people actually think that a decentralized medium of exchange poses a concrete challenge to (supra)national central banking as long as it is able to maintain other functions, namely: withholding its store of value, expanding as a means of payment, and becoming a recognizable unit of account. Indeed, this is what crypto-anarchic individuals want to accomplish: indulge a decentralized, and more importantly, anonymous structuring of the exchange totality. From this point of view, they have most definitely seized the *momentum*. But their quest for reshaping the capitalist mode of production via the imaginary destruction of (fiat) money is a whole different matter.

50

If we are to analyse the inner core of these new forms of money from the perspective of *communist politics*, then what is needed is a return to the *critique of economic categories* and an investigation of their relations in respective totalities. Let us on the first take approach these issues through a provisional framework

³ Alain Badiou, “Reflections on the Recent Election”, Verso blog, 6.11.2017, accessible via www.versobooks.com/blogs/2940-alain-badiou-reflections-on-the-recent-election.

by employing the literary/linguistic operations of metonymy and metaphor. Jacques Lacan strongly relied on these two operations to describe the metonymic sliding of desire (object), where the lack of being is instated. And on the other side, a metaphorical instalment of the symptom, insofar the substitution of one chain for another induces the subject's access to it (and with it to its desire-object). Consequently, what is evoked here of course is *the logic of the signifier*, linking together the object with the subject within a certain minimal structure. Next, we wish to test the concept of cryptocurrency against this logic, aiming to show that they are no more than a particular variation of money-commodity in the capitalist mode of production and in the end leading to the structures of production and exchange in Marx's conception of value form.

Starting with the metonymic relationship, we have different types of money (commodity money, fiat money, fiduciary money, bank money, and now cryptocurrency money) which all perform the same modalities as far as the economic system is concerned – they are part of the same universal Whole – the *monetary exchange*.

The metaphoric relationship completes the structure of *metonymic causality*; it does so by installing a determinate relation in the gap between two commodities (two moneys). A relation which introduces an absent cause – specific social relations of production – posing as a substanceless *identity of abstract labour and concrete labour*.

The aim of this provisional schema is twofold: the more obvious first point of departure is the Althusserian understanding of “[t]he absence of the cause in the structure’s ‘metonymic causality’ on its effects is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure with respect to its economic phenomena; on the contrary, it is the very form of the interiority of the structure, as a structure, in its effects.”⁴ Our main focus will be Rancière’s contribution to the work *Reading Capital* entitled “*The Concept of ‘Critique’ and the ‘Critique of Political Economy’*” in trying to unveil the metaphorical relationship between the unity of abstract and concrete labour presented as an absent cause of a determinate social relation in the capitalist mode of production. This is compounded by commodity exchange (the totality of circulation), mediated with a specific object – a money commodity.

⁴ Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Verso, London 2009, p. 208.

But in order to understand where this money commodity emerges from, we have to make a qualitative leap, distinguishing Marx from his earlier anthropological writings (*Economic manuscripts*) and scientific delineation in *Capital*. We need to deepen our analysis of the “Dialectics of the value form”. This work (“On the Dialectics of the Value-form”) introduced by Hans Georg Backhaus in 1969 presents a blueprint for a research programme called New Reading of Marx (*Neue Marx Lektüre*), initiated alongside Helmut Reichelt, Alfred Schmidt and others. This new reading of the first edition of *Capital* sheds light on a dialectical contradiction immanent in the “equivalent form” of value, which involves a different interpretation in the mode of presentation from the one Marx endorses in the second edition of *Capital*. It all comes down to the following question: how does one construct the notion of value that predetermines the notional development of money?

To quote H. G. Backhaus:

All the magic and hubbub which belongs the products of labour on the basis of commodity production’ manifests itself in the paradoxical relation in which the commodity is itself and at the same time its other: money. It is therefore the identity of identity and non-identity. The commodity is equal in essence to money and at the same time different from it. The ‘unity in difference’ is designated as is known with the Hegelian term “doubling” (*Verdopplung*). This dialectical concept is used by Marx to characterise the structure of commodity-money equation: Commodity exchange ‘produces a *doubling of the commodity into commodity and money*, an external opposition in which they represent their immanent opposition of use-value and value.

52

*The commodity-money equation is the economic dissolution (Aufhebung) of the Principle of Identity.*⁵

To return to our metonymic relationship and the example of cryptocurrency among other types of money: we are dealing with an *addition* to the moneys chain, which consolidates the Universal, i.e. money-object. All these concrete moneys are partial displacements of the concrete universal – money. We shall

⁵ Hans-Georg Backhaus, “On the Dialectics of the Value-Form”, *Thesis Eleven*, 1 (1/1980), p. 109.

add the following thesis: It is against this background that one should reject the optimistic call for subsuming altogether the notion of money with reliance on cryptocurrencies in our capitalist institutional framework. Furthermore, if we want to *act on* communist politics via the critique of political economy, we need to insist on dismantling the structure of the “social relation of things”, walk through the “genesis of abstract value-objectivity” (*Wertgegenständlichkeit*) and unveil the relation between a subject objectifying itself as an object on the axis: labour – value – money. Value as the central term is on the one hand something being thought, immaterial, living only in consciousness, but also always only the value of a product, something material. In order to fulfil its mission, it must achieve a reality of its own for consciousness, which is first of all alien to it and second, also takes a fantastic shape and fetishist character. Both the Althusserian reading of the *Capital* and New Reading of Marx have brought up different structural frameworks to disentangle the dialectical play of central concepts in the critique of political economy; now we must put them together in an orderly fashion, so as to fully comprehend and, crucially, *simultaneously* pave concrete actions leading to communist politics.

Abstract labour and subtractive structure

In his preparatory writings on the critique of political economy, Marx starts *Grundrisse* with the analysis of simple circulation, trying to establish a successive presentational linkage for his later works ranging from 1. value, 2. money and 3. capital in general. A parallax shift came with *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and later *Capital*, when his inquiry deepened and abstracting from “Capital in general” established “the Commodity” and its double character as a point of departure. In addition to its *use* value, a particular commodity also possesses an *exchange* value. Use value is its usefulness and utility that one derives from its usage or consumption of its natural form. Exchange value is something inherently different, a social property of a thing, exchanged on a market. Michael Heinrich in his reading of Marx introduces an univocal relation between commodity and labour in the following way: “If the commodity has a twofold character, as use value and value, then *commodity-producing labour* must also have a twofold character: it is labour that not only

produces a use value, but also value.”⁶ This means that concrete labour creates qualitatively different use values of determinate commodities. On the other hand, we have abstract labour, which is the originator of value, i.e. is a value substance, as the “crystals” of abstract labour our commodities represent “values”. As such, labour is qualitatively equal human labour and abstracted from its concrete character. We know that Marx relied on the dialectical distinction between content and form, a gap that is still being entirely ignored by contemporary scientific economic theories in their attempt of maximal salvation of consistency. To withstand all criticisms, these theories employ evermore complex mathematical formulae, but at the same time face a reflection of an incomplete Whole – a structure with some determinate but indiscernible content.

We propose the following: there is a recurring necessity of maintaining an open gap between content and form, or to put it differently, a theoretical challenge to outline a specific structural dimension of this gap and its implicit appearing in social exchange. The identity between concrete and abstract labour in the form of an absent cause is the starting point taken by Rancière in *Reading Capital* with which he draws the demarcation line between anthropological discourse of the young Marx in *Economic Manuscripts* and the scientific discourse of *Capital*. This cut represents a revolutionizing of scientific field, moving from ideological to scientific strata; it is also the implementation of a new discourse abolishing the one put forth by classical economics. In order to achieve this, we have to follow Marx’s path from the first edition of *Capital*, “since up to now it has only been the substance of value and the magnitude of value which have been specified, let us now direct our attention to the analysis of the *form of value*.”⁷ Marx acknowledges the contribution of David Ricardo to the science of economics, but points out the pitfalls that would later haunt classical economics in terms of quantitative magnitudes of value. For him, there is an alternative route of analysis: only after the mediating agency of *value-form* can we relate labour as a value substance with commodity exchange based on money. The relationship between content and form is introduced from a certain stage on; when labour ceases to present direct and exclusive origin of value (valid for classical economics) and is understood as rep-

54

⁶ Michael Heinrich, *An introduction to the three volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2012, p. 48.

⁷ Karl Marx, “The Commodity. Chapter One, Volume One, of the first edition of *Capital*”, in: A. Dragstedt (Ed. and Trans.), *Value: Studies By Karl Marx*, New Park Publications, London 1976, p. 16.

resented in the exchange of commodities, which realize their value based on their exchangeability. The significance of value form stems from its duality – natural form and form of exchange –, where one can observe the “genesis” of money form.

Following Rancière, we start the analysis of value form with *the relation of two commodities, one that furnishes the simplest value-expression for a commodity*:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & x \text{ commodity A} = y \text{ commodity B} \\
 & \text{OR} \\
 & x \text{ commodity A is worth } y \text{ commodity B}
 \end{aligned}$$

Commodities A and B are distinguished in a mutually exclusive relation, i.e. polar relation, it is precisely in their opposition (although one active and the other passive) that the inner nature of simple value form lies. We say that the first commodity (A) stands in the *relative value-form*, while the second commodity (B) has its place in the *equivalent form*. Together they form moments of the same expression of value with recourse to their reciprocal conditioning and unity. Different pairings of commodities easily trade places in the value form, on the other hand what cannot occur is a situation where one commodity would take up both sides of the equation. Rearranging all the moments of value form, we get:

Form of value of A = Natural form of B

The background effect of a simple equation of two commodities immediately sets in motion the formation of a determinate social structure. This has decisive consequences: the introduction of value (of a certain commodity) is structurally determined with the identity of two opposing and mutually excluding poles. A commodity in the *equivalent form* cannot express its value: “It furnishes only the material for the expression of value in another commodity.”⁸ – *the structure of Two implies a Third*. “[Commodities] are neither equal as mere things, nor even as items of the same substance; they are equal in determinate formal conditions imposed by the structure in which this relation is achieved.”⁹ Rancière

⁸ Karl Marx, “The Value-Form”, *Capital and Class* 4 (Spring 1978), p. 135.

⁹ Jacques Rancière, “The Concept of ‘Critique’ and the ‘Critique of Political Economy’”, in: *Ideology, method and Marx: essays from economy and society*, Ali Rattansi (Ed.), Routledge, London 1989, p. 106.

highlights the crucial difference of earlier *Economic Manuscripts* from *Capital*, first with its immediacy of contradiction in the (anthropological) equation: *essence of man = alienated man's essence*; an immediate contradiction, where the predicate exists separated from the subject, simultaneously finds its solution exactly in the unity of disjunction (alienation) – the essence of man is separated from the human subject. In the second case from *Capital*, we are presented with a more mystical equation – $x \text{ commodity A} = y \text{ commodity B}$ – in which the value qua the cause of equality relation is absent. The natural form B has *materialized* the value of commodity A in its form of appearance without any recourse to their inner determinations – a common third –, i.e. the identity of concrete and abstract labour. This identity relation, or put inversely, the scission immanent in the notion of labour, is the product of a social process (its result is *the structure with an absent cause*) in Marx's conceptual apparatus known as social relations of production.

Rancière's reading of Marx through metonymic causality is stated as follows: "what determines the connection between the effects (the relations between commodities) is the cause (the social relations of production) in so far as it is absent. This absent cause is not labour as a subject, it is the identity of abstract labour and concrete labour inasmuch as its generalisation expresses the structure of a certain mode of production, the capitalist mode of production."¹⁰ Defined in such a way, the value form unfolds the problem of objectification of labour; it overturns the production process into simple circulation, where commodities become exchanged on the same qualitative presupposition – the mutual exchange of labour. If we then paraphrase Althusser's definition of *structural causality*: value form represents the first explication of a structure of sites stemming from immanence of an absent cause in its effects. The structure is called simple commodity exchange. This kind of setting is, something Althusser also implicitly admits, identical to the problem of *inner connection, internal relationship* [*innere Zusammenhang*] and *outward form, outward appearance* [*Erscheinungsform*]. It is precisely this gap between inner essence and phenomenal "surface" that is crucial for Marx in his methodological gateway from an abstract interior to a concrete, sensuous exterior. Rancière's key contribution to the new reading of Marx is his delineation of structural causality inherent in the value form. This reading opened a new possibility of conjoining labour and value in a specific structure,

56

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

i.e. how the value of labour can be thought in unity with production, circulation and exchange. But in order for Marx's understanding of the commodity-object to have any grounding in value form *per se*, he has to deliver his famous passage:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of products of labour themselves, as socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.¹¹

This type of phantasmagorical form of a relation of things is only attributable to determinate social relations among people; on the other hand, this particular social character underpins our perception of economic objectivity. The transpositional structure among people and things conforms to the metonymic manifestation of social character, by which we mean encircling the notion of value as a "natural" property of things-in-themselves. Sensuous super-sensuous things are simultaneously forms of appearance of value and a special object inasmuch as its properties mark social relations in a specific structure of semblance. When dealing with this type of forms and structure, we are confronted with the belonging of the constitutive lack's non-belonging – the unity of abstract and concrete labour.

Just to clarify our position, let us introduce some basic determinations of the value form. Marx intended to distinguish his labour theory of value from Ricardo's transformational immediacy on the basis of the scission: content and form. For Ricardo, there was an immediate law: Labour *is* value (creating); for Marx on the other hand, accordingly to content-form distinction, value *represents* labour by taking on its form in the value of commodities. Consequently, the commodities as use-values now become "substantial bearers" of exchange-value. Exchange-values of different things are expressed as the quantum of the same qualitative determination – "value-forming substance". From here on, we can speak of

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, Penguin books, London 1993, p. 164–165.

qualitative value-equality of different use values. This is immediately followed by the definition of “is exchange value of” equilibrating different commodities of the same value magnitude into an *equivalent relation*, x of linen = y of coat. If we were to interpret an equation so defined in a scientific discourse of economics, we would get a zero-sum game; a structure of exchange, where no changes are made in terms of (cardinal) values. Value-objectivity [*Wertgegenständlichkeit*] is in a capitalist social formation first and foremost expressed with this equation, but also one where Marx obfuscates the ambivalence in relations of equality [*Gleichheitsverhältnis*] and polarity [*Polaritätsverhältnis*], which is internal to the expression »is exchange value of”.

On the other hand, this development of a contradiction in the use and exchange value alongside the process of exchange presupposes the “cell” form of capital commodity. In *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and later in *Capital*, Marx had already introduced the problem of the social division of labour into abstract and concrete labour. A unity that has to be analysed against the backdrop of commodity exchange in order to obtain the final answer to the following question: “*why this content assumes that form*”. The value substance of a commodity, understood of course in the form of time duration or magnitude of labour-time, is social labour as labour in general of a specific social structure – the capitalist mode of production. A new reading of Marx conceives this labour in general as preceding the *de facto* act of exchange, so we must think of its position in the structure as being on a new, *subtracted level*, evading the superficial analysis of commodity exchange, and simultaneously taking into account the redoubling in commodity and money. A contradiction between use and exchange value has for its ground the resolved contradiction of social-human labour, abstract and concrete labour that is, firstly, *subtracted* and, secondly, substituted with the initiation of value. Moishe Postone introduces a similar configuration:

58

Value, then, is unfolded by Marx as the core of a form of social mediation that constitutes social objectivity and subjectivity, and is intrinsically dynamic: it is a form of social mediation that necessarily exists in objectified, materialized form, but is neither identical with, nor an inherent property of, its materialized form, whether in the shape of money or goods. The way in which Marx unfolds the category of capital retrospectively illuminates his initial determination of value

as an objectified social relation, constituted by labor, that is carried by, but exists “behind,” the commodities as objects.¹²

*This expansion [Movement of capital], this ceaseless motion is, within the framework of Marx's analysis, intrinsically related to the temporal dimension of value. As we shall see, Marx's concept of self-valorizing value attempts to grasp an alienated form of social relations that possesses an intrinsic temporal dynamic; this alienated form constitutes an immanent logic of history, gives rise to a particular structure of labor, and continually transforms social life while reconstituting its underlying capitalist character.*¹³

If we disentangle Postone's complex formulation we actually get a crystallized overview of relations and objects in Marx's critical analysis – the connections between value, labour, commodity, money and capital. His interpretation suggests different levels of social objectivity with a direct link to the subjective moment residing inside them – it incorporates *value* as a form of social relation (circulation), reflected through the mediation of use and exchange, taking the material shape of a specific object, i.e. money-commodity. One of the aspects of the new reading of Marx is the differential abstraction of so-called “natural exchange”. It breaks with the transhistorical notion of product-exchange devoid of concrete existence from that of circulation in a concrete social mode of production. Contemporary economics has followed the former path; for Marx, utilizing relative exchange ratios in terms of prices and money as a “technical-material instrument, cunningly devised” and where value corresponds only to subjective-aspirations is for him an unconceivable thought [*Denk unmöglichkeit*]. From this point of view, both traditional Marxist and subjectivist theories paradoxically miss the point, because they have to abstract value out of money, while on the other hand simultaneously seek to endorse money as an instrumental means for an (already) price-determined value exchange of goods. They get twirled up in a double measure-bind of value – labour time/utility and money. Combining the simple or accidental form of value, one that presupposes the equivalence of two commodities based on exchanged quanta of labour time, with the special commodity of *labour power* – the source of creating value and objectified labour.

¹² Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1996, p. 269.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 269–270.

It is the ability of one bearer [*Träger*] in the form of possessor of money or *capitalist* to find a “free” human being who sells his labour capacity for a *limited amount of time* to him in order to determine a fruitful relationship among them. An individual’s freedom resides in the possession of his labour-capacity (as his only property) and the ability to temporarily resell it for consumption to a possessor of money. The spheres of production and circulation now form this double movement from $C - M - C$ and $M - C - M'$ to expanded $M - C \dots P \dots C' - M'$.

The introduction of labour-power sublates the simple commodity exchange and brings forward a new stage in the development of the social process; by solving the initial contradiction of commodity exchange and surplus value it instated the one between wage as the value of labour (power) against labour as the source of value. Rancière pinpoints this new structure by concentrating on the contradiction implied in simple value form, one of un/equivalent exchange, so that we have a special commodity in circulation – labour-power – which is the source of value for other commodities and is simultaneously objectified (as work-capacity) and exchanged for other commodities, even though the cause is absent in the form. It is the presupposition of the equivalence axiom that enables the commodity labour-power to be exchanged for all other commodities, in the end leading to an “impossible equation”, an absent cause in the structure of relations of production presented via value form. This structure can be understood here as an asymmetric relation inherently expressed with the value form – in polarity between relative value form and equivalent form. Immediately after the commodity labour-power has taken its place in the value form, the qualitative determinations change: the abstraction of exchange traverses into class struggle, both belonging to a particular mode of production, where social human labour corresponds to wage-labour. In order to get a fuller grip on the structure and places of objects inside the capitalist institutional framework we now need to address the second specific object (alongside labour) – money-commodity. Both commodities, labour-power and money, within the capitalist institutional framework, need our utmost attention: it is in the exclusive context of this particular structure that we encounter *an overlapping of both objects* in the exchange process.

60

Money commodity and Capital

If we return once more to Backhaus and his *On the Dialectics of the Value-Form*, we must point out the following: two commodities do not come to be set equal,

they are already set equal. They are set equal to a third – money – out of which one derives value relation as value expression. Backhaus emphasises that we are dealing with an equal setting, but only insofar we observe the content; however, if we observe the form, the setting is unequal. On the one side, we have a commodity, on the other, its value expression, i.e. money. The outcome, of course, is the relative and equivalent form. Even though both products differ in their use values and are equal in value, they are in a relation after they achieve their value expression in a third, e.g. gold or silver, fiat or crypto money. Once products engage in the form of value, their relationship introduces the notion of commodification (they become of same essence – absolute value), they realize themselves in relative ratios of value (x commodity A = y commodity B). Products attain their properties as commodities only after they are put together in mutual relation to two use values; as such they also acquire a universal (supra-natural) property – (exchange) value –, products of labour, i.e. sensuous things, “are at the same time supra-sensible or social”¹⁴. In the picturesque language of his first draft, Marx demonstrates the existence of *a universal* inside a totality with a known passage: “It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, [...] there existed also in addition *the animal*, individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom.”¹⁵ Juxtaposing products of labour in exchange, two use values mediated through value form, results in one of them becoming unequal with itself, thus positing this excess in the form of difference “of-its-own” in a third (equilibrating) term. This is why Backhaus calls the “unity” of value and use value “the unity in self-differentiation [that] presents itself as the doubling of the commodity into commodity and money”¹⁶. To quote Marx: “The internal opposition (between use value and value) enveloped in the commodity [...] is therefore represented on the surface by an external opposition.”¹⁷

From the *Grundrisse* manuscript onwards, it becomes clear that Marx wanted to introduce a particular commodity – money – as a medium for economic value-determination, one whose contradiction arises as a “particular that represents itself as opposite, as universal”. All exchange values must enter equalization *vis-à-vis* the general equivalent; it is only thereafter that they become val-

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, p. 149.

¹⁵ Marx, “*The Commodity. Chapter One, Volume One, of the first edition of Capital*”, p. 27.

¹⁶ Backhaus. “On the Dialectics of the Value-Form”, p. 111.

¹⁷ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, p. 153.

ue-equal and interchangeable. Our third thing, money, also has one peculiar and crucial determination: money is a *semblance* and reality at the same time. The metamorphosis of commodities is mediated through price markings: two things connect with the third (money) and constitute a shift in form, starting with C – M – C and finishing in C – C. “Circulation sweats money from every pore.”¹⁸ After the extinguished exchange process, there remains no direct trace of money taking place, one sees only two parties with satisfied needs. Material occurrence of value in money is accounted in order to vanish, to subtract itself from the world of commodities. More succinctly, money-commodity gives sense to the entire chain of commodity circulation and paradoxically, itself remains undetermined in a relation connecting value with a (price-determined) world of commodities.

We have said that the general equivalent (money) assumes the form of the general material representative of wealth, as such a particular-individual commodity among all others, *the animal* among all concrete animals in the world. The relative and equivalent form constitute a relation of use and exchange value, but also that of commodity and money, modelled on Hegel’s *essential relation*¹⁹ (*Besondern – Allgemeinen – Einzeln*). Marx follows Hegel’s dialectical steps in terms of a sensuous-supersensuous thing (sensible super-sensible thing) [*sinnlich übersinnliches Ding*], a subjective-objective object, determined as a *real-universal* or *real-abstraction*. Heinrich gives us clues how one should approach a sensuous-supersensuous thing: “The ‘super-sensuous’ of the commodity is not the *content* of value-determination, but rather the *form, value*, a specific objectivity of value. This supra-sensuous part of commodity gets a sensuous existence in money-commodity.”²⁰ So, the property of super-sensuous cannot be attained by any sensuous instance, it [the value] needs support for its concrete manifestation. The immediate existence of value, i.e. value as such, is an abstraction; a real object can always only *represent* it. Doubling then firstly implies the existence of categories *ideally* (in the head), as well as the existence of the real-universal [*Real-Allgemeine*], a *real abstraction*, objectification, an “objective form of thought”, an “absurd form” residing in economic objectivity. This doubling presents itself immanently in the contradictions of price implementation

62

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II. Erster Teil. Die objektive Logik. Zweites Buch. Zweiter Teil. Die subjektive Logik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 2014, “Wesentliche Verhältniss”, p. 164–185.

²⁰ Michael Heinrich, *Wissenschaft vom Wert*, Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster 2006, p. 235.

("Exchange value, posited in the character of money, is price. Exchange value is expressed in price as a specific quantity of money."²¹)

The following question arises: how are we to think the conjunction of a particular with the (real) universal, concrete and abstract, arising from value form? We will proceed with the aim of introducing a possible new representation of relations inherent in the structure of value form, one that subsumes in unity the economic categories regarding their ideal and real form. Marx defines money as a universal form of wealth, a general material representative, a totality of particularities that form its substance. Wealth [represented in money] is (exchange) value *as totality and as abstraction* individualized and excluded against all commodities; or negatively, the world of commodities becomes a totality, and non-All, after wealth (as money) had been expunged from it. What successively follows is the development of labour and capital categories; with dialectical unfolding of social relations (particular and universal), concrete labour determines a notion with moments that include all particular forms of labour, from tailoring to agriculture, one and the other, even though it is neither first or second, but a third as totality – human labour-in-general.

To recap: using a provisional framework of metonymy/metaphor we introduced a certain type of structure with two series. As far as metonymic sliding goes, we have interchangeable variations of concrete moneys driving monetary exchange, all of which correspond to the *real abstraction*, an object of the Whole – money. Money is an excess, one that completes the totality of exchange as long as it ceaselessly subtracts itself from exchange, thus making it non-All. However, a productive process propels exchange; in the range of different concrete labour-creating use values, there comes along labour-in-general, abstract labour which mediates exchange value and their unity engenders a social process with an absent cause (social relations of production posited as a filled void in the formula $x \text{ commodity A} = y \text{ commodity B}$). The value form is a representational model, introducing a synthesis of two series – one with an excess, the other with a lack. This type of structure has been thematized on more than one occasion²²;

63

²¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Penguin Books, London 1993, p. 189.

²² Deleuze has made a stringent case for the dialectic of excess and lack in his *Logic of Sense*. Nonetheless, we owe it to Badiou for maintaining a decisive minimal difference in the

we must understand it as the abandonment of our provisional framework and proceed towards an attempt of thinking together in a relational structure of value form: labour as the substance of value and money as a semblance.

Now we can pose the following question: What does this internal exclusion of money-commodity bring about in its developed form? Or, alternatively, what implication does Marx's (monetary) theory of value bring? Why should one perceive his (monetary) theory of value as a theory of Capital [*Kapitaltheorie*]? Marx strives toward an unempirical notional development of his theory of value, evident in "*Urtext to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" and in consequent texts of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. The goal is the unfolding of categories in a dialectical gateway: value-money-capital. He cautions us on two points: the specificity of conditions in the capitalist mode of production and the particular dimensions of *a third* when differentiating simple un-totalized commodity exchange from circulation of commodities $C - M - C$ and money $M - C - M$.

Observing both paths of circulation, i.e. $C - M - C$ and $M - C - M$, introduces certain differences; the first movement starts and finishes the process with commodities, while the second does so with money (as capital). In the first instance we are dealing with a relentless subtracting of money-commodity out of circulation. Value is thus extinguished when its form, monetary object, is being subtracted out of simple circulation. In the second movement both commodity and money function only as different modes of value existence, money as general and commodity as particular, which is now an *automatic subject*. Hence, value as such reaches its higher sense, interchanging forms of commodity and money, and by changing its own magnitude becomes a self-valorizing process, authorizing Marx to write: capital is money, capital is commodities. So, this second movement is the origin of the self-valorizing process that induces surplus-value, where money as capital begins to reside and attributes to a conscious bearer – the capitalist. This type of inversion or “personification of things” and their subjectivization are characteristic of economic categories that need *support* for the valorization of capital commodity. If the condition for valorization is not satisfied, money retains its basic form; it “petrifies” in value, whence no change

64

logics of lack and excess, subscribing to the division of algebra in topology, elaborated in *Theory of the Subject*.

occurs. On the other hand, when we are confronted with the form $M - M'$, then money represents itself in a “crude and conceptually undifferentiated” form of capital. Why such an a-conceptual form? Because the process leading to its final result (M') is obliterated, what is presented is only the point of initiation of M and the closure of M' . Such valorization can of course occur as a product of use value, a particular one whose ability is to add value – labour-power. “*Labour is the only use value which can present an opposite and a complement to money as capital, and it exists in labour capacity, which exists as a subject.*”²³ The subtraction of money and separation of money as capital from the functional capacity of creating use values obfuscates the asymmetrical relation of production between capitalist and wage-labourer. Marx devotes an entire chapter to the externalization of capital relation, stating: “As interest-bearing capital, and moreover in its immediate form of interest-bearing money capital (the other forms of interest-bearing capital, which do not concern us here, are derived from this form and presuppose it), capital obtains its pure fetish form, $M - M'$ being the subject, a thing for sale.”²⁴ Here the desire of money, the fleeting occurrences of money-object in circulation, overturns into the drive of capital, where money as capital enters an infinite circular movement and deploys its “*ingrown existence of interest*” for the sake of the automatic production of surplus-value. Herein lies its utmost fetishist form, its *begriffslosigkeit*. The distinction between the final movements of $C - C$ and $M - M'$ fixates the different capacities money represents; as far as initial social human value-building goes, it demarcates the wage-labourer from the capitalist. This happens when money steps over the Rubicon, meaning that the functioning capital is *de facto* self-reflexive with money-capital. Once it sets foot in capitalist production, in which money can be transformed into capital on the basis of self-valorization, the outcome comes in the form of profit. We must be precise here and not miss a decisive doubling of absence in cause: in the first series we lose the money-object, while in the second we lose money-as-interest-bearing-capital, capital entertaining its own pre-suppositions in money-form and giving itself sense with self-commodification. A gap emerges, a parallel to one existing in psychoanalysis between desire and

²³ Karl Marx, The Original Text of the Second and the Beginning of the Third Chapter of “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” (the *Urtext*) in: Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, *Collected Works*. Vol. 29, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1968, pp. 507.

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*, Penguin Books, London 1981, p. 517.

drive, sustaining the difference in enveloping products of human labour, money and capital with the notion of value.

There is one more insight we must undertake in our analysis. Marx says: “Fundamental changes have taken place in the course of the transition from form A to form B, and from form B to form C. As against this, form D differs not at all from form C, except that now instead of linen gold has assumed the universal equivalent form.”²⁵ We must emphasize an additional aspect: In transitioning from form C (universal equivalent form) to form D (money form), we also encounter a significant qualitative difference. The equivalent form posits a random commodity in the place of a universal equivalent, apart from serving its “initial useful purpose” it functions also as a means of exchange/payment and unit of account. It is still in-itself a useful thing that does not change significantly over space and time (omitting the inherent natural depreciation of material) and still in becoming a thing-for-itself. Linen will always be linen. Inversely, a money-commodity possesses among previous functions also a third, namely store of value. Marx indirectly develops this functionality in a chapter in *Capital* called “*Money, or the Circulation of Commodities*”, where money now posits the relation among creditors and debtors and is perceived as a chain of payments in the form of *credit-money*²⁶. Our aim is to underline the underemphasised notion of interest-bearing presupposition of money-capital as money-object instated in value form, which introduces a specific temporality into the circulating world of commodities.

Temporality

Interest-bearing capital once more confronts us with the problem of form: before us stands surplus value in the form of appearance, first in profit and later in its most mediated and concrete form – interest. We are dealing with *Begriffslosigkeit*, an “absurd” or “perverted” form, an “irrational” form, “the mother of all crazy/displaced forms”, the utmost representative form of relations within the capitalist institutional framework. We must never lose sight of Rancière’s appraisal of all missing intermediate terms in unfolding this *begriffslose* form - $M' = M + \Delta M$: “The *Begriffslosigkeit* expresses the disappearance of all the intermediary terms whose connection makes the relation M to M’ possible. It thereby express-

66

²⁵ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, p. 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

es the disappearance of what underlies this connection and makes it possible, the capitalist relations of production.”²⁷ We began our analysis with use values of products of labour and made them into empirical, *sensuous* things that meet our needs, proceeded to a *sensuous-supersensuous* character of commodities, money or capital. We now arrive at *supersensuous* determinations of prices or interest. The connection between the three encompasses the value – money – capital relation; where capital becomes a commodity, the price of which is expressed in interest and its “valorization” attributes to circulation of money-capital. Negatively put, only money as capital can fertilize itself with interest (interest-bearing capital), while other types of (productive) functioning capital amount to a residual part of gross profit. Marx precisely disentangles the concealment taking place during the real process of thing-ly reproduction against the backdrop of money-capital being an “a-conceptual form”, interest-bearing profit divorced from profit of enterprise. A type of concealment, where no relation between capital and labour is presented, only interest-relation among two capitalists. “In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish is elaborated into pure form, self-valorizing value, money breeding money, and in this form it no longer bears any marks of origin.”²⁸ The irrationality of form becomes ultimate in the form of interest – via the vanishing of the relation that inscribes it onto a particular place. How can a relation vanish? How can capital pose as a mere thing? The fact of it being a thing transcribes it as a commodity, thrown into the circulation process like any other, one that is at the same time also money-capital, money-object indulging automatic yields in the shape of interest.

We must embark further, towards the inner determinations of money, i.e. its functionalities. One of the key questions arising for Marx is the gateway from money-object to money-capital, a representation of a credit (debt) and interest relation. If anything, then academic economic *acribia* succeeded in grounding intertemporal analysis as a baseline for economic theorizing. It had inaugurated its object of cognition by separating present actions of economic agents from future expectations and outcomes. Individuals are deemed to follow the *rationality principle* and plan their future decisions and choices; this is how the usual story of neoclassical synthesis goes. The planning of aggregates on the macro-economic level is naturally tied with the Keynesian equation $I = S$; equating in-

²⁷ Rancière, “The Concept of ‘Critique’ and the ‘Critique of Political Economy’”, p. 158.

²⁸ Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, p. 516.

vestment activity with savings immediately implies different time periods. Marx sought to show and explain the problem of credit and macroeconomic cycle of investment/saving by expanding the categorical structure in the circuit of money capital and interest-bearing capital. Marx's line of analysis includes unfolding commodity to money, then money to the notion of capital, from capital he comes to the money-capital circuit and from the circuit he arrives at credit (and interest bearing). We have discussed money as an extra-commodity internally excluded from the world of commodities and content-wise posited in the development of value form. As far as quantitative determination goes, it is expressed in price-determination of commodities and is posited as a multiplicity, a quantum of capital form – money-capital. Its abstraction is sublated once debt/credit arises, shaping money's functionality (store of value) unified automata of use and exchange value into a form of interest-bearing (profit and interest rates)²⁹. Interest-bearing capital functioning as money has a double determination in exchange: 1. understood as money travelling through formula $M - C - M'$, it achieves its surplus (ΔM) by lending its use value to a demanded productive capital investment (occurring at the t_0 time period) and 2. as interest-bearer carrying a definite expected yield (at the t_{+1} period). The abstract categorical outfit of money is stripped of once it has its role in the circuit of capital; in circulating capital as commodity, money becomes the most simplified form of this movement. This "new" process of money and capital defines a new concrete motion – money as functioning capital, yielding a profit rate in a particular period of time.

We will examine this process further. First we must make some small interpretative adjustment of categories: use value of money should be understood simply as profit, realized after a period of t_{+1} . Value of money-capital is redoubled into profit and exchange value (price, manifested in the form of interest) which now entails the following contradictive determination: on one hand, it is determined, quantitatively, with price (interest at maturity date t_{+1}) and qualitatively

68

²⁹ Let us bear upon a moment at the contemporary rise of financial and capital markets, this »automatic« subject of market valorization occurring at the last economic expansion of 1986–2007. In times of diminished key interest rates for longer periods of time we experience T-bills (treasury bills) of *de facto* becoming interchangeable against money. Especially on the account of historically low transaction costs of money transfer because of information technology, and now even more with the prospects of cryptocurrency's blockchain technology. Cf. Stiglitz and Greenwald, *Towards a New Paradigm in Monetary Economics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2003, p. 12–16.

as the present value (discounted at t_0). Such double determination and expression of money becomes an empirical and material presupposition for unfolding the category of capital. Historical development of its forms (securities as market commodities; treasury bills, municipal bonds, stocks, options, derivatives, etc.) has led to the current state of developed financial capitalism – a system of expected (intertemporal) yields – i.e. the capitalist institutional framework. Put differently, we have to slightly modify the expanded formula of interest-bearing capital circulation:

$$M - M \dots C \dots M' - M' \text{ is transformed into } M - M \cdot (t_0) \dots C \cdot (t_{+1}) \cdot M' - M'$$

In the fourth chapter of *Capital*, Marx describes the path from commodity to capital form, and by doing so articulates the capitalist mode of production; using dialectical sublation from the initial simple circulation $C - M - C$ to money-capital $M - C - M$ and all the way to its most developed form of interest-bearing capital. Here money is subverted from “ex-timate” standing as subject-value of simple exchange to a subject of developing credit, the last stage of capital. The automaticity should be understood as a separation from its genus (value as a representation of human labour, expenditure of human labour power in labour time), where value becomes an attribute of different money-forms circulation. We encounter such mediation only as the fruits of the capital form as (expected) profits (discounted yields at time t_0) and future interest (t_{+1}). The whole structure of simple commodity production is confronted with the dominating effects of interest-bearing capital through segmentation or discontinuity among different time periods based on the capital form's maturities. Interest-bearing capital or simply a security issued at present day immediately connects some future point of time. The time of capital is the time of its subjective bearer distributed at times t_0 and t_{+1} . This is what John Maynard Keynes meant when he underlined the character of money (and consequently capital): “*For the importance of money essentially flows from its being a link between the present and the future.*”³⁰, which connects directly with Postone's analysis of two forms of time and his corollary, “[...] then, *value is an expression of time as the present.*”³¹. Value resides in the *abstract time framework* where it remains constant magnitude of value

³⁰ John Maynard Keynes, *The general theory of employment, interest, and money*, Prometheus Books (Great Minds Series), New York 1997, p. 293.

³¹ Cf. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, p. 296.

throughout different levels of historical capitalist productivity and uses money as a ledger for temporal inscriptions of events for the latter (i.e. movement of capital). When unified with its contrary, *historical time*³², it becomes a building-block of institutional framework, designating names and places; they are determined only positively as a complete and whole social body. Indeed, what is missing is the articulation of an element or event, whose part has no place in this body, one that amounts to driving force of subjectivity. Money (capital) and its temporal dimensions of circulation become retroactive unveilers of these “parts” and are a function of cuts presented by unfolding of historical time.

If we recapitulate what has been said so far: we started out our initial structural proposition from Althusser’s (Rancière) structuralist approach with the immanence of cause on its effects and further elaborated the New reading of Marx’s logical underpinnings of value form and money in a capitalist mode of production, referring to the process of exchange. Rado Riha puts it like this: “As opposed to pure abstract value-determination, money is something material, but the significance of this materiality is strictly linked to the value-determination’s moment of *internal exclusion*, in as much that it adheres to value as an inner condition of its universality, and on the other hand as something that is always excluded from it.”³³ The strict separation of essence and appearance on the one hand means a redoubling, and at the same time a distance, difference, overshadowed with a unified representation of the pair. Commodity and the money form drive the pair use and exchange value to a final separation inside their unity; we are left with use value of a commodity, exchanged on the market, and on the other side money-commodity, pure exchange value, devoid of any content and as such a vanishing moment.

70

Money is the result of the dialectic unfolding of inner contradiction in the value of a commodity; it is the agent of subjectivization and at the same time, its material appearance, constantly dis-jointed out from the world of commodities – i.e. is *excluded* from exchange structure. It is made of *nominalist* appearances, as they are omnipresent in classical and neoclassical monetary theories, relying on quantitative determinations of exchange circuits, and also on objective

³² *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³³ Rado Riha, »*Problemi teorije fetišizma*», in: R. Riha and S. Žižek, *Problemi teorije fetišizma*, Univerzum, Ljubljana 1985, p. 46.

magnitudes in the concepts of real and monetary economics (e.g. quantitative theory of money). In terms of places in a structure: that the notion of money falls directly in place where it belongs and not-belongs at the same time means an overlapping of inner contradiction – objectified opposition of use and exchange value. This opposition represents the content of money's function as a unit of value (price), the means of circulation (exchange); and this opposition sublates both moments, leading to a third, a subjectivization of money as money (inversion of circulation $C - M - C$ to $M - C - M$), i.e. a mover of “totality of concrete commodities”, universally self-excluded from it.

Marx says: “The circuit of capital is thus a unified process of circulation and production, it includes both.”³⁴ We have followed this lead with two series: *first*, that of production of commodities and social relations of production (unity of concrete and abstract labour) as its absent cause and *second*, the circulation of commodities, a world incomplete by its internal exclusion of money-object. Interest bearing capital as the most developed and mediated “mother of all crazy/displaced forms” is the most advanced development of economic objectivity. Value form introduces a particular logical analysis of socio-economic “construction” of objectivity; in a configuration where capital and credit take simultaneous side-by-side placement, a place where difference is materialized (irrational form) i.e. the inversion of aforementioned circulation occurs. The content of the most developed capitalist form is produced thereafter, by endorsing a historical overview in becoming of “capitalist spontaneous arising”. Capital as a general category “seems to appear” in all kinds of money-forms, resembling the fact that capital is historically always already present in money and obfuscating its “true” content. Money capital just does not become capital in general overnight, on the contrary, accumulation of capital in terms of time elapsed is needed for its expansion. Indeed, one conformed to credit-debt relationship cycles. Then, a retroaction from the future sutures the content of the form (money-capital) stemming from concrete interest-bearing capital which envelops a particular time horizon as a capital circuit moment. This oscillation between abstract universality in commodity' appearances and singular moment of interest-bearing capital conjoins, what appears as incommensurable, functions of money. Therein lays the asymmetric relation immanent to the class character of value form.

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: a critique of political economy, Volume II*, Penguin Books, London 1992, p. 139.

Lea Kuhar*

Object-oriented Critique of Political Economy¹

In his 2006 book entitled *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*² Meillassoux argues that correlation has been the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant. By correlation he means the idea according to which we only ever have access to the relation between thinking and being, and never to either considered apart from the other. By embodying this position, modern correlationist philosophies denied the existence of being anterior to every form of human relation to the world and were as a result forced to conduct infinite investigations of the transcendental conditions of the knowing subject. For Meillassoux, the biggest flaw of such a position is that it cannot think the world without thought, and can only think the world as it is given, not as it is. What is needed in the philosophical situation described by Meillassoux is a philosophy that would be able to access the uncorrelated – the world in itself, the world as it is prior to every correlation, without falling into the traps of the old metaphysical and dogmatic philosophies. In the aforementioned book, Meillassoux outlines the basic conditions of such a philosophy and names it *speculative materialism*. According to him, speculative materialism can gain knowledge of the absolute through the facticity of things and thus think the absolute *as a fact*. For a thinking that encompasses only facts, everything in the world is without reason and could become otherwise – the trees and the stars, and physical and logical laws. The only positive knowledge of the world is the knowledge that everything has a capacity to-be-other or not-to-be and the only thing necessary is *contingency* itself.

73

According to Meillassoux, things are contingent because the potentiality of what they could become cannot be totalised. For this reason, only theories that ratify the non-All of the social structure have a sufficient ontological scope to think the

¹ This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 “Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy”, which is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

² Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2015.

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existence of contingency, thereby rendering the old materialist theories, such as the materialism presented in the works of Karl Marx, outdated. Meillassoux does not mention Marx directly in *After Finitude*; however, he does mention him at the end of his book *The Number and the Siren*, where he implies that he is a modernist, which is merely another term he uses for correlationists.³ Several critiques of Marx are nevertheless present in the numerous theories of speculative materialism (later renamed *speculative realisms*) that share a criticism of the correlationist logic – the *object oriented ontology* of Graham Harman, the *actor network theory* of Bruno Latour, the *vibrant materialism* of Janet Bennett, and the re-actualisation of Deleuze’s *assemblage theory* by Manuel DeLanda, to name only a few. In one way or another, they all reject Marx’s approach to science, his notion of agency and its underlying ontology, which they claim to be correlationist.⁴

In this article I will subject Marx’s materialist theory to the anti-correlationist demands of speculative materialism. My intention is not so much to evaluate and examine all the criticisms put forward by new materialisms against their predecessor, but to see if Marx’s ontology is indeed correlationist, meaning that there is not any place for contingency in its theoretical framework. To do that, I believe it is necessary to focus on the question of the role of objects in Marx’s critical theory. My claim is that Marx’s understanding of objects evolves from his earlier works towards his later works. By focusing on the changes in the comprehension of objects, I want to show that Marx’s theory cannot simply be subsumed under the logic of correlationism, that it can ratify the non-All of the social structure it criticises, and that it is able to form a sufficient conceptual apparatus that allows one to think the moment of contingency in what seems to be the deterministic structure of the capitalist mode of production.

74

In the first section, I focus on the theory of objectification developed by Marx in his early works such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Theses on Feuerbach*. In his theory of objectification – which, according to Meillassoux’s criteria, is still correlationist – Marx claims that society exists

³ Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren: A Decipherment of Mallarmé’s Coup de dés*, trans. R. Mackay, Sequence Press, New York 2012, p. 221.

⁴ For an overview of new materialist criticisms of historical materialism, see Simon Choat, “Science, Agency and Ontology: A Historical-Materialist Response to New Materialism”, *Political Studies*, 66 (4/2018), 1027–1042.

only as a cluster of objects that affirm themselves in other objects. The same objectification that befalls society also befalls the worker as a subject. I show how this general theory of objectification affects both Marx's theory of alienation and his critique of the capitalist mode of production. In the second section, I argue that in his later texts, such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Marx does not abandon his theory of objectification altogether, but focuses on a specific mode of objectification present in the capitalist mode of production. The objectification of capital is the objectification of a specific social relation and produces a special object – surplus value, which functions as a condition of possibility of all other forms of objectification. In the last section, I analyse the distinction between the object of *Capital*, which is the object of Marx's scientific discourse, and the object of the critique of political economy, which is the object of Marx's critical discourse. This distinction was already mentioned, but never explicitly elaborated, by Althusser in *Reading Capital*. Although it may seem like a small analytical distinction at first, I argue that it brings significant consequences for Marx's critical endeavour, since it reveals that his entire theory of objectification can be comprehended only from the standpoint of class struggle, which is a position in the social structure that cannot be objectified. This is the point in Marx's materialist theory where I believe he is able to surpass the correlationist logic from within.

Theory of Objectification in Marx's Early Works

In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*⁵ Marx develops his theory of objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*], arguing that by working the worker objectifies his labour in the material objects he produces. The crucial element of the theory of objectification is the argument that the worker as an individual is deeply intertwined with both the act of working and its product. These three moments cannot be separated since they cannot exist or function on their own. Saying that the act of working is what makes the product is, for Marx, similarly misguided as it would be for a physicist to attribute reality to Newton's concept of force, which states that forces are the cause of the motion they generate, which is a pure tautology and means nothing at all. There are no physical forces in themselves; there are only abstract concepts that we can deduce from the

75

⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan, Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola/New York 2014.

consequences of their functioning. If an apple falls off a tree we say it did so because of gravity. Gravity as such, however, does not exist; it is just an abstract construct that helps us understand motion. The movement of an apple is the working of gravity. Similarly, Marx argues that there is no labour as such, there is only concrete labour and it can only be comprehended through the effects of its realisation, i.e. the production of a certain object. The same that is valid for the relation between the worker and the act of working is also valid for the relation between the worker and the object he produces. In the act of producing objects there is no privileged position for the worker. Marx argues that the worker creates objects because he is established by objects, because at his core *he is an objective being*:

To say that man is a corporeal, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigour is to say that he has real, sensuous, objects as the objects of his being or of his life, or that he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects. To be objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing.⁶

By arguing that the worker is an objective being and can therefore affirm himself as a being only in objects, Marx makes two points: *firstly*, he abolishes one of “philosophy’s most ancient taboos,” to use Balibar’s expression, i.e. the distinction between *praxis* and *poiêsis*.⁷ Since the Greeks, *praxis* has been the action in which man realises and transforms himself, while *poiêsis* entails actions that are subject to the constraints of their material conditions. In *praxis*, people as free men seek to perfect themselves, while in *poiêsis*, perfection is the perfection of things, of products for use. Marx abolishes this distinction by showing how *praxis* constantly passes over into *poiêsis* and vice versa. One can never strictly distinguish between the object and the subject, since there is no such thing as a non-objective subject. There are only objects that affirm (objectify) themselves in other objects. A particular subject is merely a cluster of different acts of objectification. The logic is universal and it functions in the same way for all existing things. “The sun is the object of the plant,” writes Marx, “an indispensable object to it, confirming its life,” but at the same time, “the plant is an object of the

76

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. C. Jones et al., Verso, New York 2011.

sun, being an expression of the life-awakening power of the sun, of the sun's objective essential power."⁸ There is no essence of the plant that would manifest itself in the sun. The plant consists only of its act of affirming its qualities through the sun as another object.

Secondly, Marx argues that in the process of objectification it is not just one's individual life that is objectified but also one's species-being (*Gattungswesen*).⁹ By arguing that, Marx produces a theory of *alienation* that distinguishes his theory from the theories of his predecessors – especially the one posited by Feuerbach and Hegel. For Hegel, alienation is a positive term and it designates the activity that the subject exercises upon himself in order to affirm himself. It is a double operation consisting of *estrangement* (*Entfremdung*) as a process in which the subject objectifies himself so he can separate himself from his interiority; and *externalisation* (*Entäußerung*) as a process in which the subject recognises objectivity as something that belongs to him. In the first part of the process the subject loses himself in the object. In the second part the subject loses the loss itself by recognising the objectivity as *his* objectivity. For Hegel, alienation is therefore a positive operation that enables the subject to know himself as an objective being. In the *Manuscripts* Marx presents a critique of such a conception of alienation, arguing that Hegel inverted the relation between world and mind by subsuming the former under the latter. In the double process of alienation, the otherness of the object gets annihilated, which results in consciousness becoming an autonomous force that drives history forward. Wealth, state power, religion, etc., are misunderstood by Hegel as products of the mind, as mind-dependent entities.

That is also the reason why, at least in the *Manuscripts*, Marx prefers Feuerbach over Hegel. Feuerbach also claims that man is nothing without objects and that objectification is a process of the self-expression of a subjective being. Man cannot exist for himself; he has to express himself through objects, which is why one can know the essence of a man only through the effects of such objectification (language, religion, culture, etc.). Unlike Hegel, Feuerbach does not understand

⁸ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 157.

⁹ "Man is not lost in his object only when the object becomes for him a human object or objective man. This is possible only when the object becomes for him a social object, he himself for himself a social being, just as society becomes a being for him in this object." *Ibid.*, p. 107.

alienation as a positive term consisting of the activity of double negation, but as a negative situation that arises when the subject transfers his own activity to the activity of an object. Alienation is the loss of the subject in the object, which now controls the subject. It is not a process of objectification, but a process of reification (*Verdinglichung*) that turns man into the object of his object. The best example of such a process is religion. Man objectifies his being in religious objects; yet this process is subsequently reversed so it looks like man is the expression of his own product (God created man and not the other way around).¹⁰ The subject-object relation is therefore crucial for both Hegel and Feuerbach, while there is a big distinction in the way they comprehend the process of alienation. For Hegel, alienation is a positive process in which the object as something other than the subject gains a subjective form and becomes a part of the subject. For Feuerbach, alienation is a negative process in which the object, which originally belongs to the subject, is transformed through reification in a way that makes it appear to be something foreign to him.

In *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), Marx argues that Feuerbach correctly dissolves religious essence into the human essence but fails to recognise the correct meaning of the latter. He accurately poses the relation of “man to man” as the fundamental relation, but fails to see that this relation is not a relation between one human essence and another but “the ensemble of the social relations.”¹¹ There is no such thing as a pre-defined social essence. Society is formed by a specific manner of mutual confirmation between a plurality of objects. What makes the worker a species-being is the fact that in the act of objectification he does not affirm only his own objective being but also the social relations that function as the historical conditions of the possibility of the act of objectification. The act of objectification is therefore social because objectification is not only an individual process in which one object affirms itself in another object, but also a process in which the relation between the acts of objectification are objectified. This is what Marx means by saying that objectification is always the objectification of one’s species-being. And this is also the point where alienation occurs. Alienation is not the loss of an individual in his objects (Feuerbach) or

78

¹⁰ “Religion immediately represents the inner nature of man as an objective, external being.” Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot, Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut 2008, p. 156.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in: *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Works, Volume 5, April 1845–April 1847*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2010.

the loss of the concrete objects themselves (Hegel). For Marx, alienation occurs when the worker loses his ability to objectify himself. The alienation is therefore the *failure of objectification*.¹²

One needs to be careful how one understands the meaning of this failure. Every objectification is in some sense a failure. It is a failure since it designates the fact that no object is sufficient in itself so it constantly needs to affirm itself in other objects. This kind of failure is therefore constitutive of the identity of every object and is very similar to the concept of alienation outlined by Hegel. However, the process of alienation described by Marx designates a different kind of failure. It designates the moment when the process of objectification turns into its opposite and creates a separation between the worker, the act of working, and the produced objects.¹³ Alienation is the ensemble of social relations in which the act of objectification leads to non-objectivity, and the act of self-affirmation leads to the loss of the affirmation. It is a process that puts the worker in a paradoxical state where “whatever the product of his labour is, he is not,”¹⁴ where he “does not affirm himself in his work but denies himself,”¹⁵ and where his activity becomes “an alien activity not belonging to him.”¹⁶

Object(s) of Capital

The point of Marx’s analysis of alienation in the *Manuscripts* is not so much the insight that in the capitalist mode of production the objectification of social relations fails. It is more an inquiry into how this failure itself becomes a specific form of social objectification. In his later works, such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, he conceptualises this form as *capital*. Capital is a “social relation”¹⁷ that exists as a specific way of separating the worker from the act of working and the produced object. This separation is possible due to the primal division between *the act of producing* and *the means of production*. This division produces additional

79

¹² This thesis is elaborated in Franck Fischbach, *Sans objet. Capitalisme, subjectivité, alienation*, Vrin, Paris 2009.

¹³ The process of separation is described in more detail in the next section.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁷ Marx, “Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production [London 1887]”, in: *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe II. 9.*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1990, p. 664.

splits. The act of producing splits into *the act of doing labour* and *the produced object*. The former splits into *concrete* and *abstract labour* and the latter splits into *use value* and *exchange value*. Marx shows how this chain of separations produces the *value form*, which is driven by its own quest for representation that forces it to objectify itself as *labour power* and *money*. He also shows how this whole process of the objectification of capital produces a special kind of object – *surplus value* – which (and this is the main point) becomes the condition of possibility of all other forms of objectification.

Marx's whole analysis is a result of the investigation of the social conditions of objectification resulting in the capitalist mode of production. What the worker sells on the capitalist market is not his labour as an activity (the act of objectification) but *the promise* of such an activity. The worker enters the market with a promise that says "I can work" and under the right conditions "I will work." The worker does not own his labour. What he owns is his *labour power*. As labour power, the act of working is transformed into what Pierre Macherey calls a "quasi-existence," an existence that is stuck in the intermediate state "between being and non-being."¹⁸ According to Macherey, this transformation is one of the biggest absurdities achieved by capital.

[T]he miracle that the system of wage-labour performs consists in separating power from its action by artificially creating conditions that allow a power to be considered independently from its action, as if a non-acting power, a power that would not be active, would still be a power. From the physical point of view, this is more than a mystery: it is an absurdity.¹⁹

80 Trying to understand this paradox, one could argue that labour power is merely labour that is *not yet what it already is*, meaning it already exists on some level but its specific mode of existence has not been objectified yet. Labour is not yet labour, meaning it is not yet actual, but one can argue with enough certainty that eventually it will be realised and such knowledge of its future realisation is that which grants it a certain existence prior to its concrete existence.

¹⁸ Pierre Macherey, "The Productive Subject", in: *Viewpoint Magazine*, Issue 5: Social Reproduction, 31 October 2015. Available at: <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Understood like this, the process of objectification is transformed into what Aristotle calls *dynamis* (potentiality). Aristotle distinguishes two modes of *dynamis*, potentiality as possibility and potentiality as capacity.²⁰ While the former grasps possibility in its most basic ontological determination and defines it as an ability of something to change into something else, the latter represents the ability to come into action, to realise an already existent skill, knowledge, or capacity. One could therefore argue that labour power is *dynamis* in the second meaning of the term. It is a set of certain skills that already exist as capacities but cannot be realised unless the external circumstances (access to the means of production) allow such. According to Macherey, this answer is not sufficient since it does not include the other side of the paradoxical existence of labour power. Labour power is not just a capacity for certain skills that may or may not be realised in the future. At the same time, it *already is that which it is not yet*. It is a pure nothing, but it is a “nothing that is something.”²¹ It is a nothing that can be bound, limited, and formed according to the capitalist’s will. Its future existence is inscribed into its current state of quasi-existence in a way that fetishises its non-existence. On the one hand, it is a double abstraction – abstraction from all the concrete activities of labour and abstraction from all the qualities of labour in general; on the other hand, this abstraction is *real* since it is not merely a thought process but *a social act that has a form of thought*.²² In this sense, labour power is *already existent* even before its objectification. It exists as an act of *practical metaphysics*,²³ a metaphysics with a performative function that can change the reality to which it is applied, even before its concrete realisation.

The quasi-existence of labour power presents a certain challenge. If one tries to grasp it as something concrete, as something that it *already is*, one can only locate it as a promise, as something that is *not yet*. If one tries to comprehend it as something that is *not yet*, one discovers that it is already present and working in a bizarre way. Labour power is therefore a specific state where labour

²⁰ Aristotle, Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vols. 17, 18, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, London 1989, 1048b–1049b.

²¹ The formulation of labour power as “nothing that is something” is a formulation presented by Rado Riha in his lectures at the ZRC SAZU Postgraduate School, academic year 2014/2015.

²² Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, The Macmillan Press, London 1978.

²³ Macherey, “The Productive Subject”.

simultaneously *is not yet what it already is* and *already is that which it is not yet*. What may seem like a small, analytical distinction is soon revealed to be one of the main contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. When the non-working power starts to work, the paradox of its bizarre existence is not extinguished but becomes objectified as a certain surplus added to the produced objects. This surplus is what Marx calls *value*. Value has a very specific materiality, a non-materiality, to be exact. At the beginning of *Capital* Marx argues that “not an atom of matter enters into its composition.”²⁴ It does not have materiality since it is the objectification of pure nothingness.²⁵ To put it differently, it is a product of labour power that objectifies itself as an “empty space”²⁶ added to the products of concrete labour, thereby turning them into commodities. By inheriting the bizarre existence of labour power, the commodity, this elementary form of value, also inherits its problem. It is the embodiment of something that already is and something that is not yet. It is a certain amount of labour power, but its exact amount cannot be determined. For this reason, it needs to affirm (objectify) its identity in something else. Marx distinguishes three main forms of such an affirmation.

In its *elementary form*, value tries to express itself in another value. The argument is that the part of nothingness added to the use value of one commodity equals the part of nothingness added to the use value of another commodity (x commodity A = y commodity B). The value of the second commodity therefore functions as an expression of the value (the amount of nothingness) of the first one. The problem is that the second commodity indeed functions as the equivalent of the first one, but it cannot express the quantitative amount of value. It can only express their *sameness*. If one were to try to determine the amount of value in the second commodity, one would have to compare this commodity to a third one. For Marx, this is not really a problem as, according to his analysis, value is a product of specific social relations and cannot exist as a relation between only two commodities. The logic of objectification is not valid for the exchange between the two commodities if it is not valid for the whole universe of commod-

82

²⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p. 40.

²⁵ Marx argues that “human labour-power in motion, or human labour, creates value, but is not itself value. It becomes value only in its congealed state, when embodied in the form of some object.” (*Ibid.*, p. 43.)

²⁶ Rado Riha, “Badiou, Marx in analiza vrednostne forme blaga”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 37 (1/2017), pp. 153–169.

ities. Value therefore needs to affirm itself in all objects. It does so by shifting from one commodity to another, thus transforming the whole process into what Marx calls *the expanded form of value*. Every value can now be expressed in all the other values (x commodity A = y commodity B = z commodity C, etc.).²⁷

The problem of the expanded form of value is similar to the problem of its elementary form. The value of one commodity can be expressed in all the others; however, it can only express the sameness of their nothingness and not its measure. Value is expressed in every commodity as a “this is not it,” thus driving the whole process forward. In the last form, *the general form of value*, it therefore tries to express all commodities in one special commodity. The amount of nothingness of this one commodity now becomes the measure of all other commodities. The problem is that not every commodity is suitable for this task. To put it differently, no commodity is suitable for this task since all of the commodities are split between the use value and exchange value. To find the appropriate representative, value needs to find an object that is not a commodity. Since this kind of object cannot exist in the world of commodities, it needs to exclude itself from this world.²⁸ What happens next is that value objectifies the lack of its appropriate representative in the world of commodities. “Nothing that is something” becomes “something that is pure nothing.”²⁹ In Marx’s analysis, this object is *money*. Marx argues that only money is “the universal equivalent form of all other commodities, and the immediate social incarnation of all human labour.”³⁰ Money is a singular object that expresses something universal.³¹

²⁷ Since Marx’s value-form analysis is based on the elimination of materiality as something empirically given, it could be read as a parallel of the Lacanian logic of the signifier. Rado Riha, “Badiou, Marx in analiza vrednostne forme blaga”.

²⁸ “If a commodity be found to have assumed the universal equivalent form (form C), this is only because and in so far as it has been excluded from the rest of all other commodities as their equivalent.” MEGA II. 9., p. 60.

²⁹ Rado Riha, “Problemi teorije fetišizma”, in: *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo II*, Univerzum, Ljubljana 1985, p. 22. The formulation of money as “something that is nothing” was also formulated during lectures at the ZRC SAZU Postgraduate School in the academic year 2014/2015.

³⁰ Marx, *Capital*, p. 116.

³¹ “Labour on the basis of exchange values presupposes, precisely, that neither the labour of the individual nor his product are directly general; that the product attains this form only by passing through an objective mediation, by means of a form of money distinct from itself.” Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books and New Left Review, London 1993, p. 176.

It is an object that cannot be included in the universe of commodities but can at the same time express the nothingness of all commodities.

By analysing the two main forms of objectification, “nothing that is something” (labour power) and “something that is nothing” (money), Marx de-fetishises the two main objects of the capitalist mode of production and reveals their massive power. Together they can stop the constant shifting of value from one commodity to another and can unify the world of commodities, making a meaningful whole out of the previous disunity of elements. They suture the commodity structure of the capitalist mode of production so that it becomes a coherent and homogenous totality. As the universal equivalent, money can equate the value of every commodity with the value of every other commodity. It functions as an object of mutual affirmation in which one amount of nothing confirms itself in another. The same affirms the same. All the commodities get their measures from the symbolic place they occupy in relation to this universal equivalent. At this point, the universe of commodities seems to have resolved all of its paradoxes. However, Marx shows that this is not the case. As the universal equivalent, money indeed represents the measurement of value, but by doing so it does not extinguish (nor represent) its non-identity. Since there is no final resolution of the initial contradiction, Marx argues that money acquires the occult quality of being able to add value to itself, “it brings forth living offspring, or, at the least, lays golden eggs.”³² Money is therefore also split into two parts. On the one hand, it represents the identity part of value (C-M-C), so it seems like the whole process is a closed one. On the other hand, it represents its non-identity, a certain surplus added to the initial money (M-C-M’). In the last part of his value form analysis Marx therefore shows that money, “this final product of the circulation of commodities[,] is the first form in which capital appears.”³³

84

Capital is the end, the beginning, and the whole of the process of production. Commodity³⁴ and money are different forms it can assume and cast off along its way. It is an objectification of social relations that are grounded on the non-relation between the worker, the act of working, and the produced object. In this

³² Marx, *Capital*, p. 134.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 127.

³⁴ The transformation of labour into the labour power is a transformation of labour into a commodity.

regard, the failure of social objectification is the specific form of the objectification of capital that comprises and subsumes all the other forms of objectification (the objectification of use-values). It produces the bizarre existence of labour power and is, at the same time, produced by its bizarre existence.³⁵ It is a necessary consequence of the separation between the workers and the means of production and it produces this separation at the same time. What is crucial for Marx is that this movement can never be completed. The reason for this is that by being objectified as labour power and money, capital actually produces more of the *nothingness* from which it had emerged. By endowing motion of its own, it makes sure that every non-working labour power that starts to work produces not only value but *surplus value*. The more the value tries to objectify its own nothingness, the more nothingness it produces, driving the whole cycle of capital's objectification in a never ending cycle. From power that produces, it turns into *productive power*.³⁶

The Object of *The Critique of Political Economy*

From an early point of his investigations up to his later works, Marx continued to examine the existing world from the perspective of objects, shifting from the more general theory of objectification presented in the *Manuscripts* to its specific form of realisation in the capitalist mode of production. He examines how the initial antagonism determines the production of objects specific to the capitalist mode of production and analyses their special form of objectification. By focusing on the value form, he shows how surplus value as a special object deter-

³⁵ "Now, in so far as capital, money existing in all particular forms of objectified labour, enters into the process with not objectified, but rather living labour, labour existing as process and as action, it is initially this qualitative difference of the substance in which it exists from the form in which it now also exists as labour. It is the process of this differentiation and of its suspension, in which capital itself becomes a process. Labour is the yeast thrown into it, which starts it fermenting." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books and New Left Review, London 1993, p. 298.

³⁶ In *Capital*, Marx argues that "value is here the active factor in a process, in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it at the same time changes in magnitude, differentiates itself by throwing off surplus-value from itself." Marx, *Capital*, p. 133. In *Grundrisse*, he adds: "surplus value in general is value in excess of the equivalent. The equivalent, by definition, is only the identity of value with itself. Hence surplus value can never sprout out of the equivalent; nor can it do so originally out of circulation; it has to arise from the production process of capital itself." Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 324.

mines the objectifications of all the other objects. Thus far, it seems there is no room for contingency in Marx's critical analysis. However, I would like to argue that there is an object present in Marx's theory that cannot be quite subsumed under the theories of objectification described in the previous chapters. This object was already implied by Althusser in *Reading Capital*, where he claims there is a small yet crucial distinction between *the object of Capital* and *the object of Marx's critique* of political economy.³⁷ Although Althusser never specifies their difference, he presupposes they belong to two different discourses, which are deeply intertwined. The former belongs to Marx's *scientific discourse*, while the latter belongs to Marx's *critical discourse* – to his “non-philosophy,”³⁸ to use Balibar's expression. The former introduces the above-mentioned concept of *value form* and deals with a certain *lack* that is produced by the objectification of capital. The latter introduces a concept of *class struggle*, which designates a *void* in the existing social structure, a special position that cannot be objectified. The point of this distinction is not so much that there are two objects but that the former is a necessary counterpart of the latter. To put it differently, value-form analysis is only possible from a position of class struggle.

Let us have a closer look at the distinction between both discourses. There are two kinds of lack present in Marx's scientific discourse. The first one is based on his critique of the conceptual apparatus produced by classical political economy. Marx's critique is not just any kind of critique, as it does not function in a metaphysical or dogmatic way, nor does it function in a strictly negative way. It does not build a new theory just to oppose it to the existing one, nor is it a negation or a deconstruction that would grind the previous theories and leave only fragments behind. It is posited inside the concepts produced by the theory of classical political economy and it functions as an account of their internal limitation. By limiting the theory of classical political economy, that is, by showing what it does not see in the things it sees,³⁹ Marx renders it with a *lack* that

86

³⁷ Althusser posed this distinction at different places but he never specified it. Louis Althusser, “The Object of Capital”, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster and D. Fernbach, Verso, London 2015, pp. 215–357: p. 219.

³⁸ Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. G. Elliott and C. Turner, Verso, London 2014, p. 4.

³⁹ Althusser specifies this non-vision as a part of vision as follows: “what classical political economy does not see, is not what it does not see, it is what it sees; it is not what it lacks, on the contrary, it is what it does not lack; it is not what it misses, on the contrary, it is what

functions as a new object (value form) of his theory.⁴⁰ By establishing value form as an object of his scientific analysis, he is able to form a conceptual apparatus capable of articulating another lack, i.e. the *lack* (nothingness) produced by the process of the objectification of this form. As I tried to show in the previous section, value form cannot be represented in other objects since it cannot find a suitable object. Hence, it is objectified as *labour power* (something that is nothing) and *money* (nothing that is something), which exist as representatives of this lack of representation (their own nothingness). Together they compensate for the existence of the lack of any other object suitable for their representation. In the words of Jacques Alain Miller, “they exist only in order to hide the reason for their existence.”⁴¹ What is important for Marx is the fact that the same “suture”⁴² that enables labour power and money to form the social structure as a coherent and homogenised whole also produces a constant quest for the production of surplus value. To put it differently, labour power and money constantly produce the lack of representation of value that they try to get rid of. In this way, capital incorporates in its movement its own lack. Everything is subsumed under the movement of value transformation. It therefore lacks nothing. It does not have an outside meaning; there is no Other for capital. Since it does not have the Other, it is non-All. In his scientific discourse, Marx therefore thinks the non-All of the capitalist mode of production.⁴³

it does not miss. The oversight, then, is not to see what one sees, the oversight no longer concerns the object, but the sight itself. The oversight is an oversight that concerns vision: non-vision is therefore inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision.” Louis Althusser, “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy”, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster and D. Fernbach, Verso, London 2015, p. 19.

⁴⁰ In his analysis, Marx is therefore also not trying to find a new correlation between an already existing object and his own theory. He does not claim that his theory correctly reflects the object that is otherwise wrongly presented by classical political economy. As he emphasises in the first chapter of *Capital*, David Ricardo already identified labour as the substance of value and correctly figured out that its measure depends upon working time. He did not, however, pose the question of *the value form*.

⁴¹ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Action of the Structure”, in: P. Hallward and K. Peden (Eds.), *Concept and Form, Volume 1*, Verso, London 2012, p. 72.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 73. Miller focuses on the concept of suture in the text by Jacques Alain Miller, “Suture. Elements of the Logic of the Signifier”, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 91–103.

⁴³ The lack that Marx discovers in the movement of capital is therefore “the lack of a lack.” Here I am directly implying the formulation introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller: “the lack of a lack is also a lack.” Jacques-Alain Miller, “Suture. Elements of the Logic of the Signifier”, p. 80.

Marx was able to analyse the lack of representation of value only by discovering *a rational kernel in the Hegelian mystical shell*. This was due to his critical discourse, which in a way is very similar to Hegelian dialectics. The novelty of Hegel's theoretical approach was that the truth of the whole of the world was not given from the standpoint of an absolute knowledge that would extract itself from the studied object and judge it from a given exterior position. On the contrary, in the famous preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he writes that *die Wahre ist das Ganze* ("The truth is the whole"), which means that no simple criteria that would enable one to make objective judgments about the world exists. However, this does not mean that everything is relative. There are two positions – the position of *knowledge* and the position of *ruth*. Knowledge is driven by the desire to find the truth of a given object, but every time it thinks that it is finally getting closer, it realises that its presuppositions of what the truth would look like do not coincide with its findings (e.g. sense-certainty wants to comprehend something as purely concrete but is faced with something purely abstract). This logic repeats itself through the different shapes of knowledge and the path to the truth is set anew each and every time. Hegel therefore turns what could be seen as a weakness of dialectical thinking into its strength. All knowledge is produced precisely because of the distinction between the concrete and limited point of knowledge and the absolute truth. There is no final merging between the former and the latter, since at the end of the path knowledge realises that the path itself was everything there is. The whole is therefore the path that knowledge treads while it chases the truth and truth is the realisation of the whole as a trodden path.

The dual position between knowledge and truth is preserved in Marx's critical discourse but is materialised in the position of *value form* and *class struggle*. In the first few chapters of *Capital*, Marx analyses the path that commodity treads when it is trying to resolve its inner contradictions, a path that is presented through the above-described movement from commodity to capital. However, to be able to analyse this movement Marx already needed to take a certain position, i.e. the position of *class struggle*. Class struggle is not a point in the social structure, a neutral position that would enable one to objectively grasp society, but rather designates the impossibility of such a position. It signifies the fact that society is fundamentally split. It is true that Hegelian dialectics also includes contradiction as the main force that drives the whole of historical development forward. The difference is that the contradictions in Hegel's dialectics are internal to the dialectics itself, while the contradictions in Marx's dialectics

indicate a moment of exteriority. In Hegel's dialectics, one discovers the original unity over and over again, while in Marx's dialectics one repeatedly discovers the original contradictions. The original unity within Marx's dialectics cannot be re-discovered because it has never been lost. It has never been lost because it has never really existed.

The distinction between *value form* and *class struggle* reflects the distinction between the *lack* and the *void*. In the text "Toward a Materialist Ontology" Samo Tomšič defines this difference in the following way: "Lack still implies an empty place, which can be occupied by an object, which veils, or mystifies, as Marx would put it, the radical implication of the lack, namely the void, which stands for the abolition of the logic of places altogether."⁴⁴ In Marx's materialist ontology, the position of class struggle designates an ontological position in the social structure that cannot be objectified. However, one needs to be very careful not to confuse the impossibility of the objectification of society with the failure of the objectification of workers in the capitalist mode of production. While the latter indicates a certain impossibility of objectification that arises in specific social circumstances, the former indicates the ontological point of impossibility of every society. It designates that there is no society in itself, that social relations are not predetermined but are constituted anew in each system of production. To say that all hitherto existing history is the history of class struggle is to say that "there is no such thing as social *relations*."⁴⁵ This does not mean that society does not exist. It means that every society is grounded on the inexistence of social relations. Every form of society, including the capitalist one, is a specific way of dealing with the social non-relation. This is also the reason why in the *Capitalist Unconscious* Samo Tomšič argues that Marx's theory could be read as "*a non-relational theory of value*."⁴⁶ Marx examines the process of the objectification of capital as one specific way in which the social non-relation becomes objectified.

Marx's earlier works can be labelled as correlationist since in them Marx primarily deals with the relationship between the object, the subject, and the society and focuses on the question of how a specific ensemble of social relations deter-

⁴⁴ Samo Tomšič, "Toward a Materialist Ontology", *Continental Thought & Theory, A journal of intellectual freedom*, 2 (2/2018), p. 112.

⁴⁵ Samo Tomšič, *Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso 2015, p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

mines the specific mode of their objectification. This changes in his later works. His value-form analyses, on the one hand, enables him to ratify the non-All of the social structure he criticises. On the other hand, his critical analysis does not function as a closed system that would argue either that every object in society is determined or that it should be determined in another way. The fact that Marx's later analysis "is at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system"⁴⁷ is possible only because Marx proceeds from the position of class struggle, i.e. a position of the void and not the lack. Value-form analysis as a specific mode of objectification is possible only as a counterpart to the position of class struggle, as a point in the existing society that cannot be objectified. Lack, as the object of Marx's scientific discourse (the failure of social objectification as a specific form of social objectification), and the void, as the object of his critical discourse (the social non-relation), are deeply intertwined. This is also the reason why I believe Marx is able to show that value form is an absolute necessity of the capitalist mode of production without it being absolutely necessary. In this way he implicitly shows that contingency is a necessary counterpart of the otherwise deterministic functioning of labour power and money. Even though labour power and money render the whole process of objectification meaningful, the fact of their existence is not predetermined in any way. On the contrary, they exist merely as one possible outcome of the social non-relation. In this way, Marx can indicate the point in the all-encompassing totality of the capitalist mode of production where one is able to encounter something more than what currently exists therein. Not something that is hidden or not yet realised in the sense of the abstract capacities of labour power, but in the sense of the unrealised possibilities of new forms of social objectification.

⁴⁷ *Marx an Ferdinand Lassalle*, MEW, 29:550. Available at https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1858/letters/58_02_22.htm.

Elena Louisa Lange*

The Transformation Problem as a Problem of Fetishism

‘The further we trace out the valorization process of capital, the more is the capital relationship mystified and the less are the secrets of its internal organization laid bare.’

Karl Marx¹

Introduction: Marx’s Fetishism-Critical Method

In the international research of Marx’s Critique of Political Economy of the past decades, it has become fashionable to perform the Bob Dylanesque² song of “The Rejection of the Labour Theory of Value”, a kind of spoken-word blues with lots of minor chords. The chorus goes like this: “The labour theory of value/ it’s just a residue of the classics”³. The verses tell the story of a “substantialist”, “embodied” labour theory of value held by poor forlorn Marx, against his better judgment. The “message” is that we, and our interpretation of Marx,

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, Penguin, London 1981, p. 139.

² I apologise to all Marxist Bob Dylan-fans, should they exist.

³ “Can we not say that they [the three points which characterize the first section of *Capital*] are the Classical residue in Marx’s value theory?” Makoto Itoh, “A Study of Marx’s Theory of Value”, *Science and Society*, 40 (3/1976), p. 312; “[Marx’s] linking [the substance of value] to embodiment seems to derive from classical political economy.” Geert Reuten, “The Difficult Labor of a Social Theory of Value”, in: F. Moseley (Ed.), *Marx’s Method in Capital. A Reexamination*, Humanities Press, New Jersey 1993, p. 89; ‘I think that the introduction by Marx of a posited *ground* for value in labour before the form of value is fully theorised represents a residue of classical political economy in *Capital*.’ Chris Arthur, “Money and Exchange”, *Capital and Class*, 30 (3/2006), p. 10; David Harvey even suggests that Marx had refused his own value theory: see ‘Marx’s Refusal of the Labour Theory of Value’, at <http://davidharvey.org/2018/03/marxs-refusal-of-the-labour-theory-of-value-by-david-harvey/>. Interestingly (or rather tellingly), these authors do not provide any original sources, i.e. sources by the ‘classics’, for their claims.

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will ever only find peace, if “money is the constituent of value”⁴, not (abstract) labour and its relation to capital.

Elsewhere⁵, we have not only demonstrated how fundamentally mistaken the view of Marx labour theory of value as a residue of the classics is (and the song, in fact, as old as Eugen Böhm-Bawerk’s ‘critique of Marxism’⁶), but also shown how this fashionable trait in recent Marxism has become indistinguishable from certain axioms of mainstream economy, especially the neoclassical tradition. This becomes eminent in the complete ignorance of the problem of the *fetishism* of the bourgeois relations of production and their interpreters, the *critique of which* essentially informed Marx’s own labour theory of value as the only coherent theory of value in the history of social critique.

For Marx, lacking in the classics, and strangely ignored in Marx’s modern interpreters, the *distinction between abstract and concrete labour* is the crucial critical heuristic to clear the path to a thoroughgoing critique of the capitalist relations of production and its inverted self-representations. This distinction is directly reflected in the formulation of the labour theory of value, by determining the social substance of *value* as abstract-general human labour and distinguishing it from concrete labour as manifested in the commodity’s *use-value*⁷. This conceptualisation equally allowed Marx to pierce the problem of form and content – the problem of fetishism.

The specificity of abstract labour as the *substance* (content) of value for Marx consists in the fact that it always appears in a specific *form* – namely the *value forms* of the commodity, money, capital, wage, profit, price, interest and rent, categories that comprise the ‘science’ of political economy. In these value forms

⁴ Geert Reuten, in F. Moseley (Ed.), *Marx’s Theory of Money. Modern Appraisals*, Palgrave: Basingstoke 2005, pp. 78–94.

⁵ Elena Louisa Lange, “Form Analysis and Critique: Marx’s Social Labour Theory of Value”, in P. Osborne et al. (Eds.), *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image*, CRMEP Books, London 2019, pp. 21–35; Elena Louisa Lange, “The Proof Is In The Pudding. On The Necessity of Presupposition in Marx’s Critical Method” in: R. Bellofiore et al. (Ed.), *Marx Inattuale*, Consecutio Rerum, Edizioni Efesto, Rome 2019.

⁶ In the same way that the folk blues of the 1960s was a weak reissue of the Delta Blues of the early 20th century.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 1*, Penguin, London 1976, p. 129, p. 132.

however, the relation to labour is becomes obfuscated. It is crucial to note the *dynamic* of the obfuscation: it *increases* from the simpler to the more complex forms of value. E.g., in the commodity, the relation to production is still quite obvious: ‘This mystification is still a very simple one in the case of a commodity. Everybody understands more or less clearly that the relations of commodities as exchange values are really the relations of people to the productive activities of one another. The semblance of simplicity disappears in more advanced relations of production.’⁸ We will see how ‘more advanced relations of production’, or rather their *presentation*, indeed more ‘perfectly’ obscures the origins of production, and with it, exploitation.

Yet, it is precisely this inversion of *substance* (abstract labour as value in production) and *form* (the different *value forms* it assumes in the process of exchange), in that this substance, as essence, cannot appear but in an *inverted, distorting, and altogether spurious form*, which goes unnoticed in the elaborations of classical and vulgar political economy. In other words, before Marx, the science of political economy was solely concerned with the *forms* of value as value’s mere *appearance* – without giving a thought to the specific *substance*, i.e. the *general social form of labour*, that commonly grounds the forms of value in a *constitutive nexus*.

This essay will present the heuristic usefulness of viewing the problem of the value-price-transformation or the transformation of labour values to prices of production – the topic of chapter 9 and 10 of *Capital* vol. 3 – in accordance with the pervasive method of Marx’s critique in *Capital*, i.e. as the critique of *fetishism*. We believe that only an understanding that sees the transformation problem as a *qualitative* problem of the *fetish-characteristics* of the bourgeois relations of production, the forms of which are both indicative of, and likewise obscuring their content, can fully grasp the extent to which Marx’s own theoretisation surpasses the *quantitative* solutions to the problem – *even beyond Marx’s own objective*. Though Marx, by his own fetishism-critical method, first and foremost opened up the *terrain* of viewing the equalisation of profit rates as a problem of capitalist self-mystification, he fatally missed to recognise this *qualitative* dimension of the problem *posed by his own method of inquiry*. Instead, he chose to solve the problem *quantitatively*, underestimating the heuristic power of this own approach. This will form a part of the following discus-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

sion, though by no means we can exhaustively address the methodological and theoretical problems associated with this lacuna. In this context, we can only hope to give hints at what we think are promising insights into emphasising the *coherence* of the fetish-critical method throughout the categorial development of all three volumes of *Capital*.

As indicated, the quantitative solution Marx offers in chapters 9 and 10 of *Capital* vol. 3, as a whole bulk of research literature since Eugen Böhm-Bawerk's first critique (1896) attempted to demonstrate, has proven to be veritably problematic, if not faulty. Marx's allegedly 'failed' attempt to successfully demonstrate the equivalence of prices of production to labour values, i.e. Marx's *failed* transformation procedure, caused the fierce rejection Marx's labour theory of value received in the history of its reception. In recent years, it was especially Fred Moseley's "macro-monetary" intervention that tried to retain the labour theory of value against the critics of Marx's "failed" transformation procedure.⁹ In short, for Moseley, there are no two versions of cost price, one based on values (i.e. the sum of the actual constant capital and variable capital advanced), and one based on prices of production. There is only one cost price, based on values. Therefore, "according to this interpretation and contrary to the traditional interpretation, Marx did *not* fail to transform the inputs because the inputs (the cost prices) are not supposed to be transformed... but are instead supposed to be the *same magnitude* (K) in the determination of both values and the prices of production."¹⁰ Moseley argues this by a close comparison between Marx's original manuscript and Engel's edition of volume 3. But the contention that "the inputs are not supposed to be transformed", so that there is "nothing to transform" is odd in the face of *Marx's own* elaborated efforts at a transformation procedure from labour values to prices of production in Chapter 9 of *Capital* vol. 3. While

⁹ Fred Moseley, *Money and Totality. A Macro-Monetary Interpretation of Marx's Logic in Capital and the End of the 'Transformation Problem'*, Brill, Leiden 2016. In a way, Moseley's intervention more 'radically' applies the quantitative solution offered by the New Interpretation (NI), developed simultaneously by Duncan Foley in the US, and Gérard Duménil and Alain Lipietz in France in the early 1980s. Both Moseley and the NI offer a quantitative heuristic, the 'value of money' or, in later dictum, the 'monetary expression of labour time' (MELT) to demonstrate the 'retainment' of 'the proportionality of profit and unpaid labor time in the face of any deviations of prices from labour values.' See Duncan Foley, "The Value of Money, the Value of Labour Power, and the Marxian Transformation Problem", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 14 (2/1982), pp. 37–47.

¹⁰ Fred Moseley (Ed.), *Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1864-5*, Brill, Leiden 2015, p. 15–6.

we agree with the offered solutions, we also believe that both Moseley and the proponents of the NI offer an interpretation to a problem whose significance *Marx himself was clearly not aware of*. Our investigation therefore differs from the ‘macro-monetary’ quantitative solution in stressing the qualitative significance of the value-price-divergence for understanding the problem of fetishism.

This essay will formulate an attempt to shift the view of the formation of a general profit rate and of prices of production away from the technical-mathematical field to the, as we believe, more fundamental epistemological problematisation of the cleft between our cognition of “social processes” in their own presentation (*Darstellung*) and in their real, essential movement. Our qualitative interpretation retains the labour theory of value in a different, and, as we believe, more fundamental way than the attempts of a quantitative solutions to the transformation problem.

The conditions of the transformation problem

Marx’s incentive to find a solution to the transformation problem was motivated by demonstrating the quantitative congruence of prices of production to labour values.¹¹ At the same time, it would hinge on this demonstration whether the labour theory of value had any validity with regard to the “Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole”, as presented in the manuscripts for volume 3 of *Capital*. After all, this is the level of analysis in which capital’s self-mystification and fetishisation “at the surface” would be revealed and countered.

In volumes 1 and 2, and the beginning of vol. 3 of *Capital*, i.e. the level of the essential conceptual and non-empirical analysis of the capitalist production and circulation process, Marx assumes that commodities are exchanged at their values, i.e. at “prices” that directly correspond to the socially necessary labour time for their production (“value-prices”). In accordance with the method of the presentation, this was hypothetical. Only *after* developing the concept of profit and of cost price in chapters 1–3 of the manuscripts to volume 3 – an *already fetishised, transformed* concept of surplus value and value – could he show that, at the surface of capitalist production under the condition of different branches of

¹¹ This incentive was motivated by Marx’s critique of David Ricardo’s ‘solution’ to the problem, the discussion of which unfortunately has to remain out of the scope of this paper.

production and competition, real prices necessarily diverge from values. On the assumption that the rate of surplus value is the same for all individual branches, and the organic composition of capital (the rate between c and v) is different, the exchange of commodities over the different productive sectors would result in completely different profit rates. Evidently however, profit rates tend to equalise – trivially because capital “seeks for as much surplus value as possible”, so that, were it not the case, capital would collectively assemble in the sphere of production with the highest rate of profit. Competition therefore tends to *equalise* the rate of profit. Since the equalisation of profit rates in a national economy is an empirical fact, the prices that guarantee this equalisation must necessarily diverge from the values of the commodities. Marx calls these prices *production prices*: they are neither market prices (which are constant subject to change), nor merely “sales prices”. Prices of production, rather, denote a *new value form* in the course of the methodological presentation. They result from the competition between the sum of all branches of production to guarantee an average rate of profit to be gained from every individual capital in social production as a whole. In contrast, the market production price, or ‘market value’ in Marx’s terminology, expresses competition *within* individual branches in one line of production. In other words, prices of production “arise when the average of the different rates of profit is drawn from the different spheres of production, and this average is added to the cost prices of the different spheres of production ...”¹² The price of production p , for Marx, consists of the cost price k (the costs of the productive capital for the capitalist) plus the average profit (a surcharge to the cost price in proportion to the capital employed), so that $p = k + kp$, or $p = k(1+p)$.¹³ On the basis of this formula, Marx attempts to prove how the level of the average rate of profit and accordingly, the prices of production, can be established *on the basis of the value quantities* produced in all spheres of production. In style of an axiom, i.e. without further deducing this claim, Marx hypothesises that the average rate of profit derived from the *system of production prices* is *identical* with the average rate of profit in each production sphere in *terms of value*. In other words, the average rate of profit must be identical with the ratio of surplus value to the complete social capital invested in the totality of social production (“value rate

96

¹² Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 257.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 265: “The formula that the price of production of a commodity = $k + p$, cost price plus profit, can now be stated more exactly; since $p = kp$ ” (where p ” is the general rate of profit), the price of production = $k + kp$ ”. If $k = 300$ and p ” = 15%, the price of production $k + kp$ ” = $300 + 300 \cdot 15/100 = 345$.”

of profit”), during a particular time span. If we consider five different types of capital with different value compositions, then, in Marx’s example, we arrive at the following schema:

Capitals ¹⁴	Rate of surplus value	Surplus value (s:v)	Rate of profit (s:c+v)	Used up c	Value of commodities (used up c+v+m)	Cost price (used up c+v)	
I. 80c+20v	100%	20	20%	50	90	70	
II. 70c+30v	100%	30	30%	51	111	81	
III. 60c+40v	100%	40	40%	51	131	91	
IV. 85c+15v	100%	15	15%	40	70	55	
V. 95c+5v	100%	5	5%	10	20	15	
390c + 110v		110	110%				Total
78c + 22v		22	22%				Average

If we now treat the different single capitals I-V as a single total capital and distribute the surplus value of 22 or the rate of profit of 22% evenly among the capitals I-V, we would arrive at the following prices of production of the commodities:

Capitals ¹⁵	Surplus value	Value of commodities	Cost price of commodities	Price of commodities ¹⁶ (cost price + average rate of profit)	Rate of profit	Divergence of price from value
I. 80c+20v	20	90	70	92	22%	+2
II. 70c+30v	30	111	81	103	22%	- 8
III. 60c+40v	40	131	91	113	22%	- 18
IV. 85c+15v	15	70	55	77	22%	+ 7
V. 95c + 5v	5	20	15	37	22%	+ 17

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256. Heinrich formalises this schema as $r = \Sigma s_i / \Sigma (c_i + v_i)$, if s_i , c_i and v_i denote surplus value, constant and variable capital for the i -th sphere of production, and Σ the sum of all i , and r the average rate of profit. See Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert. Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster 1999, p. 269.

¹⁵ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 256. Heinrich accordingly formalises this schema for the price of production of the i -th commodity (i.e. the product of the i -th sphere) as $p_i = (c_i + v_i) (1 + \Sigma s_i / \Sigma (c_i + v_i))$. See Heinrich *op. cit.*, p. 269.

¹⁶ This should more correctly read as “Prices of production of commodities”. However, at this point Marx has not yet introduced the concept of the price of production.

As we can see from the last column in latter table, the divergence of price from value in the individual capitals, when considered as one single total capital, balances itself out. Therefore, a diverge of price from value, taken in production as a whole, *does not take place*:

Taken together, commodities are sold at $2 + 7 + 17 = 26$ above their value, and $8 + 18 = 26$ below their value, so that the divergences of price from value indicated above cancel each other out when surplus-value is distributed evenly, i.e. through adding the average rate of profit of 22 on the capital advance of 100 to the respective cost prices of commodities I-V ... And it is only because they are sold at these prices that the rates of profit for capitals I-V are equal at 22 per cent, irrespective of their different organic compositions...¹⁷

With this table and method of transformation, Marx thinks he has finally proven his initial claim, namely that the production price system must rest on the basis of the value system by necessity, keeping his theory of value intact. He has thus provided a solution to the value-price-transformation on the basis of his own labour theory of value, fulfilling the two axioms following from this claim, namely that I. the sum of profits must be equal to the sum of surplus value “which this capital produces in a given period of circulation”¹⁸, and II. “the sum of prices of production for the commodities produced in society as a whole ... is equal to the sum of their values.”¹⁹ Marx therefore believes he has shown that these particular rates of profit in each sphere of production are s/C and “to be developed from the value of the commodity as shown in the first Part of this volume”, in which he demonstrates the notion of profit as being a derived, a “mystified” form of the real and fundamental relation between abstract labour and capital in the notion of surplus value. The congruity between prices of production and values in the production of commodities in society as a whole is of decisive importance for Marx, since

[i]n the absence of such a development, the general rate of profit (and hence also the production prices of the commodity) remains a meaningless and irrational conception. Thus the production price of a commodity equals its cost price plus

¹⁷ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 257.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

the percentage profit added to it in accordance with the general rate of profit, its cost price plus the average profit.²⁰

Two important consequences must be drawn from this: one is unproblematic and merely serves to specify Marx's understanding of surplus value production on the surface of totally developed, competitive capitalism: profit accrues to the individual capitals only *in proportion to the total social capital advanced*. The allocation of surplus value or profit in the perspective of total capital consequentially rests on a *redistribution* of surplus value to the individual branches of production. In other words, as soon as competition is considered, even a favourable (low) organic composition of capital can only realise *a portion of the profit* it would realise under different conditions. Single capitalists therefore never realise the "full" surplus value produced in their own branch of production, but only a fragment of the surplus product generated in social production as a whole, by the *whole* working class. This also means that the notion of "individual value" is, strictly speaking, self-contradictory, even if Marx uses this term to differentiate it from the *market value* of a commodity (more on this in the next section).

The other consequence is of a more technical nature, and also more devastating for Marx's own quantitative solution to the value-price-transformation: while the first axiom is merely a hypothesis which is impossible to prove empirically (which must not mean it is wrong), the second axiom contains a logical flaw and is, therefore, untenable: it assumes that the capitalists can buy their productive capital and, likewise, the workers their means of subsistence, at their respective *values*. However, in fully developed capitalism in conditions of competition, this is impossible: productive capital as well as means of consumption are traded at definitive *prices*. Therefore, the standard reproach against Marx's calculation method is that he had allegedly "forgotten" or "failed to transform the inputs"²¹ in his calculation of cost prices (see table 2, column 5). This is of course a problematic formulation, because the transformation of the inputs *already requires the existence of prices of production* on whose basis cost prices could afterwards be accounted for. In other words, the problem is not one of Marx's "forgetfulness". The standard reproach also misses that Marx's was well *aware*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²¹ I use Moseley's formulation. See Moseley, *Money and Totality*, p. XII.

of the problem²²: but he fatally *underestimated its significance* for the quantitative solution, as Heinrich emphasises.²³

The problem rather consists in the circular logic of Marx's quantitative solution to the value-price calculus: cost prices cannot be accounted for in separation and *before* the prices of production, because cost prices themselves must be calculated *on the basis of production prices*. Seen this way, cost prices (and prices of production) must be accounted for simultaneously. But, as Heinrich has pointed out, then we cannot assume that "the general rate of profit of the production price system coincides with the average rate of profit of the value system."²⁴, hence, not only the second, but the *also the first axiom becomes untenable*. This predicament however seems to concern the tenability of the labour theory of value as a whole.

It is unnecessary at this point to refer to the vast amount of both Marxist and non-Marxist literature either discussing solutions to the transformation problem, or taking it to present fundamental objections to Marx's conception of value and sometimes even to declare the theoretical bankruptcy of Marx's teaching as such (e.g. Paul Samuelson, Ian Steedman, Michio Morishima, analytical Marxists such as Jon Elster, John E. Roemer, G. A. Cohen, and others).²⁵

²² A divergence of prices of production from values can 'arise out of the following reasons' for Marx: '(2) because the price of production of a commodity that diverges in this way from its value enters as an element into the cost price of other commodities, which means that a divergence from the *value* of the means of production consumed in a commodity may already be contained in the cost price, quite apart from the divergence that may arise from the difference between average profit and surplus-value.' Moseley, *Marx' Economic Manuscript of 1864–5*, p. 318.

²³ Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 270.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ For a nearly exhaustive overview of the debates on the transformation problem until 1988 and a critique of these views, see Michael Heinrich, "Was ist die Werttheorie noch wert? Zur neueren Debatte um das Transformationsproblem und die Marxsche Werttheorie", *PROKLA* 72 (1988), pp. 15–38. For a recent survey and critical discussion on different solutions to the problem since 1988, starting with the TSSI interpretation, see Moseley 2016 (op. cit.), pp. 286–360. For further critiques see Duncan Foley, *Recent Developments in the Labour Theory of Value*, a paper given at fourth mini-conference on value theory at the Eastern Economics Association meetings in Washington, April 3–6, 1997.

The general reproach is that Marx made an error in hypothesising the two axioms of “aggregate equalities” simultaneously, namely I. That the total profit is equal to the total surplus value (rate of profit = “value rate of profit”) and II, that the total price of production is equal to the total value (that the divergence of price from value in the total economy = 0).²⁶ Since both cannot coincide to form a coherent theory of values and price in the real capitalist economy, the theory of production in vol. 1 (and vol. 2) of *Capital* is declared redundant. We are therefore stuck with a theory of the apparent movements of price without being able to coherently, i.e. logically ground the prices of commodities in labour values. Or so it seems.

The Transformation Problem as a Problem of Fetishism

Commodities as products of capital are the results of a specific social form of labour, namely capitalist wage labour. As such, they are explicitly thematised by Marx as late as the beginning of ch. 9 of vol. 3 of *Capital*, “Formation of a General Rate of Profit (Average Rate of Profit), and Transformation of Commodity Values into Prices of Production.” As products of capital, commodities are always-already bearers of an *average rate of profit* as the result of the unity of the process of production and circulation. However, the categories of value and of surplus value are logical-conceptual *presuppositions* to understand the categories of profit and production price. Therefore, addressing the issue of “value” or “surplus value” and addressing the issue of “production price” and “profit” means to address two different levels of abstraction. Yet, the level of abstraction required by the category of value is presupposed in the category of prices of production. The former is based in the confrontation between capital and labour in “purer form” than the latter, in which the basic confrontation is already obscured by the “apparent”, i.e. fetishised form of profit. Especially the first chapter of *Capital* vol. III in which Marx develops the categories of cost price and profit is revealing in this regard. It probably presents the most concise analytic deconstruction of the fetish-characteristic value form of profit we can find in his complete oeuvre. The relation between surplus value and profit here presents the *critical relation* between *the essence* and the *appearance* of the relation between capital and labour:

²⁶ This view was held by Bortkiewicz in 1907 and later reformulated by the “neo-Ricardians”. See Moseley, *Money and Totality*, p. XII.

In surplus-value, the relationship between capital and labour is laid bare. In the relationship between capital and profit [...] *capital appears as a relationship to itself*, a relationship in which it is distinguished, as an original sum of value, from another new value that it posits. It appears to consciousness as if capital creates this new value in the course of its movement through the production and circulation processes. But how this happens is now mystified, and appears to derive from hidden qualities that are inherent in capital itself.²⁷

Yet, what does it mean to say that it “appears to consciousness as if capital creates this new value”, which generates the impression that, in profit, “capital appears as a relationship to itself”? What does it mean to say that “surplus-value must appear as profit, profit is the transformed form of surplus value”²⁸? In other words, what does it mean to say that “essence must appear”²⁹? In order to grasp the *necessary* nexus between the non-empirical, conceptual foundation of profit, and the simultaneous illusion and “mystification” it creates by *simply being itself*, we must take a closer look at the determining factor of the rate of profit, i.e. cost price.

As is known, the rate of profit is represented by the ratio of surplus value to the *total* capital invested, i.e. both constant and variable capital, or the *cost price* of capital ($s/c+v$ or s/C). The loss of the distinction between constant and variable capital however is constitutive to how capitalists perceive of their own act of “advancement” of capital. Here is a first hint at how capital can “appear as a relation to itself”, namely in the fact that, for the capitalist and his “investment”, the “capitalist cost is measured by the expenditure of *capital*, whereas the actual cost of the commodity is measured by the expenditure of *labour*.”³⁰ Here we can detect the importance of the concept of “transformation” for Marx which he uses as chapter and part titles throughout vol. III³¹: “transformation”,

²⁷ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 139.

²⁸ Patrick Murray, “The Secret of Capital’s Self-Valorisation ‘Laid Bare’: How Hegel Helped Marx to Overturn Ricardo’s Theory of Profit”, in: F. Moseley and T. Smith (Eds.), *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic*, Brill, Leiden 2014, p. 192.

²⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic. Volume One, Book Two (The Doctrine of Essence)*, trans. and edited by George di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010 [1813], p. 418.

³⁰ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 118.

³¹ As e.g., the titles of Part One and Two of the manuscripts to vol. 3 indicate, i.e. ‘The Transformation of Surplus value into Profit’ and ‘The Transformation of Profit into Average Profit’.

for Marx, is not simply an affair of relegating the mode of presentation towards different relational quantities, co-efficients or variables. The concept of transformation, carefully chosen by Marx, denotes a *reduction* or even *contraction*, not just with regard to the *informative content* of our view of the problem, but of the way that the *problem poses itself* to the vulgar perspective at all. Because the notion of profit relates the “extra” value to the total capital invested, we will only be inclined to look for the difference between capital invested and the surplus it yields, without further questioning *which component* of the “value” invested is productive of new value at all – they all equally seem to yield a ‘profit’. Let us consider separately the two results of viewing all value components of cost price as equally yielding profit. As for the first problem arising from the concept of the rate of profit (s/C), this is still quite obvious. For the capitalists, the constant fixed capital used in production does not completely enter into the commodity’s cost price at once and directly, but only partially. Both circulating capital and variable capital however, appearing to the capitalist merely as costs in general, completely enter the cost price, because they are completely used up in production. Hence, as far as value formation is concerned,

the variable portion of capital, that laid out on labour-power, is expressly identified here with constant capital (the portion of capital consisting of production material), under the heading of circulating capital, and the valorization process of capital is completely mystified.³²

Second, however, this mystification is not without consequence for the theory of the source of profit. Two faulty premises here give rise to the fetishistic illusion that labour is just a value component among others: first, for the capitalist, if a commodity is sold beneath its cost price, the capital expended cannot be fully replaced. If this process continues long enough, “the capital value will disappear completely”³³. If relations present themselves this way, it is very understandable that “the capitalist is inclined to treat the cost price as the real *inner* value of the commodity, as it the price he needs merely to preserve his capital.”³⁴ Second, however, ‘is the fact that the cost price of the commodity is the purchase price which the capitalist has paid for its production, i.e. the pur-

³² Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 124.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

chase price determined by the production process itself.³⁵ The source of profit therefore must appear to consist in the *excess value over the cost price* of the commodity, realised with the sale of the commodity, in the

excess of its sale price over its value instead of an excess of its value over its cost price, so that the surplus-value concealed in the commodity is not simply realized by its sale, but actually derives from the sale itself.³⁶

Because the difference in the costs of production and the surplus gained from the sale, apparently seems to spring *from the sale itself* – in that the difference is thought to consist between C and the sales price, not between k and C – the source of profit is determined to be in the circulation process, in the commodities’ ‘profit upon alienation’. This argument has already been presented in the “Contradictions in the General Formula” in ch. 5 of vol. I of *Capital*. But it is not until at this *exact point in the presentation*, with the specification of the concept of cost price, that we finally comprehend not only *that* a fetishistic illusion occurs, but also *why*. In other words, with the analysis of the notion of profit and cost price, we can determine the *mechanism* by which the fetishistic view of capital as a “self-valorising force” takes hold of capitalism’s self-understanding.³⁷

Yet, if the problem is an *epistemological* one, arising from the capitalist mode of production itself, then why did Marx feel the necessity of abandoning to investigate the *qualitative dimension* of the relation between surplus value and profit for a *quantitative solution*?

The centrality of Marx’s critique of fetishism pivotal to the architecture of his intervention is specifically discussed at three conceptual trajectories: first, as the introduction to the theme of *Capital*, the conceptual development of *value* in ch. 1 of *Capital* vol. I; second, in his introduction to the notion of profit in ch. 1 of *Capital* vol. III; and third, in his deconstruction of the “Trinity Formula” in Ch. 48 of the same volume. The *interrelation* of the three conceptual stages is crucial at this point, in that how they mediate the previous levels of abstraction with the

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³⁷ For a similar stress on the importance of Chapter 1 of vol. III of *Capital* for his “deconstruction” of the conventional theories of profit, see Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 208–9.

new one is the *symptom* of the newly reached level of obfuscation or “mystification”. At the same time, the analysis provides the key to unravel to mystification at hand: in the concept of profit, i.e., the notion of cost price as it presents itself to the capitalist, as well as in its real determination, we can explain how the appropriation of alien unpaid labour must disappear from the surface. The “obvious” dynamic of capitalism, located in movements of price, altogether erases any epistemological residues of unequal exchange between capital and labour. The “obvious” dynamic of the capitalist mode of production, however, embodied in price movements, is *competition*. Competition is the *necessary condition* that inadvertently leads to the equalisation of profit rates, so that it is also the inner mechanism or *cause* (*Grund*, in the Hegelian sense) for the emergence of prices of production. “*In competition, therefore, everything appears upside down*”³⁸, as Marx observes: average profits *seem to be* independent of the organic composition of capital, the wage level *seems to* determine rises and falls in the prices of production, fluctuations in market prices *seem to* reduce the average market price of a commodity to its production price, not to its value. Hence, at the level of *Capital* vol. 3, the real mechanism of competition³⁹ informs the inversion of appearance and essence in the conventional understanding:

The finished configuration of economic relations, as these are visible on the surface, in their actual existence, and therefore also in the notions with which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to gain an understanding of them, is very different from the configuration of their inner core, which is essential but concealed, and the concept corresponding to it. It is in fact the very reverse and antithesis of this.⁴⁰

At this point, we can *retroactively determine the fetish-character of value* as it appears to us already at the very beginning of Marx’s exposition in *Capital*. At the same time, we can finally comprehend why “essence must appear”. Yet, the attempt to ‘demystify appearance’ is itself not indicative of a particular strategy.

105

³⁸ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 311.

³⁹ This is not to say that competition is the *inner cause* for capital’s necessity to obtain a share in social production’s aggregate surplus value. The contrary is the case: the necessity of *individual* capitals to obtain a share in the social surplus value, constitutes competition in the first place. See Marx’s critique of Smith in the *Grundrisse*. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse (Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy)*, Penguin, London 1973, p. 752.

⁴⁰ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 311.

We therefore confront the epistemological problem of, if one will, the ‘dialectic’ of precondition (*Voraussetzung*) and result (*Resultat*) that Marx was very well aware of as a problem of the inversion of appearance and essence. Here, we face it in the context of the value-price transformation: while a coherent theory and concept of value is *presupposed* for the analysis of cost price, profit, and prices of production, it is prices of production, or rather market production-prices that we are confronted with in reality, and *not the category of value*. Then how did ‘value’ become a key heuristic to defetishise the categories of bourgeois political economy? In the following, we will attempt to give a sketch, if for reasons of space only a brief one, of what we believe are answers to questions that Marx himself was not thoroughly aware of.

In his monumental *Money as Measure, Means and Method. Calculating with the Identity of Time* (2014), (*Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode. Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit*), Frank Engster explores the condition of possibility of *uniformly relating the different kinds of labour* with one another through *money*. This, for him, is the fundamental epistemological question with regard to the value-price-transformation, revealing the status of Marx’s critique.⁴¹ The question here follows up on the method of inquiry posed above: even if we assume that “essence and appearance never coincide”, how does the inquiry – the investigation of the nature of price and a uniform rate of profit – point at “its” inner core, namely the production of value and surplus value? Under which conditions could we, being confronted with *prices* only, assume their determination by *value* ‘in the last instance (*in letzter Instanz*)’⁴²? Engster suggests that the initial question – how do we get from value to price? – should first be reversed: what permits us to go *from prices back to value*? This important question however hints at where Marx in fact *underestimates* the impact of his own inquiry, namely that it supposes not only a quantitative, both both a *quantitative* and *qualitative incommensurability* of value and price. This is the real significance of the fetishistic illusion of the superficial presentation of the aggregate surplus

106

⁴¹ ‘The status of Marx’s critique of value is ultimately revealed only in the transformation and inversion of price.’ Frank Engster, *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode. Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit*, Neofelis, Berlin 2014, p. 615.

⁴² “... die Werte, die hinter den Produktionspreisen stehen und sie in letzter Instanz bestimmen.” K. Marx, *Das Kapital. Dritter Band. Marx-Engels-Werke* Band 25. Dietz, Berlin 1964 (1894), p. 219. Fernbach translates: “... (values) ultimately determine them.” Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 311.

value in profit rates: that they in fact *do not* and *cannot* correspond, neither in quantity, nor quality – and, yet, that they *need not*. We agree with Engster’s view that the relation of value and price *must* be incommensurable, since the notion of “price” itself is only a fetishised form of appearance of value. Therefore, we must not only concede a *quantitative incommensurability* concerning their magnitudes, but also of a *qualitative* one that points us to the fact that they address *different conditions of valorisation*, and, respectively, different relations of capital to itself. Engster expresses this in the notion of ‘rupture’ (*Bruch*): ‘This rupture both comes to appear in the prices of commodities and in money, and is simultaneously obscured in them.’⁴³ Accordingly, the two incommensurables of value and price *cannot be overcome by money as the measure of value* (as e.g. in simple commodity exchange). First, Engster explains why the ‘traditional’ attempts at quantitative “solutions” to the transformation problem within the Marxist camp had to fail:

The problem of transformation seemed to consist in the fact that one and the same *quality* – value – appears to be *quantitatively* determined in different terms, in so far as the values created by labour and the final prices (of production) diverged. The transformation was reduced to the attempt of a mere conversion (*Umrechnung*) of given quanta (labour quanta or labour time) into equally quantitative prices of production. If however, on both sides of the calculus, determinate quantities are already treated as given, then the transformation can only mean to converse two quantities *of the same quality*⁴⁴ and to determine their relation through it. Moreover, the transformation of values into prices is understood as a spatial-temporal act. On the one hand, the transformation is performed as mathematical accounting (*Verrechnung*), which, on the other hand, must be carried out in space and time in order to put individual labour in relation to total labour in order to draw their average, and also to put the total sum of surplus value in relation to individual capitals to form the general rate of profit. The question however, which forms the basis of this transformation, namely, *why* the individual labours as well as their results can be put into *one and the same relation* and why this relation can be realised as an *identical* quality (a quality which consists in nothing but its *quantification*) – this question is uncritically left aside, above all because money as the “locus” of the transformation is completely ignored ...

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 614.

⁴⁴ Emphasis added.

But while it is correct that value has no quantitative determination before price, and accordingly, in price, value quanta are not transformed, it is too hastily concluded [by Heinrich] that the level of value is merely ‘conceptual-logical’.⁴⁵

Second, Engster thematises the predicament that value can never become the object of *empirical* verification:

... if value in any case appears as transformed into prices, and can never be known in any other way, then the transformation of values into prices must be *reverted*: why does it have to seem, by the appearance of prices, as though appearance was based on a *previously vague*, but ultimately *decided* relation? Why, by the category of price, does it have to seem that it results from a transformation of this relation into individual prices – a transformation however, which cannot to be reconstructed from determinate, given values, and which, viewed quantitatively, must rather remain indeterminate and insofar out of the scope of empirical verification?⁴⁶

In Marx’s quantitative transformation procedure it seems as though the non-empirical category of value *retroactively acquires an empirical, determinate quality* introduced by the concept of production price. But that would mean that values and prices were of the *same inherent quality*, so that the fetishistic displacement occurring through the ratio of the surplus to the total capital invested – Marx’s own critical insight from the analysis of profit and cost price – did no longer have a heuristic function explaining its necessarily fetishistic character.⁴⁷ Instead of emphasising the significance of the fetishistic illusion of price and the equalisation of profit rates that accounts for the ‘upside down’ view of conventional political economy, Marx *accepts* the premise of profit-rate equalisation *as a fact* to subsequently prove the *compatibility* of the sum of surplus value and the sum of profit, and of the sum of values with the sum of prices. It seems that

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 612; footnote.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 612–3, footnote 155.

⁴⁷ Himmelweit and Mohun seem to point at a similar argument of the systematic specific difference between values and prices of production: ‘... the development of capitalist competition does not introduce a deviation of prices from previously existing socially necessary labour-times, but instead gives those socially necessary labour-times an independent quantitative aspect they did not previously possess.’ Himmelweit and Mohun, “Real abstractions and Anomalous Assumptions”, in I. Steedman et al., *The Value Controversy*, Verso, London 1981, p. 240.

his insights into the fetishistic character of competition and the formation of a general rate of profit, fostering false assumptions about the essential dynamic of valorisation, and hence, the qualitative *incompatibility* of value and price, ‘goes by the board’⁴⁸ in Marx’s own quantitative transformation procedure.

Yet, Marx was explicit in his intent to demonstrate how the process of capital’s valorisation is not only *abstractly* based on the appropriation of alien labour without an equivalent, but how this can be proven in the *real and concrete relations*, relations in which we are confronted with the fact of the equalisation of profit rates and the existence of *prices*.

According to Engster, Marx has conceived of fetishism in a “new” way in the context of the value-price-transformation. This becomes evident in the notion of “rupture” (*Bruch*). While at the level of simple commodity exchange (i.e. commodity exchange considered at the most abstract level), it is merely *commodities* that engage in a social relation through a ‘measure-giving’ (*maßgebliche*) unit (money), at the level of prices of production, not commodities, but *their production* is put into relation with the measure-giving unity in money-price. The rupture in both cases concerns value itself, insofar as it pertains to the laws of value’s process of valorisation – the production process of capital – and its appearance in price. The rupture then includes “the complete difference between, on the one hand, the becoming of value through its valorisation and, on the other hand, its finished appearance as price at the surface of society.”⁴⁹ In the concept of price, therefore, “the *whole essence of valorisation must necessarily appear in inverted form* – if only by the fact that value, while being by all means a *total social relation* and a *total social process of valorisation*, appears in the price of a commodity in an immediate and singular, explicit and final fashion.”⁵⁰ In other words, the difference between value and price can only appear as their rupture. Yet, with regard to the fetishistic transformation, Marx was intent to derive the obvious, “apparent” form from its fundamental social grounding in value *quantitatively*.

⁴⁸ Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 3*, p. 268.

⁴⁹ Engster, *op. cit.*, p. 615.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

There may be several reasons for Marx's own solution to what he saw as Ricardo's transformation problem, over which we cannot speculate here. Against the choir of the critics of the labour theory of value, however, we can say that its significance for the analysis of the perversions and self-mystifications of the capital relation, is far not exhausted in testing its quantitative tenability.

John Milios*

Value, Fictitious Capital and Finance. The Timeless of Karl Marx's *Capital*¹

Marx's monetary theory of value¹

Karl Marx is not a proponent of classical value theory as labour expended. Marx developed in *Capital* and his other mature economic writings a monetary theory of value and capital.² He analysed value as an expression of relations exclusively characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Value registers the *relationship of exchange* between *each commodity* and *all other commodities* and expresses the effect of the specifically capitalist homogenization of the labour processes in capitalism (production for exchange and production for profit).³

Marx specifies and develops the notion of value and through it all other notions reflecting the capitalist mode of production (CMP) on the basis of a twofold methodology: (a) an analysis on *different levels of abstraction*, which aims at (b) a process of *gradual clarification-concretisation*, starting from a commonly accepted definition of the concept under discussion and reconstructing it step by step into a new (Marxian) concept. It is in this sense that his theory constitutes a *Critique* and not a correction (or a version) of Classical Political Economy.⁴

¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the first *Historical Materialism Athens Conference: 'Rethinking Crisis, Resistance and Strategy'*, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 2–5 May, 2019.

² The product of labour 'cannot acquire universal social validity as an equivalent-form except by being converted into money', Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Classics, London 1990, p. 201.

³ '*The value form of the product of labour* is the most abstract, but also the *most general form* of the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character', *Ibid.*, p. 174. 'The concept of value is entirely peculiar to the most modern economy, since it is the most abstract expression of capital itself and of the production resting on it. In the concept of value, its secret is betrayed. [...] The economic concept of value does not occur in antiquity'. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Classics, London 1993, p. 776 ff.

⁴ The point of departure shall always be a 'simple', i.e. easily recognizable form, which though may lead to the 'inner'-causal relationships: *De prime abord*, I do not proceed from

It is clear then that a comprehensive theoretical investigation of Marx's theory shall not stick itself to the introductory treatment of the notions in question, but take into consideration his whole analysis (in the 3 Volumes of *Capital*, the first draft of which Marx had completed in 1865).

Marx applies the above-described methodology to the elaboration of his concept of value. That is why he makes a Ricardian-like version of value as his point of departure. However, he did not restrict himself to this initial definition (according to which value is identified with the quantity of labour – with socially average characteristics of productivity and intensity – expended on the production of a commodity), but formulated a new, monetary theory of value.⁵

Marx's theory of value shapes a new theoretical domain and a new theoretical object of analysis: Marx's concept of value constitutes a complex notion, a theoretical 'junction' which allows the deciphering of the capital relation, by combining the specifically capitalist features of the labour process with the corresponding forms of appearance of the products of labour.⁶

"concepts", hence neither from the "concept of value", and am therefore in no way concerned to "divide" it. What I proceed from is the simplest social form in which the product of labour presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the "commodity". This I analyse, initially in the *form in which it appears*' Karl Marx, *Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW)*, Bd. 19, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1976, p. 368. Karl Marx, *Notes on Adolph Wagner's "Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie" (Second Edition), Volume I, 1879*". Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/01/wagner.htm>. See also Christopher Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Brill Academic Publ., Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002.

⁵ Marx introduces, of course, the notion 'labour power', which is a *major* new theoretical concept distinguishing him from Ricardo. However, it is not *the* major point, as we have noted in the past. John Milios, Dimitri Dimoulis and George Economakis, *Karl Marx and the Classics. An Essay on Value, Crises and the Capitalist Mode of Production*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2002, p. 15, 31. When the Classic economists claim that the value of 'labour' (the wage) equals the value of the worker's means of subsistence, it is clear that they speak about something different from the quantity of labour expended by the worker. In other words, the notion of labour power is to be found implicitly in Ricardo's (and Smith's) analysis.

⁶ Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, überarbeitete und erweiterte Neuauflage, Westfälisches Dampfboot, Berlin 1999. John Milios et. al., *Karl Marx and the Classics. An Essay on Value, Crises and the Capitalist Mode of Production*. John Milios, 'Theory of Value and Money. In Defence of the Endogeneity of Money', paper presented at the Sixth International Conference in Economics, Economic Research Center, METU, Ankara, September 11–14, 2002. Christopher J. Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Brill Academic Publ., Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002.

Value is the 'property' that the products of labour acquire in capitalism, which gains material substance, is actualised, in the market, through the exchangeability of any product of labour with any other, i.e. through their character as commodities bearing a specific (monetary) price on the market. Value registers the *relationship of exchange* between each commodity and *all other* commodities and expresses the effect of the specifically capitalist homogenisation of the labour processes in the CMP, (production for-the-exchange and for-profit), as delineated through the concept of *abstract labour*.

Value is determined by abstract labour; however, abstract labour does not constitute an empirical magnitude, which could be measured by the stopwatch. It is an abstraction, which is constituted (it acquires a tangible existence) in the process of exchange:

Social labour-time exists in these commodities in a latent state, so to speak, and becomes evident only in the course of their exchange. [...] Universal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result.⁷

Marx commences with developing his theory of value (and of the CMP) from an analysis of *commodity circulation*. In order to decipher the form of appearance of value as money, he introduces the scheme of the 'simple form of value', in which, *seemingly*, a quantity of a commodity is exchanged for a (different) quantity of another commodity:

x commodity A is exchanged for y commodity B.

Classical economists have thought this scheme to be barter; they further considered that all market transactions may be reduced to such simple barter acts (merely facilitated by money, since, with its mediation, a mutual coincidence of needs is not required any more).

Marx shows however that in this scheme we do not have two commodities of pre-existing equal values (i.e. measured independently, e.g. by the quantity of 'labour expended' for their production) exchanging with each other. Instead we

⁷ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1981, p. 45.

have only *one commodity* (the commodity acquiring the first, i.e. the ‘left-hand position’ or the *relative value form*), whose value is measured in units of a different use value (the ‘commodity’ acquiring the position of the equivalent, and thus serving as the ‘measurer of value’ of the commodity in the relative form). The second ‘commodity’ (in the position of the equivalent: B) is not an ordinary commodity (unity of exchange value and use value), but plays simply the role of the ‘measure of value’, of ‘money’, for the first commodity.

The value of the relative (A) is being expressed *exclusively* in units of the equivalent (B). The value of the latter (of B) cannot be expressed; it does not exist in the world of tangible reality:

But as soon as the coat takes up the position of the equivalent in the value expression, the magnitude of its value ceases to be expressed quantitatively. On the contrary, the coat now figures in the value equation merely as a definite quantity of some article.⁸

It has come out therefore that the ‘simple value form’ does not amount to an equality in the mathematical sense or a conventional equivalence: x commodity A = y commodity B (which would imply that y commodity B = x commodity A). It is on the contrary characterised by a ‘polarisation’, i.e. by the fact that each ‘pole’ occupies a qualitatively different position and has a correspondingly different function. This polarisation and this difference result from the fact that value is manifested (i.e., empirically appears) *only* in exchange value.

In other words, the simple form of value tells us that x units of commodity A *have the value of* y units of the equivalent B, or that *the value of* a unit of commodity A *is* y/x *units of* B. In its Marxian version, the ‘simple form of value’ measures only the value of commodity A in units of the equivalent B.

114

From the analysis of the simple value form, Marx has no difficulty in deciphering the *money form*. For this purpose, he utilises two intermediate intellectual formulas, the *total or expanded* and the *general form* for expressing value. The second form in this developmental sequence (the *general form* of value) is characterised by one and only one equivalent in which all the other commodities

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One*, p. 147.

express their value. These commodities are thus always in the position of the *relative value form*. Only one 'thing' ('commodity') has come to constitute the *universal equivalent form of value*.⁹

The first feature of money is its 'property' of being *the general equivalent*. Thus the relation of general exchangeability of commodities is expressed (or realised) only in an indirect, *mediated* sense, i.e. through money, which functions as *general equivalent* in the process of exchange, and through which all commodities (acquiring the relative position) express their value.

The Marxian analysis does not therefore entail reproduction of the barter model (of exchanging one commodity for another), since it holds that exchange is *necessarily mediated by money*. Money is interpreted as an *intrinsic and necessary element in capitalist economic relations*.

Commodities do not then assume the form of *direct mutual exchangeability*. Their *socially validated form is a mediated one*.¹⁰

In Marx's theoretical system there cannot be any other measure (or form of appearance) of value. The essential feature of the 'market economy' (of capitalism) is thus not simply commodity exchange (as maintained by mainstream theories) but monetary circulation and money:

The *social* character of labour appears as the *money existence* of the commodity and hence as a *thing* outside actual production.¹¹

The fact that even the most straightforward act, that of exchanging two commodities must be understood as a procedure consisting of two successive monetary transactions, a sale followed by a purchase, in accordance with the formula C-M-C (or C-M, M-C, where C symbolises the commodity and M the money) allows the comprehension of a main inherent trend of the 'market economy': the propensity of money to become independent from its role as a *means* of ex-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, "'Das Kapital' und Vorarbeiten, Marx, *Das Kapital, Erster Band, Hamburg 1867*", v: *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) II.5*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1983, p. 42.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach, Penguin Classics, London 1991, p. 649.

change or a measure of value, its tendency to become an '*end in itself*': On the one hand in the case of 'hoarding' (e.g. as a result of a sale that is not followed by a purchase: C-M), and on the other in the case that money functions as 'means of payment', i.e. when the purchaser appears in the act M-C as 'debtor', 'as the mere representative of money, or rather as the representative of future money'.¹²

The circulation of commodities differs from the direct exchange of products not only in form, but in its essence. [...] The process of circulation, therefore, unlike the direct exchange of products, does not disappear from view once the use-values have changed places and changed hands [...] Circulation sweats money from every pore. Nothing can be more foolish than the dogma that because every sale is a purchase, and every purchase a sale, the circulation of commodities necessarily implies an equilibrium between sales and purchases. [...] No one can sell unless someone else purchases. But no one directly needs to purchase, because he has just sold.¹³

Money is the 'material embodiment' of the social relations immanent in the CMP.¹⁴ Production and circulation of commodities carries with it or rather presupposes money. With Marx's words:

It has become apparent in the course of our presentation that value, which appeared as an abstraction, is only possible as such an abstraction, as soon as money is posited.¹⁵

Marx's monetary theory of capital

Taking into consideration the above stated analysis, one comprehends that in Marx's theory of money the notion of the 'general equivalent' cannot be the final, but an *intermediate*, provisional and 'immature' concept in the course of the theoretical analysis. The same is valid for the sphere of circulation of com-

116

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 233.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 207–209.

¹⁴ In contrast, money had a different nature in societies where pre-capitalist modes of production prevailed: In those societies, money as means of exchange or a store of 'wealth' had played a secondary role, filling up the 'external pores' of society. In capitalism, by contrast, money is the most general form of appearance of the core economic relation, of capital; it is the 'vehicle' through which the economy's structural relations manifest themselves.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 776.

modities, which according to Marx builds the outer husk or the surface of the whole capitalist economy. The sphere of circulation is a structural feature of the CMP; it characterises no other mode of production.¹⁶

We saw that even from the moment that Marx introduces the notion of money as the general equivalent he argues that money does not only play the role of a 'means' or a 'measure', but that it also tends to attain the role of an 'end in itself' (hoarding, means of payment, world money). Here we have to deal with an *introductory definition of capital*, with the (provisional and 'immature') introduction of the *concept* of capital: money functioning as an end in itself.

In order to be able to function as an end in itself, money has to move in the sphere of circulation according to the formula $M - C - M$. Due to the homogeneity of money however, this formula is meaningless,¹⁷ unless for the case that it describes a quantitative change, i.e., an increase in value: The aim of this motion cannot be anything else than the continual 'creation' of surplus-money. The formula becomes then $M - C - M'$, where M' stands for $M + \Delta M$.

However, money can function as such an 'end in itself' only in the case that it dominates over the sphere of production and incorporates it into its circulation, $M - C - M'$, i.e. when it functions as (money) capital. The exploitation of labour power in the production sphere constitutes the actual presupposition for this incorporation and this motion. Thus '*the circulation of money leads (...) to capital*'.¹⁸

¹⁶ "An analysis [...] would show, that the whole system of bourgeoisie production is presupposed, so that exchange value may appear on the surface as the simple starting point, and the exchange process [...] as the simple social metabolism which though encircles the whole production as well as consumption." Karl Marx, "*Das Kapital' und Vorarbeiten, Marx, Das Kapital, Erster Band, Hamburg 1867*", p. 52. As Murray correctly notes, '*Marx's whole presentation of the commodity and generalised simple commodity circulation presupposes capital and its characteristic form of circulation*. It is perhaps the foremost accomplishment of Marx's theory of generalised commodity circulation to have demonstrated – with superb dialectical reasoning – that a sphere of such exchanges cannot stand alone; generalised commodity circulation is unintelligible when abstracted from the circulation of capital'. Patrick Murray, "Marx's 'Truly Social' Labour Theory of Value: Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory: Part I", *Historical Materialism* 6 (1/2000), p. 41.

¹⁷ Or, better, aimless: it can neither cause a change in the quality nor in the quantity of the entity in motion.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 776.

Marx formulated and then developed the theory of capital on the basis of his concept of value. Capital is value which has been appropriated by capitalists. Precisely because it constitutes value, capital makes its appearance as money and commodities. But the commodities that function as capital are certain specific commodities: the means of production (constant capital) on one hand and labour power (variable capital) on the other.

The capitalist appears on the market as the owner of money (M) buying commodities (C) which consist of means of production (Mp) and labour power (Lp). In the process of production (P), the C are productively used up in order to create an outflow of commodities, a product (C') whose value would exceed that of C. Finally, he sells that outflow in order to recover a sum of money (M') higher than (M).

In the Marxist theory of the CMP both value and money are concepts which cannot be defined independently of the notion of capital. They contain (and are also contained in) the concept of capital. Marx's theory, being a monetary theory of value, is at the same time a monetary theory of capital.¹⁹

The motion of money as capital binds the production process *to* the circulation process, in the means that commodity production becomes a phase or a moment (although the decisive moment for the whole valorisation process) of the total circuit of social capital: M—C (= Mp+Lp) [P]-C'—M'

Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital. It comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within circulation [...] and starts the same cycle again and again. [...] The circulation of money as capital is an end in itself [...]. The circulation of capital is therefore limitless.²⁰

118

In this process, the capitalist appears to be the producer of value and surplus value. This is much more so, as the worker does not produce commodities (and value) individually, but only as a constituent part of 'the collective worker':

¹⁹ '[...] value requires above all an independent form by means of which its identity with itself may be asserted. *Only in the shape of money does it possess this form.* Money therefore forms the starting-point and the conclusion of every valorisation process'. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 255.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 253, p. 256.

[...] the specialized worker produces no commodities. It is only the common product of all the specialized workers that becomes a commodity.²¹

Every capitalist is always at the same time a 'trader' or 'merchant' (who as a money owner buys commodities, the enterprise's inputs: means of production and labour power, in order to sell commodities, the produced output) and 'manager' of a labour and production process, which makes it possible for trading to be effective. This means that, despite certain ambiguities and contradictions to be found in Marx's texts, all forms of labour that produce surplus-value are productive, regardless the branch or sphere of economic activity.²² As Marx puts it:

If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, *a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation*.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

²² On the contrary, capitalistically non-productive are all forms of labour that are not being exchanged with (variable) capital: non-remunerated labour (e.g., household labour producing use values for one's own consumption), remunerated labour exchanged not with capital but with private income (e.g., servants, gardeners, housekeepers, etc. in private households), public servants or government employees in state apparatuses that do not sell goods or services (e.g., ministries, the police, public schools etc.), self-employed producers who sell 'simple' commodities (i.e., commodities that are not being capitalistically produced and thus do not contain surplus value to be realized in the market).

²³ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 644. Emphasis added. Marx writes also characteristically: "Since the direct purpose and the actual product of capitalist production is surplus value, only such labour is productive, and only such an exorter of labour capacity is a productive worker, as directly produces surplus value. Hence only such labour is productive as is consumed directly in the production process for the purpose of valorising capital. [...] And only the bourgeoisie can confuse the question of what are productive labour and productive workers from the standpoint of capital with the question of what productive labour is in general, and can therefore be satisfied with the tautological answer that all that labour is productive which produces, which results in a product, or any kind of use value, which has any result at all." *Ibid.*: 1038–1039, the trans. compared with the German original and slightly altered). As regards the circulation sphere, he clarifies: "in so far as circulation itself creates costs, itself requires surplus labour, it appears as itself included within the production process." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 524.

After the introduction of his monetary theory of value and capital, i.e., from Part 3 of Vol. 1 of *Capital* onward, Marx analyses the process of capitalist production and accumulation in reference to *labour and surplus-labour*, so that the readers comprehend that surplus-value (which appears as a monetary profit) derives from surplus-labour. In other words, Marx tries in this section of his work to illustrate the process of class exploitation of the working class by capital, a process that is being concealed by the money relations between the capitalist and the worker.²⁴

Marx himself warned the reader of the simplistic assumptions in this part of his analysis, namely that when talking about surplus-labour one talks not about the specificity of capitalism, but about an exploitation process which has common characteristics with all modes of production: surplus labour expenditure and the creation of a surplus product which is appropriated by the ruling class (which characterises every mode of production and not only the CMP). He writes:

Capital has not invented surplus-labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian καλός κ' αγαθός, an Etruscan theo-

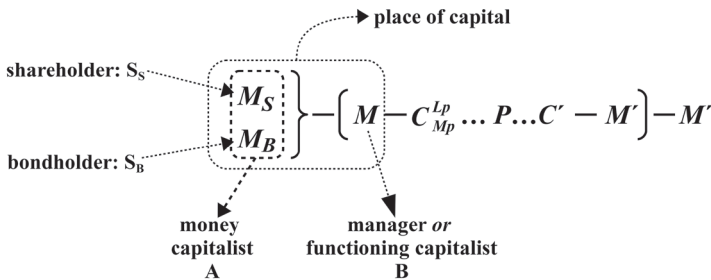
²⁴ Marx writes: "This portion of the working-day [devoted to surplus-value production, J.M.], I name surplus-labour-time, and to the labour expended during that time, I give the name of surplus-labour. It is every bit as important, for a correct understanding of surplus-value, to conceive it as a mere congelation of surplus-labour-time, as nothing but materialised surplus-labour, as it is, for a proper comprehension of value, to conceive it as a mere congelation of so many hours of labour, as nothing but materialised labour." Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 325. However, the tribute paid by the peasant communities to the emperor of China or to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (e.g. the tenth of their wheat production, etc.) was also the product of surplus-labour. The total working time of those peasants (the direct producers in the specific mode of production) were significantly over the time required to produce their subsistence means. This does not mean, however, that they produced commodities or surplus-value. To analyse capitalism one has to move forward, to the specific forms of appearance of the surplus product produced by surplus-labour. This is what Marx emphasises, when he adds to the above-cited passage: "*The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave-labour, and one based on wage-labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the immediate producer, the worker.*" Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 325. Emphasis added.

crat, a civis Romanus, a Norman baron, an American slave-owner, a Wallachian Boyard, a modern landlord or a capitalist.²⁵

The reason for this analysis of exploitation on the basis of surplus-labour, (a notion which does not reflect the *specific difference* of the specific mode of production under examination), and not in relation with the specific forms under which the appropriation of surplus-labour manifests itself in capitalism (profit and money relations), is, as mentioned, the existing in these forms self-generating consequences of concealment of class exploitation: The subordination of labour to capital imposes the capitalist as *the* producer of commodities and regulates exchange ratios between commodities in accordance with production costs. Profit is thus presented as proportion of the advanced capital, so that '*surplus-value itself appears as having arisen from the total capital, and uniformly from all parts of it*'.²⁶

Fictitious capital and the regulatory role of finance²⁷

Proceeding to a more concrete level of analysis in Vol. 3 of *Capital*, Marx acknowledges that *the place of capital* is in general occupied by more than one subject: a *money capitalist* and a *functioning capitalist*. This means that a detailed description of capitalism cannot ignore the *circulation of interest-bearing capital*, which depicts the structure of the financial system. Marx's argumentation might be represented in the following schema:



²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 344–45.

²⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, p. 267.

²⁷ In what follows in this Section see Dimitris P. Sotiropoulos, John Milios and Spyros Lapatsioras, *A Political Economy of Contemporary Capitalism and its Crisis. Demystifying Finance*, Routledge, Abington and New York 2013.

In the course of the lending process, the money capitalist A becomes the recipient and proprietor of a *security S*, that is to say a written *promise* of payment from the functioning capitalist B. This promise certifies that A remains *owner* of the money capital *M*. He only cedes to B the right to make use of it for a specified period.

Two very basic consequences are implied by this analysis and are, briefly, as follows.

Firstly, the place of capital (the incarnation of the powers stemming from the structure of the relations of production) *is occupied both by the money capitalist and by the functioning capitalist*. In other words, the place of capital is occupied by agents that are both ‘internal’ to the enterprise (managers) and ‘external’ to it (security holders).²⁸

Secondly, the pure form of ownership over capital is the *financial security*. Nevertheless, the *price* of security does not emerge either from the value of the money made available or from the value of the ‘real’ capital. The ownership titles are priced on the basis of the estimated (future) income they will yield for the institution or person owning them, which of course is part of the surplus value produced. In this sense they are *sui generis commodities* plotting a course that is their very own.²⁹

Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest, of its own increase. The thing is now already capital simply as a thing; the result of the overall reproduction process appears as a property devolving on a thing in itself [...]. The social relation is consummated in the relationship of a thing, money, to itself [...] In this capacity of potential capital, as a means of producing profit, it becomes a commodity, but a commodity *sui generis*. Or, what amounts to the same, capital as capital becomes a commodity.³⁰

²⁸ In Marx’s own words: “in the production process, the functioning capitalist represents capital against the wage-labourers as the property of others, and the money capitalist participates in the exploitation of labour as represented by the functioning capitalist”. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, p. 504.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 607–9, pp. 597–8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 516, 459–60.

The financial 'mode of existence' of capitalist property – as a *promise* and at the same time a *claim* for appropriation of the surplus value that will be produced in future – brings into existence a broader terrain within which each flow of income can be seen as revenue corresponding to a 'fictitious capital' with the potential to find an outlet on secondary markets.³¹ The pure (and most developed) form of appearance of capital is its fictitious form. It is 'fictitious', not in the sense of imaginary detachment from real conditions of production, as is usually suggested, but 'fictitious' in the sense that it reifies the capitalist production relations.

The formation of fictitious capital is known as capitalization. [...] The market value of these securities is partly speculative, since it is determined not just by the actual revenue but rather by the anticipated revenue as reckoned in advance.³²

Following Marx, banks, insurance companies, funds, and other forms of financial enterprises are productive, 'from the standpoint of capital' (see also the argument developed in the previous Section of this paper):

Let us now consider the total movement, M–C...P...C'–M', [...]. The capital that assumes these forms in the course of its total circuit [...] is *industrial capital* – industrial here *in the sense that it encompasses every branch of production* that is pursued on a capitalist basis [...].³³

Contrary to a classical or historicist reading of Marx, he defines as 'industrial capital' every form of individual capital, regardless of the sphere of production in which it is employed. He further explains that in its circuit, each 'industrial capital' constantly passes through the subsequent phases of money capital, productive capital, and commodity capital.

123

Marx's second discourse

Marx's theoretical oeuvre does not avoid, however, certain contradictions or ambiguities: At certain points of his work Marx becomes ambivalent towards

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 597–9.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 596–597.

³³ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Two*, Penguin Classics, London 1992, pp. 132–133.

Classical (Ricardian) Political Economy. This happens especially at certain points of his 1864–65 draft of Volume 3 of *Capital*, which were edited and published by Engels in 1894.

Before dealing with Marx's ambivalences towards classical Political Economy, let us resume the main theses formulated above, even if some previously stressed points are being repeated here:

Marx's monetary theory of value demonstrates that value and prices are not situated at the same level of analysis. They are not commensurate i.e. qualitatively similar (and so quantitatively comparable) entities. Money is the *necessary form of appearance of value* (and of capital) in the sense that prices constitute the only form of appearance of the value of commodities. The difference between values and production prices (i.e. prices ensuring the average general rate of profit for the whole capitalist economy) is thus not a quantitative one, assuming that the latter simply arise from the former through a 'redistribution of value among capitalists'. It is a difference between two non-commensurate and so *non-comparable* entities, which are, though, intertwined in a notional link, which connects causal determinations (values) and their forms of appearance (prices).

However, when Marx deals in Volume 3 of *Capital* with the 'transformation of values into prices of production', and later with 'absolute ground rent', he distances himself from the implications of his own theory (non-commensurability between value and price) and draws *a quantitative comparison between values and production prices*: through mathematical calculations 'transforms' the former into the latter. In this way, albeit tacitly, he adopts (he retreats to) the Classic viewpoint that values are entities that are qualitatively identical and therefore quantitative comparable (i.e. commensurable) with prices.

124

Instead, therefore, of re-affirming his theoretical system, according to which prices are derived from values conceptually ('the *social* character of labour appears as the *money existence* of the commodity'³⁴), Marx retreats to the *empiricism* of the Ricardian theory: He accepts the problematic that two individual capitals utilising the same amount of living labour but different amounts of

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, p. 649.

constant capital produce an output of equal *value* but (given the general profit rate) unequal (production) price. He then claims that in order to justify the theory of value one has to prove the two 'invariance postulates', namely that on the level of the economy as a whole *the sum of values equals the sum of commodity prices, while at the same time the total surplus-value shall be equal to the total profit*. The 'transformation of values into prices of production' was aimed to provide that proof.³⁵

There so emerges a second discourse in Marx's writings, which adheres to the Classical tradition of Political Economy.

Between the two Discourses there exists a notional gap; they are incompatible with each other.

As shown above, *Discourse 1* (Marx's monetary theory of value and capital), comprehends money as the only empirically tangible measure of value ('value can only manifest itself in the social relation of commodity to commodity'³⁶), since it considers price to be the exclusive *form of appearance of value* (both notions, value and money, being situated on different levels of abstraction: 'value, which appeared as an abstraction, is only possible as such an abstraction, as soon as money is posited'³⁷). In the value expression, the [general] *equivalent*, i.e. money, constitutes the *exclusive measure of value* of any commodity, (all being situated in the 'relative' position); the value of this general equivalent cannot be expressed ('the magnitude of its value ceases to be expressed quan-

³⁵ It is characteristic that when Marx describes the mechanism for equalising the rate of profit in the various sectors of the capitalist economy by means of competition, he frequently speaks – following the concepts of the Classical system – of the *values* which initially diverge and are then transformed through competition into production prices, instead of the *prices which diverge from the production prices* (and thus entail different rates of profit) but which are finally converted into production prices (which is tantamount to equalisation of the rate of profit). For a detailed analysis see John Milios et al., *Karl Marx and the Classics. An Essay on Value, Crises and the Capitalist Mode of Production*, pp. 111–141. The issue of qualitative identity and thus of quantitative comparison between values and prices appears also in Part VI, Ch. 45 of Vol. 3 of *Capital*, when Marx analyses the 'absolute ground rent': 'If the composition of capital in one sphere of production is lower than that of the average social capital [...] the value of its product must stand above its price of production'. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, pp. 892–93.

³⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, pp. 138–39.

³⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 776.

titatively'³⁸). Any form of non-monetary exchange or of direct 'value-comparison' between commodities is precluded: 'Commodities do not then assume the form of *direct mutual exchangeability*. *Their socially validated form is a mediated one*'.³⁹

According to *Discourse 2* (Marx's Classic problematic in Sections of Vol. 3 dealing with the 'transformation problem' or 'absolute ground rent'), on the contrary, value and price are situated on the same level of abstraction, are qualitatively identical and therefore quantitatively comparable. The implications are, a) that in practice we are able to measure values independently of (abstracting from) money; b) that 'abstract social labour' belongs to the world of empirically observable and measurable objects, exactly like money⁴⁰; c) that one may undertake quantitative 'comparisons' between values and prices and even calculate the 'money equivalent' of labour time (or its converse) for the aggregate economy.

The question is now raised, of what may be the possible causes of Marx's ambivalences towards Classical Political Economy. Answering in a general way, one may say that the issue simply reflects the contradictions of Marx's break with Ricardian theory, contradictions which are immanent in every theoretical rupture of the kind, i.e. in every attempt to create a new theoretical discipline on the basis of the critique of an established system of thought.

I will let the further discussion of this question open. At this point, it is worth mentioning, though, that the majority of Marxists seem not to perceive the existence of these two deviating discourses in Marx's writings, and, even more, not to understand the theoretical consequences of reducing Marx's theory to (or identifying it with) the Ricardian perception of value as a quantity of 'expended labour'.

³⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 147.

³⁹ Karl Marx, "'Das Kapital' und Vorarbeiten, Marx, *Das Kapital, Erster Band, Hamburg 1867*", p. 42.

⁴⁰ According to *Discourse 1*: 'Social labour-time exists in these commodities in a latent state, so to speak, and becomes evident *only in the course of their exchange*. [...] Universal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result'. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1981, p. 45. Emphasis added.

The present-day relevance of Marx's analysis: Neoliberalism and Financialization as capital discipline

Present-day developments in finance date from the beginning of the 1980s and have their origins in the abolition of the restrictions that had been imposed on banks, on the international movement of capital, and on the mode of operation of stock exchanges after the crisis of 1929 (particularly in London and the USA). In other words, they have their origins in the emergence of what is called the neoliberal framework for regulation of the financial sphere.

One of the basic characteristics of the neoliberal model is the increase in non-bank funding of credit, both by states and by enterprises, and rapid development of risk management techniques and the financial sphere as a whole, a development which is described by the term financialization.

Derivatives and all other modern financial devices and innovations are the necessary precondition for implementation of financialization. They introduce a formative perspective on actual concrete risks, making them commensurate with each other and reducing their heterogeneity to a singularity.⁴¹

Financialization is not, as some authors claim, just a political strategy of the ruling class,⁴² nor a (political) process of *unequal exchange*, *permanent theft*, *dispossession*, etc., i.e. appropriation by the sphere of financial circulation of a surplus

⁴¹ “With derivatives, the ability to commensurate the value of capital assets within and between companies at any point in time has been added as a measure of capital’s performance alongside and perhaps above the capacity to produce surplus over time. [...] Derivatives separate the capital of firms into financial assets that can be priced and traded or ‘repackaged’, without having either to move them physically, or even change their ownership”. Dick Bryan and Michael Rafferty, *Capitalism with Derivatives, A Political Economy of Financial Derivatives, Capital and Class*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York and London 2006, p. 97.

⁴² “The establishment of neoliberal capitalism cannot be understood as a merely economic phenomenon, a change in policies and institutions. The crisis of neoliberalism is the expression of the inner contradictions of a political strategy supported by basic national and international economic transformations, whose main objectives are the restoration and increase of the power, income, and wealth of upper classes”. Gerard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 2016. Available at: <http://www.cepremap.fr/membres/dlevy/dle2016d.pdf>

produced in the ‘real economy’, as others seem to believe.⁴³ Financialization is the present-day development of capitalism.

First of all, the financial existence of capitalism was always there, from its very beginning.

All these securities actually represent nothing but accumulated claims [...] *In all countries of capitalist production, there is a tremendous amount of so-called interest-bearing capital or “moneyed capital” in this form.*⁴⁴

In other words, it is not a deviation from or a distortion of some ‘good’ industrial capitalism, or equally a new, predatory, method of exploitation (exploitation by dispossession etc.), a ‘bad’ exploitation as opposed to the ‘good’ exploitation by the ‘productive’ industrial capital, but a historic development expressing the *formal determinations* innate in the capitalist mode of production. As Marx clearly pointed out,

when we actually examine the social relations of individuals within their economic process, we simply have to adhere to the formal determinations of this process itself.⁴⁵

All discussions about financial instability and income redistribution are important, doubtless reflect significant aspects of present day capitalism, but they do not capture its essence, as they do not ‘adhere to the formal determinations’ of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalist rule and exploitation is thus presented as being constituted by a virtuous core, productive accumulations which ensures income increase for all participants, which is being corrupted by non-productive financial speculation, casino-capitalism etc.

⁴³ ‘The rise in importance of accumulation by dispossession as an answer, symbolized by the rise of an international politics of neoliberalism and privatization, correlates with the visitation of periodic bouts of predatory devaluation of assets in one part of the world or another. And this seems to be the heart of what contemporary imperialist practice is about’. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, p. 599. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Karl Marx, “*Ökonomische Manuskripte und Schriften 1858–1861*”, v: *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) II.2*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1980, p. 59.

However, the rise of finance is neither a threat to industrial capital, nor does it indicate a weakness of the latter (its inability to secure proper accumulation patterns). Finance sets forth a particular technology of power (along with a particular mode of funding economic activities) which is completely in line with the nature of capitalist exploitation. Every capitalist enterprise has a Janus-existence, as production means and as financial securities, an existence with which the Ricardian version of value as 'labour expended' cannot come to grips. In developed capitalism the key role of financial markets does not have only to do with supplying credit to companies. The complementary function of financial markets is to *'monitor' the effectiveness of individual capitals, facilitating within enterprises exploitation strategies favourable for capital.*

The decisive criterion is that the *value* of the company's securities (shares and bonds) as they are assessed by the international markets, should be *maximized*. Thus, equity holders' and bondholders' interests are basically aligned with respect to enterprise profitability. The demand for high financial value *puts pressure on individual capitals (enterprises) for more intensive and more effective exploitation of labour, for greater profitability.* This pressure is transmitted through a variety of different channels. To give one example, when a big company is dependent on financial markets for its funding, every suspicion of inadequate valorization increases the cost of funding, reduces the capability that funding will be available and depresses share and bond prices. Confronted with such a climate, the forces of labour within the politicized environment of the enterprise face the dilemma of deciding whether to accept the employers' unfavourable terms, implying loss of their own bargaining position, or whether to contribute through their 'inflexible' stance to the likelihood of the enterprise being required to close (transfer of capital to other spheres of production and/or other countries). The dilemma is not only hypothetical: *accept the 'laws of capital' or live with insecurity and unemployment.*

Besides, organized financial markets favour *movement of capital worldwide, intensifying capitalist competition*, at the same time securing more favourable conditions for valorization (exploitation) of individual capitals.

Strange to say, these new rationalities of the system systematically push for an underestimation of risks. Contemporary capitalism is caught in this exhausting tension between the need to be 'efficient' and the underestimation of risks.

Financial instruments should be seen as innovations engendering new kinds of rationality for the promotion of exploitation strategies based on the total circuit of capital; not as a dysfunctional configuration impeding the development of the 'real' economy. At the same time, however, this means ever greater pressures for risk-free profit, for issuing of securities, in other words for intense competition, with consequent a downplaying of risk and massive withdrawal from participation and funding when secure profit is jeopardized.

The 2008 crisis was a systemic one. Systemic in the sense that it has been engendered by the elements and the relations that are at the core of the neoliberal model. It is systemic also because it has struck at important nodal points of the system and through them at the terms of operation of the internationalization of capital.

The interconnectedness of events is thus the reverse of what is often maintained. What is involved is not a continuing crisis of overaccumulation dating from the 70s, which has fed superfluous capital into the sphere of finance, in this way leading to speculation, the 'bubble' and the crisis. The preceding crisis of overaccumulation of capital had already been blunted through the contribution of the neoliberal settlement (in which a decisive nodal point was the functioning of the financial sphere).

The blocking of the sphere of finance and credit funding on which expanded reproduction of capital was based was inevitably interpreted as 'involvement' of this expanded reproduction. This in turn meant an abrupt fall in profitability and the necessity for cutbacks in production, overcapacity of the means of production, overaccumulation of productive capital and the need for a new cycle of restructuring.

In other words, the fall in the general rate of profit was not the cause, but one of the effects of the crisis.

The explosion of financial derivatives and the innovating forms of risk management fuelled the crisis. In other words, *the conditions for increase in class domination of capital appear simultaneously as conditions undermining that domination*. Systemic crisis does not spell destruction for the system. It means exposure of its contradictions.

The new arrangements that were put forward did not question the international character of the financial system, securitization, the deepening of the market, the squeeze on working people.

The core of the neoliberal dogma remained intact, with the overwhelming correlation of power in favour of capital simply taken as a given, so that labour would continue to be treated as the 'flexible' variable, destined to absorb all the shocks, currents and future.

A concluding political remark

Neoliberal capitalism seems invincible in today's financialized economic environment. However, class struggle will always create contingent events. The continuation of neoliberal policies and the stability of capitalism will be a matter of the social relation of contending forces. What Karl Marx commented on the limits of the working-day, is also true for all forms of conflicting class interests in a capitalist society:

There is [...] an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights force decides.⁴⁶

Capitalism was always and will never cease to be exploitative, domineering, speculative. But it will not disintegrate or decay due to its exploitative, domineering, speculative character, certainly not due to the supposedly specifically 'predatory' function of the financial sphere – as opposed to the 'productive' role of industry. It will continue to exist until the labouring classes overthrow it. But for this we need a revolutionary political strategy.

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 344.

Nelson da Silva Junior*

The Politics of Truth and its Transformations in Neoliberalism: the Subject Supposed to Know in Algorithmic Times

In the scenario of the last elections in Brazil, a series of disturbing phenomena came to light: the polarization of the Brazilian population into two large blocks, the dissemination of verbal and physical violence, the naturalization of prejudice, segregation and exclusion. We witnessed the contempt for reflection and debate as ways of reconciling differences. In its place, a kind of legitimacy of verbal and physical aggression against those considered as incarnations of moral and sexual corruption of order, family and economic progress emerged. Finally, it is worth emphasizing the presence of a leader with authoritarian attitudes and discourses, often contradictory, with homophobic, misogynistic and racist statements, with Manichean narratives capable of mobilizing the masses and who ended up winning the elections by popular vote: the Captain Jair Messias Bolsonaro. His name and rank were in perfect continuity with the military and religious references of his campaign.

Conservatism and moralism as differential elements that weighed on the popular vote seem to be a disturbing nostalgia for the period of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Hannah Arendt, presents the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as an attempt to answer the questions of her generation before the horrors of the Second World War: – What had happened? How could that have happened? (Arendt, 2000, 339, 340). For example that the function of the intellectual is to try to respond to the “current”, that is, to what is presented as incomprehensible in society. This paper is a reaction, an attempt to understand at least a part of what is going on in this current mass mobilization.

In 1976 Michel Foucault published a short text on how the political function of the intellectual had changed over the XXth century¹. This change is illustrated by him with two different types of intellectuals based on their relation to poli-

¹ Michel Foucault, “La fonction politique de l’intellectuel”, *Dits et Écrits. II, 1976–1988*, Gallimard, Paris 2017, p. 109–114.

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tics. In the late XIXth century, and until the 2nd World War, the intellectual was a free and morally engaged subject that embodied the universal conscience. They would not be confounded with other also educated people whose occupations implied scientific knowledge, such as the physician or the engineer. Instead, they had, in general, an education in law, and used to pronounce their opinions and were heard every time social issues, discussions on universal and humanist values, such as justice, crimes, and their proper punishment would appear. The mid-XXth century brought about another kind of intellectual, the one Foucault calls the specific one, who was heard for their knowledge on specific matters, mostly on technical issues and whose effects would concern everyone, like atomic energy and its risks. Contrary to the universal one, the specific intellectual is specialized and has deep knowledge of a few objective problems. However, this limited knowledge is precisely what supports their opinion when general problems come about. This change was the result of the development of technological structures that brought about a new form of political power whose agents were the scientists.

Foucault's approach to truth is inspired by Nietzsche's critique of western idealism. That means that truth is not considered as a transcendent and/or absolute reality. On the contrary, truth is thought of as a radically worldly and contingent social creation, inseparable of power and political thrives historically situated. In this sense, every society, according to Foucault, has its *general politics of truth*: the types of discourse that it accepts as true, its mechanisms and ways to distinguish true and false statements, techniques and procedures to achieve truth and also the status of those who are allowed to say it. In our society, the political economy of truth is historically marked by five traits: the scientific discourse is the legitimate form of truth; truth is constantly demanded and used by politics and economy; truth is abundantly diffused and consumed; it is mostly produced under the control of large political and economic institutions like Universities, the Armed Forces and so on, and finally truth is in the core of political debate and social confrontations².

134

This description may still appear valid today, for scientists and universities continue to be considered the most legitimate agents of truth discourses. Their productions still arouse high interests within the political and economic domains

² *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.

and are more than ever object of extended diffusion, of consumerism and high pitched social debates. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the *political regime of truth* of our society has undergone important changes since Foucault's text. This was due not only to something Foucault didn't have access to, namely the advent of the internet but mostly to its intertwined functioning within the neoliberal politics throughout the world.

First, the production of truth is no more exclusively under the control of universities and state institutions. Private corporations have since extended their funds to R&D, fostering a knowledge production very precisely tailored to their market needs. The diffusion of research achievements and or its failures has also changed, however in opposite directions. On the one hand, with the advent of the internet, scientific knowledge seems to have been finally rendered accessible to everyone on the planet. Indeed, one could say that we live in an unprecedented time of *democracy of truth*. On the other hand, the diffusion of knowledge has gradually become more akin to the diffusion of advertisement, both because of its simplified language form as well as its consumption enhancing role. In this sense, the traditional social agents endowed with the discourse of truth, such as scientists and universities, were also affected by the same economic logic that shaped scientific truths. They don't speak for themselves anymore, for their testimony is no longer a free one, and their opinion is requested only under heavy market constraints. They are invited only as legitimizing actors, such as film stars are called to support the sale of products. Now, this doesn't mean that the specific intellectual has become just a puppet at the service of marketing professionals. They still have the essential task of producing effective and complex technologies. In other words, they are still responsible for the production of truths. It is their legitimizing and diffusing role on truth matters that has changed. First, they have lost the privilege of giving the *last word* on the matters of their domain. For, not only has the internet become an almost infinite source of instant knowledge, but also the digital environment offers a myriad of different points of view opposite to theirs. This entails perhaps what can be considered as the most important change in the *truth regime* of our society: with so much information, with such contradictory material, it is now up to the consumer to decide what can be considered true or cannot. The current legitimizer agent in the new economy of truth of our society is, in fact, the common man himself.

Compared to the specific intellectual, the common man does not produce truths, but he usually decides what facts and ideas he will believe to be true. Another difference is that his knowledge domain is not a specific one like the former's, but rather a universal one. Finally, there has been a contrary movement in what Foucault names the "rarefaction of truth" in his description. This expression is, in fact, a very literal one: by that he meant the scarcity of occurrences of statements commonly held as true in our society. Whereas these occasions were then sparse, for they depended on the acknowledgment of a few number of respected researchers, these circumstances became currently inflated, incessant and widespread, since everyone is now endowed to discern the truth.

But, the digital environment out of which the common man drags his knowledge is not the natural field of his own experience. Far from it, and due to the highly developed algorithmic technology, this environment is carefully and thoroughly controlled. This means that the common person, the internet user, is split into a double situation: on the one hand, he acts freely and chooses the trustworthiness of each information he has access to without noticeable constraints. On the other hand, the environment from where he acquires his information sets is the result of a precisely designed and personalized process of selection. Here we are faced with an indirect form of power: the power over the possible actions of the other. This kind of individualized power in our society was interpreted by Foucault as a *pastoral power*, an expression that was chosen after the kind of control that was developed by the early Christian monastic tradition. Digital technology became a powerful political tool in the neoliberal economy since it enables the shepherding of large numbers of well fit and customized free individuals. To properly fathom how this personage appears and engages in the new truth regime of our society, we can start with a comparison with his predecessor, the mass media traditional receiver.

136

This will allow us to discern the more general structures of this new technology and its application to the pastoral modality of power, whose first diagnosis was made by Foucault. If the common man is artificially elevated to the new subject supposed to know in neoliberalism, it is first necessary to understand how this occurs, and then to think about what this reveals of the general strategy of power in neoliberalism.

The mutation of pragmatics in media: from the passive mass to the free individual

Mass communication grew exponentially throughout the twentieth century due to the technical advances with extended reach and/or high capacity of reproduction. Marshal McLuhan, for example, had already spoken of media transforming the planet into a global village back in the 1970s. Although this expression has become truer nowadays, since communication networks have spread a much finer mesh around the globe, two very different functions of communication are at play in each of these moments. A radical change occurs in the logic of communication with the advent of new technologies like personal computers, the internet, and smartphones.

In traditional media channels, such as radio, television and print newspapers, the same information was bound for all. The transmitting device was essentially dynamic concerning a mass of static viewers, fixed recipients of an incessant flow of information. This structural passivity of the viewer can be considered as the mark of his submission in the logic of mass media since he is powerless to interact with the information to which he has access. Now, in the Internet environment, both the device and the user are essentially dynamic. This may give the impression that the viewer is less passive in this context, but, in fact, he is in an even more unfavorable relationship than before concerning his freedom of interaction with the information he receives. This apparent contradiction between user dynamics and their unfavorable position becomes clearer if we think that the current media devices are active computer programs. Such programs provide new information to the user from an algorithmic analysis of the breaks in their search patterns. Thus, an unusual search for airline tickets on Google will produce the emergence of dozens of on-screen tour packages. In this way, the user experience is that of a comfortable anticipation of the world to their interests. The user's freedom, however, is far less than that of the television viewer; for it is precisely in their *innovative actions*, in the changing of their pursuits and interests that the user contributes to their mapping and isolation in new sets of possibilities of action.

The modalities of social experience that this new information technology offers can no longer be understood in the old paradigm of mass communication. In the latter case, the same message was transmitted simultaneously to a large number

of people, mobilizing affections and thoughts in unison. Currently, the plurality of web television unites people in segmented groups, producing aesthetic affinities in a much more specific manner. The most powerful instruments of social interaction nowadays are undoubtedly social media. Through Facebook and Instagram, everyone can have the sensation of seeing and being seen by everyone else. However, this overall experience is biased. The groups, to which each user is invited to belong to, follow, in their constitution, the same selection logic that information technology uses in drawing their profile. One of the effects of this type of grouping is the collective legitimating of the information received by the user, leveraging the persuasive effectiveness of any information. Another effect is that of a progressive isolation between different clusters since the informations to which each group has access to are hardly accessible to others. Not only is there no discussion between opposing segments, but they are isolated and have no access to the same information nor the same fake-news, facilitating group constitution in opposition to others, in the well-known logic of narcissism of small differences³.

Another particularly effective aspect of emotional appeal completes this process in the relationship between leaders and their interlocutors, namely, the creation of an apparent closeness between leaders and followers. Trump, for example, broke ground in a new method of communicating with the population by using Twitter. Jair Bolsonaro, on the other hand, privileged Whatsapp in his communications with the population during his election campaign and this style has been continued throughout his government. Statements, which in traditional politics would be considered as “protocol breaks”, are a specific style of government made through communication. The voter’s or citizen’s experience tends to be an intimate one with their leader, which in turn legitimizes the truthfulness of the leader’s statements. By comparing the information they receive directly from their leader with those they receive through traditional means of communication, disagreements tend to be systematically interpreted as manipulation made by the opposition. The discrepancy of information within the media itself is thus integrated with the practices of intentional disinformation known as fake-news. The periodic disrespect of the leader for institutions also gains space in this ambiance. Indeed, the rise of the hero begins precisely with their

³ Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Studienausgabe, Fisher Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt-am-Main 1982, Bd. IX.

contempt for the situation. This technique proves to be very effective, despite disrespectful statements being systematically followed by denial of the same. In this case, the effect of the contradictions is not mistrust, but something closer to what Orwell described in his critical parable to Soviet totalitarianism, the “*doublethink*”. In analytical terms, the psychic defense at stake is that of refusal, whose ultimate formalization is the statement: “Yes, I know, but still ...”

As described by Freud, the circle of truth closes around each group and its leader. Within the groups, identifications are reinforced by the exclusion of threatening differences and also by the creation of new enemies. However, something else is at stake, namely the participation of technical instruments in this process of producing groups, simplifying truths and reducing discursive logic to simple negations. This technical element did not exist until recently in mass communication. The algorithmic production of a specific information set for each individual and simultaneously for their groups, calls for a new conceptual approach to the type of power at play, different from that used by the traditional means of communication.

The pastoral power, the other side of bio-politics

Let us begin with the singling out of the control actions on each individual. According to Foucault, this is not a recent technique in the practices of power. Regardless of the high degree of technological refinement at play in social networks and media today, its origin can be found in the model of the shepherd and their flock employed by the Christian monastic tradition.

Foucault underlines the differences between the form of collective government according to the pastoral power and that of Greek politics. The polis’ government was impersonal in the sense that the ruler was replaceable over time. In the case of pastoral power, the government implies a maximum individualization: the shepherd is responsible not only for the flock as a whole but for each sheep. For this reason, the pastor of Christian souls must know the thoughts of every one of their believers: “it is not possible to exercise this form of power without knowing what goes on through people’s minds, without exploiting their souls without forcing them to reveal their innermost secrets”⁴.

⁴ Michel Foucault, “Le sujet et le pouvoir”, (1982) *Dits et Écrits. II, 1976–1988*, Gallimard, Paris 2017, p. 1048.

Foucault considers that the principles of pastoral power are perpetuated in the bio-political management of populations by public policies (health, security) and by private institutions. He goes on to coin a neologism, *governmentality*, to describe the articulation of generalized with individualized control of the population. *Governmentality* is the “set of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and practices that allow to exercise this very specific, although very complex, kind of power that has as its main target the population, [which has as its main knowledge form,] the political economy, [and] as its essential technical instrument, the security devices”⁵.

Our society, more than any other, would be characterized as a complex combination of “individualization techniques and totalization procedures”⁶. Foucault once referred to this combination as “truly demonic”⁷. The advent of pastoral techniques in the algorithmic universe of social media was not witnessed by Foucault. Through them, the technology of pastoral power has reached levels of articulation of totalizing social management procedures that are probably more demonic than those of his time. It can be understood that the totalizing procedures of our time are those of neoliberalism. Of course, *governmentality* according to Foucault is not limited to the neoliberal way of population management, which is only its present form. But we are immersed in this form and it uses the pastoral power that it has available in its best interest. The updating of the pastoral power on the internet articulates with surprising perfection the principles of totalization of the neoliberal project to which it is associated.

Currently, neoliberalism is characterized by two aspects. Firstly, the questioning of the idea that the State is an unquestionable necessity, which marks its difference with the previous form, grounded on the idea of State as an end in itself. Secondly, it promotes the logic of maximizing benefits and reducing costs as a universal principle of action of political reason. These two aspects of neoliberalism are homologous to the idea that subjects be radically free. Gary Becker, the Nobel laureate in economics, argues that any human behavior should always be

140

⁵ Michel Foucault, (1977–1978) *Sécurité, Territoire, Population, Cours au Collège de France*, EHSS/Seuil/Gallimard, Paris 2004, p. 111.

⁶ Foucault, “Le sujet et le pouvoir”, p. 1048.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “‘Omnes et singulatim’: vers une critique de la raison politique”, *Dits et Écrits. II*, 1976–1988, Gallimard, Paris 2017, p. 966.

considered as a “rational choice between excluding objectives having the maximization of objectives as a goal”⁸.

However, Becker does not problematize the set of choices available to this so-called free subject. A closer analysis of this set would easily demonstrate that in the end, it is a tightly controlled freedom. For example, in the case of the algorithmic functioning of the new social media, the irreconcilable objectives offered to the rational choice of individuals are subject to a refined control. The same could be said about the individual’s rational choices in the world today. Thus, the rationale of an apparent paradox of neoliberalism can be seen, namely that of being simultaneously, a theory of social management based on individual freedom and one that places itself as totally compatible with authoritarian and violent governments, as clearly shown in Pinochet’s “inaugural experiment” in Chile.

Language as the possible field of action of subjects

The Foucauldian perspective of neoliberal *governmentality* stresses precisely this: power relations can only occur with subjects who act as if they were free. Since the advent of bio-politics, Foucault says, governing has become a way to structure the possible field of action of others, both present and future⁹. This implies defining ‘devices’, ‘frames’ ‘environments’ and norms in which human beings will understand themselves as free. Therefore, the specificity of the performative project of neoliberalism in the set of forms of *governmentality* is made clear. No one evidenced this more than Margaret Thatcher when she stated: “Economics is the method, but the goal is to transform the spirit”¹⁰ (Harvey, 2013, 32). In other words, if the goal is the conduct of each individual’s action within the general conduct of the population, this depends on considering and educating each individual as a free and rational subject in face of their choices. By controlling the discursive, legal and moral framework of the subjects considered as units of cost-benefit analysis, it is possible to say that the devices of neoliberalism are forms of production of subjectivities that work at an ontological

⁸ Gary S. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1990, p. 5.

⁹ Foucault, “Le sujet et le pouvoir”, p. 1055.

¹⁰ David Harvey, *Neoliberalismo: História e Implicações*, Ed. Loyola, São Paulo 2013, p. 32.

level. In effect, as precisely underlines Laval, this “is not primarily an ideology. It is, above all, a technology of power”¹¹.

To conclude these reflections, I would like to highlight a few points for further discussion. The first point concerns a transformation in the discursive strategy of domination, which begins to work essentially in the field of pragmatics. The rhetoric of authoritarian leaders and, to use a particularly happy expression proposed yesterday by Ian Parker, their “calculated stupidity”, remains fundamentally the same as described by the founders of the Frankfurt School.

Horkheimer and Adorno saw in Freudian psychoanalysis a strong ally in the understanding of advertising in culture and politics. In his empirical research on anti-Semitism, Adorno broadened the interpretations of the Freudian mass psychology, and described new rhetorical elements: the small great man, the lowering of inhibitions, the nobility of sacrifice, the indetermination of the cause to be defended, the limitation of argumentation to repetition to a restricted group of clichés, etc.¹²

It should also be remembered that Adorno differentiates with surgical precision the psychoanalytic approach and the sociological interpretation itself in the understanding of the mass phenomenon. For him, even though there is always a spontaneous propensity for fascism in all the masses “the manipulation of the unconscious is indispensable for the updating of its potential”. Thus, Adorno maintains that “fascism as such is not a psychological problem. Fascism only “defines a psychological area that can be successfully exploited by the forces that promote it for reasons of self-interest”¹³.

142

Adorno understands such an appropriation of psychoanalytic concepts by the cultural and political industry as an anesthetic of the “revolutionary potential of the masses”. Considering that psychoanalysis aims to emancipate the subject from the heteronomous laws of the unconscious, Adorno describes the cultural industry as a kind of “reverse psychoanalysis”. He, therefore, reaffirms the rel-

¹¹ Christian Laval, *Foucault, Bourdieu et la question néolibérale*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris 2018, p. 42.

¹² Theodor W. Adorno, “Teoria freudiana e o padrao da propaganda fascista”, in: *Ensaio sobre psicologia social e psicanálise*, Editora Unesp, Sao Paulo 2015.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185–186.

evance of the Freudian theory of power, as well as the efficacy of the semantic register in which it is in force. But he also includes it in a broader dimension of language, properly pragmatic, where the technology of communication institutes forms of power capable of absorbing and using in its favor the concepts of psychoanalysis, annulling its critical potential.

In my view, the approach of this form of domination from the Foucauldian point of view confirms Adorno's shift to the pragmatics in the interpretation of the mass mobilization phenomena. But, his conceptual tools go even further in the importance of a reflection on power from the point of view of language as an element that precedes the subjects. Language is the socializing environment *par excellence*, and as such, it is also within this possible field that subjects and their actions can be better controlled. According to Foucault, the main object of his work was to try to "produce a history of the modes of subjectivation of the human being in our culture [in other words,] the modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects"¹⁴. In this sense, he considers discourses, disciplines, and practices as essentially performative forces of knowledge and power that socialize subjects by objectifying them. This way of transforming human beings can be seen as being on different grounds from rhetoric and persuasion. In the modes of subjectivation, subjects and their consciousness are thought of as the effects of discourses, disciplines and practices, devices fundamentally open to historical contingency. In other words, the Foucauldian perspective, based on an essentially pragmatic approach to discourses, suggests that an analysis of power in the neoliberal key emphasizes a properly performative level of its functioning, where language precedes subjects and their social relations.

This allows us to conclude by emphasizing the centrality of language in a critical view of alienating discourses and their techniques. Syntax, semantics, and pragmatics can be seen as a contour capable of tracing differences in forms of power that are reached by language and which not only persuade and are a part of but that constitute subjects and social relations. Power in neoliberal *governmentality* is not only updated by a semantics centered on the paternal figure, following the Freudian hypothesis on mass psychology, nor in a syntax of instrumental reason of planetary dimensions, as shown by the Frankfurtian

¹⁴ Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir", p. 1042.

school. It infiltrates more subtly into the structures of language that define the essence of subjects and their social relations.

The second point that I suggest for the discussion concerns the transformation of the politics of truth under the neoliberal regime by elevating the common man to the place of the supposed subject to know. After the universal intellectual, after the specific intellectual, truth is today legitimized by the common man. But this is not achieved simply through a mere rhetorical conviction of the common man of his intellectual excellence. On the contrary, his ascension to the place of supposedly knowing subject depends on a refined control of the social structures of recognition of his new position, that is, of his most immediate discursive environment. As Foucault affirms, it is a truly demonic technological evolution, capable of articulating total forms of management, of biopolitical amplitude, with individualized forms of surveillance, which silently conduct their conclusions, guaranteeing their impression of autonomy and discovery.

Now this privileged access to the truth produced no longer by rhetorical persuasion, but by the performative character of pastoral power has its price. The main difference, from the point of view of discursive interactions, is that rhetoric admits what might be called a *logomachy*, this is a war of words, where the opponents legitimately recognize themselves as such. Already in the performative moment of domination, the common man, duly elevated to the place of knowing, feels that he must protect the truth without submitting to such a war of words. Not by chance, the information they get about the world and society always takes the same form: "You were being deceived". In 1973, in his seminar on *The Psychiatric Power*, Foucault demonstrates how truth in medicine progressively passes from a revelation regime, that is, from a sporadic event to a demonstration regime. Now, in the algorithmic domination of neoliberal politics, truth as demonstration is again reabsorbed in the regime of truth as revelation. The experience of knowing the truth of the common man is not separable from that of having been deceived, which allows us to consider this knowledge as essentially paranoid. Indeed, aggressiveness thus begins to mediate social relations around the holding of truth. It is no accident that the revisionism of history and the denialism of the spherical geography of the earth are points of honor for the new subject supposed to know, since in paranoid knowledge, all that is common sense, all established knowledge must be put under suspicion.

Art and Criticism

Articles in the section that follows were edited by Aleš Erjavec, Ernest Ženko and Wang Jie.

Aleš Erjavec*

Art and Criticism

“Art” and “criticism” will here serve as launch pads for a discussion about art criticism and as an object for analysis of its historical roots and cultural presence, and will also provide social and political context for their meaning. As such, these brief opening sentences cannot do more than point out some observations of a general nature and make a few critical (and affirmative) remarks as regards their present situation. In the seventies and eighties of the previous century, journals such as *Art in America* and *Flash Art* presented and discussed the most recent and most relevant art of the epoch. Even more: it could be claimed that the art discussed and presented in such periodicals most often formed the very backbone of the current art and through it, of art criticism. In many respects, they can still serve as examples of criticism at its best. Such cases could also be supplemented by the somewhat different *American Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, *The Scandinavian Journal of Aesthetics*, and the more general (socially involved and radical) *New Left Review*, with this last journal being perceived in the eyes of many as not critical at all (or at least not related to art criticism). Of course, this is but one part of criticism of Anglo-American art, the other part consisting of a myriad of journals, reviews, and other periodicals in which occasional or regular views on art are presented and which can be long or short and of a theoretical or more quotidian nature. Art criticism is part and parcel of what is simultaneously general and particular criticism.

147

In the 1970s and 1980s art criticism was a fairly marginal phenomenon, as the very discourse from which it arose and which it used was essentially adverse to traditional criticism and was turned against traditional criticism such as that of Baudelaire. If Baudelaire’s art criticism stood for one type, i.e. the traditional kind of art critical discourse, then the other was the one that dominated the new type of theoretical discourse (“the French” style). Yet another cross-section emerged, namely between politically partisan criticism, on the one hand, and culturally or artistically involved criticism, on the other. One was avant-garde

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(such as that of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger) and the other traditional (such as numerous writings by various reviewers across the European continent).

It was in Great Britain and the United States that the most influential forms of artistic reflection emerged, with France and Germany following suit. Soon, such critical spirit spread to other parts of the globe, while Continental criticism lost much of its cultural identity: it was simply swallowed up by the newly emergent theory of structuralism and Critical Theory – a position that, to some extent, it still occupies today.

For a long time, criticism in general and art criticism as a major part of cultural criticism retained more of their “marginality” than when compared with criticism and art criticism in the political and social sense. Georges Gusdorf even claimed that romanticism only existed in England, France, and Italy, with its other instances being merely late offshoots of the central movement.¹

Let us return to art criticism. Both European and American art critics today form the central segment of the structure of the global network or the edifice of contemporary art. Today too, art criticism is an important if not always also an essential constituent of the edifice of art as such, or – more precisely – it acts as (or forms) an unavoidable and omnipresent segment of art, where its various surroundings can be more or less important for our understanding, impression, and expression of art. By making such claims I am universalising British and American criticism (with Terry Smith being another author and curator worth mentioning) and its multifarious endeavours, turning them into the essence of art criticism as such, and implying that we are mostly still referring primarily to British and American criticism of art as the prevalent contemporary forms of criticism. The same would be true of criticism in French, German, and other cultures – even though their dealings with art were to a substantial extent determined by the Anglo-American influence. There exists another reason for such choice and limitation as to the lack of Continental criticism (or even art): there is very little contemporary art criticism that would today focus on the national or regional from these two perspectives. Since this volume assigns an important place to contemporary Chinese art criticism, it is worth noting already here that contemporary criticism in China in essence does not differ much from its West-

¹ See Georges Gusdorf, *Fondements du savoir romantique*, Payot, Paris 1982.

ern simile. Let me close these paragraphs by reiterating that at least today art criticism forms an extended integral realm of political criticism as such, and it retroactively shapes art's past and therefore its future.

As Terry Eagleton points out in his study on *The Function of Criticism* (1984), "modern criticism was born out of a struggle against the absolutist state."² It represented a part of the "bourgeois public sphere."³ In this sense, the early criticism carried a more central social and political function and by far exceeded the contemporary social ineffectiveness of the plethora of critical discourses that, contrary to their beginnings, shared random topics and methods.

In European history the early criticism was cultural.⁴ In the words of Eagleton,

the examination of literary texts is one relatively marginal moment of a broader enterprise which explores attitudes to servants and the rules of gallantry, the status of women and familial affections, the purity of the English language, the character of conjugal love, the psychology of the sentiments and the laws of the toilet.⁵

Today (also due to its general character), criticism concerns everything, including art but most certainly not only art: "Everyone is called upon to participate in criticism."⁶ Therefore a critic "is merely a speaker from the general audience and formulates ideas that could be thought by anyone."⁷ In the late eighteenth century criticism becomes explicitly political. "Criticism, then, has become a locus of political contention rather than a terrain of cultural consensus."⁸ At approximately this time the central term used to designate a cultural critic is a "man of letters." (In the middle of the nineteenth century he stands in the place of the Continental "intellectual.") Yet another step was made in the direction of the unity of social thought and of language when the latter became a "discipline" in the universities.⁹ The founding "of English as a university 'discipline'"

² Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, Verso, London 1996, 2005, p. 107.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

also entailed the professionalisation of literary studies, which was quite alien to the amateur outlook. Critics wrote for very different publications and for very different reasons. The same could be said in past decades of criticism whose focus was on new media, namely radio and television, not to mention even more recent means of audiovisual communication and production.

Until the 1960s a constant characteristic of art criticism was that it ignored aesthetics, “theory”, and philosophy. The situation changed approximately at the time of Arthur Danto’s writings on Andy Warhol and the Brillo boxes in the 1960s: as Danto observed, in the early 1960s artists discovered philosophy while philosophy slowly discovered art. Michael Fried, the well-known pre-Danto American art critic from the 1960s, admitted that among the philosophers or aestheticians in the 1960s he only read Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Lukács, thereby demonstrating that philosophy was not really very important for either art or for art criticism – philosophical truth was but truth and knowledge to be ignored without a loss – it was there to be disregarded, it was a false, an inessential and a borrowed ingredient of art criticism. Baudelaire’s writings *Critique d’art* from the middle of the eighteenth century were very much similar.¹⁰ More recent twentieth-century criticism of art relied on notions such as “literalism” and “objecthood”, while Clement Greenberg referred to “opticality”.

In Fried’s view, the real change and challenge in theory relating to criticism took place with the arrival of French theory – structuralism and post-structuralism – in the United States and United Kingdom. Then theory became a “must” also in art criticism. At the same time, this change signified a massive change in the nature of art and in its relation to, and dependence on, theory. “Reflection” in the sense of theoretical reflection (and as opposed to phenomenology) became the catchword of the day (and this is the way it is used by structuralism and post-structuralism). An illustrative example of such personally-involved criticism (very much resembling contemporary impressionistic criticism) was not only the art criticism of Charles Baudelaire but also that of Guillaume Apollinaire. A critic of such type would have digested hundreds and hundreds works and knew how to create opinions and judgments even on the basis of scant and meagre facts; often they revealed their creativity by recreating lacunae and un-

150

¹⁰ See Charles Baudelaire, *Critique d’art. Suivi de Critique musicale*, Gallimard, Paris 1992.

noticeable creations that just were there although they could not be sensed and noted without their author being a *connoisseur* in every way.

While the early Roland Barthes – the one from the fifties – still referred to “criticism” and “critique”, with reference to Racine and similar authors, with the rise of structuralism criticism lost its importance, and drifted into irrelevance where criticism’s subjective note mirrored the related experiential feature of criticism, which therefore lost its personal stamp, to be replaced by the objectivity offered by the “science” of literature and of discourse. The experiential type of criticism found its incomparable example in the mentioned Baudelaire – whose criticism was involved in everything from painting to “*dandysme*” – a topic (and method) picked up later by Walter Benjamin, whose discourse, too, resembled the “phenomenological approach,” as Michel Foucault disdainfully characterised such method in the English edition of *The Order of Things* (1970). This specificity determined the “phenomenological approach” as distinguished from the “theory of discursive practice” as promoted by Foucault. It was such Foucauldian discourse that Michael Fried saw as overcoming the discourse of the type he shared with traditional art criticism.

In the recent past – in the last hundred years – different artists, authors, and art critics have defined the purpose of art criticism in different ways. Hal Foster for example, claimed that the central category was and remained “the criterion”:

Not long ago “criticality” became a value in its own right (a fetish, if you like), which is another reason why it became a bad object for many artists and critics. This criterion should be seen in the contexts of others that preceded it. In the early 1940s critics such as Clement Greenberg advanced “quality” as the key value in modernist art: to be so judged, a work in the present had to stand the test of comparison to the best work of the past. As Greenberg averred more than once, this criterion did not promote a break with tradition; on the contrary, it was an attempt to preserve such continuity. Then in the early 1960s artists like Donald Judd claimed “interest” as a criterion. As an avant-gardist value, it moved to challenge other criteria, such as “quality,” that preceded it, and it did not necessarily aim to preserve tradition or even to refer to it; often just the opposite. Next, in the early 1980s a group of artists and critics asserted “criticality” as the central value;

“quality” seemed elitist, an “interest” not political enough. One could argue that the value of “self-criticism” connected all these criteria.¹¹

From its very beginnings in England, art criticism was an important segment of the public sphere: “When the figure of the critic emerged in the Paris Salons of the early eighteenth century, he not only assumed ‘the point of view of the public visitor,’ but also created, in writing about the art on view, a representation that helped different groups to become self-aware as a public.”¹² This thesis – developed by Jürgen Habermas in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and then applied in the art criticism of both Habermas and Hal Foster – found a fervent supporter in Terry Eagleton. According to Eagleton, the public sphere developed in the Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was poised between state and civil society. It comprised a “realm of social institutions – clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals – in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of powerful political force.”¹³

It would be erroneous to expect criticism of art to remain unchanged from its first modern appearance to our times. Instead, criticism of art has undergone enormous transformations, most of which have had to do with changes in its subject matter, namely art. We have to underline this last statement, for while possessing a life of its own, art criticism is nonetheless essentially linked to its subject – art – and it is the transformations of the latter that affect its meta-narrative – which art criticism in essence is.

152

Furthermore, we should not expect art criticism to remain the same when regarded from a synchronic perspective. This means that at the same time and sometimes even in the same culture or on the same territory one kind of art criticism differs from another kind of art criticism in another community. We have in mind cases where age, social position, ethnic background, education, and language skill (such as in émigré and immigrant cultures) determine specific characteristics of the art and consequently of the art criticism. An important

¹¹ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days. Art, Criticism, Emergency*, Verso, London 2015, pp. 173–74.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23.

¹³ Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 8.

aspect of the art criticism of art is its link to the “cultural empires” (as Richard Shusterman has called them, such as those of the French, British, Americans, or Germans), with the smaller cultures and criticism of art therein forming relatively independent and self-enclosed wholes.

The development of art criticism was accompanied by the appearance of an art market, a situation in which art critics served as experts advising rich bourgeois which works to buy. Literary criticism preceded art criticism – mainly because the public or private exhibition of works of art emerged later than the publication of books, articles, or poems.

But, finally, what is art criticism? According to Wikipedia it is the “discussion or evaluation of visual art.”¹⁴ We see how visual art took over the whole realm of art criticism.

In extraordinary circumstances – such as those of a social and political revolution, for instance the October Revolution – other priorities were ascribed to art than those that were of importance in countries with a parliamentary democracy where art was related to issues of taste, the essence of the sensuous, the beautiful and the sublime, etc., and not to politics, ideology, etc. Also, what was at stake was not the financial success of a work or an artist, nor his or her originality within the extant and generally accepted system of art, but the propaganda or political message of a picture, its socially critical or glorifying capacity, and its power to change people’s minds. Even if Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that, contrary to literature, no picture has ever changed people’s political persuasion, this is not entirely true, starting with Picasso’s “Guernica”.

A succinct description of the role of art in conflictual times was offered by Mao Zedong in 1943: “In the world today, all culture or literature and art belongs to a definite class and party and has a definite political line.”¹⁵ In this statement Mao closely followed Lenin, who in the essay “What Is to Be Done?” (1902) claimed that there is no “third way” or “middle ground” when it comes to ideology:

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_criticism.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, in: *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art.” A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1980, p. 75.

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses, the *only* choice is this: either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology, with the latter being developed by the Party as the collective subject of history. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence “to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way*, means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.”¹⁶

It is therefore understandable that the two political systems – socialism and capitalism – differed also when it came to art criticism. Today when we speak of art criticism or the art market we usually have in mind Western art and its market, as well as its networks, value systems, and the ways in which these function. The only well-known exceptions to this rule may have been Russian Formalism and similar movements (and which later became the basis for structuralism and post-structuralism).

Art criticism is only a segment of the whole range of activities that appeared for the first time in history in these past two or three centuries. We are here referring to educational programs in various schools, universities, art schools and academies of fine art, visual culture, design, etc., as well as galleries, museums, collections, art magazines and other specialised publications such as books on art history, even the activity of auction houses – and so on.

Let us look at art criticism from the standpoint of an art critic: this is usually someone who has not planned such a career but who became an art critic by coincidence, by being an art lover, which also means that he or she must have had an affinity for the art and artists.

154

In fact, such a feature may be the essential characteristic of someone devoted to art: he or she is in love with the subject. This banal but important point was recently made by the Cuban-Spanish art critic Gerardo Mosquera in 2018, who in 2018 wore a sentence to this effect on his T-shirt.

¹⁶ Lenin, *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1973, p. 48.

Today, art critics may appear to be uninfluential people, with most of cultural power finding its place among curators, government officials, etc. This was not always true: if we look at some of the past American art critics, such as Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, or Arthur Danto, then one discerns the enormous power, influence, and finally, responsibility each of them had. Such critics shaped public taste and indirectly or directly determined the trends, interpretations, contents, techniques, and styles of artworks. In recent decades, when art criticism started to border on art theory, and, also, when art was no longer representational, the art theorist was to some extent replaced by the art critic. This signals a diminution of the role of the critic, and the entry of the theorist into various art worlds, and reminds us again of Michael Fried's observation about French theory. "Literary theory, in the forms in which we now know it, is a child of the social and political convulsions of the 1960s."¹⁷ The same statement also applies to art criticism.

In this regard, Elizabeth Bruss makes an insightful observation (which should not be necessarily limited to literature): "An increase of theoretical activity [...] arises whenever the function of criticism is itself in doubt. Theory, that is, does not emerge at just any historical moment; it comes into being when it is both possible and necessary."¹⁸

In the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth, art criticism was an important segment of the edifice called "art". At the turn of the previous century, Viennese art history developed; in the 1920s and 1930s aesthetics and a whole spectrum of various theories emerged or were strengthened (including psychoanalysis and Marxism). This process was accelerated in the post-World War II period (from the 1950s to the 1970s), giving rise to unusual and unexpected combinations of various disciplines: psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan), structural linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure, Algirdas Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov), various kinds of Marxism (or "historical materialism"), anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), ethnography, deconstruction, New History (Michel Foucault, Hayden White), New Art History (Norman Bryson), etc., etc. These new methodologies and disciplines brought together very disparate theories, epistemologies, and authors. At that time, one other activity was slowly drifting into obliv-

¹⁷ Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

ion, namely aesthetics. At its best and at its worst, this discipline was typical of the time, as it was: generalising, universalising, with limited knowledge of contemporary art, and determined not to descend into the uncertain waters of qualitative evaluation and obviously very academic, to a large extent referring to the “Paris School” and what has often also been called “Modernism”. One reason for such behaviour was the “positivist,” “scientific” (*wissenschaftlich*), and “objective” approach, which most certainly made writing less subjective (for it was written from a temporal distance). The other reason was the methodology of the then dominant kind of art history, namely the Vienna School of Art History (1847–1918), which around 1900 established a normative framework with which to gauge the quality of artworks. The guiding developmental criterion was style: the art historical style that was retained from one period to another was considered a sign of qualitative development. Contrariwise, art that died off and had no continuation in the ensuing history was regarded as irrelevant for the further development of art. In the history of literature this criterion did not exist. A problem associated with this art history was that the method it used ceased to be valid after the Renaissance. While this was a big problem in past decades, in recent years it has been overcome by a more eclectic application of various art histories. Also, as we have mentioned, some two decades ago there also emerged the “new art history”, which attempted to bridge the gap between the Vienna School and contemporary theories, as well as between art and its context.

Traditionally, firm barriers existed between art history and other disciplines. Thus presentation, description, evaluation, and comparison with other artworks occurred between two extremes, neither of which offered judgments of taste: that of art criticism and that of aesthetics (interpreted as philosophy of art), with art history being limited to a recent or somewhat more distant past (i.e. a few decades, perhaps a century ago). What has happened in the last few decades is that “art theory” has stepped between artworks and the public, with this art theory encompassing both aesthetics and so-called “contemporary” art history. Since these two types of theoretic discourse intervened, they have to an important extent taken the place and function of art criticism. Today they both function as descriptive and analytical tools but not as evaluative means: art criticism no longer evaluates art, nor do aesthetics and art history, for they too have limited their discourse to analytic descriptions with the help of which they situate an artwork, the *oeuvre* of an artist, or a trend within a broader framework, be it temporal or cultural, in its context.

As mentioned, after World War II all kinds of art criticism were strongly influenced by various strands of the social sciences and humanities, these ranging from deconstruction, Marxism, formalism, and psychoanalysis, to Critical Theory. The result was a strong ingredient of theory in any kind of criticism. Criticism became divided into two competing currents: (a) the theoretical and philosophical one and (b) criticism resting on empirical knowledge and even on the conscious and intentional ignorance of theory. Although this bifurcation is still present, it is fair to conclude that today the “theoretical” and philosophical strand of criticism (whether in literature or art) has gained the upper hand and that the more empirically oriented criticism has moved to the background, except perhaps in cases of popular media. Today, as in the past, both art and literary criticism also serve educational and commercial purposes.

In the art and literary criticism from some decades ago we could still distinguish a few different approaches. The main ones were: (1) autobiographical, (2) ideological, (3) deconstructive, (4) psychoanalytic, etc. Biographical criticism attempted to explain a work of art or literature on the basis of the artist’s biography. I am referring here partly to facts from the artist’s life and to the “atmosphere,” favourite motifs, the general subject matter, and the like. Furthermore, if a seventeenth-century Dutch painter depicted the Dutch countryside with a windmill, this could tell us something about the environment that he or she grew up in – or it could simply tell us something about the taste of his clients.

Ideological and political criticism is today mostly a thing of the past but it flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, when its roots lay in the tradition of critical realism. In the most banal way, the question usually raised in the face of such criticism was: “What did the artist want to say?” If the critic was standing in front of a Chinese painting with lots of red colour he could guess that the painting was supposed to express or evoke communism and happiness. The other answer to the question of what an artist wanted to say with his or her picture would be that which struck us as its subject matter. Here we were bound to gather some contextual knowledge. As Mark Twain remarked a long time ago, a picture of a woman on a hay wagon could be interpreted as “Mary on her way to the country fair” or as “Queen Marie-Antoinette being taken to the guillotine.”

Deconstructive criticism “deletes” all external knowledge about an artwork. This means deleting autobiographical, contextual, historical, and other infor-

mation and focusing only on the work as a closed work from which all data has been erased. In this case, the critic approached a work as if it were undergoing a phenomenological reduction.

Many other kinds of art criticism could be mentioned, but let us limit ourselves to the ones just pointed out. Usually art criticism combines different approaches or methods, a procedure that is today much more common than it was some decades ago when the border between various critical approaches was almost insurmountable.

So far we have mostly made use of two contemporary or recent authors involved in art criticism – Terry Eagleton and Hal Foster. The former is based on British Marxism while the latter focuses on radical (or “leftist”) viewpoints that find their support in the Continental theoretical and philosophical tradition, starting with the French one. This, then, is another division of criticism of art – one that overcomes the early division illustrated by Eagleton and Foster.

To us today the problem of art criticism appears to be twofold:

(1) In much of contemporary art classical value judgments are no longer applicable. Since this is one of the paramount topics of criticism (if not also *the* main one), its marginalisation has caused a profound questioning of the *raison d'être* of criticism as such. Since evaluation has ceased to be a key critical criterion when confronted with an artwork, new, although less persuasive, criteria have emerged: reading, for example, was recently proclaimed to be a novel form of criticism. We thus find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: criticism whose aim was originally to express value judgments – to separate art from non-art – has been stripped of this criterion, which today is often not even mentioned. Also, the extra-artistic criteria (political and those erected on originality) are today often the central ones.

(2) The other problem with artistic, literary, and other criticism is that philosophy has made previous tasks of criticism irrelevant or marginal, thereby bringing into question the very essence of criticism. The described situation is today characteristic of Western countries and culture. When we say “philosophy”, we most often mean aesthetics interpreted as philosophy of art.

Criticism is strongly dependent on the situation in various realms of the humanities and social sciences. Thus the development of deconstruction in literary criticism (Paul de Man, for example) or in architecture (Bernard Tschumi & Jacques Derrida) has been dependent upon the developments in prose, poetry, architecture, etc. The same applies to the phenomenological tradition (its presence having diminished since the 1960s). In the less central humanities some traditional forms of criticism live on. Fine and visual art criticism is today most often a combination of theoretical positions and empirical knowledge. What this means becomes clear when we consider that Arthur Danto was simultaneously considered to be the most important American aesthician (meaning “philosopher of art”) and the most influential art critic.

In recent decades the “pictorial turn” has invested visual arts with a relevance and position without equal in any other genre.¹⁹

It is quite obvious that in China, too, an enormous visual turn has been occurring since the 1990s. For this reason, other genres have become secondary and sometimes also marginalised. With the pictorial turn, literature and the written word have drifted into the background, causing the image to come to the foreground. It could be claimed that the first half of the previous century was a time of literary culture that assigned an important place also to literary criticism. In the 1980s the so-called pictorial turn caused literature to lose significance within the framework of art and for it to be replaced, as the artistic paradigm, by visual art.

This volume brings together essays that mostly concern European and Chinese criticism of art and visual culture, showing their common features – these latter being revealed if in no other manner than by the bridge between the nationality and the national identity of the artist, on the one hand, and the theoretical tradition of the critic, on the other. Some of the other essays focus on general issues of art criticism – on Chinese cinema for example, which has become, just like the Chinese fine arts and avant-garde art of the 1980s and 1990s, an outstanding instance of new poetics and a novel way of expressing reality and fiction. In this

¹⁹ The described situation is characteristic of the First World. In many other countries (China included), the importance ascribed to literature has been retained. It remains to be seen whether this is a passing phenomenon or part of an unavoidable global trend.

respect, the combination of Slovenian and Chinese art critics and theorists and their frequent subject matter in this collection relate to another topic, namely Slovenian and European cinema proper, for in both cultures it was the “visual” and the “pictorial” turn that represented the first step out of the communist universe and into the postmodern period of the 1990s.

I have mentioned that art criticism from different cultures and countries relates mostly to the cultural and artistic artefacts of a certain country or culture rather than to art criticism as detached from the former. Such is also the developed stage of the relationship between various developed, interactive French and British cultures of criticism. Already criticism and art (literature) such as that of Baudelaire and E. A. Poe today reveal the proximity and shared cultural ingredients of the two groups of art critics in these two language-based communities.

The early distance between the recent French and the more distant British criticism of the twentieth century can hardly be imagined today: while the themes, issues, and characters may continue to be similar today, the whole series of events, objects, and phenomena on each side of the American/British cultural/linguistic divide retains the irreducible difference between the two, thereby leading to the permanent resurrection of the difference that turns Poe’s earlier homogenous stain of the Poe/Baudelaire sameness into an increasingly broad designation as being an entity covered by the term “art”. In the nineteenth century critics such as Baudelaire followed what a century later turned into the abyss called individual artistic genres, but one that did not erase the separation of traditional art and criticism from the newly arisen “French” tradition in painting and art criticism. The division into the traditional art and criticism and the newly introduced “French” tradition in criticism reproduced the now strongly entrenched separation into “science”, language, and the avant-garde. In this sense, contemporary art criticism has turned a decisive page in the art historical book of the twentieth-century tradition. It remains to be seen whether the “French” discourse and style will turn out to have a pivotal influence on the global change from the previous tradition, or whether it will reveal its “sameness” and essential continuity with what appeared to be a clear break, thereby remaining within the boundaries of tradition.

Curtis L. Carter*

Criticism as a Form of Cognition

I. *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* and Art Criticism

Erlebnis, here refers to as knowledge by acquaintance, is knowledge attained in the presence of an object or event, for our purposes here a work of art. *Erlebnis* is not a vague or content less gesture toward the ineffable. Rather, *Erlebnis* consists of an ordered, intelligible, symbolic process through which the producer artist sends out as information consisting of feeling, form, or ideas that comprise the work of art, which is then received by an observer such as the art critic. *Erkenntnis* is knowledge about something and consists of a description and interpretation of an object or event. It is based on internalizing perceptual observation and reasoning processes such as analysis, association, comparison, appeal to prior knowledge, as well as judgment which may include assessment. In the case of art, however, a critic's description, interpretation, or evaluation based solely on *Erkenntnis* seldom, if ever amounts to an exhaustive characterization of the work. It is necessary to supplement *Erkenntnis* with *Erlebnis* which is supplied by seeing, hearing, or undergoing, in the actual presence of the visual or performative artwork. Hence both *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* have a major place in the creation of art criticism.

My intent is not, therefore, to propose that *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* constitute a dualism of knowledge with respect to art criticism. There are in fact elements of both at work in the responses to a work of art whether a painting, a musical composition, theater performance or a dance. A critic responding to a work of art receives initial impressions of the work as *Erlebnis*, but criticism itself also benefits from various forms of *Erkenntnis*, including a mixture of initial information drawn from the critic's prior knowledge of art history, art practices, and also, in some instances, contributions from philosophical aesthetic theories, as in the case of Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto and Noël Carroll.

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In view of the fact that John Hospers once appealed to the very same distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* to deny that art works can provide knowledge of any sort, a brief explanation of our differences is required. Following Moritz Schlick, Hospers argues that *Erkenntnis*, but not *Erlebnis*, is a form of knowledge. Hence, on this view works of art provide only immediate expressive experiences lacking in cognitive significance. By implication it follows that art criticism would suffer a similar fate, as art criticism derives the core of its cognitive significance from the art that it serves. Since no substantial reasons are given for excluding *Erlebnis* from knowledge, other than to argue that knowledge is about things, while acquaintance is immediate, Hospers' conclusion seems arbitrary and without justification. On the other hand, it is entirely within the historic and philosophic meanings of the terms "knowledge" and "cognition" to include both *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* as forms of knowledge or cognition. For this reason, and because the recognition of both forms of knowledge will constitute an important step toward ending the banishment of the arts from the realm of cognition as well as marginalizing art criticism, both *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* are represented here as forms of knowledge.

Before proceeding to the discussion of Beardsley, Danto, and Carroll's views it is useful to take note of some of the differences between the artist's and the critic's approaches to cognitive aspects of the arts. While a visual artist, actor or dancer's knowledge may include what has been discovered during the creative process itself, as well as from the resulting artistic outcome, there are apparent differences between the knowledge experienced directly by the artist producer and knowledge as it appears in criticism. The critic's knowledge, for example, does not depend entirely upon the immediate presence of the work. Criticism can be written and read without one's being simultaneously attending to the actual art-making process, whereas the knowledge acquired by the visual artist or performer is available only in the actual doing or undergoing taking place during the act of creating art. It is thus necessary to elaborate further upon the characteristics of cognition as it appears in criticism.

First, the critic shares with other viewers the opportunity to experience first-hand the work of art or performance under review. The spectator's first-hand experience is initially imbued with *Erlebnis*, and may also be informed by *Erkenntnis* depending on the prior experiences of viewing and the level of acquaintance with art practices and theories, as well as previously formed beliefs concerning

art. The critic's experience, too, begins with *Erlebnis* qualities from direct experience with the art work under consideration. However, the critic's task relies on additional conceptual tools supplied by art history, art theories such as representation, expression, modernism, and postmodernism. Presumably, the critic draws upon perceptual skills acquired from in-depth expert experience while considering a particular art work in relation to its historic and cultural contexts. On a more abstract level some critics such as Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto and Noël Carroll also draw upon their respective aesthetic theories which offer a philosophical framework for their discussing the art.

In contrast to art practices in the visual arts, music, or dance, art criticism occurs in the medium of a written verbal language within the limits of its own more or less individualized and institutionalized practices including the conventions of linguistic syntax and semantics. Even where verbal or written language is a part of an art form, as in literary arts, texts of musical compositions, and drama, the language of criticism serves a different function, contributing to *Erkenntnis* more than to *Erlebnis*. Works of art function as stimulus patterns consisting of complex visual or sound images and meaning available for the critic's responses, while criticism itself consists primarily of description, interpretation, and evaluation. Criticism is thus contributory more to *Erkenntnis* than to *Erlebnis*.

Of what does the critic's description of a work of art consist? It is based on the impressions received as the work of art presents itself to the senses, how it looks and feels. Some, but not all, of the properties that appear in a critic's description of a work of art are available to direct observation. For example, the colors, shapes and lines in a visual art composition, or the shapes and the movement of a physical body in motion, including the properties of speed, duration, and intensity, are readily observable to an experienced critic. In a theatre performance, the text is enhanced by costumes, lighting, set design, and the music, as well as the patterns of voice and visually observable movements.

Other features important to experiencing art are registered in the mind and body of the critic without being susceptible to direct observation in the usual sense of visual or auditory confirmation. These qualities are nonetheless essential to the critic's description of a work of art. Kinesthetic and expressive qualities, as well as form, and ideas embedded in the work, all contribute to artistic significance and meaning. Other more complex qualities emerge from the simultaneous

presence of the kinesthetic, expressive, and formal properties interacting to create an overall sense of style in a work. A critic's account of a work, thus records the holistic, emergent properties that define the work as a whole, as well as the qualities of its separate parts. Sensitive observation skills and creative uses of language are required to present these more intangible aspects of a work.

Interpretation and evaluation, unlike description, call upon the critic to develop her own thoughts in response to the work informed by the experiences of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis*. Interpretation allows the critic to say, in general, what the piece was about and to give suggestion as to its overall meaning. Frequently, interpretation will relate the features of a particular work to a framework of ideas or beliefs existing outside the piece. In the case of a critic's response to Picasso's "Guernica," 1937, she might relate this work to the artistic revolutions of European modern art and to the particular cubist stylistic contributions of Picasso, as well as to the social-political happenings of the Spanish Civil war during the 1930s. Taking another example, a critic might, for instance, refer the viewers of choreographer Doris Humphries', "The Shakers," to the beliefs and practices of the nineteenth century Biblical religious group known as Shakers. Interpretations of a new work within an established art form call for analysis of the work in the light of its artistic innovations. Significant changes, such as the development of digital arts call for art criticism to explore developments beyond established art practices, by referencing both unique features and the work's relation to existing art.

Evaluation require the critics' judgment or assessment to be exercised against a background of presumed expertise and knowledge. Placing a value on a work of art as is called for in evaluation, for instance, must address many factors. Among these are the originality of the particular work under review, the importance of the concept exhibited, the skill of the performers, and the liveliness or dullness of the experience offered by the art work, and its place in the history or development of its medium. Other factors include, originality of performance style, social relevance, the critic's taste, and her perceptual and interpretive skills. Critical evaluations, in the best sense, arise out of, and are supported by, the presence or absence, the strengths and weaknesses, of a selection of such considerations.

Critics may also write about more general issues including characteristics of a visual artist's, writer's, a performer's style or about the general features of a par-

ticular art medium. These auxiliary items contribute to the overall aims of criticism: to improve our understanding or knowledge of visual, literary, and performance arts. With the emergence of mass media/digital art forms, criticism now extends to these new art forms as well as its applications to more traditional arts.

II. Criticism and Aesthetic Theory

The three approaches to criticism under consideration here hold somewhat differing views on aesthetic theory. Aesthetic theory differs from criticism in its origin. It is not ordinarily a direct response to particular art works or to particular art practices. Rather, aesthetic theory is typically formulated in abstract philosophical language (*Erkenntnis*) and is lacking in the sensuous immediacy included in the direct experiences of works of art. Similarly, aesthetic theory lacks the immediacy and concreteness of artistic experiences which are more directly conveyed in the writings of a perceptive critic.

Each of their respective approaches to criticism under consideration here is closely linked to the critic's views on aesthetics. Aesthetic theories as employed by the three critics consist of rational concepts and critical arguments representing a form of *Erkenntnis*. Aesthetic theories provide the concepts and principles necessary for identifying art works and for distinguishing art works from non-art. An aesthetic theory, for example, thus helps to establish the conceptual framework for identifying and appreciating works of art. In this respect, aesthetic theory also contributes to the development of the conceptual structure of art criticism. Similarly, changes in aesthetics theories invite an openness to change both in the theories themselves and in the approaches to criticism to which they may apply.

For example, Beardsley holds that works of art are perceptual objects best characterized by aesthetic properties, which are a function of formal unity and regional qualities of the art work. According to Beardsley, aesthetic properties are objectively present in the work and available to a spectator by means of perceptual discrimination. Danto would argue that to know a work of art requires something more than the eye alone can supply. It requires a theory of art that informs the viewer of the conditions under which an object or activity may be considered a work of art. Carroll's narrative aesthetic theory holds that determining what constitutes a work of art requires constructing an explanation con-

sisting of an historical narrative that connects the artist's intentions to existing art world precedents and practices.

What then is the relation of aesthetic theory to the cognitive significance of art? Aesthetic theory contributes to the conceptual foundation for abstracting the cognitive significance of art as it is reflected in criticism. Taking dance as an example, before a choreographer sets out to create a dance, she must have some idea of what a dance would be. Similarly, a dancer does not perform the dance apart from some prior understanding of the nature of performing. Without such knowledge, the dancer would not know where to begin or end, and would have no idea when she had succeeded or failed. Correspondingly, the spectators would not know when a performance is taking place, and when it is successful, without some implicit or explicit understanding of the underlying concepts and principles that establish the nature and objectives of performing. The theory may be implicit or explicit, but it must exist in some form if the activity of performance is to be recognized as a significant artistic activity, that is, one with purpose and meaning in relation to an art practice such as dance. Of course the norms and practices in the arts are open to constant innovation and change, sometimes posing a challenge for both performers and spectators to keep up with the changes.

III. Art Criticism of Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, Noël Carroll

Although the topic of art criticism has drawn the interest of numerous American aestheticians of recent vintage, three names (Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, and Noël Carroll) stand out for their contributions to examining the relation of art criticism to aesthetic theory. Their knowledge of art practices as well as of philosophical aesthetics is extensive: (Beardsley literary and other arts viewed from the perspective of New Criticism, Danto for visual arts, and Carroll on film, *Avant garde* theater and dance). Each of these writers, known for important contributions to aesthetic theory, has also functioned as an arts critic: Beardsley on literary arts, Danto as visual arts critic for *The Nation*, and Carroll in *Art Forum*, *Drama Review*, *Soho Weekly Art News*.¹

¹ The evidence is abundant that both Danto and Carroll produced art criticism. Michael Wreen, editor of Monroe Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, with Donald M. Callen,

Monroe Beardsley

Beardsley's thoughts on criticism occupy a substantial body of his writings beginning with "International Fallacy" with W. K. Wimsatt in 1946, and followed by numerous publications devoted to art criticism, including his books *Aesthetic Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), *Aesthetic Inquiry: Essays on Art Criticism and the Philosophy of Art*, edited with H. Schueller (1967), *The Possibility of Criticism* (1970), and a steady stream of journal articles and book chapters into the 1980s.²

Approaching the question of the relevance of the artist's intentions (a series of psychological states or events in the artist's mind concerning the imagined work and its creation) to interpretation or evaluation of a work of art, Beardsley and Wimsat rejected any relevance of authors' interpretations for the interpretation or evaluation of a work of art.³ This initial essay has been widely reproduced in journals and debated among literary theorists, thus marking a place for Beardsley in arts criticism. In his subsequent essay, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revisited," Beardsley reflects on his earlier claims and the responses, with clarifications aimed at shoring up his objections to artist's intentions. Here, he does not abandon his earlier rejection of author's intentions, but offers further clarification. In doing so he offers an account of author as "anyone who intentionally produces a text: that is a syntactically ordered sequence of words, spoken or written in a natural language."⁴ The essence of his sustained argument opposing the quest for artist's intentions is his view of the art work as symbol, functioning as an illocutionary⁵ act or as a representation. Or as Beardsley, in keeping with "New Criticism" practice puts it, the focus is

in a personal interview January, 2016, stated that Beardsley wrote criticism as well as aesthetic theory.

² Beardsley's writings on criticism are nicely ordered in "Bibliography of Writings in Aesthetics by Monroe Beardsley" accompanying Monroe Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View: selected Essays*, M. J. Wreen and D. M. Callen (Eds.), Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1982, pp. 371–378.

³ Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy", *Sewanee Review*, (Summer 1946), pp. 468–488.

⁴ Monroe Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy revived", *The Aesthetic Point of View*, p. 189.

⁵ Illocutionary acts as discussed in the writings of philosophers J. L. Austin and John R. Searle are linguistic acts such as declarations, directives, or expressives.

on the work of art instead of upon imagined action of the artist in creating the work of art.⁶

Despite his admonitions against the use of artists' intentions in criticism, Beardsley nevertheless acknowledges a role for artists' intentions in his aesthetics. In the essay "An Aesthetic Definition of Art" which appeared in 1983, toward the end of his career, artist's intention has a key role. "An art work is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest."⁷ Here the intention is shifted to the aesthetic interest of those who approach an artist's production (work of art) with the intention of obtaining aesthetic experience. On this view it would be sufficient that the artist's work has the capacity to produce aesthetic interest on behalf of others for whom it might generate interest. How this apparent shift in the use of intention would play out in Beardsley's approach to art criticism is not entirely clear. It would seem to shift the focus of criticism to the recipients' interests leaving the place of the artist's role in uncertain territory. On such a view, the critic's task would involve not only focus on the particular features of an art work, but also require in depth knowledge of the interests of the culture and the capacity of the population attending to the art for aesthetic interest. Notably, Beardsley's position here would further complicate what might constitute a work of art.

A central theme in Beardsley's aesthetics is the relation of art criticism to aesthetics. In the introduction to *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* he states "neither aesthetics nor criticism can be carried on independently of the other though each has its own tasks."⁸ Here a work of art is also understood to be an aesthetic object which is essentially a perceptual object, and can be subject to multiple presentations. Continuing his argument concerning the relation of criticism and aesthetics, Beardsley states, "To be a good critic, it is not enough to accumulate a vast amount of information about and a rich experience of, the art..."⁹ you must be able to present the experience of art and link it to

168

⁶ Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy revived", p. 194.

⁷ Monroe C. Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art", in: H. Curtler (Ed.), *What is Art?*, Haven Publications, New Yorke 1983, pp. 15–29, and Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Malden, Massachusetts 2005, p. 58.

⁸ Beardsley, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism*, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

other aspects of experiences of the world as well as to the concepts employed in aesthetics as a philosophical discipline.

The latter view of course leads to questions central to criticism. For example, the question, “What do critics actually assume about the relation between aesthetic objects and their presentations?”¹⁰ Details of Beardsley’s noteworthy analysis of the relation of criticism and aesthetics in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* and his other writings on the subject would take us beyond the limits of the current project. However, it is of interest to note that he reaffirms his conviction that aesthetics has a very intimate connection with criticism, while acknowledging that his suggestion of some twenty years earlier proposing to identify aesthetics with meta-criticism may have been carried to excess. Still, he persists in claiming that what critics have to say remains a principal source for problems of interest to philosophical aesthetics. Similarly, the general practices of the critics “offer important evidence for testing the truth of proposed aesthetic theories.”¹¹ For additional information on Monroe Beardsley’s contribution to criticism and aesthetics, see “Monroe Remembered: Aesthetic: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism on its Fiftieth Anniversary.”¹²

Arthur Danto

Like Beardsley’s, Arthur Danto’s life work embraces both art criticism and philosophical aesthetics. After an initial focus on a career as a visual artist, Danto elected to study philosophy at Columbia and subsequently developed original contributions in aesthetics and other areas of philosophy. Initially, his work focused on Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but later he embraced aspects of Hegel’s philosophy of art. His interest in Hegel’s discussion of the so called “end of art” became a pivotal element in Danto’s projection of the end of art history as it had been understood up through modernism, and the beginnings of major shifts in western art such as the works of Andy Warhol and other Pop artists of the 1960s.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹ Monroe Beardsley, “Critical Evaluation”, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, p. 317.

¹² Peter Kivy, “Monroe Remembered: Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism on Its Fiftieth Anniversary”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 44 (1/2010).

Perhaps the most central philosophical work of Danto for our topic of art criticism is his book, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), where he sets forth his views on the relation of art and philosophy. In this philosophical work, which he attributes to his becoming a critic, Danto advances a philosophical theory of art including the conditions necessary for something to be considered a work of art. A central problem in his approach to aesthetics, initiated in part by Danto's puzzlement over Warhol's, *Brillo Box* (1964), concerns the identity of art works, culminating in the question of how aesthetics might distinguish art works from non-art works, even those that might entertain the same, or closely resembling, perceptual qualities.¹³

This extension of his philosophical interests to art criticism is not difficult to imagine given Danto's engagement as a practicing artist, even more so from his reflections on a wide range of artists of his time from Warhol to Abstract Expressionist Marc Rothko to environmental artist Robert Irwin's works featuring luminosity. His dialogues with art critic Clement Greenberg and other art critics again point to Danto's growing interest in art criticism. In contrast to Danto's merging of criticism and aesthetic theory, Greenberg preferred an approach to art criticism based mainly on visual response without reference to theory or other knowledge.¹⁴

Danto again revisits this theme promoted by Warhol's Brillo Box in his essay, "Aesthetics and Art Criticism" (1994). He argues that the differences between Warhol's, *Brillo Box*, as an art work and the advertising Brillo Box of designer, Steve Harvey, come down to a difference in the kind of art criticism appropriate to the two objects. "Steve Harvey's boxes are about Brillo and about the values of speed, cleanliness... Warhol's iconography is more complex and has little to do with those values at all. In a way it is philosophical, being about art..."¹⁵

170

¹³ Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2009, p. 61. Danto elaborates upon the ontology of art as it relates to Warhol's 1964 *Brillo Box* in the essay, "Aesthetics and Art Criticism", in Arthur C. Danto, *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York 1994, pp. 382–384.

¹⁴ Arthur Danto, "Clement Greenberg", *The Nation*, 1994. See also: Arthur Danto, "After the End of Art", p. 125, pp. 135–137, 148–150.

¹⁵ Arthur C. Danto, "Aesthetics and Criticism", p. 386.

Although in *Transfigurations of the Commonplace*, Danto offers conditions for what can be considered art, he insists that, as far as his practice of criticism is concerned, he is open to art that conveys the philosophical essence of art.¹⁶ As a critic, Danto is receptive to any variations of art such as might appear in a pluralistic art world. On this point, Danto's range of art works of critical interest differs from Beardsley who finds no place in his view of art for the likes of Duchamp's ready mades or Warhol's Brillo Boxes. He disavows interest in artists whose works purport to represent historical breakthroughs, by presuming that such developments in art history have ended. Neither a fixed agenda nor aesthetic qualities as such are necessary to the practice of art criticism. What is central to the critic's practice, as Danto views it, are the ways in which aesthetic qualities or other elements of the art contribute to the best explanations of the art work. For Danto, and in keeping with the spirit of Hegel's aesthetics, the development of art "is a whole under constantly revised development... and no criticism which fails to see this can have much value."¹⁷

Noël Carroll

In contrast with Beardsley and Danto, Noël Carroll's approach to art criticism has evolved from its early beginnings as a form of advocacy for emerging arts of the 1970s and 1980s, to its current advancement of criticism as evaluation. His writings on evaluative criticism are in part an effort to refute the central claims, advanced by Beardsley, in support the priority of artist's intentions. Similarly, while showing the highest regard for Danto as the leading art critic of his time, Carroll argues that Danto's commitment to interpretation calls for a greater recognition of evaluation than is accorded in his approach to art criticism.

Carroll's early experience as an art critic took place mainly in the downtown New York art world of theater, dance, film, and performance during the 1970s and 1980s. His criticism focuses on down town artists in contrast with the up-

¹⁶ Danto's latest thoughts on the question of what constitutes art appear in his book, *What Art Is*, New Haven and London, 2013. In this work Danto argues that philosophy of art, "is an attempt to distinguish art from other things in the world" and "an attempt to answer the question, what makes art?" Cited in Joseph Tanke, "The Artness of Art: Arthur Danto's 'What Art Is'", *Art in America*, August 30, 2013.

¹⁷ Arthur C. Danto, "The end of Art and Its Critics", *L&B (Lier en Boog): Series of Philosophy and Art Theory*, Vol. 13, 1998, p. 54.

town New York art world featured in Danto's art criticism.¹⁸ Carroll's criticism documents the "rich and lively" new developments of the *Avant Garde* arts in a particular locale. He and other young critics of the time became in fact a living part of the art scene. In this scene, he saw the unfolding of innovative developments where choreographers of postmodern dance interacted with painters and sculptors whose work often evolved into performance art. As a philosopher-aesthetician observing these developments, Carroll did not miss the theoretical implications of such developments for the often reciprocal connections to artistic movements such as minimalism in the fine arts, and on to the re-entry of theatrical narrative and expression in the arts of the 1980s and beyond. Or, to what others might prefer to label postmodernism.¹⁹

Carroll's later views on criticism are consolidated in his book, *On Criticism* (2009) and elaborated in his more recent essays, especially those responding to Beardsley's and Danto's accounts of art criticism. The core notion in Carroll's account of criticism is evaluation. Evaluation is intended as a rigorous, reasoned process in which artistic judgment is supported by factual evidence. The role of the critic in Carroll's normative view is to show what in a work of art is of value and give supporting reasons. Such reasons draw upon on the artists' intentions, classification of the work into the relevant artistic category, and historical context, and examination of the particular features of the work taking note of its similarities and differences from other related candidates. Evaluation in Carroll's view is supported by an examination of the particular features of the art work, taking note of its similarities to, and differences from other related candidates. While he acknowledges important roles for description and interpretation in criticism, their worth is primarily in support of evaluation.

¹⁸ For a picture of this New York art world as it emerged in the 1960s and unfolds in the 1970s and 1980s see the works of Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body 1963*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 1993 and Sally Banes, *Subversive expectations: performance Art and Parathheater in New York: 1976–85*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1998.

¹⁹ The work of Noël Carroll's formative developments in art criticism are documented in part in the collection of essays, Noël Carroll, *Living in an Art World: Reviews and Essays on Dance, Performance, Theater, and the Fine Arts in the 1970s and 1980s*, Chicago Spectrum Press, Louisville 2012. Terms such as postmodern dance and postmodern painting he characterizes as style markers which eventually became assembled in the more inclusive notion of Postmodernism. See pp. 338–351 for Carroll's critical assessment of Postmodernism.

For Carroll, the central goal of art criticism is to provide a rational basis for art appreciation. What does this mean? First is to identify the art's purpose or purposes, second is to identify the means for achieving the purpose, and then assess whether the artist's chosen means are adequate to realize this purpose. In a related essay, "Art Appreciation" (2016), though not on criticism as such, Carroll focuses on this central aim of art criticism which is to enrich art appreciation. In this essay, he distinguishes two forms of appreciation: "as liking" and as "sizing up." So far as criticism is concerned, he sees little or no value in appreciation as liking. On the other hand, he finds a close connection between "sizing up" and the task of criticism. In some respects, the process of art criticism as Carroll views it follows parallel to the process of logical analysis that a philosopher might undertake in addressing a problem in other fields of inquiry, especially those related to issues related to questions of value.

IV. Challenges to Criticism as Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation

All three aspects of criticism: description, interpretation, and evaluation have been challenged at one time or another, for example, when judged by criteria of cognitive significance established for knowledge in the sciences. Normally, as Joseph Margolis has pointed out, description implies a stable, well defined object available for inspection, when there is a need to check the facts of any description of the work.²⁰ Margolis argues that works of art are intentional, culturally emergent objects embedded in a physical medium. According to his theory, a work of art can be known only in relation to the artistic and appreciative traditions of a particular culture.

The ability to satisfy the conditions necessary for establishing a stable work of art depends upon the medium. For example, the physical medium in virtually all art practices including paintings, film, and digital art works is subject to deterioration in the particular works, or changes resulting from obsolete media processing technology. Maintaining the identity of a stable artifact accessible for criticism is especially problematic in the performing arts. Even where there is a literary text for a theater performance, a score as in musical compositions, a

²⁰ Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy: Conceptual Issues in Aesthetics*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 1989, p. 111.

notational system for certain forms of dance, the actual performative rendering of the drama, score, or the dance, as it comes to the critic responding to a particular artistic event, may vary with each performer's rendering and according to the context in which it appears. Improvisational arts pose even more problems for determining the identity of a particular work.

Descriptive criticism works best with stable visual works such as literature, paintings and sculptures or film, but is problematic with theater, music, or dance. Works in these media do not easily satisfy the requirements of object stability, because a performance exists in the full sense only as it is actually happening. It is sometimes possible to check on disputed parts of a particular performance by researching existing texts or documentations of prior performances as well as by consulting performers, directors, choreographers or others who may have witnessed a particular performance. The existence of notation for the performed works as in theater, music or dance offers important information useful for securing the identity of a work. Still none of these means can likely capture all of the nuances that contribute to the identity of a work of performance. Hence the call for a stable object as a necessary requirement of description remains problematic for criticism of the performing arts.

Criticism as interpretation is perhaps the least problematic of the three options discussed here with respect to questions concerning stable identity for works of art. It demands a wide range of knowledge both of historic and contemporary developments in the arts as well as keen talents for observation and analysis and their relation to particular cultural environments and audiences. Yet it would allow for a wider range of flexible conditions concerning the identity of a work.

Evaluation, which refers to assessment or assigning value judgments concerning the significance of a work of art, has had a role in art criticism through much of the history of the arts. Evaluation would appear to be a natural outcome of the processes of description and interpretation. Yet it is in some respects the most problematic. The role of artist's intentions in art criticism, for example has prompted extensive debates over their place in assessing works of art, particularly among American critics and aestheticians. Notably, as we have seen, Beardsley eschewed artist's intentions both in his early writings and subsequent works. Arguing in the opposite direction, Carroll contends that a careful

scrutiny of a work of art together with external sources yields sufficient access to artists' intentions to support their role in a reasoned evaluation.

V. Dance as seen From the Perspective of Criticism

The remaining section of our discussion here focuses on applications of criticism to understanding and appreciation of the art of dance. The problem of identifying stable identity for a work of art is especially of interest for criticism of performing arts such as dance. I will use dance criticism to illustrate this point. Dance is an appropriate choice here, as two of our critics, Beardsley and Carroll, both have written essays on dance, and Carroll has written extensively as a dance critic.²¹

Knowing a dance in the sense of *Erlebnis* is akin to knowing directly through the bodily senses, as opposed to knowing the dance through the words that label or describe it. While *Erlebnis* relies on the inner experiences of the dancer or viewer, it may also be informed by *Erkenntnis*, since a performer's and a spectator's knowledge may include prior knowledge about dancing. For the performer, this includes knowledge gained through prior training and experience of dancing as well as historical knowledge. For the spectator it includes previous experiences of doing, observing, or reading about dance.

Recently critics and philosophers of dance have worried over possible discrepancies in the identity of a dance work from performance to performance, and about how discrepancies might affect the problem of establishing the identity of, or knowing a dance. Such discrepancies are indeed a problem for those who would insist on treating dance works and their performances in the manner of logically discrete symbols or culturally emergent symbols (Margolis).

Critics and philosophers of dance alike would acknowledge discrepancies in characterizing the identity of a dance work from performance to performance. The question is, how such discrepancies might affect the problem of character-

²¹ See Noël Carroll, *Living in an Artworld: Reviews and Essays on Dance, Performance Theater and the Fine Arts in the 1970s and 1980s*, Chicago Spectrum Press, Chicago 2012, pp. 70, 85, 91, 108. Monroe Beardsley, "What is Going on in a Dance?" *Dance Research Journal*, 15 (1/1982), pp. 31–36.

izing the identity of a dance work? Such discrepancies are indeed a problem for those who would insist on treating dance works and their performances as logically discrete symbols whose identity is violated by differences among their various instantiations in different performances. This is especially so in the case of works such as “Swan Lake” with long performance histories from the nineteenth century extending to the present with changes in the performer’s bodies, costumes, staging and various director’s and dancers’ interpretations of the choreography.

The reality of changes from one performance to another, in dance as well as other performing arts, must be accepted as a given for criticism. It follows that such changes must be taken into account by critics in comparing descriptions and interpretations of performances, whether in dance or performances or dramatic and musical works. It is not always feasible for a critic to check the details of one performance against another, so a particular critic’s response will always be less than a scientist’s empirical characterization. But the critic’s view offers the benefit of nuances of feeling and form as well as a humanizing characterization of the work that adds to the meaning, together with the benefits of *Erkenntnis* which brings additional richness by locating the work in the context of current and historical forms of dance.

How might such limitations affect our understanding of the cognitive significance of critical descriptions? It simply points up the fact that art works, including performances, are particulars, rather than universal entities, which are appreciated for their uniqueness as well as for any shared common elements.

Interpretations and evaluations of performances also do not fit well the cognitive models of empirical science. Interpretations may vary depending on which aspects of the work are given priority. Evaluations are subject to similar limitations. They are “subjective” judgments based on the critic’s own experiences of *Erlebnis* informed by a selection among the particular features of the work *Erkenntnis* based on related external knowledge from art history or cultural practices that the critic might choose to support her evaluations. Improvisational arts pose even more problems for determining the identity of a work of art, for there are bound to be variations in the rendering of an improvisational performance.

Hence, performances of art works in theater, music or dance do not entirely satisfy the requirements of object stability called for by descriptive criticism, because the performance exists in the full sense only as it is actually happening. It is sometimes possible to check on disputed parts of a description, by researching existing texts, documentation of prior performances as well as by consulting performers, directors, choreographers or others who witnessed a particular performance. The existence of notation for a performed work of music or dance, for example, offers additional information toward securing the identity of a performance work. But there is no assurance that the notation contains all of the essential parts of a performance. Video and film recording of prior performances offers additional means of confirming a critical description of a work, but none of these means can capture all of the nuances that contribute to the identity of a performance viewed as a stable object. The call for a stable object as a necessary condition of description remains problematic.

Interpretations offer additional challenges. Interpretations, to a degree, can be checked against the descriptive facts of a performance, and both critics and their readers are in a position to do this within the limits noted above. It is sometimes possible, moreover, to entertain more than one acceptable interpretation of a work of art without requiring agreement between the interpretations. Interpretations need not be judged true or false in order to have cognitive significance. They can be interesting, plausible, likely and still retain their cognitive significance. This is particularly the case when criticism is made against a background of expertise consisting of knowledge in the history and practice of the art, and by a trained observer whose perceptive skills are highly developed by regular practice as a critic. While critical evaluations cannot be said to be true or false in any simplistic sense, they nevertheless do advance our knowledge by inviting us to look more closely and to reflect for ourselves on the significance of a work. Frequently, the critic's suggestions lead us to explore on a deeper level our own initial reactions, thereby adding to the factual and interpretive content, or inviting a reappraisal of an initial response. The process of searching and inspection necessary to arrive at such judgments is itself, the essence of cognitive activity.

Evaluation, which refers to assessment or assigning value judgments concerning the significance a work of art, has had a role in art criticism though much of art history. Evaluation is in part a natural outcome of the processes of description and interpretation. Yet it is in some respects the most problematic.

The role of artist's intentions in art criticism, as noted previously, has prompted a debate over their role in assessing works of art particularly among American aestheticians. Recall, for example, that Beardsley eschewed artist's intentions both in his early writings and subsequent works. In his essay, "the Intentional Fallacy" (1946) written with W. K. Wimsatt, Beardsley argues that "the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."²² In his "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revived," published in 1984, Beardsley again addresses the relevance of artists' intentions to criticism. While acknowledging that subsequent writings on this topic had become "more complicated and subtle," Beardsley continues to support the anti-intentionalist view which dismisses artist's intentions as a viable resource for art criticism.²³ Against Beardsley's view of artists' intentions, Carroll argues that careful scrutiny of the artwork, together with external sources such as artists' diary or biographical information itself, yields sufficient access to artist's intentions to support their role in a reasoned evaluation of art works.

Missing from all three accounts of criticism offered here is a decisive commonly agreed upon account of what constitutes the object of the critics' attention. For Beardsley the focus is on the particular "aesthetic" qualities of the art work itself. For Danto the critic's attention is on interpreting the meaning attributable to the art, often in the context of an exhibition setting with references to its broader artistic and cultural locale. For Carroll, the focus of criticism seems to be a particular work, or body of work together with the rational justification of the critic's assessment that constitutes the object of criticism. Left open is the identity of the work itself.

Conclusion

178

From the distinction drawn here between *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis*, it follows that human potential for learning through the arts encompasses at least two important aspects. *Erlebnis* points to knowledge accessible directly through participation in the artistic activities such as dancing, and to directly perceivable infor-

²² Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy", *Sewanee Review*, (Summer 1946), pp. 468–488.

²³ Monroe Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revived", *The Aesthetic Point of View*, pp. 188–287.

mation that is communicated in the presence of art works such as a dance performance. Knowledge in such instances is transmitted in the formally ordered patterns of a system of dance movements that includes kinesthetic and expressive features as well as abstract time and space configurations. Responses to art, including criticism, art histories, and aesthetic theory, are represented here as essentially a form of *Erkenntnis*. They provide a broader context of understanding the particular art work that is the focus in the discussion of *Erlebnis*. These responses help us to see more clearly the structural and stylistic aspects of art works and bring forth their larger significance.

Responses in the form of criticism help to link the process of making and appreciating art works to other aspects of knowledge including the sciences and the humanities. A critic might point out, for example, the theories of physical and optical space that are assumed in the presentation of ballet on a proscenium stage. Or she might suggest a relation of dance to the humanities with a discussion of a particular type of dancing in reference to a theme in literature or philosophy.

When functioning in relation to criticism, aesthetic theory thus contributes to the conceptual foundation for abstracting the cognitive significance or meaning of art. Working together, criticism and aesthetic theory help us to see more clearly the structural and stylistic aspects of art works and bring forth their larger significance. Responses to art in the form of criticism also assist in the processes of linking the making and appreciating art works to other aspects of knowledge in the sciences and the humanities.

Peng Feng*

Flattery or Abuse: Art Criticism in China

In a small but provocative book, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* James Elkins presents a wide array of evidence suggesting that “Art criticism is in worldwide crisis.”¹ Is the crisis really worldwide? At least in China, the case is different. Elkins’ book was published in 2003, when art criticism in China had just started to thrive. The first China Annual Art Critics Assembly was held in 2007. The China Literature and Art Critics Association was founded even later in 2014. Why do Chinese art critics set up these organizations while world art criticism is in crisis? What are their purposes? To withstand the crisis or to meet prosperity? What happened to art criticism in China?

1. Traditional Chinese Art Criticism

If we look back into the long history of China, we can find numerous texts related to art criticism since the 5th century B.C. In addition to short comments on music and painting recorded in *Analects*, *Zhuangzi*, *Hanfeizi*, and so on,² Ji Zha’s *Viewing the Music* in the Zhou Dynasty, is a systematic, detailed and quite longer text and can be regarded as a standard text of art criticism,³ if we take art criticism as “criticism of any work within a certain group of artforms, including: literature, drama, dance, music, the graphic arts (encompassing photography), sculpture, architecture, and moving-image arts (film, video, and computer generated visuals),” as Noël Carroll does.⁴ After one thousand years,

¹ James Elkins, *Whatever Happened to Art Criticism?*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago 2003, p. 2.

² The three books record the dialogues and essays of Confucius (551 bc–479 bc), Zhuangzhou (369 B.C.–286 B.C.), and Hanfei (280 B.C.–233 B.C.), respectively. For English translation, see Li Yutang, *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art*, Putnam’s Sons, New York 1967, pp. 21–24.

³ Jizha’s commenting on music happened in 544 B.C. and is recorded in *Zuo Spring and Autumn*, in *Zhuzijicheng*, Zhonghua shuju, Beijing 1954, vol. 6, p. 58.

⁴ Noël Carroll, *On Criticism*, Routledge, New York 2009, p. 11. However, I will focus on the criticism of visual arts in this essay.

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in the 5th century A.D. artist and art critic Xie He in his *Criticism and Catalogue of Ancient Paintings (Guhua Pinlu)* divided 27 painters of the third to fifth centuries into six numbered grades. In a short preface, Xie He briefly introduced the principles of his critical evaluation, that is, the “Six Laws,” which is seen as “the first Chinese attempt at a systematic approach to the theory of the art.”⁵ However, Xie He’s text and similar texts in the history are seldom read as art criticism today, while they raise the interests of art history and aesthetics.

Art criticism seems to have a contemporary character that sets it apart from art history. This contemporaneity means not only that art criticism often deals primarily with contemporary artworks,⁶ but also that, more strictly speaking, art criticism itself is contemporary writing or talking. For example, Denis Diderot was an art critic since he focused on contemporary artists of his time and their recent works. But, after two and a half centuries, today Diderot’s writings on paintings and sculptures are read as materials of art history and art theory or aesthetics rather than art criticism. Art criticism can be transformed into art history and art theory or aesthetics as time goes on. In other words, art criticism by its very nature doesn’t have a history not only because it concentrates on contemporary art scenes, but also because only contemporary writing or talking can be treated as art criticism. Xie He was likely an art critic in the fifth century, but he is not treated as art critic today by the scholars who are interested in his writings or in Xie He himself as a historical person.

However, the distinction between art criticism and art theory or aesthetics does not depend on contemporaneity but on universality. Both art criticism and art theory or aesthetics can focus on contemporary phenomena of art, but art theory or aesthetics pursues universality while art criticism focuses on individual art works, artists, and art movements. In this sense, art theory or aesthetics is a typical second-order discipline while art criticism is a first-order discipline. One of the differences between art theory as a second-order discipline and art criticism as a first-order discipline is that the former is not interested in evalu-

⁵ Alexander Soper, “The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho”, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 8 (1949), pp. 412–423; citation from p. 412. There are many different interpretations of Xie He’s Six Laws, also see James F. Cahill, “The Six Laws and How to Read Them”, *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 4 (1961), pp. 372–381. Hsieh Ho is the old Chinese phonetic alphabet of Xie He.

⁶ For discussion of the contemporaneity of art criticism, see Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: History, Strategies, Voices*, Pearson, Boston 2013, pp. 3–7.

ation while the latter makes evaluation its priority. Evaluation is so crucial to art criticism that Barbara Rose claims: “The act of criticism is the value judgment. The rest is art writing.”⁷ However, art theory or aesthetics always avoids making evaluation. “As a second-order discipline or metacriticism,” Richard Shusterman writes, aesthetics, especially analytic aesthetics “was a strong tendency to avoid evaluative issues, generally by relegating them to the first-order level of criticism itself.”⁸ According to this distinction, Xie He’s *Criticism and Catalogue of Ancient Paintings* is both a second-order discipline and a first-order discipline. The “Six Laws” is highly generalized and universal and so can be classified as a second-order art theory. The evaluation and classification of artists can be regarded as a first-order art criticism.

Like Xie He’s *Criticism and Catalogue of Ancient Paintings*, most texts of traditional Chinese art criticism, including criticism of painting (huapin) and criticism of calligraphy (shupin), is not only art criticism, but a trinity, including art theory, art history, and art criticism.

2. From Art Commentary to Art Criticism

Under the influences of the classification and compartmentalization of western modernity, the integrated traditional Chinese knowledge has been divided into different disciplines during its modernization processes. Art is no exception. Art criticism is gradually separated from art history and art theory or aesthetics. There are two modern Chinese words corresponding to art criticism in English: *yishu pinglun* and *yishu piping*. *Yishu pinglun* literally means art commentary or art review, while *yishu piping* exactly captures the meaning of art criticism. Word frequency statistics based on China National Knowledge Infrastructure reports that a big shift from art commentary to art criticism happened in 1996. Before 1996, art commentary was used more often than art criticism in essays published by journals and newspapers, but the gap between the two words was not big. However, after 1996 art criticism has been preferred to art commentary, and the gap has been getting bigger and bigger. Especially in the contemporary

⁷ Barbara Rose, *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-Art, 1963–1987*, Weidenfield & Nicolson, London 1988, p. 215.

⁸ Richard Shusterman, “Introduction: Analytic Aesthetics: Retrospect and Prospect”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46 (1987), p. 119.

art circle, art commentary has been almost abandoned. How to interpret this change?

In his essay *The Changing Role of Critics in the 1990s*, Qian Zhijian observes the change from art commentator to art critic in the 1990s. Qian writes, “The term ‘art critic,’ or *yishu pipingjia* in Chinese, was not widely adopted and accepted in China until the early 1990s. Before that, especially in the 1980s, those who practiced art criticism were generally addressed as ‘art theoreticians’ and later ‘art commentators.’”⁹ However, art criticism did not completely replace art commentary in the 1990s. Art criticism and art commentary have been coexisting up to now. Qian also noticed this co-existence:

Two groups of art writers who practiced criticism were now clearly formed, whether consciously or not. One group saw themselves as defenders as well as advocator of “art in tune with socialism,” while the other group tried to stick to their modernist ideas and ideals. Interestingly, those from the former group preferred to be addressed as “art theoreticians” or “art commentators.”¹⁰

There are many differences between art commentary and art criticism. The first is a political difference. The distinction between art commentary and art criticism is, as Qian mentions, the difference between socialist realism and capitalist modernism. It is a difference not only in art styles but also in political stances. As China has been developing from socialism into a mix of socialism and capitalism, or, in other words, socialism with Chinese characteristics, China’s political system is no longer a single socialist system, but a multi-component system that includes both socialism and capitalism. Art criticism and art commentary coexist but represent different political stances. Art commentary represents socialism and its realism, while art criticism stands for capitalism and its modernism. The increasing use of art criticism in some ways means that modernism trumps realism, and, correspondingly, capitalism plays an increasingly important role in China.

⁹ Qian Zhijian, “The Changing Role of Critics in the 1990s”, in: *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium*, John Clark (Ed.), New Art Media Limited, Hong Kong 2000, p. 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The second is a difference in attitude. Art criticism prefers critique to praise, while art commentary is fond of positive evaluation. The art commentators before the 1990s, as Qian observes, “were virtually nothing more than trumpeters of artists who dedicated their work to the socialist cause.”¹¹ Since art criticism is imported in China from western sources, it bears the meaning found in its western contexts. Concerning art criticism in English, as Houston points out, “when first encountered, the term sounds inherently negative or aggressive.”¹² In this sense, art criticism in China has certain risks, since it criticizes not only the artworks, but also the social phenomena and even the authorities. Meanwhile, art criticism focuses more on analysis and interpretation, while art commentary is full of assertions and descriptions. The analysis and interpretation in art criticism are based on art theory and art history, while the assertions in art commentary are based on political positions.

The third is a difference in time. Before the 1990s, art commentary was used more often than art criticism in Chinese publications. There is a tendency of art criticism replacing art commentary. This change is an epitome of social change in China. The society can tolerate different voices and dissents, which means China is becoming more democratic, diverse, and open. However, art commentary does not disappear, since China has not become a capitalist country. With its great economic achievements, China is increasingly convinced of the superiority of its political system. The so-called socialism with Chinese characteristics is actually a mixture of socialism and capitalism, but the proportion of the two varies from time to time. Briefly speaking, before the 1990s socialism took a larger proportion, capitalism surpassed socialism after the 1990s, and since the second decade of the 21st century, socialism and capitalism seem to have reached a certain equilibrium. This change is somehow reflected by the frequency of the two words: art commentary and art criticism.

185

3. The Emergence of Commercial Art Criticism

In addition to the change from art commentary to art criticism, there are some changes within art criticism itself. As Qian observed:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹² Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: History, Strategies, Voices*, p. 1.

The transition of the art critic from “spiritual leader” to “critic-as-curator” or “critic-as-dealer” is a phenomenon that in a way marked the art world of the 1990s. It was brought by dramatic changes in the art world itself, on which this changing role itself had a large impact, whether positive or negative. That critics played and are playing such multiple roles in the contemporary art arena complicates the understanding of art criticism in today’s China.¹³

Actually in Qian’s text “spiritual leader” cannot be separated from “critic-as-curator.” Some “critic-as-curators” such as Gao Minglu and Li Xianting at a special historical moment were respected as “spiritual leaders.” As Qian points out:

This new role of critic-as-curator, though the majority of the critics were not yet familiar with the concept of curatorship, won art critics in China unprecedented honour and respect as well as power that was beyond the older generation’s expectation. Such a situation culminated during the ’89 China/Avant Garde exhibition co-organized by Gao Minglu, Li Xianting and others, which was held in early 1989 at the China National Gallery in Beijing. This exhibition won both Gao and Li fame as “spiritual leaders.”¹⁴

Not every “critic-as-curator” could win fame as “spiritual leader.” Only a few critics, who had received good academic training “from art academies,” a special “position in between the official and semi-official,” and intention to “promote their modernism-oriented ideas,” could be “spiritual leader.”¹⁵ But there were new roles for the critics; among them the most important one is “critic-as-dealer.”

Since the mid-1990s, the art market in China began to grow. “The desire to invest in art made sponsorship available to art critics who were eager to realize their ideas in exhibitions that seemed ideologically less dangerous. Many critics willingly took the role of curators, and the majority of important exhibitions throughout the 1990s were organized by these critics/curators.”¹⁶ Most of these shows did not get financial support from the government. The critic-as-curators had to find sponsorship by themselves. They did not only need to satisfy

¹³ Qian Zhijian, “The Changing Role of Critics in the 1990s”, p. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

the commercial purposes of their investors, but also needed to earn a living by curating exhibitions. “To make art criticism a profession in China seems to be extraordinarily difficult and challenging” in the 1990s, as Qian reports:

For many of the critics, to survive as a professional/independent critic is likely very often a question. They receive very low fees for their writings from publishers, and nothing from art galleries or museums when their writings come up with certain exhibitions. In 1993, critics Yi Ying and Yin Shuangxi drafted the so-called Critics’ Agreement, which declared that critics had the right to receive payment from artists who requested their articles. Thirty-six critics from different cities signed the agreement.¹⁷

As the art market started to boom by the end of 1990s, critics could manage art exhibitions and shows by buying and selling art works. “Again, for financial reasons, some critics started to try to play the role of critic-as-dealer.”¹⁸ A few critics ventured to open their own galleries and were finally away from art criticism.

4. The Developments in Chinese Art Criticism

Based on Qian’s observation, art critics in the 1990s could be divided into three groups: art commentators for political purpose, critic-as-curator or “spiritual leader” for academic purpose, and critic-as-curator or critic-as-dealer for commercial purpose. Through the development of art criticism from the 1990s into the 21st century, the divisions between the three groups, that is, political criticism, academic criticism, and commercial criticism are becoming more and more apparent.

Political art criticism dominated the art circle before the 1990s. After entering the 1990s, this kind of art criticism began to decline. But it did not disappear. The political art criticism waxes and wanes as the political situation changes. When capitalism surpassed socialism in the 1990s, political art criticism waned and commercial art criticism waxed. Recently there seems to be a return of political art criticism because of a great shift in international and domestic politics.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Academic art criticism has been very weak, but not totally absent. It is weak because there seems to be no place for art criticism in academia. Universities do not consider art criticism an academic discipline. The publication of art criticism is not counted as an academic achievement and so does not contribute to the promotion of university professors. However, the situation in literary criticism is very different. There are positions of literary criticism in the universities, and the publication on literary criticism can help professors in the universities, especially the literature departments, get promoted. Despite these issues, academic art criticism still survives. It played and continues to play an important role in breaking the dominance of political and commercial art criticism.

The academic value of art criticism is questioned because it is inextricably linked to the art market. As the art market flourishes, the independence of academic criticism in China is put into question. It is undeniable that most art criticism in China is commercial criticism. Oddly enough, this is not the case with criticism in other art forms. In addition to literary criticism which we mentioned early, theater criticism, dance criticism, music criticism, and even film criticism are not heavily commercialized. One of the reasons is that the art market is more developed and active than the market of music, dance, theatre and so on.

In short, in the tripartition of art criticism in China, political criticism seems to be outdated, academic art criticism is only a flash in the pan, and what is prevailing at this moment is commercial criticism. The three groups or types of art criticism can also be treated, loosely speaking, as a sequence from the political through the academic into the commercial. It should be noted, however, that these three kinds of art criticism actually exist together, never totally replacing one another.

5. The Changes in Western Art Criticism

Art criticism in the West is also undergoing such changes or developments. For example, James Elkins observes a change from judgment to description. "In the last three or four decades," Elkins writes, "critics have begun to avoid judgments altogether, preferring to describe or evoke the art rather than say what they think of it."¹⁹ While, most critics witness a change from judgment to

¹⁹ James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago 2003, p. 12.

interpretation instead of a change from judgment to description. According to Carroll's observation, "the majority of critical theories on offer today are primarily theories of interpretation. They are about getting the meaning, including the symptomatic meaning, out of artworks. They take interpretation to be the leading task of criticism."²⁰ However, Carroll himself is different from the majority. He is arguing for a criticism based on evaluation. He writes:

In contrast, I argue that evaluation is of the essence of criticism, especially in terms of the kind of artistic category or genre that the artwork at hand instantiates. Whereas I maintain that evaluation is central to the criticism of art, many of the reigning theories of criticism today appear to treat interpretation as key. But I can even envision examples of criticism sans interpretation, so long as they do include evaluation.²¹

If Carroll is right, evaluation may return in the future and there might be another turn or change from interpretation to evaluation. This seems to mean that the three elements of art criticism, namely, description, interpretation, and evaluation, are given different emphasis in different times. There is a circle between the three main elements.

Irit Rogoff's view is different. She charts a sequence of developments in western art criticism from criticism through critique into criticality:

It seems to me that within the space of a relatively short period we have been able to move from criticism to critique to criticality – from finding fault, to examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic (as in the case of all the aforementioned work on and in museums), to operating from an uncertain ground which, while building on critique, wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in a relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames.²²

²⁰ Noël Carroll, *On Criticism*, Routledge, New York 2009, p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Irit Rogoff, "Looking Awar: Participations in Visual Culture", in: *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, G. Butt (Ed.), Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford & Carlton 2005, p. 119.

The sequence of developments that Rogoff finds in western art criticism is different from the sequence in Chinese art criticism, that is, as I mentioned early, from political criticism through academic criticism to commercial criticism. But there are some relations between them that should be mentioned. The change from criticism to critique in the West is somehow similar to the change from political art criticism to academic art criticism in China. It is true that political art criticism or art commentary normally flatters mainstream art that caters to the ideology instead of finding fault that is the characteristic of criticism in the West. In other words, political art criticism in China is prone to make positive judgment, while art criticism in the West prefers the negative. But both the positive and the negative are judgment or evaluation. There is also negative judgment in Chinese political criticism, especially when it deals with the non-mainstream art such as avant-garde art. In short, both criticism in the West and political art criticism in China emphasize evaluation or judgment. Whether the evaluation is positive or negative, it is a judgment.

Critique in the West is similar to academic art criticism in China insofar as both emphasize analysis and interpretation. The change from political art criticism to academic art criticism is similar to the change from criticism to critique in the West, since both changes means a shift from judgment and evaluation to analysis and interpretation. In the stage of critique in the West and the academic art criticism in China, both Western and Chinese critics prefer to describe, analyze and interpret from a neutral and objective perspective rather than to judge and evaluate on the basis of political ideologies or aesthetic point of views.

Criticality, the third stage in Rogoff's sequence, is unheard of in the Chinese art community. For most Chinese art critics and aestheticians, criticality is a totally new concept. What is criticality? According to Rogoff and others, criticism in the West is in trouble. Neither the criticism focused on evaluation nor the critique concentrated on analysis and interpretation could accommodate contemporary art that is so obsessed with changing and challenging. The only way for art criticism to get itself out of crisis is to engage in the creation of art. Art criticism is no longer something about art, such as description, interpretation or evaluation of art, but a part of art. Art criticism should change from descriptive, interpretative, or evaluative criticism into performative criticism, in order to respond to new kinds of art that are themselves unpredictable events or improvisational performances. It does not mean that the value or meaning of

an artwork is realized by the interpretation of art critic, as conceived by Danto's theory of the "artworld." According to Danto, to see something as art requires "something the eye cannot descry"—a knowledge of the history and theory of contemporary art.²³ Art critics, not artists, create the "atmosphere of theory," which is the defining property of art. However, according to Rogoff, art critics are not only engaged in interpretation but also in practice. In this sense, art critics are also artists. James Elkins observes this tendency in art criticism. He says:

One of the principal contemporary tendencies in criticism is what might be called performative criticism. By that I mean critical writing that is construed as performance, or as performative; it is intended to respond to new kinds of art that are themselves evanescent, body-centered, and time-based, such as performance art.²⁴

Tirdad Zolghadr considers Rogoff's sequence of development of western art criticism, from criticism through critique to criticality as a successful summary. But he argues or acknowledges that the "process is, of course, easily parodied as affected and pompous."²⁵ James Elkins especially doubts Rogoff's criticality. He says:

My difficulty with it is that I am not convinced that "criticality" has any coherent definition. In practice, Rogoff uses it to describe situations in which the critic's role, her purpose and voice, are so much at risk – so intimately engaged with the artist's work – that her subjectivity, and her practice, may alter, and in turn alter the reception of the work. I find it at once a hypertrophied description of any phenomenologically understood encounter art, and – most important in this context – not cogent as a contribution to the historical lineage that produced the first two terms, criticism and critique.²⁶

What I am interested is not the definition of criticality. Literally speaking, criticality means a state of critical urgency. My question is: Could we identify a state

²³ Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (19/1964), p. 579.

²⁴ James Elkins, "Afterword", in: *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, J. Khonsary and M. O'Brian (Eds.), Artspeak and Fillip Editions, Vancouver 2010, p. 160.

²⁵ Tirdad Zolghadr, "Worse than Kenosis", in: *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, p. 19.

²⁶ James Elkins, "Afterword", in *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, p. 160.

of critical urgency in Chinese art criticism? Could we find a parallel between criticality in the West and commercial art criticism in China?

6. The Criticality in Chinese Art Criticism

In recent years, the most salient recent phenomenon in Chinese art criticism is abuse and fighting between critics. These abuses and fights could be regarded as the Chinese way of interpretation of criticality in the West.

These are some examples. In the spring of 2013, curator and critic Bao Dong and Cui Cancan abused each other via Sina Weibo, the Chinese Twitter, since Cui criticized the exhibition “On/Off” of which Bao Dong was one of curators. They agreed to settle their argument by a fight in the middle night of the 28th of February. The fight did not happen since Bao Dong did not appear at the last moment. In the summer of 2014, curator and critic Duan Jun criticized performance artist Han Xiao’s work at a conference in Shenlongjia. This event provoked abuse and threats toward Duan from Han. Duan was so angry that he beat Han. As a consequence, Duan was detained for a week. In the winter of 2015, an associate professor of China Academy of Art Zhu Yeqing released an announcement via Wechat that he would like to challenge four full professors of the Academy, including the president and three vice presidents. In the second half of 2016, there was a large-scale quarrel of long duration between poet and critic Yu Xinqiao and curator and critic Liang Kegang as representatives of one group and curator and critic Zhu Qi and Wen Song as representatives of another group. Many critics and curators engaged in this quarrel. Recently the debate about artist Chen Danqing has been intensifying. The abusing and fighting in the art circle attracted a lot of media attention. The critics were somehow becoming famous through fighting and abusing each other.

192

In addition to a focus on abuse and fight, Chinese art criticism is full of flattery. Abuse and flattery have become two sides of commercial criticism in China. Critics raise awareness by abusing, in order to make money by flattering.

So criticality in Chinese art criticism is really in a crisis or a state of critical urgency. It is obviously negative. This crisis is the inevitable result of commercial art criticism. Neither political art criticism nor commercial art criticism can make art criticism healthy.

7. The Return of Critique

After 40 years development, art criticism in China has changed from political criticism into commercial criticism. The pressures of ideology are replaced by the worries about capitalist co-option of criticism. How to get rid of the political pressures and commercial worries? One way might be to develop independent or academic art criticism. Compared to political and commercial criticism, independent criticism is very underdeveloped. Firstly, newspapers and magazines do not have space for art criticism and so they do not have their own art critics, such as Arthur Danto for *The Nation*, Roberta Smith for *The New York Times*, Peter Schjeldahl for *The New Yorker*, and so on. Most art critics in China only write for catalogues and commercial magazines. They are not paid by newspapers or magazines but galleries, museums or artists themselves. Secondly, art academies and universities have education programs for art history and aesthetics, but they do not have programs for art criticism. Art critics in China have different educational backgrounds, such as aesthetics, art history, literary theory, and so on, but nobody was originally trained as art critic. Thirdly, art criticism essays have neither literary value nor academic value. On the one hand, these essays cannot be read as fiction or literary prose. On the other hand, professors in universities and art academies cannot get a promotion by these essays. They need to publish academic papers and books in art history or aesthetics.

Because of the pressure of capitalist co-option, criticality does not look like a promising solution. The orientation of criticism in China seems not to be from criticism to critique to criticality but from criticality back to critique. We need to develop the academic, professional, or independent criticism that amounts to the critique in Rogoff's sequence. The good news is that some universities such as Peking University began to extend the program of aesthetics and art history to include art criticism. The department of art history and the graduate program of aesthetics join up and set up a new department of art theory, history and criticism. Thanks to the joint efforts of Peking University and other universities, art finally separated from literature and became an independent discipline in China in 2012. In addition to art practices, art research, or, in Chinese *yishuxue* (artology), is developing very fast. Together with art theory, art history, and art management, art criticism has become an integral part of artology. We are expecting to see that the critics who are trained in the program of art criticism

can provide more detailed descriptions, insightful interpretations and objective evaluations, rather than engaging in flattery and abuse. When art criticism is practised as a discipline that aims at the production of knowledge, instead of political grandstanding or commercial collusion, criticism in China will have bright prospects.

Wang Jie*, Meng Fanjun**

Aesthetic Anthropology: Constructing A New System of Contemporary Aesthetic and Art Criticism¹

I. The Context for Proposing Aesthetic Anthropology

The pervasiveness of consumerism, Internet plus, globalization, and excessive entertainment is having impact on every discipline, causing steadily growing obstructions with which scholars must cope. Aesthetics is among those disciplines confronting this fourfold complex problem.

Consumerism brings beauty and artwork into everyday life in the form of commodities. The ubiquity of cultural object imagery is becoming an important subject for aesthetic research, moving beyond the previous interest in fine art and niche socio-culture. The Internet-based dissemination of knowledge and aesthetic emotions makes it possible for aesthetics, a traditionally philosophical humanistic discipline, to become cross-disciplinary, integrating humanities and social sciences, even natural science in complex ways. Amid the conflicts and reconciliation between globalization and anti-globalization, the latest aesthetic experience belonging to the common people remains the main dynamic power in the generation of aesthetic cognition and emotion. The constant collision between local aesthetic experience and global aesthetic emotional unity highlights the regular inclinations that dominate the aesthetic emotions of earth-dwellers. Excessive entertainment places new fetters of everyday aesthetics on humans, who are deprived of fetter-breaking capacities as they immerse themselves in sensory pleasure. It is therefore urgent for aesthetic scholars all over the world to reiterate the need for free, well-rounded, balanced human development. Correspondingly, studies on the tragic humanism deserve high priority in Chinese aesthetics and art criticism.

195

1 1. Major Project of National Social Science Fund: Study on Essential Issues and Criticism Patterns of Contemporary Aesthetics (15ZDB023); 2. Project funded by China Postdoctoral Science Foundation: Study on Zeki's Neuroaesthetics

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The theories and methodologies of aesthetic anthropology may help tackle these four challenges in the new era. Specifically, aesthetic anthropology is grounded in the concepts of philosophical anthropology and the methods of cultural anthropology: it takes local aesthetic experience as the core subject; it studies aesthetic mechanisms in specific historical and cultural circumstances, and seeks a solution to track down problems among the collection of local aesthetic experiences from now into the future.

II. Analyzing the Key Concepts of Aesthetic Anthropology

Modern anthropology has existed for more than 150 years. It differs greatly from classical anthropology in both core concept and signature methodology. In this section we present a run-down of core issues to consider when constructing the new system of aesthetics and art criticism based on the combination of differences in concept and methodology. These core issues constitute the primary aesthetic differences between modern and classical anthropology. Modern anthropology is characterized by the pursuit of objective scientific concepts and empirical research in the field, both of which serve to identify the material foundation and social historical traditions of the human spiritual world – that is, to elaborately depict local aesthetic experience and aesthetic institutions.

In a sense, however, aesthetic anthropology has followed the value orientation and behavioral patterns of classical anthropology, adopting the humanistic ideals of the latter. In the space-time continuum, aesthetic anthropology refers to the past, the present, and the future simultaneously. It represents a commemoration of the past, a pursuit and respect of utopian ideals, and an action for the present. Built on the past, aesthetic anthropology has also improved upon the past. In a nutshell, aesthetic anthropology is based on empirical evidence, while its value orientation is humanistic.

Three aspects may introduce the core issues and key concepts of aesthetic anthropology:

1. Field: The Very Place Within Which Local Experience and Dominant Culture Interact

Field investigation is an iconic method used in modern anthropology. However, anthropologists have yet to provide an ontological definition of “field.” There-

fore, “What is field?” is the first question posed in anthropology and aesthetic anthropology, a necessary and unavoidable question for the establishment of either discipline.

In anthropology, “field” is considered a natural, self-evident space, a space “beyond our living” where field investigation is conducted. From an everyday perspective, this definition presents no error of principle. Given the need to construct a discipline, if the concept of “field” has not undergone ontological construction and dialectical interpretation, and if field has neither a summary of its universality in the broadest sense nor an analysis of its specialty in the most specific sense, then it cannot serve as a first cornerstone for either anthropology or aesthetic anthropology to become a rigorous discipline. This lack is clearly unacceptable.

Given the spatial traits of field research in the past, we may offer both a closed and an open definition of “field.” Both definitions represent a summary of physical experiences and must be conceptualized metaphysically.

As the first space to generate original human experience, “field” is primitive, simple, and relative; it also is the very space wherein local experience and dominant culture interact with each other. All field research seeks to obtain original experience as its first aim, as such experience is the liveliest and simplest for human sensation and cognition to comprehend.

As we analyzed the dialectical relationship between local experience and dominant culture, we explored the ontological meaning of “field”. In the primitive space, local experience is not only considered to be the knowledge, emotion, tradition, and institution of a barren land, but also essentially to include communication with and infiltration into dominant culture. There are two ways to understand this notion:

On one hand, local experience is not culturally insulated, but rather influenced by the dominant culture at the periphery. Ripples of this peripheral influence reach the dominant culture, causing new influence. Such is the interaction between local experience and the dominant culture. In *From the Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society* by Xiaotong FEI, the “Elderly’s Politics” is not a primitive cultural phenomenon in a feudal rural institution. Instead, it is a specific form of Confucian culture like “governance with the power of virtue” or “government as

parents” in rural political structure.² Cultural concepts found in places of dominant culture and in rural institutions are like two same seeds of thought, one planted in the royal court and the other in the countryside – the difference in environment leads to the difference in presentation. This was demonstrated in a case in our field research. In a local performance gathering at Fuli Town, Yangshuo County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, there was both reference to mainstream political ideology – commodity economy – plus the local culture, which is the main way of telling cultural stories among the Zhuang nationality. The local tales of filial piety and the value system of mainstream political ideology were seamlessly knitted into one during the local performance.³

On the other hand, indigenous cultures in South America or Africa are entirely strange, if not marginal, to Westerners. Indigenous local experience seems unrelated to mainstream Western culture, but at the moment it is observed and chronicled, it becomes a component of and a reference frame for the mainstream culture. That is to say, being local is relative to being global and dominant. If there’s nothing global, there’s nothing local. For instance, the Law of Proximity and the Law of Similarity seem to be basic patterns of the savage mind, but how can there be any such pattern without the comparison frames of experimental thinking and modern categorical thinking? Therefore, local experience and the dominant culture coexist and communication between them occurs in the “field.”

Based on the discussions above, we believe that, although field is home to a host of primitive and simple human experiences, it is the very place in which local experience and the dominant culture are communicated. In a relatively mobile field culture, field is not a fixed closed-off space but a moving system of spatial coordinates. From a theoretical point of view, it’s necessary to attach a contemporary meaning to this “mobile field.” Field is not only the peripheral area of the Third World or a forsaken ancient village, but exists in every nook and cranny of our modern life, in geographical spaces like residential areas, hospitals, schools, cinemas and malls, and in special geographical spaces of humanistic interest. These are the basic features of “field”: any place that of-

² Fei, Xiaotong, *From the Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society*, Shanghai People’s Publishing House, Shanghai 2006, pp. 40–43.

³ Wang Jie, *On Modern Aesthetics: Anthropological Reflections*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2014, pp. 11–14.

fers primitive experience, any place that offers conflict or communication between local experience and the dominant culture, and any modern geographical space that is primitive, simple, and relatively mobile. The understanding of field has undergone an ontological transition from a specific wilderness to the modern mobile field concept. “Mobile field,” which we propose as an ontological assumption, has the historical support of anthropology. “From 1979 to 1995, Xiaotong FEI proposed the juxtaposition of sociology, ethnology, and anthropology, during which the three disciplines regained vitality in China.”⁴ FEI proposed the need to develop this trio of studies in a cross-disciplinary, fitting, and concerted way.⁵ In fact, the closed-off concept of field to which we previously referred is similar to the subject of ethnological studies; the open concept of field is similar to the subject of sociology studies.

Alongside the ontological pursuit of the definition of “field,” the subjects of aesthetic anthropology extend to every part of society – the untouched ethnic spaces as well as the unique urban spaces. Therefore, combining the disciplines avoids the mistake of studying only the ethnic minority or the wild for aesthetic anthropology. Clarification is also made in the local experience of aesthetic anthropology by studying spatial location and spatial range. There is an additional need, however, to clarify the specifics of local experience, including material life of daily necessity and cultural life like arts, traditions, and institutions. Once a researcher refines aesthetic experiences by collecting and interpreting local experience, the subject of aesthetic anthropology obtains a firmer, stronger foothold, for example, the continuous field investigation on contemporary Chinese films conducted by Professor Jie WANG’s team at Zhejiang University.

2. Context: Cultural Space for the Interaction between Aesthetic Institutions and Social Customs

Compared to the notion of “field,” context is a concept of recycling, cultural history, and flexible compulsion. Context is the cultural sphere of field, the imma-

⁴ Hu Hongbao, *History of Chinese Anthropology*, China Remin University Press, Beijing 2005, pp. 6–7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5. In the speech on the Celebration of Ten Anniversary of the Establishment of Institute of Sociology and Anthropology of Peking University and Symposium on Discipline Construction, ‘co-existence of three disciplines’ was expressed as ‘co-existence of multiple disciplines, October 31, 1995.

terial manifestation of field specific to the space and time. Context holds sway in the generation, development, and change of local aesthetic experience.

Microscopically, the generation of context is based on human practice and cognition. Macroscopically, its generation is dually driven by the aesthetic institution of ideology and the social customs of daily life.

We have amassed massive raw materials representing the experience of Heiyi Zhuang Nationality⁶ in the studies of social customs, and conducted comparative research in aesthetic institution between Chinese and Western aesthetic experience.⁷ These two types of work concur with field research, using context analysis as the primary method.

Context analysis occupies a prominent position in aesthetic anthropology. If field investigation targets the material basics of local aesthetics, context analysis places greater focus on the cultural sphere of local aesthetics. Revolving around the dialectical relationship between local aesthetic experience and the dominant culture, field research and context analysis are geared toward objective, empirical foundation and humanistic values. The two methods are complementary and provide methodological support for the theoretical system of aesthetic anthropology.

3. Style of Practice and Orientation of Values: Inheritance and Innovation

When it comes to value orientation, aesthetic anthropology advocates the humanistic concern and tragic complexity espoused by classical anthropology. With human dignity, freedom, and emancipation as its mission, aesthetic anthropology requires aesthetic researchers to evaluate the decisive function of capital and ideology properly; to follow trends closely and grasp the subtle relationship between local aesthetic experience and global transmission of

200

⁶ Fan Xiujuan, *Aesthetic Anthropological Study on Folksongs of Zhuang Ethnic in Black Suit*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin 2013. Cheng Xuejun, *Aesthetic Anthropological Study on Culture of Zhuang Ethnic in Black Suit*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin 2013.

⁷ Tony Bennett, *Culture, Governance and Society*, Orient Publishing Centre, Shanghai, 2016. Wang Jie, "Aesthetic Habits, Cultural Conventions and Free Governance: Theoretical Interpretation of Chinese Contemporary Aesthetic Experience", *Social Scientist*, 12 (2012), pp. 120–126.

aesthetic culture; and to strike a balance between compulsory influence and respectful protection. In the process of globalization and modernization, tragic clashes are inevitable. This inevitable cultural logic in real life compels us to raise the banner of tragic humanism and provide theoretical support and guidelines for those who support the good life.

The quest for local aesthetic experience draws upon researchers' memories of the idyllic lifestyle, childhood, hometown, space of the weak, and traditional agriculture life, and stimulate their hope that by finding a connection between marginal cultures and the dominant culture; they will find a way to improve and adjust the relationship between the two cultural forms while also contrasting, balancing, and coordinating those forms.

While exploring local aesthetic experience, scholars of aesthetic anthropology may on one hand trace back to a nostalgic past in their hometown; and on the other hand, assume a futuristic utopian new world. If the nostalgic past is tantamount to obsessing on the primitive experience of agricultural society, the utopian new world portrays the pragmatic expectation of an industrial capitalism or other social forms, such as communism in the future. These two value orientations lead to two modes of practice for aesthetic anthropology: inheritance and innovation.

Given the four challenges of the times, the protection and inheritance of "local aesthetic experience" pose a global difficulty. We cannot make "local aesthetic experience" develop in pace with the times simply by offering protections. "Local aesthetic experience" cannot truly grow into a solid cultural entity with only the help from others. In the globalization and Internet era, every local culture is challenged by invading foreign cultures. When a local culture fails to resist or absorb a foreign one, a significant objective remains finding ways to make the traditionally closed-off "local aesthetic experience" more adaptable, and to strengthen the capacity of "outward transmission."

The excellent quality of local aesthetic experience cannot be obtained solely dependent on others. Indigenous innovation is truly needed. There is an urgent need to pass on and improve traditional aesthetic experiences, to utilize modern cultural capital, and to take an effective approach to overcome the crisis

of fissures between value and value-in-use of “local cultural and art forms” brought about by cultural capital.

III. Major Ways to Enhance Aesthetic Anthropology

1. The Shortcomings of Current Cultural Anthropology Methodologies and the Solutions

1). *To Strengthen the Philosophical Anthropology Dimension*

When local knowledge is guided by philosophy, general knowledge will precede local knowledge. Without philosophy, all acquired knowledge is simply scattered attempts at understanding reality; it is not science.⁸

Claude Levi-Strauss “gave anthropology a rational training and won respect for the first time for a social science.” This respect was extended because Levi-Strauss adopted structuralist concepts to systematically analyze scattered anthropological records, thus making anthropology a systematic discipline.⁹

When interpreting and analyzing anthropological records, which philosophical stance or school of thought is the correct one upon which to rely? Is it structuralism or psychoanalysis? Is it hermeneutics or existentialism? It is hard to settle upon one single answer. Inevitably, multiple philosophical approaches must be taken to analyze complex anthropological records. During this process we, on one hand, resort to thinking from a “meta-philosophical perspective” to critique the prerequisite of materials and construction of aesthetic anthropology; on the other hand, we take Marxism’s historical materialism as the starting point and main objective. In the final evaluation, we conduct effective analysis of the basic subject – local aesthetic experience based on all the actual materials of aesthetic anthropology, with an aim to generate holistic aesthetic experience and interpretation.

202

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1996, p. 3.

⁹ Wang Jie, *On Modern Aesthetics: Anthropological Reflections*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2014, pp. 71–72.

2). *To Break Through the Limits of Simple Fieldwork and In-depth Interviews*

By placing aesthetic anthropology in philosophical context, we aim to solve the methodological defects of being scattered and shallow. Fieldwork includes observation, one-on-one interviews, in-depth interviews, and group questionnaires, etc.; these methods yield a daunting amount of first-hand materials representing local aesthetic experience. The first issue that arises is how to interpret those materials.

Generally speaking, simple analysis, summary, and deduction after fieldwork seldom enable us to explore local aesthetic experience at a deep level. Summative local knowledge, also known as ethnography,¹⁰ offers a panoramic view of indigenous residents' culture. As the field of anthropology grows, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of indigenous residents – immerse ourselves in their experiences – to enable such in-depth exploration. Only then can we understand their understanding, and find the very structure of aesthetic cognitive emotions in the field.

3). *To Transcend the Limits of Empirical Research Limited to Contemporary Aesthetic Studies?*

The foundation of anthropology as an empirical social science lies in having first-hand empirical research materials. Empirical materials are drawn from anthropological methods like field investigation, in-depth interviews, thick-description ethnography, and so on. However, empirical researches in anthropology cannot cope with every problem. On one hand, we must ask whether it is possible to collect objective first-hand materials; on the other hand, we must study and ponder the structure of contemporary Chinese people's aesthetic emotion and its complex presentation.

First, we believe that neither “Zero Degree Writing” nor “documentaries” can be totally objective, and the same is true of “thick description” in anthropology. Any scholar who knows the relationship between subjective stance and objective description and who grasps the nature and structure of subjective-objective relationships can achieve relative objectivity while conducting empirical research.

¹⁰ Wang Mingming, *What is Anthropology*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2003, pp. 64–65.

The Team of Contemporary Aesthetics and Art Criticism at Zhejiang University conducts a study on the very place where contemporary Chinese aesthetic experience occurs – contemporary Chinese films. By accumulating, classifying, and sublimating aesthetic experience, the Team combines empirical data with aesthetic experience, reviews comments by candidates for graduate and post-graduate students or by post-doctoral research fellows, truthfully presents the public's common aesthetic responses to contemporary Chinese films, and thus chronicles the structure of the audience's aesthetic emotion. The Team has discussed the following movies: *Lost*, *Hidden Man*, *Ash Is Purest White*, *The Great Buddha+* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. By performing thick description of aesthetic cognitive emotion, the Team seeks to find a path toward ethnic aesthetics and provide cognitive and emotional support for practical ethics.

On the other hand, aesthetic researches are bound to come to an assumption of ethical outlets, and it is impossible to grasp the value stance of any research without having a direction for ethical practice. Hermeneutic anthropology master Clifford Geertz said, "The basic mission of hermeneutic anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to let us know the answers of other people who graze other sheep in other valleys, so that these answers can be put on records of anthropology open to inquiry and retrieval."¹¹ The mission, then, is to set up a platform for equal interaction between hosts and guests. Thick description in itself is both the process and the result of this interaction. Geertz also advocated "the need to put oneself in these predicaments," but his approach is fundamentally different from Marxist historical practice. The former ends in "thick description," while the latter must perform social practice for cultural governance, spiritual and social innovation, and even the free and equal development of all human beings. The living soul of Marxism lies in paying attention to, critiquing, and transforming reality. From Marx and Engels all the way to modern or contemporary Western and Chinese Marxists, these researchers are not concerned about reality but rather engaged in social revolution and constructionist movements.¹² The humanistic stance we advocate is rooted in the social and historical practices of Marxism, mirroring the connection between theoretical research and social practice. It also can be seen in the integration of

204

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, New York 1973, pp. 33–34.

¹² Wang Jie, "Questioning Style of Aesthetics to Social Reality", *Social Scientist*, 3 (2011), p. 6.

theoretical research into people's real concerns. This represents the ethical and practical outlet for aesthetic anthropology.

2. Basic Methodology of Aesthetic Anthropology

The basic methodologies of aesthetic anthropology are threefold: 1). To study the aesthetic significance of primitive experience and art texts in the specific cultural context rather than simple form studies; 2). To pay special attention to avoiding any form of culture-centrism or cultural superiority and to conduct field work flexibly (e.g. via observation, interview, dialogue, writing aesthetic ethnography), using the series of discussions on contemporary Chinese films as an ethnographic research of contemporary aesthetic and emotional structure; and 3). To return to the original intention of anthropology, which is to study and expound upon humanity and humanism. Tragic humanism is still of importance to contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

3. Coping Strategies of Aesthetic Anthropology

To cope with the ubiquity of entertainment in everyday aesthetic life, we call for a return to the awakening of tragedy in aesthetics and art criticism, and the all-round development of people in a humanistic structure. To settle down the converging power of the global community of aesthetic culture, we expect self-assertion of the subjectivity of local aesthetic experience and that local culture to become more adaptable and to be transmitted outwardly under the premise of diversity. To reject the pervasiveness of artwork in the era of consumerism, we insist upon adhering to and perfecting the metaphysical principles of aesthetics, and propose that art criticism be critical in nature. To cope with the presence of Internet-based aesthetics and art criticism, we are developing a multi-disciplinary methodology for aesthetic research and a multi-disciplinary path to art criticism.

IV. Film Criticism with Aesthetic Anthropology: The Examples of *Wolf Warriors II* and *The Wandering Earth*

1. The box office earnings of *Wolf Warriors II* amounted to 5 billion yuan, a great case of phenomenal film in recent years. The amazing box office yield of contemporary Chinese films stems from the public's need for better cultural life. Yet much remains to be done before the caliber of local culture is presented accurately in films. The Team at Zhejiang University has invited expert and schol-

arly deliberation; presented multi-dimensional, comprehensive discussions of *Wolf Warriors II*; analyzed the single case for advantages and weaknesses; and sought growth points for Chinese culture under critiques.¹³

After the critical debate, we have offered a comprehensive presentation of the film's success and dilemmas and provided constructive opinions of the film with thick local features. Those who engage in the debate believe that the film's domestic success has multiple cultural or contextual causes; for instance, the film was aired on several important historical memorial days, which triggered emotional responses among the Chinese. However, the film's overseas box office earnings are not as good as in domestic areas, which means that the aforesaid "local aesthetic experience" cannot be grasped by overseas audiences – i.e. it is not globally adaptable or capable of good outward transmission. The team suggested that in order to increase the film's worldwide acceptability, filmmakers should find a balance between "local experience" and "global acceptance."

The traditional Kungfu representation of national pride satisfies the psychological needs of domestic filmgoers, and creates an aesthetic mode of fighting back as opposed to non-resistance which mirrors the lack of masculinity in China's major metropolitan areas. The expression of emotional nuances in the film is somewhat rough, given the film's setting of international humanitarian relief; and makes it difficult to touch people with the power of tragic humanism. A truly world-wide film may be achieved by depicting simple events in a simple life.

After comparing the film with other classical movies made in China and elsewhere (such as *007*), debaters have offered critiques on the choice of a main social theme versus a marginal one; the expression and moderation of nationalism; the balance of aesthetic-cognitive structures in third-world countries, developed countries, and China specifically; the choice of main character image; and the audio-visual presentation of the film.

As in this case, we have encouraged group discussion and presented the source of local aesthetic experience in contemporary reality. We have borrowed from

¹³ Wang Jie, Gao Youpeng and Zhou Xiaoyan, "Utopia: A Story of Man—A Discussion on Warrior Wolf II", *Shanghai Art Review*, 5 (2017), p. 4.

anthropological critiques to explore the generative rules and future orientations of phenomenal Chinese films.

2. The box office income of *The Wandering Earth* reached 4.6 billion, and it is subsidiary to *Wolf Warriors II*. It has become another phenomenal Chinese film. Our film reviewing team in Zhejiang University conducted an aesthetic anthropological analysis of it. Although the film has achieved tremendous box office success, it is not judged as a landmark Chinese science fiction film by discussion. On one hand, the film meets the rational needs of the current Chinese film market, but violates its own presupposed rational context and becomes the product of irrational emotions. On the other hand, the success of emotional control in industrial film can be attributed to the absence of profound tragic humanism. The industry has controlled human emotions to a precise degree. But this kind of manipulation is based on the technical level of cultural industry, which is far from true aesthetic emotion itself. This technique of industrialized and technical emotional manipulation is actually a manifestation of aesthetic ethical imbalance. This imbalance directly leads to the distortion of aesthetic emotion and its separation from reality. It is a kind of spiritual and cultural stimulant that breaks away from the daily emotions of the masses and from the simple state of human nature, and attempts to have direct impact on human perception with extreme emotions. This mood comes and goes quickly, and this kind of emotional control is ubiquitous in movies. In the era of fast food culture, this effect is beyond reproach. It's like eating an ordinary breakfast – you don't experience a residual aftertaste for three months afterward.

However, if the film proposes to depict a significant theme, which represents death and despair to all audiences, the public will be disgusted if the filmmaker presents it in this fast-food way. Take this film as an example. Imagine that the earth's population has dropped from more than 7 billion to 3 billion, each family has been cut in half directly, and each family must face the choice of which family member lives or dies. The grief would be enough to immerse mankind in despair for decades, or even centuries. For example, the losses of the Tangshan and Wenchuan earthquakes still cause people pain. In this film, more than 3 billion people died: what should be the state of collective emotions? We cannot imagine that kind of sadness on earth, with corpses littering the landscape, and death ice sculptures of relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues everywhere. We really cannot imagine how long it would take for human beings to appease

from this disaster. In such a context, the lyric words and sentences that middle school students blurt out – such as “hope is something as precious as a diamond” – seem so frivolous; the phenomenon of father-hatred brought about by the adolescent rebellion seems so childish; the fact that teenagers wandering around during the rebellious period happen to save the earth, seems that much more comical. In the film, all these features are important to plot cohesion.

The emotional atmosphere stems from the context of the death of 3 billion people. Of course, this sentimental manipulation technique is not only seen in *The Wandering Earth*, but also in many other Hollywood blockbusters. The crux of industrial movies lies in breaking away from the presupposed context, but also from the context of the times. This phenomenon is similar to direct injection of emotional hormones to stimulate the audience. Filmgoers want to enjoy aesthetic spiritual products, but they only buy industrial cultural hormones – sometimes stimulants, sometimes tear bombs, which lack the ethical and moral construction of the future. From this point of view, many of the emotional complexities of this film are the products of ethical imbalance, which fails to satisfy the needs of the masses for a better life.

In addition, misunderstanding of modern tragedy creates a problem in positioning the emotional outlet of the film. The film presupposes a disaster in human history. This vast martyrdom brings pain, destruction, and despair. Resistance and salvation are human instincts. The essence of tragedy lies in the incompleteness of salvation. After all, the old times will pass and the new society will come. Between the old and the new, the result of salvation is not important. The process of salvation represents the glory of humanism, due to the release of individual or collective cognition, emotion, and will. Thus the suspenseful ending will be more meaningful.

Although the absence of modern tragedy leads to so many problems in the creation of this movie, Chinese-style misery provides another kind of spiritual choice. Rooted in Chinese experience, Chinese-style misery inspired the collective efforts of the characters to fight against their fate, whatever the result would be. This is more valuable than despair and failing to act caused by physiological oppression in disaster movies. From this perspective, this film shows its unique value.

V. Reflections on Aesthetic Anthropology

1. Theoretically, aesthetic anthropology and art criticism are similar; however, differences remain, mainly in that the research subject of aesthetic anthropology is active aesthetic experience, rather than material artwork. Therefore, aesthetic meaning flows amid multiple contexts and forms the object of aesthetic anthropological research. Thus the discipline is obviously contemporary.

Aesthetic anthropology has the systematic structure of aesthetic theory; boasts metaphysical critical thinking; and features the completeness, systems, and unity of ontology, methodology, and value theory. Art criticism is the application of aesthetic and philosophical theory, with stress placed on theories that are critical, practical, and guide the future.

2. In terms of methodology, aesthetic anthropology combines the empirical research methods of philosophical anthropology with those of cultural anthropology, and strives to solve complex issues of contemporary aesthetics by taking a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach.

Both Chinese and Western anthropology boast long histories. Anthropology, through the course of its development, has different priorities and means of expression, but is consistent in research perspectives and the openness and inclusiveness of research methods. In the Internet era, aesthetic anthropology has become a system open to any research on humanity's aesthetic issues, so there are enough academic resources to solve complex issues in contemporary aesthetics.

3. There is a prejudicial view that aesthetic anthropology can only study the aesthetic culture of ethnic minorities and cannot study the complex problems of contemporary aesthetics, which we believe is a slightly biased misunderstanding of the discipline. With our metaphysical arguments of field, we have opened up more space for research: aesthetic anthropology methodology includes methods from both ethnic aesthetic studies and sociological aesthetic studies.

After a long period of accumulation, aesthetic anthropology has gradually developed a theoretical system. Through ontological construction and reflection

on methodology, we are basically able to solve the aforementioned four complex problems of our times. We expect more aesthetic researchers to discuss aesthetic anthropology with us, so we may promote contemporary aesthetics together.

Qingben Li*

China's Internet Movie and Its Industrial Development¹

Internet movie is a new form of art industry in the age of new media. According to Marshall McLuhan, the content of any medium is always another medium. "The content of writing is speech, just as written word is the content of print and print is the content of a telegraph."² Similarly, we can also logically say that the content of Internet movie is movie. In other words, what we usually call "Internet movie" is the extension of movie in the network media. Since the new century, Internet movies have made rapid development in China, and attracted widespread attention from all social circles. At the same time, it is worth deep and careful studies in academic circles.

Specifically speaking, the development process of Internet movie in China has gone through three stages: Internet short film, micro film and Internet big movie, which also constitute three main types of Internet movies.

I. Internet Short Film: UGC and Parody of Traditional Film

Internet short film is the initial type of Internet movie. It usually refers to videos with plot and story made by netizens (unprofessional film maker) and uploaded to the Internet autonomously. It is a typical UGC (User Generated Content) product in the era of Web 2.0. Specifically, it is formed by adapting traditional movies, recombining their fragments as material, and adding dubbing. As computers become cheaper and cheaper, and the functions of various software become more powerful and easier to use, changing dubbing, subtitles, editing and other works can be accomplished by ordinary computers and some simple software, such as Photoshop, a technique for image re-creation, which makes it possible for non-professionals to make Internet short films.

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² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, Gingko Press, Hamburg 2003, p. 19.

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Internet short film reflects some characteristics of grass-roots culture and usually takes “parody” as the main creative method. The earliest Internet short film in China is *Dashiji* (2001) and the most famous representative one is *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun* produced by Hu Ge in 2005.

Parody, also known as humorous imitation, is a borrowing and reproduction of other works, which thus constitutes a special intertextual relation between the new and the original. The borrowed work is usually classical, or is known to the general public, and the new version humorously subverts the text. *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun*, is an obvious parody of the film *Wuji* (*The Promise* 2005), directed by Chen Kaige and of the TV program “Chinese Law Report”, shown on China Central Television. It uses the report form, but its plot is based on *Wuji*, and the film pretentiously includes two irrelevant advertisements in order to subvert and exaggerate *Wuji*’s storyline. This led to a related copyright lawsuit: Chen Kaige accused Hu Ge of imitating his work and infringing his copyright. At the time, the case became a major social issue, many netizens publishing their opinions of the case. In fact, Chen Kaige’s copyright lawsuit was neither supported by law, nor by public opinion. An anonymous blogger pointed out that *Wuji* was itself an imitation and plagiarism of Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Salammbô*.³

In comparing *Wuji* with *Salammbô*, we easily conclude that Chen’s film is really an imitation and reproduction of the main characters and stories of Flaubert’s novel. For example, the heroine Qingcheng in Chen’s film is clearly based on *Salammbô*, General Guangming on Matho, the slave Kunlun on Spendius, Duke Wuhuan is an echo of Hamilcar, and *Wuji* city stands for Carthage. In addition, Chen’s film contains many visual references to the ancient Greek writer, Homer. For example, Qingcheng’s first appearance on the walls of *Wuji* is reminiscent of Helen’s appearance on the walls of Troy, and the chase between two snowmen calls to mind the chase between Achilles and Hector.

From the perspective of intertextual and intermedial theory, *Wuji* and *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun* lack in any kind of independent meaning, and easily plunge audiences into a dialogic (in Mikhail Bakhtin’s sense) network of

212

³ Unknown. “Is Qingcheng from *Salammbô*?”, www.qingdaonews.com/content/2005-12/16/content_5735880.htm, December 16, 2005.

textual and medial relations that move from imitation to parody. During World War II, Bakhtin submitted a dissertation on the French Renaissance writer Francois Rabelais, in turn an important influence upon Flaubert. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin studies the interaction between the social and the literary, advancing the notion that parody and laughter in fiction has an impact upon power structures. Heteroglossia as the manifestation of the public exercise of the freedom of speech has a positive value for the art of film. Paradoxically, after the recognition of Flaubert's influence and with the parody exercised in *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun*, the film *Wuji* achieved greater box office success throughout the country.

Like *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun*, Other Internet short films also have the characteristic of parody. For example, *Separation in October* is edited and collaged from the former Soviet film *Lenin in 1918*. It tells the story of CCTV News Commentary Department in an extremely ridiculous tone. Once the film was broadcast, it immediately triggered a strong response on the Internet. It is through the ways of parody that many Internet short films win the favour of netizens.

Internet short film is not for profit, let alone commercial operation, but it already has three parts that constitute the upstream and downstream of the industrial chain. Among them, netizens are producers, websites are broadcasters, and audiences are viewers. The problem is just that these three parties are not linked in the way the industry operates. At this time, the production scale of internet short film is small, the creation cost is high for individuals, the quality of short film is uneven, and there is no complete system with production, supply and marketing. From the point of view of industrial development, these are typical characteristics of industrial sprouting period. Anyway, the basic pattern of industrial development of Internet movies has been established in the period of Internet short films, which also lays a foundation for further exploration of profit model.

II. Micro Film: PGC and Conspiracy with the Market

Micro film refers to short videos that are viewed and played on a network platform for less than half an hour. Micro film has complete story plot, and is usually produced by professional team which is mainly different with Internet short film. In the initial stage of Internet short film, the netizens uploaded video con-

tent to the website voluntarily, and the video content needs the media platform to disseminate, and then a video website came into being. However, with the passage of time, the drawbacks of UGC mode gradually emerge, mainly manifested in: the ownership of copyright is vague, the quality of content is uncontrollable, and the content homogenization is serious. In order to solve the drawbacks of UGC mode, video websites began to explore the PGC (Professionally Generated Content) model, to seek broadcast content, and to buy off copyright and resources from professional film and television production companies.

From the perspective of profit model, micro film mainly receives financial support through advertising implantation. There are three kinds of advertisements: embedded advertisement, patch advertisement and sponsor support. It is also because of the realization of investment that the various elements of the industry can be combined. Micro films, which have gained capital injection, have embarked on the road of commercialization. Producing, broadcasting and watching movies constitute a top-down industrial chain, which completes the industrialization operation of network movies that could not be realized in the period of Internet short films.

Conspiracy with the market is the biggest characteristic of micro film. The ninety seconds of the micro film *Imminent* (2010), starring Daniel Wu is the typical conspiracy with the market. Essentially an advertisement for the Shanghai GM Company, Wu plays the role of a spokesman for a new model of Cadillac, successfully ditching his opponents in a race. Full of stunts, car chases and explosions, the entertaining aspects cannot disguise the film's real marketing purpose, especially when scenes from it were screened at the 2010 Guangzhou auto show.

214

According to Henry Lefebvre, everyday life is the intersection of “illusion and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls, and the sector he does not control”.⁴ Lefebvre also argued that in the mid-twentieth century, everyday life had been changed into a zone of sheer consumption shared by everyone, regardless of class or specialty. Focusing on the everyday life, commercial advertisement, as a main production form in the consumption culture, is just a conspiracy between art and market, pursuing “the aestheticization of everyday life”, as Mike Featherstone wrote in *Consumer Culture and*

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, Verso, New York and London 1947, p. 40.

Postmodernism. For Featherstone, the aestheticization of everyday life mainly refers to the rapid flow of signs and images that saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society. The centrality of the commercial manipulation of images through advertising, the media and display, performance and spectacles of the urbanized fabric of daily life therefore entail a constant reworking of desires through image.⁵ This increasing dominance of exchange value not only obliterated the original use-value of things and replaced it by abstract exchange value, but it left the commodity free to take on an ersatz or secondary use-value. As a result, a Cadillac becomes the aesthetic sign of the city's upper classes, characterized by exquisite taste and success, rather than just a means of transport.

The micro film *Imminent* was regarded as the birth of China's micro film industry, linked to Shanghai GM's Cadillac marketing department. It represents the market conspiracy behind this industry. Similar strategies were used in the micro film *Old Boy*, advertising Chevrolet, *Watching the Ball* which featured Canon, and *4 Nights' Curious Talks* supported by Samsung. The conspiracy with the market has become a convention within micro films, and those who violate this convention will definitely be excluded from the micro film field.

Turning to *The Only Choice* and *Chills*, these are typical examples of the inter-textual and trans-medial conspiracy. The first is a micro film, the second a longer one, both co-directed by Liang Lemin and Lu Jianqing almost at the same time in 2012. The cast is also roughly the same, starring Aarif Lee as Zhang Guobiao, the chief director of investigation at Hong Kong ICAC. This micro film clips directly to the original film lens, and its story is added to the original, almost as an official prequel of it. In addition, collusion between the micro film and the HTC Corporation opens up the precedent of shooting micro films on phones. In this way, the micro film *The Only Choice* is both propaganda for the movie *Chills* and advertising and marketing for HTC phones. This is not just a trans-media conspiracy but also a market conspiracy—a win-win situation for commercial interests.

Many Chinese micro films have transmedial and intertextual characteristics, just as we illustrated above. Actually, *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun* is also intertextual and intermedial. But it is an intertextual and intermedial

⁵ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Sage Publication, London 2007, pp. 65–6.

parody. The difference between parody and conspiracy is that the former is a kind of conflict and ironic relation between the new text and the original text, but the latter is a kind of consistent and accordant relation between the new and the original texts and between the different mediums. The intertextual and intermedial conspiracy which is shown in most of China's micro film in the early second decade of this century has the same end: the market. So the conspiracy between art and market has a general impact on the production of China's micro film and on China's cultural production in general during this period.

The economic impact of micro film is huge. First shown in October 2010, *Old Boy* was clicked by more than 50 million people in a very short time. Supervised by Hang Kong's famous director Peng Haoxiang, *4 Nights' Curious Talks* also achieved great success, with a clicking rate rapidly exceeding 200 million.

The reasons for the popularity of micro films are their low costs and legal void with a lack of supervision on the part of government departments. The potential benefits attract many companies, such as Volkswagen, Samsung, Canon, Colgate, Budweiser and many others.

At the same time, the rapid development of the micro film also brings a variety of problems such as low creative levels, poorly produced works, lack of narrative skills, bad performances and, in general, low professional standards. As a result, more and more people distrust the artistic level of micro film products, with negative public opinion affecting the industry's sustainable development.⁶

III. Internet Big Movie: IPGC and Media Convergence

216

Internet Big Movie is a concept proposed in 2014 by IQIYI, one of the most famous online audio-visual company in China, to describe a new type of film "that is online distributed with a broadcast time of more than 60 minutes and produced professionally with a complete story".⁷ Its main characteristic is "Media Convergence". Both Internet short films and micro films are all uploaded to the

⁶ Hong Yin, "Micro Film: New forms of art in the age of the Internet", *The Journal of Film Art*, 4 (2014).

⁷ Xianghua Yang, "The Present, Past and Future of Internet Big Film", *China Art Daily*, April 7, 2017.

network after the completion of film production. Therefore, they are only the combination of network and film which cannot reach the degree of media convergence.

Media convergence, as an academic category, was first proposed by Ithiel De Sola Pool, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States, which means that various media show a trend of multi-functional integration. Chinese scholars points out, there are two main forms of media convergence: one is the integration and merger of media industry across fields, to form large-scale cross-media groups, to build core competitiveness, and to cope with the fierce market competition; the other is the integration of media technology, that is, the combination of new and old media technology to form a new means of communication, or even a new form of media.⁸

Internet big movie is the development of micro film. But it is wrong to think that it is simply an extension of time in micro film. In addition to the length of time, there are some more important features of Internet big movie, which distinguish it from micro film. First, most of Internet big movies have their own website, that is to say, the video website does not need to purchase the copyright of the film from the other film company, and it independently produces the films. Even if it cooperates with a professional film company, it must have the initiative. So, it is IPGC (Internet Professional Generated Content) product. Second, Internet big movies no longer rely mainly on advertising, but through the membership payment model, IP industry chain development model and online and offline enterprises joint cluster business model to make the profits. "Compared with the industrial structure in the period of micro film, the industrial chain in the period of network big film is more and more closely linked. The three links of production, publicity and screening revolve around the product of Internet big movies, forming a community of interests sharing risks and profits".⁹

Internet big movie is a new form of art industry in the era of the new media. In terms of projection time, microfilms are usually shown for less than 30 minutes;

⁸ Jian Meng and Yuanke Zhao, "Media Convergence: Cohesion and Creation of a New Media Society", *Journal of International Communication*, 7 (2006).

⁹ Jia Wei & Zhenglin Luo, "From Network Short Drama to Network Big Film: On the Formation and Optimizing Path of Network Film Industry Chain", *News Enthusiasts*, 3 (2019).

big online films are shown for 60 to 90 minutes, while traditional films are projected for more than two hours. In addition, there are more important differences between Internet big movie and traditional film.

According to Walter Benjamin, film is the art in the age of mechanical reproduction which appeals directly to its audience. The mechanical reproduction cannot assure its authenticity, and its uniqueness as a specific object belonging to a specific artist at a specific time and space, therefore it loses its “aura” and “exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line”¹⁰. However, Internet big movie is the art in the age of digital reproduction which has many differences with the traditional movies.

Internet big movie is not simply a combination of the Internet and movie. Internet participate in the whole process of film behavior, occupying a dominant position, and being the driving force of film from planning, production, dissemination to consumption. Compared with cinema-line movies, it relies on the platform of Internet, which not only brings convenience for viewers to watch movies without entering the cinema, but also avoids the risks and shortcomings of cinema-line movies affected by the off-peak season. Because of the application of big data and its distinct interactivity, the broadcasting platform can adjust the types and themes of movies in time according to the clicks and feedback from the audience, and launch more personalized new works in order to enhance user experience and stickiness, highlight the characteristics of the website and accumulate popularity.

Internet big movies have their own special narrative style. The lens language is more inclined to the use of montage, and less use of long lens and depth-of-field lens. In the aspect of narrative of the story, Internet big movies pay more attention to the interesting of the narrative, and try to avoid grand narrative. In terms of acceptance, it gives full play to the advantages of Internet narrowcasting communication, transmitting video programming to a niche audience through relatively inexpensive means like streaming video over high-speed connections, so that it takes into account the broad audience of different aesthetic preferences,

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in: D. Townsend (Eds.), *Aesthetics: Classic Readings from Western Tradition*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2002, p. 289.

keeps more in line with the viewing habits of mobile small screen in terms of theme, type, audio-visual language, etc., and converts the passive audience of traditional cinema into a participatory audience. In terms of communication effect, if the traditional film pays more attention to win the audience through the classical narrative mode and visual wonders, then Internet big movie is good at gathering empathy through hot topics and stimulating network hot discussion to expand communication efficiency. Through these methods, the Internet big movie restores the “aura” of the film art to a certain extent, which we might understand as the identification of the work of art with its unique space and time. In addition, Internet big movies often employ famous movie stars as the starring roles, which to some extent restore the cult value of art in the meaning of Benjamin, which was displaced in the age of mechanical reproduction. In the age of digital reproduction, one of the most significant aspects of current artistic production is the development of digital technology that allows photograph to be rearranged so that dead actors appear in contemporary films, and produces such faithful and infinitely reproducible reproduction that existing notions of copyright are becoming obsolete.¹¹

As regards to the industrial operating mode of the Internet big Movie, IQIYI website pioneered the platform of online declaration for Internet big movies. Everything from application cooperation to online broadcasting can be carried out on the platform. The required company qualifications, copyright declarations and poster media requirements are clear at a glance in the platform, which facilitates the independent operation of the partners. The results of the audit are timely fed back to the partners through the platform for timely revision of specific opinions. The partners only need to log on to this platform, and then they can see it. The introduction of this platform not only greatly shortens the communication process between the partners and the video platform, but also greatly improves the operational efficiency of both sides.¹²

In these ways, Internet Big Movie has made rapid progress with the development of China's Internet Audiovisual Industry in recent years. In 2014, *Adults*

¹¹ Dabney Townsend, *Aesthetics: Classic Readings from Western Tradition*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2002, p. 284.

¹² Minfen Huang & Guowei Wang, “Thoughts on China's Internet Big Films and Their Industrialization”, *Fujian Forum*, Humanities and Social Sciences Edition, 4, 2017.

2, *Erlonghu Hao Ge* (later removed because of vulgar content), *Tree Lives*, *Hooligans* and other films won good box office. In 2015, *Taoist Monks Going out of the Mountains*, *Mountain Gun Entering the City*, and *Siping Youth* (later removed because of vulgar content) emerged as the masterpiece of the Internet movies. According to the data released by IQIYI, there were more than 300 blowouts in 2014, 612 blowouts in 2015 and 2500 blowouts in 2016.¹³ By 2017, the number of Internet big movies had increased by 4.2 times and the market scale had increased by nearly 20 times.¹⁴

Although in 2018, the total number of online movies declined (the number of new online movies in the whole year dropped by about 20% to 1526 compared with 1892 in 2017¹⁵), we still have reason to believe that China's Internet big movies will have good prospects in the future. This is because there are enormous network audio-visual users and big market scale of the Internet audio-visual industry in China.

According to the statistics of *Research Report on the Development of China's Internet Audio-visual Industry in 2019*, the scale of China's Internet video users has reached 725 million, accounting for 87.5% of the whole Internet users, and the market scale of the Internet audio-visual industry has reached 88.8 billion Yuan by December 2018¹⁶. The enormous network audio-visual users provide a strong driving force for the development of internet big movie. As long as it can eliminate some unfavourable factors of development, such as similar topics, rough production, lack of professional evaluation, China's Internet big movie will inevitably present more and more exquisite works.

¹³ Dantatv Data, "IQIE Annual Box Office List of Internet Big Movies from 2014 to 2016", <http://mini.eastday.com/mobile/170116194931047.html>.

¹⁴ IQIYI, "Development Report of Internet Big Film Industry in 2017", http://www.360doc.com/content/18/0118/18/28093736_723132630.shtml.

¹⁵ Si Chen, Xinyang Zhang, & Xiaoyi Ma, "Research Report on Chinese Internet Video Excellence in 2019", *Media*, 7 (2019).

¹⁶ China Association of Network Audiovisual Programming Services, *Research Report on China's Network Audiovisual Development in 2019*, <http://www.100ec.cn/index/detail-6510524.html>.

Tyrus Miller*

My Twentieth Century: *Zeitdiagnose* and Modern Art in Badiou, Sloterdijk, and Stiegler

In books written a short time after the turn of the millennium, and the transition of the 20th century into the 21st, the philosophers Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk, and Bernard Stiegler offered three distinct, but interrelated anatomies of the 20th century or, as Badiou expressed it, simply “The Century.” These included Badiou’s *The Century*, Sloterdijk’s *You Must Change Your Life* and *What Happened in the Twentieth Century?*, and Stiegler’s two-volume *Symbolic Misery* (I: *The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, II: *The Katastrophē of the Sensible*) and his related short book *Acting Out*. All three treatments are wide-ranging in the scope of their topics and speculative in their outlook, concerning our recently lapsed century that was marked by major political revolutions and wars, the violent clash of left-wing and right-wing mass political ideologies, and mass deaths from genocidal state regimes. Each of the authors are polymathic in their fields of reference, incorporating into their accounts of the 20th-century discussions of philosophy, literature, history, art, psychoanalysis, and religious thought.

It is, however, a more focused aspect of all three books that interests me in what follows: their argument for the central role of *art* and *aesthetics* in the political, economic, cultural, and artistic legacy of the twentieth century, and their corollary argument for the need to reconstruct and reorient our aesthetic understanding going forward into the post-20th-century future. In connection with these major issues, I will also highlight a third consideration that helps link their diagnosis of the 20th-century and their prognosis for the 21st: the changing relationship between the *subject* of aesthetic experience and the subject of collective politics. Although each construes differently the specific content and causes of the 20th century mutation in subjectivity, as well as its aesthetic dimensions, they notably share a common focus and general structure of their *Zeit*-diagnostic arguments and prognostic conclusions.

221

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Badiou, *The Century*

As his title indicates, Badiou seeks not just to take the 20th century as a period in time in which various events of significance took place, but rather also to understand it as an event itself that founds a new order of time, an “epoch” related to a specific collectively constituted subjectivity that prolongs the effects of this event over an extended period. He thus writes that he is seeking to “grasp ‘the century’ as a category of the century itself,” or, in other words, “to evoke the meaning that the century held for its own actors.”¹ “Our aim,” he explains, “is not to judge the century as an objective datum, but rather to ask how it has come to be subjectivated.”² How did the imagination of this century, as a new age, as a new regime of time and experience, itself become a protagonist of the political and aesthetic projects, revolutions, crimes, and tragic failures its decades encompass? How, in turn, might our contemporary understanding of and fidelity to—or our betrayal and abandonment of—“the Century” affect our own possible subjectivation, our potentialities for becoming in the new historico-political horizon of the 21st century?

Badiou sees the essential, defining impulse of the Century as its drive towards “creating a new man,” including at the cost of violence and destruction of the remnants of the old. Humanity is itself treated as material with the plasticity to be given radically new form. Not accidentally, then, Badiou evokes the dismembered and reconfigured artforms of the 20th-century avant-gardes as the figural corollary of this larger project of giving new shape to humanity:

[E]ach and every time, the project is so radical that in the course of its realization the singularity of human lives is not taken into account. There is nothing there but a *material*. A little like the way in which, for practitioners of modern art, sounds and forms, torn from their tonal or figurative harmony, were nothing but materials whose destination needed to be entirely recast. Or like the way formal signs, divested of any objective idealization, projected mathematics towards an automated completion. In this sense, the project of the new man is a project of rupture and foundation that sustains—within the domain of history and the

¹ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Polity, Cambridge 2007, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

state—the same subjective tonality as the scientific, artistic and sexual ruptures of the beginning of the century.³

Informed by this sense of the plasticity and radical historicity of humanity, the projects of the Century strove to seize upon this material and remake it anew in the present.

Badiou calls this demand “the passion for the real,”⁴ which he sees as the source of the Century’s creativity and its evident capacity, as well, for lethal destruction and crime:

There is a conviction, laden with pathos, that we are being summoned to the real of a beginning. The real, as all key players of the century recognize, is the source of both horror and enthusiasm, simultaneously lethal and creative.... Any conviction about the real advent of a new man is characterized by a steady indifference to its cost; this indifference legitimates the most violent means. If what is at stake is the new man, the man of the past may very well turn out to be nothing but disposable material.⁵

The end of the old and the creation of the new demanded “absolute” solutions that led through the path of violent purgations and purifications, with little regard for the mere raw “materials” of the real in the making, whether those were past conceptual, artistic, ideological, or living manifestations of humanity. Given this propensity towards a violent, destructive logic of purgation, how can the passion for the real become, as it evidently does for Badiou, an object of affirmation, or even a sort of ethical-political ideal whose definitive disappearance in the new century would be regrettable?

In answer to this obvious objection, Badiou introduces a distinction between two modes of negativity, which in turn inflect the passion for the real with alternative applications and implications. The first, he writes, “assumes destruction as such and undertakes the indefinite task of purification.”⁶ The second, in contrast, is what Badiou calls “the subtractive orientation,” and suggests that

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

this latter is even in conflict with and critical of the former's unacceptable traits. Notably, Badiou turns to the practices of the artistic avant-garde to exemplify the subtractive mode, drawing upon the example of Malevich's painting *White on White* (1918), which inscribes a figured off-white, tilted white square within a lighter white square coterminous with the boundaries of the canvas.⁷

It would be a mistake, Badiou suggests, to interpret Malevich's work as heralding the destruction of painting, despite the clear distance it has gone in the direction of purification. Rather, through a rigorously applied process of subtraction, it has converged on a minimal difference that both gestures towards the merger of figure and support in the absolute and registers the irreducible reality of the difference between figure and support. It manifests this difference itself as real, and directs an almost fanatical passion towards making this difference come to presence: "[I]nstead of treating the real as identity, it is treated right away as a gap. The question of the real/semblance relation will not be resolved by a purification that would isolate the real, but by understanding that the gap itself is real. The white square is the moment when the minimal gap is fabricated."⁸ Malevich's subtractive procedure models, then, another way of pursuing the passion for the real, "devoted to the construction of a minimal difference, to the delineation of its axiomatic,"⁹ which is opposed to destruction. The question, then, becomes how to extend this subtractive model, by analogy, to other areas of application, including the political, in which the minimal difference can be disclosed as the manifestation of the real itself.

This leads to Badiou's other main line of argumentation, which characterizes the Century's crucial concern with form—indeed, with its accelerated experimental pursuit of formalization in all domains of existence, including the artistic, the political, the mathematical and conceptual, and the erotic.¹⁰ At this level

⁷ Viewable at the website of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80385>. See also Badiou's treatment of "the subtractive" in relation to mathematics in "On Subtraction," in *Conditions*, trans. Stephen Corcoran, Continuum, London 2009, pp. 113–128.

⁸ Badiou, *The Century*, p. 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ In several works, Badiou has developed a four-fold conception of philosophy, related to four distinct conditions of truth: the artistic, the scientific, the political, and the amorous. See especially: Badiou, *Conditions*; *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bostells, Continuum, London 2009; *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, State University

of abstraction, Badiou understands formalization as a means of negotiating a relationship between the finitude of forms (artistic, conceptual, political, etc.) and the infinite: “The infinite is not captured in form; it *transits through form*. If it is an event—if it is *what happens*—finite form can be equivalent to an infinite opening.”¹¹ 20th-century procedures in art, politics, mathematics, and so on, are distinctive for having most fully taken on and taken in this logic as their immanent dynamic. Moreover, this logic provides a diagnostic for the so-called “failures” of the avant-garde, such as its excessive attempt to unify the fragmented and intrinsically differentiated real with a single poetic-political grasp, while still discerning what was ennobling and enduring in them: namely, the avant-garde’s restless drive to formalize and reformatize the real as art. Thus, Badiou concludes:

In its effective process, rather than in the declarations of the avant-gardes, twentieth-century art is marked by an enduring formal unease, a complete inability to uphold a doctrine of local arrangements, or even of macro-structures. Why? Because form constitutes the transit of being—form’s immanent overcoming of its finitude—and not simply an abstract virtuality for a descent of the Ideal... Indeed, there can no longer be any established devices for the production of art. There is only the *multiplicity of formalizations*.¹²

He goes on to note that—

[T]he century is marked by an unprecedented variability in its imperatives of construction and ornamentation, being enticed not by the slow historical movement of the equilibrium of forms, but by the urgency of this or that experimental formalization.¹³

This experimental dynamism of forms is, for Badiou, the essential feature of the 20th-century artistic avant-gardes, and is that which connects it analogically with other domains of formalization to which it nevertheless can never be reduced, but which can be seen retrospectively to manifest the structure of real

of New York Press, Albany, New York 1999; and *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013.

¹¹ Badiou, *The Century*, p. 155.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

differences towards which the collective subjectivity of “the Century” directs its transformative passions.

Insofar as Badiou offers a prescriptive orientation for 21st-century thought, art, and politics, it is the recovery and reinstatement of this experimental drive to formalize, so vividly instantiated by the artistic avant-gardes, and which defines the legacy of “the Century” that he is most at pains to hold onto. In his *Handbook to Inaesthetics*, which preceded by a few years *The Century*, Badiou suggests why he wants to perpetuate 20th-century art’s demand for new forms. It is, he suggests, in evolving a rigorous set of new modes of formalization that art breaks free of traditional ways of conceiving of its relation to truth—its didactic subordination to an external truth, its romantic subordination to the subject, and the classical bracketing of its relation to truth in favor of its imaginary status—and comes into its own as an autonomous set of *procedures* for manifesting truth. This, in turn, affirms the reality of artworks and justifies the passion for the real being expressed through and in the formal practices of art:

Art *itself* is a truth procedure. Or again: The philosophical identification of art falls under the category of truth. Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real (and not the effect). And this thought, or rather the truths that it activates, are irreducible to other truths—be they scientific, political, or amorous. This also means that art, as a singular regime of thought, is irreducible to philosophy. Immanence: Art is rigorously coextensive with the truths that it generates. Singularity: These truths are given nowhere else than in art.¹⁴

With reference to the mathematician Gödel, and his discovery of the limits of any given formalization, Badiou writes:

He sees in [his demonstrations] a lesson of infinity, as well as the ransom of ignorance that must be paid every time knowledge is extorted from the real: to partake in a truth is also to measure that other truths exist, truths we do not yet partake in... Without ever being discouraged, one must invent other axioms, other logics, other ways of formalizing. The essence of thinking always resides in the power of forms.¹⁵

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2005, p. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

It is in this power of forms, and fidelity to the Century's task of radical formalization, including in the truth procedures that art has still to explore and unfold, that Badiou finds resources for continuing struggle in the 21st century: "The century having come to an end, we have to make its wager ours, the wager on the univocity of the real against the equivocation of semblance. To declare anew... the war within thought which belonged to the century...: the war of formalization against interpretation."¹⁶

Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life and What Happened in the 20th Century?*

Peter Sloterdijk's 2009 volume *You Must Change Your Life* is a wide-ranging study ostensibly addressed to a problem that has little evident relation to aesthetics, the "return of religion" in our putatively post-secular time. Sloterdijk will have none of this; not, however, because like Jürgen Habermas, he seeks to defend the project of an unfinished enlightenment against religion's renewed claims, but rather for another, seemingly paradoxical reason: "a return *to* religion is as impossible as a return *of* religion—for the simple reason that no 'religion' or 'religions' exist."¹⁷

What instead do exist, in Sloterdijk's view, both before and throughout modernity to the present day, are different regimens of spiritual and psychophysical training "that are more and less capable and worthy of propagation,"¹⁸ exercises and practices which have never vanished, despite many mutations, and hence which cannot "return." These regimens are composed of bundles of bodily and mental practices by which human beings create for themselves "symbolic immune systems and ritual shells,"¹⁹ constituents of our basic anthropological constitution through which we regulate our collective and individual intercourse with the world. Particularly important are the various "anthropotechnic" means by which human beings train themselves to experience a "vertical tension" occasioning self-transformation and self-transcendence. These techniques of provoking and responding to such vertical tension, as well as their modernization

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

and ramification into new areas of existence, Sloterdijk argues, are what call for the greatest attention in our investigation of the present age—an attention likely to be distracted by spurious “post-secularist” hypotheses either trumpeting or lamenting how “religion,” after two-century-long slump, is at last recovering its lost spiritual productivity.

Sloterdijk’s analysis is deeply indebted to his reading of Nietzsche on asceticism, though he also emphatically revises Nietzsche’s negative evaluation in favor of a more affirmative stance towards the shaping, transformative power of ascetic practices. While Nietzsche, with his overt anti-Christian animus, tended to equate asceticism with a life-denying pathology, Sloterdijk argues that the real value of Nietzsche’s arguments about asceticism lies in his recognition of their force as operators of self-willed anthropological change. Thus, he argues—

a large number of the asceticisms to which [Nietzsche] referred polemically were precisely not expressions of life-denial and metaphysical servility; it was rather a matter of heroism in a spiritual disguise... With this find, Nietzsche stands... at the start of the modern, non-spiritualistic ascetologies along with their physio- and psychotechnic annexes, with dietologies and self-referential trainings, and hence all the forms of self-referential practicing and working on one’s own vital form that I bring together in the term “anthropotechnics.”²⁰

In Sloterdijk’s view, however, Nietzsche’s discovery is in turn dependent on a prior objective modernization in the spectrum of asceticisms themselves, which he characterizes under the dual aspect of the “despiritualization of asceticisms” and the “informalization of spirituality.” The former he sees characterized most clearly in the vast twentieth-century expansion of athletics, sport, exercise, and other forms of physical “training”; the latter is exemplified for him by popular music, which offers spiritual intensities, affects, and experiences on a mass, democratic basis and without a formal spiritual framework, covering “the lives of contemporary individuals with unpredictable flashes of spiritual emergency.”²¹

You Must Change Your Life is a sprawling, speculative book, and, having set out in summary the merest outline of its sweeping argument, I will not pursue

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

further its many ramifying lines of inquiry. Instead, I will note that Sloterdijk's book takes its title from a work of art about a work of art, which suggests that the aesthetic is entangled in its arguments. "You must change your life" comes from the final line of a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo" from his 1908 *New Poems*, which derives from a modern aesthetic encounter the "vertical tension" that Sloterdijk sees as immanent in anthropotechnic practices. In Rilke poem, the artwork, the torso-fragment of Apollo, issues its silent demand to the viewer to transcend one's existing state, to become different than one is. Implicitly then too, Rilke's artwork, his poem, derives its own aesthetic power and modernistic "newness," its intensely charged temporal difference from the archaic fragment, from its effective channeling from poet to reader of the overwhelming demand made upon his by the historical otherness of the work of art. If the encounter with the sculpture represents a somatized relation with an archaic force of the numinous, its sheer power is nonetheless mitigated by its descent from the ritual into the aesthetic, safely enframed by the modern museum's institutional space and sober behavioral protocols. Yet the sculpture's overpowering entraining of the poet's vision becomes, in turn, a figural equivalent of the poet's equally intense, equally disciplined enchainment of poetic lines and words through which, finally, the reader's fascinated attention and surprise at the last line will be imposed: "You must change your life." The shock of the poet's (and subordinately, the reader's) aesthetic encounter with this sudden imposing power is presented as paradigmatic for the vertical tension that seizes us and tears us from our settledness in daily habit and habitation. Following Sloterdijk's line of thought, aesthetic defamiliarization, which the Russian formalists saw as constitutive of literary and artistic efficacy, might be thought of not simply as a practice pertaining to the modern arts, but as an exemplary instance in the historical repertoire of anthropotechnic means by which human beings confer upon themselves new shapes and higher forms.

I would suggest that Sloterdijk's anthropotechnical arguments offer an especially fruitful way of thinking about modernist and avant-garde art practices—with their emphasis on formal innovation, their cultivation of semantic difficulty to the threshold of nonsense, and their fascination with transgression and power—in a broader philosophical ambit. Indeed, we might consider as corollary in their implications Badiou's emphasis on experimental formalizations and Sloterdijk's focus on experimental anthropotechnics. Both point towards an infinitization of the "human-all-too-human" through the discipline of formalized

thought regimens, for which the creation of avant-garde artworks may also be a paradigmatic instance. If modernist works pursue a unique constellation of formal, rhetorical, and semantic elements in order to defamiliarize our experience of them, they also, Sloterdijk implies, may turn to us and address us with a demand to change ourselves with an equivalent degree of radicality. “Artistedom,” Sloterdijk writes, “is the somatization of the improbable.”²² It “is subversion from above, it *superv*erts the existing” (125). We may recall here the Ad Reinhardt art cartoon in which a man points to a modern artwork mockingly and asks “Ha Ha What does that represent?”—only to find the painting angrily turning back to the spectator and asking, “What do you represent?”. If an abstract painting or sculpture presents us with a space, it also, as Reinhardt points out, pronounces to a viewer attuned to its implicit address: “You, Sir, are a space, too.” Each work, tacitly, offers itself as a highly specific training module in a different mode of experience, a different way of life. They invite their viewers, listeners, and readers to a new set of “complications, facilitations, narrowings, widenings, inclinations, disinclinations, lowerings, raisings,”²³ entreating them to “work on themselves and make examples of themselves,”²⁴ that they might be able to increasingly discover themselves the self-made inhabitants of “a multi-disciplinary and multi-virtuosic world with expanding limits of ability.”²⁵

With this more general background established by our reading of *You Must Change Your Life*, we can deal more briefly with *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, whose title essay (subtitled “Towards a Critique of Extremist Reason”) is the most pertinent in the collection for our theme, because it directly addresses the arguments of Badiou’s *The Century*. We can summarize Sloterdijk’s approach here as accepting Badiou’s basic assertion that “the Century” was indeed characterized by a “passion for the real,” but going on to offer revisionary perspectives on both the nature of the real at issue and the modalities of the passions involved. Moreover, Sloterdijk draws a distinctive picture, rooted in a novel conception of a new metabolic relationship of modern humanity with the energy sources of nature, of the socio-historical context in which the modern

230

²² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15. I have developed this argument concerning the exemplary role of neo-avant-garde works and practices in Tyrus Miller, *Singular Examples: Artistic Politics and the Neo-Avant-Garde*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2009.

passion for the real played out. First, Sloterdijk emphasizes that the characteristic feature of 20th-century reality was complexity, and that “the dominant discourses and actions of the epoch were engaged in a furious struggle against the emergence of complexity.”²⁶ It was, Sloterdijk argues, this confrontation with complexity that impelled the tendency towards extremism evident in 20th-century thought and action:

It must be emphasized that the Medusean extremisms of that era all possessed the character of fundamentalisms of simplification—including even the fundamentalism of militancy and the myth of a “new beginning” through revolution, that bitter and proud attitude of a radical break with the given world... Wherever manifestations of the extreme were encountered in the course of the twentieth century, there was always an uprising against complexity, that is, against the formal law of the real as conceived in contemporary terms. To be sure, this uprising was carried out entirely in the name of the real itself, of which all camps had formed extremely reductionist concepts.²⁷

In one respect, Badiou’s conception of the real as discontinuous and fragmented would appear consonant with Sloterdijk’s assertion of a fundamental condition of complexity. However, in contrasting the destructive mode of avant-garde formalization, from which Badiou takes critical distance, to a “subtractive” mode of formalization that reveals minimal differences as the very structure of the real, which he affirms, Badiou reduces the response to complexity to two opposed forms of reductive asceticism, but does not question that the Century’s imperative is ascetic as such. Sloterdijk will, however, reopen this closed loop of ascetic reduction, in favor of an ethics, aesthetics, and politics of abundance, which he sees as the authentic bases of the 20th century’s novel possibilities for humanity. He does this in connection with his other basic conceptual move, which is to overturn the metaphorical implications of “radicalism,” which, he argues, are laden with the spirit of gravity, going to ground and plumbing the hidden roots that determine the phenomena of the surface.

²⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, trans. Christopher Turner, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018, p. 57.

²⁷ Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, pp. 57–58.

But in contrast, as already suggested by his exposition of spiritual acrobatism in *You Must Change Your Life* as the characteristic modern impulse towards an anti-gravitational elevation, Sloterdijk asserts that the real that provokes the defining passion of the 20th century is rather an unrooted, groundless, aerial reality that rejects the implications of the radical and fundamental. As he summarizes:

[M]odernity can only be understood as the epoch of a struggle for a new definition of the meaning of reality. In contrast to the polemical ontologies that dominated twentieth-century discourse, I attempt to show that the main event of this age consisted in Western civilization's breaking free from the dogmatism of gravity... [T]he actualization of the real primarily manifests itself in a passion for antigravity—only this... will put us in a position to understand the meaning and the progression of the clashes over the real on their own terms.²⁸

This view implies, then, a far more critical attitude towards—and a rhetorical “overturning” of the tropes of—20th-century radicalism than does Badiou's attempt, via the critical distinction of destructive and subtractive reduction, to rescue and redeem the Century's dynamic essence. Thus, Sloterdijk's invocation of a “critique of extremist reason” in his essay's subtitle, which he explicates as a “critique of gravitation”: “Critique can only really begin at all as a critique of gravitation—but this presupposes that thinking renounce its dogmatic opportunism vis-à-vis the real as basal power from below and freely shift to the midpoint between weighty tendencies and antigravity ones.”²⁹

Sloterdijk concludes his essay with a speculative history and contemporary context in which the anti-gravitational habits of modern thought, impelled by unsustainably wasteful expenditures of fossil fuels, are sublated into a new metabolic order in which the “worker of nature,” especially the generous expenditures of the sun are taken into account. Sloterdijk makes two predictions with respect to this post-fossil fuel condition. First, a realignment of the time-horizon of human experience towards the solar cyclical time of annual renewal and away from the unbounded linear time of human explosion powered by fossil fuel combustion:

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

The solar system inevitably poses a reevaluation of the reevaluation of all values—and, as the turn toward current solar energy is putting an end to the frenzied consumption of past solar energy, we could speak of a partial return to the “old values”; for all old values were derived from the imperative of managing energy that could be renewed over the yearly cycle. Hence their deep connection to the categories of stability, necessity, and lack.³⁰

Accompanying this global value shift are specific implications for aesthetics and culture, both high and low, which Sloterdijk characterizes as “expressionism” and “the romanticism of explosion,” which equate freedom and self-realization with untrammelled release of energy:

The conditions for the ebullient expressionism of wastefulness in current mass culture will increasingly disappear.³¹ It seems probable that from the vantage point of future “soft” technologies, the romanticism of explosion—or, more generally speaking, the psychological, aesthetic, and political derivatives of the sudden release of energy—will be judged in retrospect as the expressive world of a mass-culturally globalized energy fascism.³²

In his use of the term “expressionism” and his hardly-veiled evocation of futurism, linked as is well know to the historical manifestation of fascism, Sloterdijk conjures the 20th-century aesthetic avant-gardism that Badiou seeks to redeem, as well as the industrial mass culture criticized on other terms by Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. As he sums up the slogan for a new aesthetic to make tangibly experienceable a world reshaped by a politics, economy, and ethics of the sun: “For the time being, ‘high’ and ‘low’ will follow the maxim ‘Après nous le solaire.’”³³

Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*

Bernard Stiegler’s specific diagnosis of the 20th century derives from his much broader speculative philosophical anthropology, articulated over several differ-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

ent books, most prominently the multivolume *Technics and Time* studies,³⁴ of the technical structures of “retention.” Stiegler has focused on various means of registering memory and their implications for individual and collective temporal experience, insofar as they inflect memorial trace-making, preservation and storage of experiences as memory, and potentialities for reanimation of retained traces and the anticipatory projection of emergent futures. Technics of retention—including various forms of artifacts, writing, and registration in photographic and electronic media—have, he argues, structured human experience, individuation, and community in variable ways throughout human history, from anthropogenesis up to the contemporary “hyperindustrial” epoch. The 20th century, however, constitutes an inflection point in this human development, because of the implications of certain technological media and their capacity to organize temporal experiences themselves as an industrially planned and produced and mass-consumed commodity. This is particularly the object of an almost manifesto-like presentation in the two volumes of his series *Symbolic Misery*, which draws out this argument in detail. It is on this specific part of Stiegler’s larger anthropological narrative of memorial technics, and on the particular implications he draws for art and aesthetic experience in the 21st century, that I thus focus my discussion.

Before considering Stiegler’s analysis of the 20th century shift in retentional technics and temporal experience, however, I must briefly recount in outline his general argument about the structure of retention. Most importantly, drawing upon Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of time-consciousness (and also on Jacques Derrida’s critical interrogation of it), Stiegler distinguishes three orders of retention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. “Primary retention” refers to the way that perception itself requires preservation of previous moments of perception and anticipation of emerging perceptions in order to create continuity in consciousness of any perceived object. Perceptual experience in this sense already requires a more complex temporality than pure presence; memory and expectation are integral to the very possibility of experiencing the presence of objects that persist through a series of lapsing and emerging presents. “Secondary

234

³⁴ See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998; *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009; *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2011.

retention” allows what we conventionally think of as memory—recall of past moments of experience that interpenetrate with and inflect the experience of the present. This “recall” or “memory,” however, is not just oriented towards the past; it also affects our anticipation of what is emerging in the present, enriching perception with the contents of the recalled memory and allowing the apparent iteration of a perception to be, in fact, different than and new in comparison with the previous primary experience. Stiegler’s innovation (following Derrida’s insistence on the grammatological dissemination of philosophical constructs such as “perception,” “consciousness,” and “memory”) is to focus on a third “tertiary” order of retention that is exteriorized in material objects and media. Tertiary retention” is “supplementary” and “prosthetic” in relation to primary and secondary retention, yet, as Derrida’s grammatological critique of Husserl already suggested decades ago, it is also always already there at the origin, as the index of an originary “fault” or insufficiency of primary and secondary retention. Primary and secondary retention, while seemingly the objects of tertiary retention’s artificial (technical) reproduction and storage capacities, are in fact dependent upon and conditioned by the historical situation of tertiary retentional technics.

In the two volumes of *Symbolic Misery* and their precursory essay “To Love, To Love Me, To Love Us” in *Acting Out*, Stiegler offers a diagnosis of the 20th century as the period of the increasing industrial organization of tertiary retention and the proffering of industrially standardized and synchronized temporal experiences, such as films, television, and recorded music, for sale and consumption on a mass scale. Despite the couching of his argument in the theoretical idiom of phenomenology and French post-structuralism, as well as French theories of technics including Gilbert Simondon and André Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler’s discussion reprises in a striking way the “cultural industry” hypothesis advanced by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the mid-20th century. Adorno in many of his writings, along with Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, did not criticize the industrial products of culture for their artistic shortcomings, which were at most a symptom. More fundamentally, he berued their effects on aesthetic experience as a key means by which individuation was secured in bourgeois societies. As the industrial production and standardization of consumable cultural commodities intensified, he believed, the more rigid the underlying schemata of *possible* aesthetic experiences became and the less such experiences could help to constitute any coherent, individuated ensemble of

personal judgments, memories, and pleasures. Moreover, Adorno saw this disintegration of the individuated subject as, at least in part, a subordination of its lived experiential time to an externalized, industrialized temporality: the economic rhythms of novelty and obsolescence, the synchronized and accelerating cycles of fashion in advanced consumer societies.

With his long anthropological view of retentional techniques, Stiegler strongly concurs with this basic diagnosis of the culture industry's temporal colonization of the individual. Thus, for instance, he writes:

Television tends to annihilate the diversity of individual secondary retentions, so that the singularity of points of view on images collapses. It is television's vocation to synchronize individual temporalities of consciousnesses belonging to bodies, the behaviours of which it is matter of controlling with a view to *accentuating their massively consumerist expectations*.³⁵

Stiegler characterizes the socio-economic and aesthetic tendencies of which television is a vector and an example as “hyperindustrial,” namely, “an extension of calculation beyond the sphere of production along with a correlative extension of industrial domains.”³⁶ Stiegler finds in this dynamic an immanent contradiction, insofar as the hyperindustrial drive to synchronize consumption blocks the individuation process by which both individual subjects and cohesive forms of intersubjective sociality are constituted. Both individual and society suffer from a dangerous impoverishment of affective bonds:

[H]yper-industrialization brings about a new figure of the individual. But, and this is the paradox of my title (“Allegory of the Anthill”), it is a *figure of the individual that finds itself disfigured* inasmuch as the hyper-industrial generalization of calculation *creates an obstacle* to the *processes of individuation*, which alone make the individual possible.³⁷

³⁵ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, trans. Barnaby Norman, Polity Press, Cambridge 2014, p. 88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. *Epoch*, 48. See also, on this point, “To Love, To Love Me, To Love Us: From September 11 to April 21,” in Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2009, pp. 37–82.

Again, in a partial reprise of Adorno's socio-psychoanalytic theory of the subject in late capitalist society, Stiegler turns to Freudian theory to explicate hyperindustrial society's attack on the individual subject. He focuses on the role that "industrialized temporal objects"—the typical products of culture industry—play in undermining of that individuated time in which the narcissistic self experiences its own cohesion through ongoing affective, libidinally invested interactions with others. With the loss of such diachronic syncopations between self and other in favor of externally synchronized temporalities—the standardized times of broadcasts and experiential objects such as films and musical recordings—the individual threatens to fragment and disappear.

The experience of art therefore takes on an extraordinary importance in this situation, because, he writes:

Art in general is that which seeks to temporalize differently, so that the time of consciousness of the *I*, supported by the unconscious ground of its incarnated memory, is always diachronic. It liberates through its affirmation the narcissistic unexpected of consciousness's singularity, which can be projected in a *we* through the intermediary of the *screen that every work of art represents*.³⁸

Yet the 20th century, he goes on to explicate in discussions of Alain Renais, Joseph Beuys, and Andy Warhol, is also a threshold in which art is incorporated into the dynamics of hyper-industrialization and its powers to encourage diachronic individuation are imperiled. "In the twentieth century," Stiegler writes:

the integration of mnemotechnics in the sphere of audiovisual production as the most important vector for the constitution of markets, with alphanumeric technology as the new techno-logical condition of any production device, led to art's functional reintegration into the functional life of globalized capitalism—which turns over an ever increasing proportion of its revenue to the aesthetic conditioning of the consumer masses.³⁹

³⁸ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, p. 91.

³⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The Katastrophē of the Sensible*, trans. Barnaby Norman, Polity Press, Cambridge 2015, p. 158.

Ultimately, however, the recognition that any struggle against the loss of individuation entails a recapture of the aesthetic terrain on which advanced capitalism has, as Stiegler puts it, waged “aesthetic war” against individual diachrony, art may be reinvested with the emancipatory energies that were the legacy of the 20th-century avant-gardes.⁴⁰ In a passage that distantly, but distinctly echoes Walter Benjamin’s famous call for the politicization of art in the face of the fascist aestheticization of politics, Stiegler concludes his volumes with a call to arms for an art that acknowledges its role in the fight for a new political economy:

[J]ust when the sensible has become the pre-eminent front in what, as an aesthetic war of an economic nature, is ultimately a temporal war (a confrontation of calculation and singularities in the epoch of mnemotechnologies integrated into production), artistic and spiritual questions have become questions of political economy. It is only by being aware of this, by being prepared in this way, that the struggle can begin.⁴¹

Conclusion

In their examinations of the 20th century, the three philosophers considered here diverge significantly in their overall diagnoses and in the accent they lay upon different features of the period. Badiou seeks to extract the kernel of heroic, experimental formalization as the essential trait of “the Century,” while rescuing avant-garde forms (in politics as well as art) from the violence of purification and purgation that often accompanied 20th-century thought and action. Sloterdijk sees the 20th century as disclosing a hidden “anti-gravitational” essence of long-standing human dreams of abundance and freedom from necessity—most notably brought to their culmination in the mass utopias of communism and late capitalist consumerism, but also expressed through increasingly differentiated forms of spiritual and physical discipline as loosening the naturally given earth-boundedness of human existence. In turn, Sloterdijk perceives in this anti-gravitational dynamic a potential pivot upon which to reverse the ecological destruction that has been, up to now, the heavy cost of growing abundance. Stiegler considers the industrial production and standardization of external-

⁴⁰ See, on this point, the essays in *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*, ed. Aleš Erjavec, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina 2015.

⁴¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The Katastrophē of the Sensible*, p. 175.

ized, technically objectified memory—“tertiary retention”—as the decisive and distinctive feature of the 20th century. This standardization and the proliferation of industrially produced “temporal objects” such as films and recorded music, he contends, threaten the very fabric of human experience and the capacity to find meaning in the self and the world.

Can we, however, also discover congruence and complementarity between these divergent diagnoses of the 20th century? I would like to suggest that the answer is, yes, in three ways. First, it is notable that all three treat the 20th century not simply as an ordinary historical span of years, or even as an epoch in the ordinary sense of a meaningful ensemble of large-scale historical patterns over a certain period of time. Rather, it appears in each as an *anthropological* threshold, which, having been crossed, reveals the “human” itself to have been radically altered. For each, the 21st century is a moment of danger in which we look back from the other side of that threshold of human being and take stock of whither we have arrived. Second, notably, in none of the three is there any entertainment of the argument for “the end of art,” first advanced by Hegel in the 19th century and reprised in the wake of late 20th-century postmodernism and contemporary art, most notably by Arthur C. Danto.⁴² The “end of art” thesis does not, of course, signify that art is not being produced; it is contended rather that art no longer represents the vector of any truth that would lend its development a coherent historical direction and boundaries, a “philosophical history,” one might say, that it expresses. Badiou argues, in contrast, that art has only, since passing through “the Century,” fully come into its own as a truth procedure unconstrained by external didactic or romantic criteria. Sloterdijk evokes a still more grand vision of art’s relation to truth, in a telling metaphor: art’s solar turn, its tropism towards a post-Platonic sun of energetic generosity. Stiegler, too, places art in the complex of truth that emerges out of an ex-static structure of time articulated through the interaction of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions. The artist, in the present day, must be a “pioneer of individuation,” because the practice of art offers the most important counterweight to the culture industry’s expropriation of the temporal structure within which truth may

⁴² See, for example, Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; and Arthur C. Danto, “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense”, *History and Theory* 37 (4/1998): pp. 127–143. Cf. in a more art critical vein, David Joselit, *After Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2012.

occur and become humanly effective. Lastly, each takes the exploration of art's relation to truth as the nodal point for a reflection on the broader role of "the aesthetic" in the contemporary world. Badiou, admittedly, conceives of their relation disjunctively: art is "inaesthetic" in its autonomy as a formalized truth procedure that cannot be reduced to a set of effect on the sensible. In contrast, both Sloterdijk and Stiegler evoke what Stiegler calls the "*katastrophē* of the sensible"—its fateful overturning or reversal—that pivots, to a substantial degree, on the practice of art. The destiny of the sensible in a new disposition of the aesthetic is decisive in the not-yet fulfilled meaning of the *katastrophē* of which we are in the midst: whether, in other words, it will prove a "catastrophic" disaster or the emergence of a more hopeful human future.

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Participatory Art, Philosophy and Criticism

Starting from the point of view that participatory art cannot be properly evaluated within the traditional framework of art criticism, which uses purely aesthetic and formal conceptual tools, we are resorting to more general concepts within the field of philosophy. In doing so, Rancière's rehabilitation of aesthetics proves particularly helpful, as it significantly contributes to the reflection upon such art. At this point it is useful to stress the historical failure of aesthetics as the philosophical treatment of art and its consequence for critical discourse on contemporary art (Osborne). Besides acknowledging the discomfort in aesthetics and exposing the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Rancière also provides a critique of the so-called ethical turn, according to which ethical criteria in assessing participatory ("relational") art (good/bad models of participation, etc.) prevail, which means the collapse of artistic and political disagreements in the new forms of reaching a consensus. Claire Bishop calls special attention to the discomfort of participatory art in relation to aesthetics, which is manifested as rejection or evasion of the aesthetic dimension and is also reflected in critical writing. The discursive framework for considering the causes of this discomfort can be found in the productive contradiction of Rancière's aesthetic regime between the autonomy (the autonomy of the aesthetic experience tied to an art form) and the heteronomy of art in its aspiration toward social change (transgressing the boundaries between art and social reality, a fusion of art and life). Given the rise of participatory art in the 1990s and its effort for social change, the ability of art to connect to the community as a politicized aesthetic process, and consequently also of an accompanying discourse to critically reflect this kind of art, should be questioned anew. Besides providing critical theoretical and historical perspectives, an attempt is being made to evaluate the importance of philosophical concepts for the articulation of critical discourse on contemporary (participatory) art. This essay aims to contribute to the analysis of the occurrence of participatory art also by addressing the case of Slovenia.

241

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1. Methodological bases for evaluating contemporary fine/visual arts in Slovenia

Connoisseurs discuss the current crisis of art criticism as a global phenomenon,¹ so we have to consider this issue from a broader and not merely the Slovenian standpoint, while also taking into account certain Slovenian specifics. According to philosopher Peter Osborne, who detected the general absence of a historically grounded criticism of contemporary art, the situation dates back to the failure of the project of a “critical postmodernism” in the face of judgement in the early 1980s.² When it comes to writing about contemporary artistic production, post-socialist Slovenia has also witnessed a decrease in qualitative criteria, which is one of the main signs of the mentioned crisis.³ In the field of contemporary aesthetics/philosophy of art, Aleš Erjavec, for example, also points out this lack of normativity, noting “that the contemporary conditions in art and culture are characterised by normative emptiness.”⁴ According to Erjavec, one of the key reasons for this normative emptiness is the extensive establishment of the institutional theory of art (introduced by Arthur Danto and George Dickie), whose purpose is “not, first and foremost, to evaluate or differentiate between good or exceptional art and non-art, but, on the contrary, to enable a definition that will capture all possible forms and examples of art.”⁵ Despite the important con-

¹ James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago 2003. We shall also refer here to the *October* roundtable discussion, “The Present Conditions of Art Criticism” (*October*, No. 100, Spring 2002, pp. 220–228), in which the idea of critical judgement was mostly still associated with a late Greenbergian aesthetic formalism and notion of “quality” that led the discussants to reject the problematic of judgement as such in favour of “knowledge” or “theory.”

² Peter Osborne, “Art beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art,” *Art History*, Henley-on-Thames, 27 (4/2004), pp. 651–52; cf. also Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London and New York 2013, pp. 4–5.

³ Tomaž Brejc, “Kaj se je zgodilo likovnemu kritiku: izkušnje množine, dvojine in ednine v slovenskem slikarstvu” [“What Happened to the Art Critic: The Experience of the Plural, the Dual and the Singular in Slovenian Painting”], *Likovne besede*, Ljubljana (73–74/2005), pp. 73–74.

⁴ Aleš Erjavec, *Ljubezen na zadnji pogled. Avantgarda, estetika in konec umetnosti* [*Love at Last Sight: Avant-garde, Aesthetics and the End of Art*], Založba ZRC, Ljubljana 2004, p. 128.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

tribution of the most prominent writers (mostly art historians)⁶ professionally formed in the 1960s to the reflection on contemporary art, and contrary to the extreme reactions against progressive art at the time, we especially see relativization and passivity in relation to contemporary art. After being on the rise until the mid-20th century, the binding and polemically critical discussion has in general gradually dwindled, which testifies to a need for expounding a “platform for a *new critique*.”⁷

As an activity of evaluation, art criticism, which is considered above all the domain of art historians, manifests its expertise by way of an explanatory method with which it not only interprets, but also provides the criteria of evaluation and argues the quality of an artwork.⁸ As a science, Slovenian art history formed a normative toolkit for interpretation,⁹ which the emergence of 20th-century relativism then increasingly more often stripped of its competencies in determining a work’s quality or artistry and meaning.¹⁰ In general, (Western, modernist) art history focuses on artistic objects and differs from the conception of art in the philosophical or aesthetic sense. Philosophical aesthetics (a product of the Eurocentric epistemological context) asks what art is and examines the concepts of the artistic as such. In this regard, it is significant for art history primarily because it reveals the conceptual background, but it is not meant (or, rather, had not been meant until recently) to be employed in the evaluation of individual works and the direct contextual influences on them. A philosophically considered critique strives primarily to express the thought concept (for example, the currents of modernism, such as abstraction; the currents of post-modernism; etc.), which presupposes knowing the context. Its criteria lie outside the work itself, in the idea that the work embodies and according to which art itself becomes a reflection on its own possibilities, for example, in conceptualism. The conceptual turn in the 1960s with its anti-aesthetic and anti-visual interventions into the artworld stresses a fundamental mutation in the ontology

⁶ Since the 1960s, the following people were particularly active on the art scene: Braco Rotar, Tomaž Brejc, Jure Mikuž, Andrej Medved and Igor Zabel.

⁷ Miško Šuvaković, “Teorija in praksa kritike” [“Theory and Practice of Criticism”], *Likovne besede*, Ljubljana (73–74/2005), pp. 163–164.

⁸ Milček Komelj, “Umetnostna zgodovina in kritika” [“Art History and Criticism”], *Mars*, Ljubljana, 1 (1/1989), p. 5.

⁹ This interpretative toolkit was based on Izidor Cankar’s concept of style.

¹⁰ Komelj, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

of the artwork. The critical legacy of conceptual art acknowledges the conceptual as well as “anti-aesthetic” character of much contemporary art, including participatory art.¹¹

However, what is crucial for the processes of the (neo-)avant-garde (conceptualism), “postmodernism” and especially contemporary artistic practices is precisely their crossing artistic boundaries – also in terms of criticism – into the areas of exploring conceptual and broader social phenomena. Contemporary art is ontologically trans- or post-disciplinary in such a way as to cross the multiplicity of disciplinary and institutional discourses necessary for the conceptualization of art.¹² Claire Bishop, an art historian and critic, points out in particular the “social turn” of art in the 1990s, with which artists changed from being the creators of objects into the producers of situations co-created together with other participants in the project.¹³

Faced with contemporary artistic practice, art history found itself in a crisis. Since the 1960s, it had drawn on the findings and methods of linguistics, psychology, psychoanalysis, semantics, various branches of structuralism, semiotics, Marxism, feminism, postcolonial studies, etc. available in the international environment, which also had a significant effect on the happenings in Slovenia, but this did not bring about a greater increase in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary expansions of the field of art history. It was individuals who opened up the traditionally delimited fields of art, including art criticism: Igor Zabel thus explained that, in his critical writing, related especially to his curatorial work at the Slovenian Museum of Modern Art, he endeavoured to be a critic in the Anglo-Saxon sense of someone who writes reviews, which differs from the form of critical writing that originates in the German cultural paradigm, which had been traditionally the most influential in Slovenia. In Zabel’s form of critical writing, one “cannot distinguish between theory, history and evaluation.”¹⁴ In

¹¹ According to Osborne, contemporary art is historically determined as a postconceptual art. Cf. Peter Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*, Verso, London & Brooklyn 2018, p. 20.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London and New York, 2012.

¹⁴ Barbara Borčič and Vesna Teržan, “Poskušam biti kritik v angloameriškem smislu besede: intervju z Igorjem Zabelom” [“I’m Trying to Be a Critic in the Anglo-American Sense of the Word: An Interview with Igor Zabel”], *Likovne besede*, Ljubljana (17–18/1991), p. 56.

this contribution, we also endeavour to strengthen the significance of various theoretical/philosophical approaches in shaping the interpretative tools of contemporary art history and art theory in order to deal with contemporary (participatory) art in a more effective way.

2. Excursus: Philosophy, aesthetics and art criticism

It was already Jan Mukařovský, an aesthetician from the Prague linguistic circle that conceived structural aesthetics as a research and not a normative science, who, in the first part of the 20th century, argued that the question of aesthetic value in art is closely related to the emergence of art criticism.¹⁵ Here we shall mention the problem of the aesthetic and historical-ontological deficit of semi-otic and linguistic paradigms in art criticism, derived from general formalism as a theory of signification (French structuralism).¹⁶ It is important to distinguish Mukařovský's type of "formalism" of structural aesthetics, which is concerned with the "individualizing function of the aesthetic at the level of feeling and signification."¹⁷ In the perspective of the development of the structural principle in relation to an artwork, a critic, as an artist's collaborator and a mediator between the artist and the audience, assumes the standpoint of the future (as opposed to a historian, who assumes the standpoint of the past). On the other hand, criticism is in a constant intensive relation with the science of art: science too is forced to evaluate, even though it aims to translate evaluation into knowledge to the greatest degree possible. Critics, on the other hand, aim at translating knowledge into evaluation. In this, they come across the question of "aesthetic judgement," which is necessarily related to a certain taste, a normative canon ("aesthetic norm"): "Criticism and the science of art are, as is evident, contradictory even though they are internally mutually connected."¹⁸

245

One of the main things at issue here is the relationship between aesthetics (as a modern philosophical discourse on art) and art criticism – the latter in the sense

¹⁵ Jan Mukařovský, *Estetske razprave [Aesthetic Discussions]*, Slovenska matica, Ljubljana 1978, pp. 48–51.

¹⁶ For the problem of a specific type of formalism raised by the reception of French Theory in Anglophone art criticism (e.g. of Krauss's displacement of formalism from the aesthetic to the theoretical field), cf. Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, pp. 93–107.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁸ Mukařovský, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

of art judgement, different from Kant's aesthetic (pure reflective) judgement.¹⁹ We can note the revival of interest in philosophical discourses about art (e.g. Danto's acknowledgement of the immanently philosophical character of contemporary art that led to the idea of end of art)²⁰ as well as the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the prevailing philosophical discourse on art ("aesthetics") to contemporary art.²¹ The turn toward the post-Kantian European philosophical tradition should recognize the historical transformation in the ontology of the artwork as the very sign of its contemporaneity.²²

According to Šuvaković, criticism is a (meta-)discourse of the second degree (statements about statements) that accompanies, examines and promotes (recognises, describes, explains and interprets) current artistic production.²³ While modernist criticism is either "objective discourse" and a "discourse of art" or a constitutive part of current art movements or even a catalyst and motor of the art production, definition and self-presentation of an artist or an art movement, the period from the end of the 1960s to the 1990s sees the emergence of non-normative or less binding forms of post-avant-garde and post-modernist criticism.²⁴

¹⁹ According to Osborne, the roots of the confusion between aesthetics and art are in the transition between Kant and the Jena Romantic philosophy of art (cf. Osborne, "Art beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art," pp. 656–662). In the light of Osborne's brief reconstruction of the philosophical pre-history of this confusion (Friedrich Schlegel's critique of Kant's use of 'aesthetic'), we can discern the two traditions in the criticism of art: (1) the tradition of 'art as aesthetic' (aesthetic judgement) runs from Kant to Greenberg's late writings (an aesthetic theory of medium and judgements of 'quality'; indifference to the cognitive, relational, historical dimensions of work of art); and (2) tradition of 'art as (historical) ontology' (art-critical judgement) runs from philosophical Romanticism to conceptual art and its consequences in the 'post-medium' (Krauss) or 'transmedia' (Osborne) condition. In this second tradition (the first to think the ontology of the artwork as the condition of its experience), Osborne looks for the conceptual ground for contemporary art criticism.

²⁰ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986, pp. 81–115.

²¹ Cf. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 6.

²² *Ibid.* According to Osborne, one of the reasons is also a diffusion of interest in post-structuralism into Anglo-American art criticism (cf. *ibid.*, p. 7).

²³ Miško Šuvaković, *Postmoderna (73 pojma)*, Nova knjiga/Alfa, Belgrade 1995, p. 68.

²⁴ In several places, Šuvaković provides a similar classification of art criticism, spanning from modernism (for example, criticism as a judgement or a response to a work of art: positivistic, impressionistic, expressionistic, formalistic or existentialist criticism) through the "crisis of criticism" in the 1960s and 1970s ("against interpretation," acritical criticism,

Postmodernist theory and art in general could be said to be a unique critique of the integral humanistic view of the world. Due to the disintegration of the firm categorical constructions of modernism (philosophy, aesthetics, art history and criticism), the conception of the subject also underwent a fundamental turn and came to be considered a product of very heterogeneous languages of culture.²⁵ Consequently, the critical writing about contemporary art and culture was increasingly less transparent and more heterogeneous. We shall demonstrate how a critical discourse of contemporary art should participate in the revival of a philosophical art criticism.

The key task of philosophy/aesthetics in relation to art is supposed to be (or was supposed to be until recently) a persistent search for the definition of art.²⁶ The task of aesthetics understood as the philosophy of art is to construct and interpret the definitions of art and a work of art or to provide arguments for the claim that something (an object, a situation, an event, a text) is or is not a work of art. Aesthetics is a metalingual philosophic theory that provides a legitimacy, in terms of value, meaning and theory, to something that can become or can be experienced, understood and evaluated as a work of art. Aesthetic definitions are either ontological (when they define a work of art as a morphological phenomenon) or relativistic (when they define a work of art as a conventionally accepted object, situation or event).

The possible new prospects of philosophical-aesthetic reflection in establishing normativity can also be considered in the context of a prior questioning of the generally established institutional theory of art.²⁷ This has important consequences for the interpretative work of art theory and criticism, which, in contemporary times, find themselves in the context of the demands for a critique of culture and the broader network of the global transnational capitalist society, which, among other things, also calls for a renewed critique of political

criticism of criticism, structuralistic criticism) to contemporary times (post-criticism, criticism at work, media criticism, criticism of art as criticism of culture). Cf. Šuvaković, *Post-moderna*, pp. 68–69.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

²⁷ Erjavec, *Ljubezan na zadnji pogled*, pp. 101–115.

economy.²⁸ In line with the institutional theory, they therefore usually begin by problematizing the contextuality of a work of art or an artistic practice, which lies in specific functions of culture and society.²⁹ It seems that this eliminates the questions about the functional theory of aesthetic experience as the main aesthetic concept and qualifier of value (tradition of modernism). Furthermore, the social turn of art (Bishop) takes us through the insufficient sociological discourse on art to a renewed and strengthened philosophical–aesthetic reflection on contemporary (participatory) art, the kind stimulated by Rancière’s aesthetic oeuvre. Rancière is a thinker who, among other things, “tried to change aesthetics into a tool for the interpretation of contemporary art by declaring modernism – especially the Greenbergian one – to be outdated.”³⁰ The dominant category of modernist art criticism was, until the 1960s, the category of medium. New philosophical concept of art criticism should explore the consequences for modernist criticism of the deconstruction of the ontological significance of the “medium.”³¹ One task of contemporary criticism is, according to Osborne, the renewal of the legacy of Romantic philosophy of art (bequeathed by Benjamin and Adorno) for clarifying the distinction between “art” and “aesthetic” in the context of contemporary art.

3. Methodological remarks on participatory art

Art-theoretical and critical aspects

The analysis of Claire Bishop’s case studies in *Artificial Hells* (2012) effectively shows the challenge posed by the methodological implications of participatory process art, which demand that we seek alternative criteria for the study and evaluation of such art.³² When research is faced with an artistic practice that has

²⁸ Lev Kreft, *Estetikov atelje: od modernizma k sodobni umetnosti [Aesthetician’s Studio: From Modernism to Contemporary Art]*, Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, Ljubljana 2015, p. 268.

²⁹ *Context-driven research* is becoming crucial also for contemporary aesthetics. Cf. Ernest Ženko, “Mode-2 Aesthetics”, *Filozofski Vestnik*, Ljubljana, 38 (2/2007), pp. 99–115.

³⁰ Aleš Erjavec, “Predgovor” [“Foreword”], in Terry Smith, *Sodobna umetnost in sodobnost*, Slovensko društvo likovnih kritikov, Ljubljana 2013, p. 20.

³¹ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 3. Osborne demonstrates a transacategorical character of the so-called post-conceptual art (equated with contemporary art) as a consequence of the critical destruction of “medium.”

³² The work of North American critics was crucial for the establishment of the field of participatory art in Europe, for the creation of the terminology used in its analysis and thereby

to do with people and social processes, visual analyses prove to be insufficient as they miss the affective dynamics between the participants of the event itself. It was already conceptual and performative turns in art of the 1960s and 1970s that tried to shake the commodity-object in favour of an elusive experience, but visuality remained an important part of them. In contemporary participatory art, performativity (in addition to teaching as an artistic medium)³³ is crucial since the live contact between the participants enables a more effective participatory engagement. The emphasis therefore lies on direct experiences based on the process of intersubjective exchange (group dynamic, raised consciousness, etc.). In view of this, Bishop calls attention to the problem of only rare observers having the possibility of obtaining an overall insight into the generally longer participatory projects; often, the curators are the only ones with a comprehensive overview of individual projects, but their narratives lack a critical distance due to their own personal involvement.³⁴ We can see this as one of the consequences of the curator becoming the central figure of the art world in the 1990s, also tasked with theoretically expounding the support for both their own activity and the creation of art projects. To a certain degree, the figure of the curator thus overshadows the role that the art critic played in modernism.

Bishop's entire project, delineated in her *Artificial Hells*, can be understood as a call for "more bold, affective and troubling forms of participatory art and criticism."³⁵ The author devotes special attention not only to the processual nature of participatory art, but also to its product or result, which she attempts to evaluate in relation to the formation of an "analysis of the politics of spectatorship."³⁶ In this text, we also affirmatively consider the mediating object (concept, image or story) as an important link between the artist and a secondary audience, on the one hand, and the related elaboration of the politics of spectatorship and the critical view, on the other. We will return to this in our discussion of local Slovenian artistic practice.

also for the formation of Claire Bishop herself. In Europe, the main stimulation for the development of the field is Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, from which Claire Bishop decisively distances herself.

33 According to Bishop, the two predominant forms of participation in contemporary art are delegated performance and pedagogical project.

34 Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The key critical topics related to participatory art include the tension between (1) questions of quality (related to the limitation of the traditional modernist value of objectness) and the equality of forms/expressions and (2) between individual (also a modernist value) and group/collective authorship. As Bishop's case studies of participatory art illustrate,³⁷ we face the insufficiency of the positivistic sociological approach to participatory art (evidence, measurability of results), on the one hand, and the need to preserve the fundamentally undefined reflections on quality characteristic of the humanities, on the other hand. In discussing participatory art, *quality* is often considered a contentious word because it supposedly serves the interests of the market and social elites; furthermore, it is believed to be connected with the connoisseur formalism of art history (and thus also with the figure of the modernist art critic); and, finally, in a more radical perspective, the question of quality is supposedly equated with the dividing line between high and low culture. Bishop builds her analysis on the presupposition that "value judgements are necessary, not as a means to reinforce elite culture and police the boundaries of art and non-art, but as a way to understand and clarify our shared values at a given historical moment."³⁸

Special attention should be given to the forms of conceptual and affective complexity of the socially oriented art projects that reject the aesthetic dimension. Like in conceptualism and situationism, the photo-documents of contemporary participatory projects (workshops, public tribunals, protests, etc.), as "anti-aesthetic visual phenomena," do not offer objects of new formalism, but prompt an analysis of their contribution to "the social and artistic experience being generated."³⁹

In involving people, participatory art aims above all at "the creative rewards of participation as a politicised working process."⁴⁰ In the methodological sense, dealing with people and social processes, however, at least partially requires a sociological reading since the analysis necessarily has to include concepts such as "community," "society," etc., which have traditionally had a greater significance within the social sciences than the humanities.⁴¹ But because, in addi-

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

tion to being a social activity, participatory art is also a symbolic activity, which enables it not only to be embedded in the world, but also to be separated from it and have a certain aesthetic distance to it. Accordingly, the positivist social sciences are, in this regard, less useful than the more general, more abstract concepts from the field of philosophy (especially aesthetics/philosophy of art and political philosophy).

For the needs of discussing participatory art practices, we use theories and concepts from aesthetics or the philosophy of art and political philosophy (Rancière, Mouffe), philosophy of contemporary art (Osborne), contemporary art history and criticism (Bishop) and also architecture and urbanism (Jurman and Šušteršič, Krasny).⁴² This specific form of interdisciplinarity and trans- or post-disciplinarity differs from the interdisciplinary approaches of art history from the 1970s since the need for theoretical inter- or transdisciplinarity originates in the participatory art practices themselves.

The politics of aesthetics in contemporary (participatory) art

With the evident need to find new ways of analysing participatory art that would no longer be related merely to visuality, we are, as Bishop has noted, faced with the problem that art and the aesthetic are often characterized as “merely visual, superfluous, academic” and thus less important than the concrete results concerning social relations.⁴³ Questioning the emphasis on affective responses, compassionate identification and consensual dialogue brings to light a typical discourse around participatory art, in which “an ethics of interpersonal interaction comes to prevail over a politics of social justice.”⁴⁴ Opposed to this trend, which can be denoted as an “ethical turn,” is Jacques Rancière’s politics of aesthetics.

As a rule, criticism solves the problems with describing the artistic value of participatory art by resorting to ethical criteria (judging whether an artist provides a good or a bad model of collaboration). An example of this is the ethics of au-

⁴² On participatory urbanism, see Urška Jurman and Apolonija Šušteršič, ed., *AB – Architect’s Bulletin (Participation)*, Ljubljana, 41 (188–189/2011). See also Elke Krasny, ed., *Hands-On Urbanism 1850–2012: The Right to Green*, MCCM Creations, Architekturzentrum Wien, Hong Kong and Vienna 2012.

⁴³ Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

thorial renunciation as a criterion of judgement and the comparison with other projects: a superior model of collaborative practice is one “in which individual authorship is suppressed in favour of facilitating the creativity of others.”⁴⁵ In addition, the visual, conceptual and experiential results of the projects are often subordinate to the judgement on the relationship between the artists and their collaborators; what might be interesting as art (for example, social dialogue becoming an art medium, the significance of dematerializing a work of art and its transformation into a social process or the specific affectiveness of social exchange) is thus subordinate to ethical judgements on working procedures and intentionality.

Contrary to the sociologically and ethically coloured approach to evaluation is the decision to deal with participatory projects “*as art*.”⁴⁶ In view of the described circumstances, we need to reconsider the role of aesthetics, which some time ago (in the context of historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes) became discredited for allegedly concealing the inequalities and exclusions in society, which is why it was equated with formalism, decontextualization and depoliticization; furthermore, aesthetics became synonymous with the market and social hierarchy. A certain re-evaluation of aesthetics only came about in the new millennium with the important contribution of Rancière’s aesthetic thought. According to Bishop, Rancière rehabilitates *aisthesis* as an “autonomous regime of experience” that cannot be captured with the tools of logic, reason or morality.⁴⁷ According to Rancière, aesthetics is not “the name of a discipline,” but the “name of a specific regime for the identification of art”⁴⁸; it refers to a special mode of experience and thought about art, which he names the aesthetic regime. What is essential for him is the distribution of the sensible, which is possible only on the basis of an imminent and direct relation between aesthetics and politics and which extends the realm of the aesthetic beyond the limits of the art world to the domain of the social or political.⁴⁹ The aesthetic regime is characterized by interventions into the established distribution of the

252

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Polity Press, Cambridge and Malden 2009, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum, London and New York 2004, p. 82.

sensible, the equality of represented subjects and styles and the singularity of determining meaning.⁵⁰ It emerged with the “aesthetic revolution” at the turn of the 18th century, was the main characteristic of historical avant-gardes and is still relevant today. In addition to overcoming traditional art classifications and hierarchies, Rancière insists on preserving the tension or paradox between the autonomy and the heteronomy of art: “in this regime, art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or something other than art.”⁵¹ Furthermore, he tries to think together the artistic and the socio-political dimension of both avant-garde and contemporary art practices. With the aesthetic regime, Rancière introduces a political conceptualization of the sensible, which he demonstrates with the interventions of the artists and the audience (emancipated spectators) into the existing distributions of the sensible (the distribution and exchange of ideas, skills, know-how, experience, etc.), which in the modernist paradigm remained unreflected, understood as an aesthetic disturbance and the like.⁵²

What is telling here regarding participatory or “relational” art is Rancière’s claim that, in view of the artistic attempts at strengthening social ties and the sense of community, politics and aesthetics disappear in ethics or its instrumentalization in the name of reaching a consensus and denying the antagonisms in a community.⁵³ In his influential critique of the recent ethical turn, Rancière points out the weakening or even the elimination of political dissensus and social antagonisms.⁵⁴

One of the starting points of Rancière’s discussion on the “paradox of political art” is the understanding of political art in its capacity to establish (aesthetic) distance from social happening.⁵⁵ The thematization of this distance as a break or a dissensus is crucial for the consideration of contemporary artistic practices

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵¹ Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, p. 36.

⁵² The concept of the emancipated spectator is one of the key concepts for understanding the elaboration of the critical view in this discussion. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York, 2009.

⁵³ Jacques Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics,” *Maska*, Ljubljana, 19 (88–89/2004), p. 16.

⁵⁴ Rancière detects the ethical turn primarily in two forms: “sublime art” and “relational art.” Cf. Rancière *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, pp. 109–132.

⁵⁵ Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics,” p. 10.

and the policies of representation.⁵⁶ Due to it drawing on the fabric of society, contemporary art is always in a specific paradoxical intertwinement of distance from and proximity to various ideologies and public policies. Based on the above, we can conclude that there is no a priori criterion for the establishment of the relation between aesthetics and politics or politics and art. According to this theory, all art could potentially be political due to the lack of criteria for the distribution of the sensible. But with his critique of the ethical turn, which subjects art to moral judgement, Rancière clearly directs his critical attention at the collapse of artistic and political dissensuses into new forms of consensuses, thereby at least indirectly giving a value judgement on a certain type of art. The discussed examples make it clear that the “new distribution of the sensible” is not shown through abstract works unrelated to political topics or through the didacticism of critical art – contrary to the “good” projects that ensure the aesthetic equality of forms in which the dissensual relation is realized by way of an aesthetic break, persistence in ambiguity and tension between the world of art and everyday reality.⁵⁷

Despite the numerous productive thought impulses, we also need to direct our attention to the lack of normativity in Rancière himself. Tracing Rancière’s thought, Bishop points out especially the ethically oriented value judgements and binaries such as “the false polarity of ‘bad’ singular authorship and ‘good’ collective authorship,” but does not go deeper into problematizing the lack of normative criteria in Rancière, whom she refers to when criticizing the ethical turn, which essentially concerns contemporary participatory art.⁵⁸ Bishop believes that Rancière’s arguments are “philosophical rather than art critical,” but what she nevertheless finds important is especially his debunking of the binaries in the discourse of politicized art such as individual/collective, author/spectator, active/passive, etc., because this opened the path toward the development of a new artistic terminology by which to discuss spectatorship.⁵⁹ The fact is that

254

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Bloomsbury, London and New York 2015, p. 148.

⁵⁷ Among the examples that show Rancière’s appreciation of the rebellious forms of critical art that evidently resist current events are Martha Rosler’s anti-war photomontages (*Bringing the War Home, 1967–1972*) and Chris Burden’s *The Other Vietnam Memorial* (1991). Cf. Rancière, “The Politics of Aesthetics,” pp. 14–15.

⁵⁸ Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the questions of value and judgement do not play any visible role in Rancière's aesthetic works. We therefore agree with Jakub Stejskal's conclusion:

“That the question of value is not addressed by Rancière can perhaps be explained by the generally egalitarian character of his aesthetics, for which any hierarchical distribution is to be dissolved. Introducing artistic excellence and good taste smacks of hierarchies and canons.”⁶⁰

Rancière's resistance to aesthetic evaluation or his positive evaluation of only that art which aims at securing the aesthetic equality of forms – despite his otherwise delving deep into the paradoxical nature of aesthetic experience – seems to be ignorant of another key paradox: “that the egalitarian redistribution taking place in the aesthetic sensorium becomes accessible only through an evaluative experience that elevates certain artefacts above others because of their very possibility to have such an effect on us.”⁶¹ We thus find ourselves, on the one hand, in the sphere of the institutional theory of art, and, on the other hand, within the normativity of western modernism, both in Rancière's aesthetic regime and Bishop's critical discourse. Whereas “aesthetic” or “autonomous” art openly embraces aesthetic judgement and its translation into money value, there is a false openness and distance in heteronomous (participatory) art, which operates within the same boundaries of the institutionally defined artworld. We should acknowledge that with the rise of neoliberalism the idea of judgement was replaced by the idea of the measurement of art in terms of social importance/impact by both a neoliberal state's mechanisms of power and an activism opposed to it. The value of contemporary participatory art is thus not articulated in its own terms, and therefore the artworld urgently needs a discourse of judgement or validation.

255

4. Critical and interpretative views of participatory practices from Slovenia

After the fall of communism, Eastern Europe, that is, former socialist countries, also witnessed a rise in socially engaged and participatory art. When Slovenia

⁶⁰ Jakub Stejskal, “Rancière's Aesthetic Revolution and Its Modernist Residues,” <https://philarchive.org/archive/STERAR-6>, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

became independent in 1991, it went through a period of transition to neoliberal capitalism, which was crucial for the formation of new production conditions for making art. This led to a change not only in the way that artists worked and related to their audience, but also in the reception and the evaluation of art, which moved more and more to the margins of social happening. While the critical performative, research and participatory practices moved from the traditional institutional venues of fine and visual arts through alternative places and locations into the broader social space, they remained quite neglected in the eyes of criticism and critical theoretic reflection. We can assume that what caused a certain unease among the critics was especially their participatory procedures, which demanded a fundamental rethinking of value criteria. We also have to stress the pragmatic aspect of the method of researching such arts, which due to their experiential nature demand a specific discursivity: concretely, the case study mentioned below took several years of continued research of the local art scene, ranging from the study of archival material and a series of conversations, interviews and discussions with the artists, curators and individual participants in the projects to an engagement with the audience to which the research findings were presented in the form of texts, lectures, exhibitions and public debates.⁶²

The first wave of art in the urban public and social space that appeared in Slovenia in the mid-1990s was followed by the second wave at the beginning of the new millennium (the majority of these artists have been from the narrower sphere of fine arts and architecture).⁶³

⁶² In this process, however, a transition took place from a theoretical critical treatment of the practices of Celje artists (research about the so-called Celje alternative of the 1970s, Admission Free Festival from the late 1990s, etc.) to active participation in several projects of artists from the Association of Fine Artists of Celje. Recently the author of this essay has assumed the role of curator in several exhibition projects: *Grass, Sparrow and Gasoline*: artistic actions, interventions, performances and installations in public space, ZDSLU Gallery and the public space of the city of Ljubljana (2013); *The Architecture of Interpersonal Relationships*: open studio, Celje (2015); *WE MET AT SIX: Proposals for Communal Practices and Green Areas in Celje*: an exhibition on view at the Celje Gallery of Contemporary Art (2015).

⁶³ Among the more prominent socially engaged artists of the first wave is Marjetica Potrč; from the second wave are especially engaged members of Ljubljana-based Obrat association (Polonca Lovšin and others) and also of the Association of Fine Artists of Celje (Andreja Džakušič and others).

These artists are interested not merely in the overlooked aspects of the local urban space in their research, but also in the relationships with the local residents of the space of exploration itself, as well as in the aesthetic and conceptual relationships with the gallery audience and the general public. The participatory process at a specific location itself does not actually have a secondary audience, which makes the public critical discourse in the form of an exhibition all the more important. The exhibition discloses the results of the preceding artistic research related, for example, to specific city locations that stand out by their topical nature since they are subject to broader civil initiatives. The artists communicate the messages from the separate initiatives through heterogeneous and multi-dimensional works, which are aesthetic and at the same time expand into the social space (the set of works can include live events, installations, documentary material, drafts, sketches, drawings, photographs, video, as well as natural materials, relocated from the urban environment into the gallery space). Creating works/projects following the principles of participation is necessarily integrated into a network of connections with specific historical and socio-political contexts as well as everyday life situations. The artistic means of the urban life research are always contextually specific and thus bound to the singularities of determining the meaning.⁶⁴

5. Toward an elaboration of the politics of a critical view

In conclusion we shall summarize the main challenges for contemporary philosophically informed art criticism: one of the main problems is how to deal with participatory art as a transdisciplinary concept and how philosophically oriented aesthetics (questioning the truth/definitions/social functions of art) can help to construct a transdisciplinary ontology in such a way as to cross the multiplicity of disciplinary and institutional discourses. Rancière's aesthetics can bring some valuable critical insights regarding the ethical turn of aesthetics and politics but cannot contribute to critical judgment about participatory art (in terms of the changed ontology of the artwork). It would be useful for art criticism to reconsider the meaning of the concept of socially determined autonomy (in the Adornian sense, accepting Schiller's argument on the autonomy as appearance in the artwork) for contemporary ("post-autonomous") participatory art and (*politics of*) aesthetics (Rancière). Reevaluation of this concept can also

257

⁶⁴ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 23; Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

bring a better understanding of artists' and activists' aims in global social movements for a new democracy. The treatment of participatory art, with its tension between autonomy and heteronomy in the context of the growing hybridization of autonomy and neoliberalization, demands a reevaluation of the critique of political economy in art and aesthetics. This would be helpful for art criticism on how to treat spaces of participatory artistic "*counter arrangements*" (in the Foucauldian sense as well as in the sense of struggle with the commodity form) or specific interspaces of art in a global capitalist society and also on how to deal with participation itself. In horizontally-oriented cultural organizations (e.g. of producing participatory art projects), all models of participation and the activation of the "audience" must be reconsidered, including ambivalent processes in the Post-Fordist participation imperative. This is crucial in searching for alternative social modes of the institutionalization of art and its critical (self-)reflection.

Rancière's conception of aesthetics in its close relation to politics can importantly contribute to our understanding the effects of contemporary art dealing with the social field – and thereby also the unease in the related criticism. With the help of Rancière's aesthetic regime and the politics of aesthetics, we can also see contemporary participatory art in Slovenia as a certain continuation of the participatory impulses of international neo-avant-garde movements and their heteronomous nature.⁶⁵

A frequent objection to participatory, community-oriented art is that the ethics of interpersonal relations prevails over the politics of social justice (Bishop). But it is not necessary that every such project ends in a consensus, exclusion and the concealment of otherness rather than in an aesthetic break with the habits of perception, a break that, by way of a dissensus, irony or critique, arouses a unique negative pleasure, embarrassment, unease, ambivalence, etc. in relation to the questions about the "excluded" as a condition of the existence of every community (for example, about foreign migrant workers). For art is also characterized by elements of critically opposing society and operating in the field of antagonism or *agonism*, where it can realize the power of maintaining a contradictory

⁶⁵ Cf. Mojca Puncer, "The Politics of Aesthetics of Contemporary Art in Slovenia and its Avant-Garde Sources", *Filozofski Vestnik*, Ljubljana, 37 (1/2016), pp. 133–156, 226–227.

position in relation to the economico-political imperatives.⁶⁶ The participatory process is not immune to the characteristic traps of the contemporary capitalist modes of production when it comes, for example, to unpaid collaborators that co-create the work of art, etc. This is why it is not unusual that, with its distancing from the conventional forms of art production under capitalism, participatory art prompts discussions within the tradition of Marxist and post-Marxist writing about art (Mouffe, Rancière, Bishop, etc.).

In Slovenia, Lev Kreft has called for a reconsideration of the relevance of Marxist aesthetics in relation to the critique of political economy in the context of both art and aesthetics by referring to Marx's research into the "*esthesis* of the capital" and his "critical analysis of fetishism of commodities and universal mystification," which Marx does not discuss "as ideological illusions, but as objective conditions of sensuality and perception."⁶⁷ In contemporary times, after art and aesthetics turned to everyday life and all areas of life have been taken over by the globalized capitalist machine, the need for such a critique has become evident in view of the increasing objectification of interpersonal relations in line with the criterion of usefulness "because the commodity form translates relations between people into relations between objects."⁶⁸ As a subversive social power against capitalism, art must reach toward the social (a sensual experience of community), but at the same time remain in the domain of art and be successful in both fields, which means that – in line with Rancière's aesthetic regime – it persists in a constant tension, even a paradox. Artistic re-presentation has the power of intervening in public discourse, which appears as a contextually specific artistic and aesthetic strategy (of division, intervention, over-identification, etc.), repeatedly put to the test in every new project (Rancière, Bishop). This realization has important consequences for the reflection on contemporary participatory art, which, with the democratization of the aesthetic means of expression, endeavours to transform the material conditions of its own practice and establish new, different relations with the audience and the reality outside art. This is also in concurrence with Rancière's finding on the radical contingency of the work of an "emancipated spectator," who is in principle active and

⁶⁶ Cf. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London and New York, 2000.

⁶⁷ Kreft, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

equal with everybody.⁶⁹ Furthermore, such a politics of spectatorship essentially concerns and determines the formation of the critical view and the elaboration of its politics. That is also one of the guiding lines of this discussion, which, by using contemporary philosophical concepts and by interpreting the participatory artistic practice in a conceptually open way, encourages and deepens the critical reflection on contemporary participatory art in Slovenia and the broader international context of the movements of the contemporary transnational globalized artworld.

⁶⁹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 17.

Tomaž Toporišič*

Is Art itself a Criticism? Linking Wilde to Derrida, Rancière and Badiou

I. The critic's object is not always to explain a work of art but rather to deepen its mystery

It is more than evident today that the millenniums turn in contemporary society as well as in theoretical approaches to art undermined tactics of the art critics, who have suddenly found themselves in a situation where there was no consensus on what criticism should be. And, even worse: in the second half of the 20th century, room for criticism within the society has diminished radically.

Criticism along with other theoretical fields had to reinvent new responses to this newly created reality, characterized by a paradoxical or schizophrenic situation one could describe in the following sentence: *On the one hand we are witnessing a new methodological freedom, the use of a "mix" of different theoretical paradigms from semiotics to critical theory, poststructuralism, feminist and queer studies. And, on the other hand, critique and criticism is being declared as a relic of the past, as something that is far from indispensable.*

Our essay will try to deal with this question using as a starting point the famous quotation from Oscar Wilde's great dialogue *The Critic as Artist*: "Criticism is itself an art. The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought."¹ says Gilbert to Ernest.

261

In *The Critic as Artist*, published in 1891 and initially entitled "The Function and the True Value of Criticism", the English 19th century decadent poet, dramatist and novelist Oscar Wilde praises the literary genre of criticism which he

¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Volume IV: Criticism: Historical Intentions, The Soul of Man*, J. M. Guy (Ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 152.

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considers as an act of creation.² He stages his reflection in a dialogue between two characters, Ernest and Gilbert, the latter embodying his own positions by stating that “without the critical faculty there is no artistic creation worthy of the name: no work of art without clear conscience, conscience and critical spirit are one.”³ For Oscar Wilde the criticism is contemplative consciousness. To be considered as a work in its own right, the critical text must absolutely preserve its autonomy: the right criticism must be creative and independent.

We can interpret his “The Critic as Artist” as a critical exercise attempting to analyze some aspects of the theoretical foundations of literary criticism in a series of works dedicated to the relation between art, criticism and society: Plato’s *Ion* and *The Republic*, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* and Arnold’s *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*. Wilde wittingly discusses the problems of the dichotomy between the evaluations of literature from ethical or aesthetic grounds while analysing among other topics those of the poetic forms, the nature of language, the manner and means of imitation and the effect of art upon its audience and the character of the critic. The result of this far-reaching discussion is the thought that the critic is not limited to “the subjective form of expression” and that the creative critics of the world have often employed the form of the Dialogue as a particularly impressive means of illuminating ideas:

GILBERT. [...] By its [the Dialogue’s] means he [the critic] can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every fancy and reality to every mood. By its means he can exhibit the object from every point of view, and show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things, gaining in this manner all the richness and reality of effect that comes from those side issues that are suddenly suggested by the central idea in its progress, and really illuminate the idea more completely, or

² “The Critic as Artist” is considered as Wilde’s essay containing the most extensive statements of his aesthetic philosophy. It is regarded by many as his iconoclastic classicism, an interpretive-impressionistic critical exercise which attempts, through knowledge, scholarship, and personality, to analyze some aspects of the theoretical foundations of literary criticism. A dialogue in two parts, it is by far the longest one included in his collection of essays titled *Intentions* published in May 1891. “The Critic as Artist” is a significantly revised version of articles that first appeared in the July and September issues of *The Nineteenth Century*. Wilde elaborates a purely aesthetic method that’s “superb in [its] changes and contradictions. He inverts Mathew Arnold’s apodictic critical formula to suit himself, so that “the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not”.

³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 142.

from those felicitous after-thoughts that give a fuller completeness to the central scheme, and yet convert something of the delicate charm of chance.

ERNEST: By its means, too, he can invent an imaginary antagonist, and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical argument.⁴

We will link this seductive idea with contemporary philosophers thinking art and criticism in a specific, let us say post-structuralist way: Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou. Our question will be: How did the post-post-structuralist theoretical deconstruction, primacy of the third paradigm, the viewer, intertextuality, interculturality, intermediality, mediated culture change the very phenomenology of criticism?

In his deconstruction as a specific form of criticism Jacques Derrida asserts that there is not one single intrinsic meaning to be found in works of art, but rather many, and often these can be conflicting. In his famous essay *La Vérité en peinture* (1978) he uses the example of Vincent van Gogh's painting *Old Shoes with Laces*, arguing that we can never be sure whose shoes are depicted in the work, making a concrete analysis of the painting difficult. According to Jacques Rancière the interest of the scene is to show the thought at work. His concept is opposed to a whole philosophical tradition that says that we must first define the terms and see how they are combined and given the rationality of the thing. The scene thus produces its own critique of both art and society. Not without similarities with Rancière, Alain Badiou claims in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* that art produces its own truth and thus he redefines a relation of truth over beauty within the contested field of aesthetics: »Art is itself a producer of truths.«⁵ He thus describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art. Aesthetics has historically brought philosophy to art; Badiou reverses the situation. Can therefore Art itself produce its own criticism?

263

Let us return to Wilde and bring to our mind the argumentation used by Gilbert in his answers to a series of questions produced by Ernest:

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 186–187.

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005, p. 1.

ERNEST. “But, seriously speaking, what is the use of art-criticism? Why cannot the artist be left alone [...] Why should the artist be troubled by the shrill clamour of criticism? Why should those who cannot create take upon themselves to estimate the value of creative work? What can they know about it?”⁶

GILBERT. The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name. [...] An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all. There have been critical ages that have not been creative, in the ordinary sense of the word, ages in which the spirit of man has sought to set in order the treasures of his treasure-house, to separate the gold from the silver, and the silver from the lead, to count over the jewels, and to give names to the pearls. But there has never been a creative age that has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms.⁷

And as though this could maybe not be persuasive enough he pulls out the joker we quoted at the very beginning:

GILBERT: But, surely, Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent.

[...]

ERNEST. But is Criticism really a creative art?

GILBERT. Why should it not be? It works with materials, and puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry? Indeed, I would call criticism a creation within a creation.⁸

Gilbert explains to his questioning but docile friend Ernest that the critic's object is not always to explain a work of art but rather to deepen its mystery, to make it a thing of wonder by revealing something of all that has gone into its

⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 128.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–144.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153.

creation. The critic, Oscar Wilde has Gilbert say, “does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest material. Anything will serve his purpose. [...] To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes.”⁹

Thus Wilde invites us to see criticism and art as two practices that are closely connected when he says that the actor is the critic of the drama. Thus he opens up the field of interpretation. And if a page of a novel can pass for a musical or pictorial criticism, why inversely a painting or a music would not they be the commentary of a literary text? We end up facing two major theoretical difficulties:

- 1) To take as a subject of study a practice the scope of which seems impossible to define.
- 2) To separate criticism and creation, whereas all criticism is, by nature, creative.

Oscar Wilde, in his text “The Critic as Artist” highlights the modernity of the criticism of ancient art that freely mixes individual practice and general theory. It was during the humanist period that the alliance of letters and arts flourished: the authors considered painters as “allies” whose works they celebrated. The artists seek their company and exchange their comments for portraits they make of them.

II. The scene produces its own critique of both art and society

The dialogical form as a particularly impressive means of illuminating ideas is also one of the tactics of one of the most prominent philosophers thinking theatre today, Jacques Rancière. In his book *La méthode de la scène* (with Adnen Jdey) Rancière questions the aestheticization of politics and the politics of aesthetics from a reflection on the stage and on time and thus defines art as one of the places where to think about aesthetics and politics. The interest of the scene as thought by Rancière is to show the thought at work, the concepts being made as opposed to a whole philosophical tradition that says that we must first define the terms and see how they are combined and given the rationality of the thing. The scene thus produces its own critique of both art and society. For Rancière one of the most salient aspects of the very close relationship between object and

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

method is the role played in this philosophy by the dramatization of concepts. Rancière suggests that no gesture is more associated with this thought than that of staging. Within and among other scenarios the scene reveals the workings of the thwarted identity of the productions of art and political fiction.

Similarly to Wilde while discussing Plato, the privilege granted by Jacques Rancière to the notion of scene makes him not only to propose a radical critique of the Platonic matrix and its successors or Marxist heirs such as Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. The very “scenographies” that are deduced from it help him to construct a new theory of the subject that distinguishes him from Alain Badiou and enable him to continue to develop Michel Foucault’s restrictive model or structure of society.

His basic claim is that art has its reasons. He calls for the capacity of spectator’s emancipation, but on the other side, artists personify for the philosopher the aesthetic and political dimension of dissensus. The decisive question thus become the relations “between aesthetics of politics and politics of aesthetics”¹⁰ We must think in terms of editing, the operations of which compose, decompose and recompose the relationships of what is shown, thought and said, in order to define the existing dominant rationalities and, consequently, to criticize them. This leads to Rancière’s interest in a history of art understood as a history of regimes of identification of the arts.

Rancière’s interest in a history of art understood as a history of regimes of identification speaks about a specific dilemma of today’s reception of art: it has become a common belief that if there are criteria for evaluating old works of art, the same cannot be said for contemporary art. The viewer is not supposed to judge, whether a work of art is aesthetically effective or not, but only to understand its iconoclastic function that it has the duty to approve. But the new rule that arises from the rejection of an older one is arbitrary, since nothing is forbidden, especially not incoherence, banality, platitude, indigence.

The same traits that once led to the condemnation of an object as artistically invalid, recommend it today as “contemporary”. This category includes virtually

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *La méthode de la scène* (with Adnen Jdey), Éditions Lignes, Paris 2018, p. 70.

any object provided it is art. In these conditions that lack the criteria, it is impossible to criticize a “contemporary” work. Most of the time any criteria would by definition be considered academic. That the work departs from it and disappoints the expectation of the public of connoisseurs is, according to French philosopher and aesthetician Anne Cauquelin, a quality to retain in her favour, far from condemning it. As a result, since without the freedom to blame, there is no flattering praise, we cannot praise “contemporary” works. The task of the one who makes the job of commenting them consists, at best, of creating the illusion of their importance by means of a learned joke.¹¹ The characteristic of art, claims Gerard Genette, resuming an idea of Ernst Gombrich, is to call on us an attitude “consisting in finding in the object, besides its possible aesthetic merits, certain “defects”, that we would like to see corrected.”¹² On the other hand we do not criticize - notes Gombrich - the mountains, the trees or the flowers. Urinals, bottle dryers or bicycle wheels are even less critical. We thus obtain another proof of our theorem. There is no art without criticism, no critique without criteria and therefore we can claim: there is art, there are criteria.

In consequence we have to admit that we cannot say anything without a principle of discrimination, we cannot speak of art without distinguishing it from non-art. When a historian or a critic mentions one, they distinguish it favourably, *ipso facto*, from the crowd of others whom they pass over in silence. Finally, the unity of the concept of art, a condition of aesthetics and the history of art, implies the universality of aesthetic values. In other words: the possibility for men belonging to different civilizations to communicate through art. Like Dürer discovering Aztec art, the Japanese the Albertian perspective at the end of the same century, Artaud Balinese dance in the beginning of the XX. Century ... Consequently, this is conditioned on the fact that men have something in common that we have called “human nature”.

267

According to Alain Badiou, the relationship between truth and art is thought of in the history of philosophy under three “schemes”. The first, which he calls didactic, defines art as “the charm of a semblance of truth”. It appears with Plato. The second, “romantic”, states that “art alone is capable of truth”. Between the two, is placed the classic schema, which Aristotle laid the cornerstones. “Art is

¹¹ See her book *L'art contemporain*, Éditions PUF, Paris 2007.

¹² Gerard Genette, *L'œuvre d'art II. La relation esthétique*, Seuil, Paris 1997, p. 167–168.

not truth, but it does not pretend to be true". It aims only to resemble the real to "please" the viewer, captivate and engage in an identification leading to catharsis, the "deposition of passions." According to this vision, art is "registered in the imaginary". If one considers the major currents of thought of the twentieth century, Marxism is a didactician, what Brecht's ideas on the theatre clearly show, Heidegger is romantic and psychoanalysis is resolutely classical.¹³

He claims these three schemes are today "saturated", their story is closed. He therefore proposes another "mode of knotting" between art and philosophy. In none of the three schemes is the truth both immanent and singular. It is precisely this simultaneity that must be affirmed. The "relevant unity of what is called art cannot be the work, because it is "essentially finite" whereas the truth in Badiou is an infinite multiplicity. This point is demonstrated by Badiou in *L'Être et l'événement*¹⁴. The truth, according to the particular meaning that Badiou gives to this word, is a type of being and not a criterion of the statements like the truthfulness of which the opposite is the erroneous one. The truth, in this sense, has no opposite. There are four types of truths that philosophy strives to make compossible. They are produced by art, science, politics and love.

However, a truth procedure as a configuration is new at the time of the inaugural event (the birth of a group of works). But it does not remain so: the configuration is "composed of a virtually infinite complex of works"¹⁵ and can last for centuries, like the novel. It follows that artistic truths (configurations) are not new most of the time and, at one time or another, they are generally "normalized"¹⁶. It is undeniable that art, in each of its domains, produces "immanent and singular" truths. They can be named "aesthetic values".

268

It seems more than convenient at this point to make a short comparison with Jacques Derrida and his concept of multiple nature of signification in *Writing and Difference*. According to Derrida the experience of writing suggests that

¹³ We are referring to the lecture of Alai Badiou "Art et philosophie" in Paris, Beaubourg, March, 26th 1993, noted by Aimé Thiault and transcribed by François Duvert. Web: Transcriptions de Conférences et interventions d'Alain Badiou ; <http://www.entrettemps.asso.fr/Badiou/conferences.htm> <http://www.entrettemps.asso.fr/Badiou/93.Beaubourg.htm>

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement*, Seuil, Paris 1988, pp. 365–377.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Petit manuel d'Inesthétique*, Seuil, Paris 1998, p. 26.

¹⁶ Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement*, p. 377.

meaning is not a pre-existing static structure but rather a process which begins with the act of inscription:

To write is to know what has not yet been produced within literality has no other dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios*, or some divine understanding. Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning.¹⁷

It is in the very nature of writing that it does not know where it is going. It always constitutes the meaning and that is, primarily, its future. But Derrida does not emphasize the notion of meaning as force in order to suppress a notion of meaning as structure. His model of meaning tries to unite the diachronic and synchronic aspects of meaning divided by Saussure's structural approach to language. Derrida nevertheless claims the system of signs must always remain incomplete, the writer cannot represent *langue*. His theory of signification reminds us that all interpretation must take account of the radically multiple nature of signification. The reference of any sign is always complex as the meanings, and experiences signified are often conflicting.

Derrida's criticism of the reduction of art to a level of an illustration of any theoretical viewpoint brings us back to Badiou and his concept of *art* being itself a producer of truths.

The "truths" in art are given in these "beauties" which attract us, attach us, move us and incite us to look for them without ever getting tired of them. They may concern the whole of a work or some of its parts (these are the "relevant units"). The "configurations" of Badiou, note well, are also forms that convey a specific type of content. If we name them truths, it will be necessary to specify that they are specifically artistic and without relation to the truthfulness, whereas it goes without saying if one names them "Beauties".

269

At the same time, these forms are often organically linked to truths from other origins. Therefore, we cannot accept without restrictions Badiou's formula, echoing the purism of yesteryear: "art is rigorously coextensive with truths that

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1978, p. 11.

it generates.”¹⁸ After all, not so long ago, Badiou admitted that “art, as a mixed procedure [individual and collective], supports the truths of love.”¹⁹ Why not also recognize that art sometimes expresses political and religious truths, as well as other meanings related to the values and worldview of each era? It is from this intertwining that the rich polyphony of works of art proceeds.

Badiou neglects the fact that the three schemes coexisted and interpenetrated in almost all authors. For example, Sartre is “classic” because for him the criterion of art is to please, but also “didactic” since he declares that “at the bottom of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative”²⁰. That the link between art and truth is limited to “the *constraint* that a *truth* exercises within the domain of the *imaginary*”²¹ may be a small thing.

But can we be content with this sentence to regulate the question of mimesis and its truth content? While it is true that the aesthetic value of a work is above all that of its form, the degree of its adequacy to the content helps to make it satisfactory and vice versa: the beauty of the form is required to ensure the good transmission of the message. In other words: judging by the effects of a work on the people, as Rousseau does, in no way leads to neglecting the properly artistic point of view. More generally, the stimulation of artistic creation by meanings and values external to art cannot be overestimated.

III. The paradox of criticism

Derrida’s criticism of the reduction of art to a level of an illustration of any theoretical viewpoint, Badiou’s concept of *art* being itself a producer of truths together with Rancière’s belief that there are hardly any clear criteria for evaluating the contemporary art and Wilde’s thought that the critic is not limited to “the subjective form of expression” and that the creative critics of the world have often employed the form of the Dialogue as a particularly impressive means of illuminating ideas lead us to the paradox of criticism today.

270

¹⁸ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, p. 376.

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, « Qu'est-ce que la littérature ? », in: *Situations II*, Gallimard, Paris 1948, p. 107.

²¹ Badiou, *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, p. 14.

And suddenly one did not feel at ease in this situation in which hermeneutic tools we use in order to critique various forms of power and authority within cultural and artistic representations became a kind of authority of their own. Thus the very body of work renowned for its deconstruction of authorial value produced new forms of authority.

Let us think of a possible example of this new form of authority: In order to underline our argument about the logocentricity of today's theatre and its dangers, we would without any doubt quote Jacques Derrida and use the authority of his work in order to underwrite our analysis and critique. And this is just one in a long line of possible examples of a paradoxical situation of poststructuralist philosophy which, according to Gavin Butt, "operates both as criticism's chief discursive enabler whilst simultaneously marking its limit point: operating as an authorizing meta discourse for contemporary critical manoeuvres, whilst simultaneously working to constrain the production of new concepts and/or methods of critical procedure."²²

Thus we are approaching the situation in which theory and criticism in particular itself became "doxa, the very state it set out to subvert." How can we avoid this? One of the possible answers is the work of certain scholars that took very seriously the challenge to criticism. Let us mention Peggy Phelan, whose performance studies over the past decade experimented with how the conventional tasks of critical might be refigured or superseded by the productive attentions of the embodied critic, concentrating her or his inquiry either in making a judgment of quality or exposing the workings of power and ideology.

How did they do this? The simplest answer would be by addressing performance as a unique spatio-temporal event that is opposed to the art-historical object. Thus Phelan – similarly to Erika Fischer-Lichte and her aesthetics of performativity – has been exploring how critical writing might respond creatively to an art form that is eventual, singular and given to disappear. We can see her writings as an attempt to use the scene of writing "to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself."²³

²² Badiou, *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, p. 4.

²³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked, The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, London 1993, p. 148.

By focusing attention on the performativity of critical response, then, and the ways in which such responses might deviate from established modes of critical procedure, Peggy Phelan, Amelia Jones, Erika Fischer-Lichte seek to consider a critical practice situated, paradoxically, after criticism was deadened by the hand of capital and powers within culture and society.

And this is probably the most suitable redefinition of criticism we can provisionally get to: criticism or inter-criticism (in the sense of Barthes, Kristeva, Eco and their researches into intertextuality, as well as Patrice Pavis's attempts to redefine theatre semiotics) should most probably concentrate on theatre as a phenomena embodying two concepts:

1. Dynamic *tour de force* of singularity and plurality, the incarnation of the fact that there is no being without "being-with," that "I" does not come before "we" (i.e., is no existence without co-existence (Jean-Luc Nancy). *Dasein* does not precede *Mitsein*)
and
2. Performative antipoetic *feedback loop* between actors and spectators, the event of the performance that provokes and integrates emergence and thus blurs distinctions between artist and audience, body and mind, art and life (Erika Fischer-Lichte).

IV. The Emancipated critic?

Of course, we all agree and should not forget that "criticism, understood in at least two of its guises, was always *paradoxical* in its mode of operation. Firstly, in the sense that it depended for its definition on departing from commonly understood beliefs and values; we should also not forget the following thought stressed by Gavin Butt:

Even the unreconstructed figure of the modern disinterested critic – much derided by postmodernists – distinguished himself by seeking to pronounce on the (aesthetic) value of that which had hitherto not been recognized as such, either by other members of the intelligentsia or by society at large. That the modern critic's judgment of quality may have subsequently both transformed, and then passed into, a received set of values of a particular class or group within society -thereby

becoming doxa – should not detract us from criticism’s important role in initially striking out *from it*.²⁴

Nevertheless, we should take into account two concepts: Nancy’s ‘singular plurality’, which refuses to start with the opposition of same and other, arguing, instead, for a primacy of relation, the ‘in-common’ and the ‘with’; and Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic of performativity, which traces the emergence of performance as ‘an art event’ in its own right.

Criticism has to be put into dialogue with these two concepts. It has to apply them to the stage phenomena and try to see them, not as fixed works of art, but performative acts with such qualities as: openness; hybridity; the change in priority from “I” (the artist, the spectator in singular) to “we” (the performers and spectators interchanging their traditional roles).

Let us return to the beginning of our essay, to Oscar Wilde: his persuasion that perfect form of the art criticism is the one that treats the work as the trigger of the author’s own creativity. Let us link it to some XX. Century interpretations of the role of the critic: Francis Ponge, Jean Dubuffet and Jorge Luis Borges. The work of art, a motive for inspiration, is also a “means” of renewal of expression, as French Francis Ponge points out:

It supposes that one is desirous of experiencing (acquiring) unheard-of feelings, of suggestive and complex forms of still unpublished feelings, that the work of art is considered as a means of modifying and renewing its sensory world. To launch the imagination in new, unexplored directions.²⁵

The critic is an interpreter even if he does not intend to explain the work. Its function is double, reception and emission at a time, and is similar to that of the artist, as defined by Jean Dubuffet in *L’Homme du commun à l’ouvrage*:

Every painting starts from an equivocal point of departure. The painter attributes himself, in effect, two very different roles. On the one hand he wants to be an in-

²⁴ G. Butt (Ed.), *After criticism: new responses to art and performance*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden 2005, p. 5.

²⁵ Francis Ponge, *Méthodes*, Gallimard, Paris 1961, 1988, p. 42.

terpreter (a medium) of the objects he evokes, to give them word, to make their voice. But at the same time he wants to hear his own voice, which is something else. The mechanism of the two senses, which can be said to be in contrast – that of reception and that of emission –, married in a single operation...²⁶

Jorge Luis Borges claims that only the artist, whether a painter or a poet, can bring together in the critical text “the two antagonistic poles of thought, namely the Impressionist pole and the Expressionist pole”.²⁷ This essential aspect can be summarized by the expression of André du Bouchet “Here in two”.

Oscar Wilde considers subjectivity as the essential element of interpretation. The critic must not be a specialist, but rather this “unprejudiced mind”, of which Francis Ponge speaks at the beginning of “Matter and Memory” (*Matière et Mémoire*):²⁸ “It is simply artistic temperament that speaks all art. It does not speak to the specialist. It claims to be universal and to remain one through all his manifestations.”

This “unprejudiced spirit” is the very incarnation of the critical poet who confronts the work without any form of prevention. Francis Ponge strives to listen to and understand the artist through his treatment of the material. The work of art, considered since Charles Baudelaire as a pretext for the invention of a new genre in which text and image “aspire to meet”, is similar to the object for Francis Ponge, object for which he must each time invent a proper expression. Observing the impression of the lithographic plates, the poet remarks that “it is the memory, the mind [...] which make here the third dimension (Ponge, *Matière et mémoire* 4).

²⁶ Jean Dubuffet, *L'Homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, Gallimard, Paris 1973, p. 197: « Tout ouvrage de peinture repose, dès son départ, sur une équivoque. Le peintre s'attribue, en effet, deux rôles très différents. D'une part il veut être un interprète (un médium) des objets qu'il évoque, leur donner parole, se faire leur voix. Mais en même temps il veut faire entendre la sienne propre, ce qui est tout autre chose. Le mécanisme des deux sens, qu'on peut dire contraires – celui de la réception et celui de l'émission – mariés dans une seule opération... »

²⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Oeuvres complètes, Tome I*, Gallimard, Paris 2010, p. 838.

²⁸ Francis Ponge, *Matière et mémoire ou les lithographes à l'école*, Fernand Mourlot, Paris 1945, p. 4. « Ce qui se conçoit bien s'énonce clairement : sans doute... Mais seulement ce qui ne se conçoit pas bien mérite d'être exprimé, le souhaite et appelle sa conception en même temps que l'expression elle-même. »

Of course, we all know that the Enlightenment idea of the critic as a discriminating authority on matters of art and culture became increasingly problematic. Therefore we have to question her or his role as specialized analysts of culture in favour of repositioning the academic inquiry as a kind of cultural participation in its own right. Or, to use the words of Jacques Rancière in *Emancipated Spectator*: We must grasp the position of the “emancipated spectator” who challenges “the opposition between viewing and acting”, by understanding “that the self evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection?”²⁹

The criticism has to reposition itself: rather than being remote from that which we survey, we have to participate, become enmeshed, perhaps even in “creative” production of the cultural fabric itself. But we should also not forget Rancière’s alternative perspective on the effort to emancipate the spectator that could stand also for the situation of the critic: Critic has to deliberately attempt to traverse the abyss that divides activity from passivity by asking “if it is not precisely the desire to abolish the distance that creates it”?³⁰ This is the actual paradox that theatre and performing arts criticism shares both with the spectator and the dramatist. In many ways what Rancière calls the “emancipated spectator”, and what we re-fashion as the “emancipated critic”, are nothing new. The transcendental figure of the critic has had its obituary read before, in the 1980s. As Gavin Butt puts it in his witty introduction to the book *After Criticism: The Paradoxes of Criticism*:

The transcendental figure of the Enlightenment critic – one placed at a special remove from society, from the object of criticism – has had its obituary read before at the height of postmodernism in the 1980s. The traditional authority of the critic, and his special dispensation to discriminate in the name of universal human values, was gladly bidden goodbye by postmodernists concerned to pay heed to cultural difference: Marxists and feminists critiqued it as an ideological form of class and gender privilege whilst post-structuralists deconstructed it as logocentric fiction. In the wake of such critiques of criticism then, postmodernists – particularly of the post-structuralist persuasion – quickly set about abandoning any absolutist statements of judgment in favor of reading artistic and literary

²⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliott, Verso, London 2009, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

texts *deconstructively*: to reveal the ways in which power might be seen as working both within and against them.³¹

Once we recognize our limits, our inability to “say it all,” we avoid closing off other possible interpretations. We admit to the fact that meaning keeps reappearing within the unstable and shifting space, between sender and receiver, author and reader, artist and viewer. It does not precede the act of its inscription that is static in its nature. Its nature is that of constant changes and developments.

When we deny art its personal and historical context, we radically undermine one’s role as an art critic. A good art critic has to bear in his mind that art *works* in many contexts. When we regard something as art we assume that it means many things to many viewers. And according to Derrida we should not commit a mistake of neglecting the validity of different interpretations of art. And we should not attempt to reduce the work of art to the level of a mere illustration of one’s own theoretical viewpoint. The dangers listed are to be highlighted by any deconstructive art criticism; they represent something that has by all means to be avoided.

And this leads us back to Wilde and his dialogic essay “The Critic as Artist”: For the true critic the subject is only raw material. It’s the way this subject is treated that matters. Oscar Wilde likens criticism to the poetry that gives form and life to matter: “I would call criticism a creation within a creation [...] I would say that the highest criticism [...] is in itself more creative than the creation ...”³² Criticism is profoundly subjective: it is just as much an impression as an expression. It is a contemplative consciousness, trying to preserve its autonomy. The true criticism must be creative and independent. And the same holds true for art as a producer of truth in the sense of Badiou, truth that is in itself critical. In this sense art one could easily conclude that art does produce its own criticism. Or, as Wilde puts it: “antithesis between (art and criticism,) is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name.”³³

276

³¹ Butt, *After Criticism*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³³ Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 142.

Ernest Ženko*

Film, Philosophy, and Intercultural Film Criticism

1. Introduction

Film criticism, as the study and assessment of the film medium and its achievements in the form of individual films, appears to be some kind of Janus-headed enterprise. On the one hand, there are those who publish commentary on films in periodicals (magazines, newspapers, and mass-media outlets), while on the other, there are those who relate their writings to film theory and philosophy and publish their articles in academic journals. Members of the first lot are actually film reviewers (here we encounter Roger Ebert, Pauline Kael, Peter Bradshaw, etc.), who review new but also old films, rate them (usually using a 4- or 5-star scale) and inform readers whether or not they would want to see a particular film. Only the second group, therefore, consists of “proper” or academic film critics, who instead of reviewing and rating films, analyse them as regards their historical, political, cultural, and genre contexts, or even focus on the entire film history. Leading film critics in this sense include Andre Bazin, Bela Balasz, Christian Metz, Sigfried Kracauer, Kaja Silverman, and others, who have related their research on film to philosophy and theory. Only this kind of film criticism, however, will be of interest here.

The seventh art, as the film medium is known, after Ricciotto Canudo in 1911 changed his mind and assigned number six to dance, in many ways differs from the fine arts as classified by G. W. F. Hegel in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Various forms of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry, as well as dance, have been found in almost every culture and society all over the world for millennia. No one knows when and exactly how those arts were first developed, who their authors or inventors were, and their origins are often interpreted through mythology or at best archaeology. The story of film, however, at least in this regard, is quite different. Being a child of modern times and of technological development, it has well-known founders and even its date of birth is considered a fact. On 28 December 1895 the brothers

277

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Auguste and Louis Lumière gave the first public and paid screening at Grand Café in Paris. It is this day that has been accepted as the birthday of cinematography.

Moreover, the seventh art was not only a modern and technological achievement (it required substantial knowledge of physics and chemistry), but also a medium specifically intended for the masses. Even though Canudo, for example, included moving images among the arts, proponents of film had to strive to prove that it actually belongs there, and that it is not merely a pastime for the working class, lacking any aesthetical, ethical, or other value. As it turned out, this new medium was, from the very beginning, a source of oppositions, dichotomies, as well as fierce struggles. Some of them are still in place today, and for some it seems that they even define the medium as such.

Some oppositions exist already on the level of production. Film, on the one hand, was conceived from the beginning as a business, and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno developed their concept of the culture industry with this medium in mind. On the other hand, however, film can be perceived as the work of an individual artist who controls the whole process from start to finish. Moreover, film is considered a medium without a specific social value, but it can play an extremely important social role, even though its purpose can be ideological and/or propagandistic. Lenin's frequently quoted famous statement "that of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema," only reinforces this view, since after his decree a proportion of film production was to be devoted to entertainment films, and another to propaganda.¹

More oppositions, still, can be found on the level of reception and above all within film scholarship. Some of them are well known; others come to the fore in specific cases, for example in intercultural contexts. Thus, for example, the notion of *world cinema* is generally not used to describe a unity of films that are produced in different geographical and cultural contexts around the world, but, on the contrary, it is frequently taken to refer to the films of all countries other than one's own. In English-speaking countries, for instance, *world cinema* is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *foreign film*, where a foreign film is not only foreign in terms of the country of production, but also in terms of the language used, i.e. non-English.

¹ Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. XLII, International Publishers, New York 1934, p. 388.

Sometimes antagonisms tend to shift and make relationships more complex, but often also meaningless. A common opposition in the context of film scholarship is not the one between foreign and domestic, but between films with added artistic value and those without it, with the latter usually identified as “Hollywood commercialism”. World cinema films are frequently grouped together with independent and art house films, they have a limited release, and many never appear in major cinemas. These films usually do not gain much popularity and consequently also not the gross takings of a typical Hollywood blockbuster; however, there are also exceptions to the rule. In the first decade of the 21st century, several foreign films enjoyed great success in English speaking countries – the first foreign language film to top the North American box office was the Chinese blockbuster *Hero*, directed by Zhang Yimou, in August 2004.

When it comes to oppositions and conflicts, film criticism is not excluded. On the one hand, there seems to be a very clear understanding of what film criticism actually is, or what it consists of. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan begin their introduction to *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (2011) with the following observation: “For many people film criticism is something by an opinionated journalist, a film critic, who tells you whether a film is worth seeing.”² Although, they continue, “such reviews can be a source of pleasure as well as utility [...] film criticism can do a great deal more”.³

That “a great deal more” is usually understood as being related to film theory, sometimes even to philosophy. Some commentators, such as Noël Carroll, claim that film theory (or, as he calls it, the theory of the moving image) has always been highly suspect amongst critics and filmmakers alike: “The major source of skepticism here is the same in both instances. Movie makers and critics care about individual motion pictures – the one they are making or the one they are analyzing.”⁴ Theorists care about films in general. Critics and filmmakers need something that they can put into practice, and for them theory is too abstract and too broad to be of use. So, in this view, if you are a film critic, or a filmmaker, you should stay away from theory and philosophy.

² Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (Eds.), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, Routledge, London and New York 2011, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham (Eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory*, Routledge, London and New York 2014, p. 235.

This example shows that film differs from the other visual arts in the sense that contrary to the other visual arts, the film medium did not go through a conceptual turn the same way as the other arts did. To put it simply, you need theory to appreciate Duchamp or Warhol, and most of 20th century art, but you do not need any theory to enjoy Antonioni, Bergman, or Jia Zhangke; you either like them or you do not. This is, of course, an oversimplification, because proponents of film theory generally do not share this view. For most of them, and even for some philosophers of film, what they do is nothing less than film criticism. So, it seems promising to first look into this great divide and examine the signs of interculturality.

2. The Place of Film Criticism in the Context of Philosophy

Almost three decades ago, Carl Plantinga published an essay in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in which he tried to draw the line between aesthetics and film theory. In his interpretation, the relationship between the two “has been marked to a great extent either by mutual inattention or by open suspicion and disagreement”.⁵ Plantinga does not claim here that aestheticians have ignored film, or that film scholars have disregarded aesthetic issues, but that a schism exists between the two academic disciplines.

Film theorists tend to ignore (or take exception to) what aestheticians say about film, and aestheticians ignore (or vehemently critique) what film theorists say about philosophy of film. The discipline of film studies considers film, and the discipline of aesthetics considers aesthetics, from within the context of particular academic institutions or fields, each with a particular history and set of conventional practices.⁶

280

Plantinga continues with a series of examples, which can be amusing, but they, at the same time, also shed some light on the place of film criticism. Ian Jarvie, for example, from the side of philosophy claims the following:

⁵ Carl Plantinga, “Film Theory and Aesthetics: Notes on a Schism”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51 (3/1993), p. 445.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Writers on film characteristically make free with references and allusions to films which they have not the slightest reason to suspect their readers know. Writers on film characteristically drop the names of, or even quote from, their own favourite gurus [...] But worst of all is the general irrationality of their procedures.⁷

Jarvie shares his view with Noël Carroll, who attacked what he called “psycho-semiotic” film theory (this is his name for the psychoanalytic/semiotic/Marxist variety of film theory) with the claim that film theory “has been nothing short of an intellectual disaster and [...] should be discarded”.⁸ From what Jarvie and Carroll claim, however, one can deduce more than just an emotionally charged attack. Irrational procedures identified as “psychosemiotic” film theory are nothing less than the core methods of film criticism.

Probably one of the most comprehensive sources of film criticism, and now a classic example, is an anthology in two volumes entitled *Movies and Methods* edited by Bill Nichols.⁹ This anthology, in Nichols’s words, was intended to “examine a range of critical methods applicable to film study, and [...] provide useful examples of how these methods can be applied to the study and appreciation of actual films”.¹⁰ As the table of contents of the first volume shows, there are two major kind of criticism: contextual (comprising political and genre criticism) and formal (covering *auteur* and *mise-en-scène* criticism); the third part covers film theory focusing on historical approaches and structuralism-semiology.

There is, however, no space for world cinema in this volume, and the only reference to China, for instance, is the title of a dark comedy by French director Jean-Luc Godard, *La Chinoise*. The reason for this West-centred approach to film criticism and film study in general is explained by Nichols himself in the introduction to the second volume of *Movies and Methods*: “The study of film has gained an added dimension of respectability precisely because it is increasingly

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

⁹ Bill Nichols (Ed.), *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. I, University of California Press, Berkeley 1976, and Bill Nichols (Ed.), *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. II, University of California Press, Berkeley 1985.

¹⁰ Nichols, *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. I, p. 4.

aligned with one of the great missions of Western humanism: the preservation and conservation of our cultural heritage”.¹¹

Nichols places film criticism within the field of cultural studies, where it investigates “the form and meaning of social relationships as manifested in texts [...] or in everyday life”.¹²

Whatever specificity can be assigned to the study of film possesses significance only when it is drawn back into the general arena of culture and ideology. It is here that film viewing pleasure can be related to class, race, sex and nationality, to questions of social structure and the position of the individual (including the question of how a sense of individuality or spectatorship itself arises or is created).¹³

It would be possible to assume that Nichols uses the concept of culture in its anthropological and non-hierarchical sense as it is used in the tradition of cultural studies; however, the table of contents of the second volume of the *Movies and Methods* does not confirm this reading. There are texts published on historical, genre, and feminist criticism, on structuralist and psychoanalytic semiotics, and in the last part several (eight, to be precise) texts under the heading “Countercurrents”.

There is no reference to China in this volume and this last part either, although there is a text about “the third world”, which apparently covers some of the issues regarding “world cinema”. It is entitled “Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction”, and was written by Robert Stam and Louise Spence. But more than the mentioned text, it is (at least for us) interesting to read the introductory remarks by Nichols.

Discussion of the Third World cinema represents an inevitable countercurrent to the theory and practice of a predominantly Western cinema. Many Western filmmakers and critics are active supporters of efforts to develop progressive, national

¹¹ Nichols, *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. II, p. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

cinemas in the Third World, and they are highly appreciative of the differences of strategy and priorities that often develop.¹⁴

Even though the above passage does not cover Chinese cinema specifically, it is worth mentioning it because it epitomises the relationship between the West and “the rest” within the field of film criticism. From this relation of inequality it would be impossible to build intercultural film criticism.

But not all of those who write on film share this view. In his book *The World Viewed* (1971; 1979), Stanley Cavell wrote: “Criticism, as part of the philosophy of art, must aspire to philosophy”.¹⁵ If Cavell’s assertion holds for film criticism, e.g. if film criticism is considered criticism at all, then it must be a part of philosophy of film art, and therefore it must aspire to philosophy. But then, film criticism has obviously turned to the other side of the great divide.

An old question immediately surfaces here: What is meant by “philosophy” in this context? Or, to put it another way that enables intercultural interpretation: “Which philosophy counts?” It goes almost without saying that for Plantinga and the advocates of the film aesthetics he enlisted, philosophy is the equal of analytic philosophy. And the situation he describes reflects a broader division characteristic of Western philosophy – the split between the analytic and Continental traditions. A bipolar disorder is therefore the defining feature of Western philosophy, and casts a shadow over film criticism as well.

This does not mean, however, that both poles are static, or ahistorical. Film theory itself has gone through several important changes, or, as some would call it, through a paradigm shift. The film theory at least partially explained by the contributors to Nichols’s anthology, and sometimes called “Grand Theory,” mostly by its opponents, became a thing of the past.¹⁶ A decade and a half after Plantinga, and two decades after Nichols, we encounter a different setting. Robert Sinnerbrink claims in this context:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 632–633.

¹⁵ Clayton and Clevan, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ Robert Sinnerbrink, “Questioning Style”, in: Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (Eds.), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, Routledge, London and New York 2011, p. 38.

The dominant strain in contemporary philosophy of film [...] has embraced a model of theorizing that is naturalistic rather than humanistic, explanatory rather than hermeneutic, scientific rather than aesthetic.¹⁷

This shift in film theory is known now as the “analytic-cognitivist” turn. A few years ago, Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham began their introduction to a *Cognitive Media Theory* book they edited with the following statement: “As we write this [in 2014], cognitive theory in film and media studies is flourishing”.¹⁸

But also, they claim, “the lines between cognitive media theory and empirical study of the psychology of moving image viewing on the one hand, and cognitive media theory and the philosophy of motion pictures [...] have never been so permeable”.¹⁹ Which also means that cognitive film criticism is also a real possibility, and in some cases even actuality. However, just like its predecessor, it does not offer real possibilities for intercultural film criticism. Not because it is West-oriented, but because it has no cultural orientation at all.

Nevertheless, the “analytic-cognitivist” turn has not been the only development in writing on film. There is another movement, less visible, more modest, and closely related to philosophy. It appears under several labels from “film and philosophy” to “film as philosophy” and to “film-philosophy”. In some cases, these tactics are based on revivals of certain approaches, e.g. film-philosophy follows Stanley Cavell’s way of writing on film; in some cases, new methods are developed. Stephen Mulhall, for example, interprets a film (for example Ridley Scott’s *Alien*) as something that (in itself) develops specific ways of thinking (*alien* thinking in this case).

284

The common denominator of all these approaches is the role that philosophy plays within the analysis – this role is crucial and central; but also, most of the writing relates to the individual films, giving them an opportunity to speak for themselves. It is not about the transformation of a certain film into philosophical concepts and deductions, and it is also not about interpretation in the sense that it was criticised already by Susan Sontag (in 1964): “The function of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Nannicelli and Taberham, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*".²⁰ Cavell, who was one of the early proponents of this approach, however, has gone further, describing that, "in how I have conceived my writing on film to be motivated philosophically, is that it takes the fact of film itself to become a challenge for philosophy".²¹ This move is radical in the sense that it overturns the tradition. Traditionally, philosophers are those who ask questions; here, it is the film that poses questions to philosophy and challenges it.

Among the influential recent authors who have contributed considerably to the relationship between philosophy and film in a general sense, one could emphasise at least two: Gilles Deleuze and Fredric Jameson. As pointed out by David Martin-Jones, it is all too easy to accuse Deleuze's *Cinema* books of Eurocentrism, and in order to apply them to the context of world cinemas, they have to be uprooted from their initial (Western) ground: "Taking this approach, we can deterritorialize the *Cinema* books and thereby enable their repetition in difference when they come into contact with the cinemas otherwise 'Othered' from their pages".²² Even though it would, no doubt, be interesting to go further and deeper into such a deterritorialisation of Deleuze's approach, due to the lack of space here we will only focus on Fredric Jameson.

3. Fredric Jameson: Film as a Cognitive Map

Jameson counts neither as a traditional film critic nor as a typical philosopher. He has been labelled "probably the most important cultural critic writing in English," and due to the range of his analysis, which is fairly extraordinary, he has also demonstrated that "nothing cultural is alien to him".²³ Following the lead of Hegel, he has also exhibited an inclination towards a dialectical approach, in which he clearly exerts an effort to grasp the world as both one and multiple. In the words of one of his commentators, Jameson "is one of the very few thinkers

²⁰ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York 1966, p. 10.

²¹ Clayton and Klevan, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²² David Martin-Jones, Deleuze, *Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006, p. 235.

²³ Colin MacCabe, "Preface", in: Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetics: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1992, p. ix.

who genuinely ignores the conventional distinctions between cultural objects [...]. As importantly he will move between media: the analysis of a text will be followed by a social description of a building, the criticism of a mainstream film will be succeeded by an appreciation of an avant-garde video”.²⁴

It is apparent, on the one hand, that Jameson does not follow Lenin’s dictum, according to which cinema is considered the most important form of art. On the other hand, however, he does not in any way deny the importance of the film medium itself. Jameson started to show his interest in this medium in the 1970s, with the publication of articles about films like *Zardoz* (1974)²⁵ and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975),²⁶ but his full theoretical engagement with this medium followed two decades later. Crucial in this context were probably a series of lectures he delivered at the British Film Institute in 1990, and two books on film that followed in 1992: *Signatures of the Visible* and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Both significantly contribute not only to an understanding of Jameson’s intellectual development, but also to a distinctive and influential form of intercultural film criticism.

One of the reasons that Jameson approached film so seriously and thoroughly is to be found in a remark at the end of his introduction to *Signatures of the Visible*. Even though in the West television to a large extent managed to outshine it, “film itself has never been more alive than it is globally, where in the new world system a host of local voices have found the most sophisticated technical expression”.²⁷ Writing in 1992, Jameson anticipated here everything from the introduction of digital technology to the microfilm movement, proving thereby the ongoing relevance of the film medium on a global scale.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Zardoz* is an Irish-American science-fiction film, written and directed by John Boorman and starring Sean Connery and Charlotte Rampling. It depicts a future world where a stone image called “Zardoz” instructs the “Brutals” to kill each other in order to gain eternal life (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zardoz>).

²⁶ In this film, directed by Sidney Lumet, and starring Al Pacino, a man robs a bank to pay for his lover’s operation, which turns into a hostage situation and media circus (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072890>).

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, Routledge, London and New York 1992, p. 8.

Any serious discussion about film, however, has to take into account the inextricable materiality of the medium (technology), as well as its effects on the subjective level (the construction of a film subject by the film apparatus or *dispositif*). From a question that seems rhetorical only on a superficial level, it follows that Jameson took his encounter with the film medium quite seriously, but also that he situates his approach within the broader context of the visual turn.

Did human nature change on or about December 28, 1895? Or was some cinematographic dimension of human reality always there somewhere in prehistoric life, waiting to find its actualization in a certain high-technical civilization? (and thereby now allowing us to reread and rewrite the past now filmically and as the philosophy of the visual)?²⁸

Human nature nevertheless did change, but the result is, to use a concept developed by Herbert Marcuse, one-dimensional: human nature has transformed into a single sense. Visual media offer us the world as a body, and in this sense “the visual is *essentially* pornographic,” and has its end in mindless fascination, in an experience without conscious thought. There is no fundamental difference between pornographic and other films; the latter are “only the potentiation of films in general, which ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body”.²⁹

Were an ontology of this artificial, person-produced universe still possible, it would have to be an ontology of the visual, of being as the visible first and foremost, with the other senses draining off it.³⁰

But even though the visual as such does not necessitate the thought, in order to understand it the act of seeing ought to be replaced by something else. There are many different kinds of thought developed to address the visual; however, for Jameson there is only one: “the only way to think the visual, to get a handle on increasing, tendential, all-pervasive visibility as such, is to grasp its historical coming into being [...]; history alone, however, can mimic the sharpening or dissolution of the gaze”.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

In order to properly address his approach, one has to take into account the theoretical style and concepts advanced through his intellectual development. First, and foremost, Jameson is a Marxist, and consequently he gives primacy to the economic forms (base), even though he analyses a film (at the level of superstructure). There are numerous difficulties that arise from a classic Marxist approach, which presupposes that an analysis of the economic base enables one to recognise and interpret cultural superstructure forms. The most essential problem, however, lies in the conclusion that any analysis and interpretation of a cultural form, such as film, ends up with the same message, which actually can only be analysed in economic terms. This way it might be possible to make a distinction between Chinese and Western film production; however, in the last instance this difference would only contribute to an understanding of distinct property relations.

In order to address this classical problem, Jameson developed the concept of the political unconscious, which was introduced in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). As pointed out by Colin MacCabe, Jameson was, as a linguist and literary analyst, “trained to respond to the smallest variations of meaning,” and has managed to develop a form of Marxist analysis that “will respect and utilize these differences rather than collapsing them into undifferentiated reflection”.³²

To accomplish this, he makes the radical theoretical move of assuming that the relation to the economic is a fundamental element within the cultural object to be analyzed – not in terms of the economic process within which the cultural object takes form but in the psychic processes which engage in the production and reception. For Jameson, every text is at its most fundamental level a political fantasy which in contradictory fashion articulates both the actual and potential social relations which constitute individuals within a specific political economy.³³

288

For Jameson, the political interpretation is therefore not an “optional auxiliary to other interpretative methods [...] but rather [...] the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation”.³⁴ While in *The Political Unconscious* literary texts

³² MacCabe, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xi.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Routledge, London and New York 1981, p. 1.

by Balzac and Conrad are used to perform an economic analysis and to formulate a social history of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the films interpreted in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* address the much broader context of consumer capitalism and the global multinational system at the end of the 20th century.

While the slogan of *The Political Unconscious* was “Always historicize!”,³⁵ the next significant question is related to the key historical category that enables historicisation in the first place. For Jameson, the contemporary economic system and the dominant cultural production form a pair in which the latter reacts in a complex way to the former. The first cultural reaction to capitalism was therefore realism, which attempted to offer forms of representation that would enable the emergent public to grasp this stage of economic development. Modernism, the cultural reaction to imperialism and monopoly capitalism, which emerged already after “a loss of innocence about representation,”³⁶ is marked by an avant-garde ethic and aesthetic, looks into the future for an ideal audience for ideal art, and itself constitutes an area of art dissociated from the economy.

Jameson’s contribution is predominantly related to his understanding of the contemporary phase of capitalism, where he follows the lead of Ernest Mandel and his concept of late capitalism as the current stage of global multinational capitalism. Postmodernism is a notoriously fluid concept that can carry a plethora of different meanings; however, Jameson’s Marxist definition is relatively precise and above all related to a new social positioning of art in which economics and culture are fully integrated, and film is, in this sense, understood as a postmodern medium *par excellence*.

Yet the film medium is more than that. Even though film is a postmodern medium, it also recapitulates the general aesthetic development from realism to modernism and postmodernism. It is a result of developed forms of industrial production and a response to the first stage of capitalism. In the well-known words of avant-garde filmmaker Hollis Frampton: “Cinema is the Last Machine. It is probably the last art that will reach the mind through the senses”.³⁷ At almost

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁶ MacCabe, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

³⁷ Hollis Frampton, “For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses”, in: Bruce Jenkins (Ed.), *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 113.

the same time, another, yet completely different, avant-garde filmmaker, Jean-Luc Godard, wrote a project for a cinematographic essay entitled *Moi Je*, and gave its second part the title “I Am a Machine” (“*Moi, je suis une machine*”).³⁸

In its aesthetic development, realism in (Western) film is represented by the classic Hollywood cinema, exhibiting the aforementioned moment of innocence about the means of representation; modernism and all its complexities can be found in European cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, while postmodern film is present only from the 1970s on. While the characteristic feature of postmodernism in Jameson’s Marxist view is the dissolution of the distinction between high and low art (or culture), it is the film medium that serves here as an example *par excellence*. This does not mean that there is no postmodern subject matter or that there are no particular themes related to it, or that postmodern art has no specific features, such as superficiality, pastiche, or the waning of affect. It means, however, that film, as a postmodern medium, crosses fields of economy and culture at every level, and “more than any other medium provides – if not the universal form – at least the possibility of combining the most ancient and local artistic traditions with the most modern and global advertising campaigns”.³⁹

If film really is the most postmodern among the art forms, it is also not difficult to understand why Jameson turned to it in order to analyse its political unconscious in the period of global multinational capitalism. His endeavour, nevertheless, cannot be fully understood without the introduction of yet another key concept: cognitive mapping.

As a concept that was gaining importance and influence during the years after its introduction,⁴⁰ cognitive mapping is fairly vague. Even though the term was already used in 1948 by the psychologist Edward C. Tolman, who wrote about cognitive maps in mice and men,⁴¹ Jameson developed it from another source,

290

³⁸ Christa Blümlinger, “The History of Cinema, as Experience”, *Radical Philosophy*, 192 (July/August 2015), p. 15.

³⁹ MacCabe, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

⁴⁰ Cf. Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping”, in: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago 1988.

⁴¹ Cf. Ernest Ženko, “Estetika kognitivnega kartiranja”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 23 (3/2002), pp. 121-134.

Kevin Lynch's work on people's ability to map a contemporary urban space that has exploded around them. With the support of Althusserian political philosophy, cognitive mapping became Jameson's crucial political device, and a means by which the individual subject, now disconnected and fragmented, can locate him- or herself in the contemporary globalised world, which no longer allows the individual subject to make sense of his or her environment.

This situation is not unique to postmodernity, since it already occurred in modernity, only that it is now magnified and multiplied to a level that calls for the new strategy of "cognitive mapping" in order to "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole".⁴² On the one hand, cognitive mapping thus allows for the capacity to negotiate the relationship between the local and the global, which seems to be crucial in order to accomplish any intercultural analysis, even though; on the other hand, it remains a way of presenting the unrepresentable. But instead of following the development of Jean-François Lyotard, and invoking the aesthetics of the postmodern sublime, Jameson focuses on the political consequences of the unrepresentable in the representation.

The result of cognitive mapping in the age of multinational capital is the omnipresence of the "theme of paranoia," which produces conspiracy theories, which Jameson sees as "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; [...] a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system".⁴³ Conspiracy theories do not represent the system as it is, but as something else, and produce an analogy that is taken to be real. In this sense, cognitive mapping demands a subject that is capable of critical distance, and also knows what is socially legitimate and relevant, therefore a subject that simultaneously exists inside and outside of society and history; a subject that is at the same time local and global.

In both books on global cinema, *Signatures of the Visible* and particularly *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (of which the first part is entitled "Totality as Conspira-

⁴² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London 1991, p. 51.

⁴³ Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", p. 356.

cy”), Jameson uses conspiracy as an allegorical structure. Yet as his analyses of films show, this allegory is more than a “poor person’s cognitive mapping.” It is rather the very paradigm of cognitive mapping. According to Jameson, we have to analyse film comparatively, because we can only understand it if we place it simultaneously in its local and global political contexts, “for any film will inevitably reflect on what one might call its place in the global distribution of cultural power”.⁴⁴

Jameson’s approach to film criticism is specific in that it enables one to understand film in its global complexity, which in the age of late capitalism became of utmost importance. Moreover, it succeeds in articulating the relationship between film and politics in multicultural settings, grounding a new manner of intercultural film criticism that is still relevant today.

4. Conclusion

Both film and film criticism have histories that, contrary to the other forms of art, are noticeably shorter, but nevertheless considerably complex. As an invention of the late 19th century, although truly a medium of the 20th century, from its very beginning film has been a source of oppositions and struggles on various levels, from production to reception, interpretation, and criticism.

The main question regarding the reception of film in this paper is related to the role of philosophy in film criticism. Due to the fact that film did not go through a “conceptual turn,” as the other visual arts did, for some filmmakers and critics alike, philosophy, but also theory in general, is something that should best be avoided. On the other hand, for others the role of philosophy is crucial, because film criticism must aspire to philosophy. The latter view becomes even more important if we connect it to intercultural film criticism and phrase it in a Kantian manner: “How is intercultural film criticism possible?”

Film criticism of the “classical variety,” (psychoanalysis/semiotics/Marxism) and related to “Grand Theory,” cannot be easily appropriated to be used in this situation because it is explicitly related to Western humanism. The cognitivist paradigm, which became prominent in recent decades, also does not seem to be

⁴⁴ MacCabe, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

a genuinely useful critical tool, even though there are examples of film criticism that follow this paradigm. This approach namely does not offer a historical or cultural orientation, which is essential to intercultural criticism.

What seems reasonably promising, in this context, is the approach taken by Fredric Jameson, who in his form of film criticism takes into account the fact that we now live in an era of multinational global capital. Consequently, his analysis not only serves as a complex form of political film criticism, but also as a strategy of cognitive mapping, which, at least potentially, enables a subject to cognitively map his or her surroundings within the global multinational society, and enables him or her to act politically.

Yet this kind of approach lies on the challenging edge of the spectrum of film criticism. Not only can it not be used as a means to review and rate films, due to its difficult theoretical language and style and its excess of contexts and references, but it also appears demanding even to those who are familiar with film theory and philosophy. Furthermore, Jameson's writings on film seem to exceed film criticism in the sense that grasps both the individual film and the film medium as an integral and inseparable part of social totality, so that each claim regarding film is above all a claim pertaining to the totality. However, in this way film criticism elevates film, which is split between art and popular entertainment, to the level of serious academic and political interest. What more could one ask for?

Povzetki | Abstracts

Jason Barker and Justin Clemens Socialism's Encore

Keywords: artificial intelligence, Alain Badiou, Jacques Lacan, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Karl Marx, materialism, socialism, Voltaire

This text is a serious parody of Alain Badiou's cruise ship lecture on Edmund Husserl and mathematics to an empty auditorium in Jean-Luc Godard's *Film Socialism* (2010). Drawing on elements and implications of Badiou's lecture, as well as from Jacques Lacan's famous "Impromptu at Vincennes" (1969) and his seminar of 1972-73, the authors recreate a comparable—or incomparable?—scene of instruction on an imaginary cruise ship in the Aegean. Jason Barker delivers the lecture *in propria persona*. The presentation of this scene is further nested à la a Russian Matryoshka doll, according to the ancient generic logic of the fictional "found and edited manuscript." In this case, the fiction is that the transcript of Barker's lecture has been recovered, digitally transcribed, edited and annotated by an artificial intelligence unit called AI SYSBRO 68 from the year 2210, following the sinking of the cruise ship due to pilot error sometime in our near future—2020? 2023? the data remains unclear—and a subsequent planetary apocalypse due to climate breakdown. The AI bot's annotations are themselves an attempt to explain to its networked brethren, denominated AI ALLSYS, some of the names and terms that appear in the lecture; however, given the AI's situation, its entirely in- or non-human nature, it is not always the most reliable or accurate of editors. It speaks of humans, which it calls "HUMS," to other AIs: it has no "experience" or "knowledge" of the human, other than the transcribed code itself and the links of the code-terms to other code in its database. We must recall that code is not language: the former has no gaps, whereas the latter is always missing from its place. The manifest theme of the text is the problematic relation of socialism and revolution. The threat of gaplessness emerges as a *telos* of technology and the complete catastrophe of infinite progress.

295

Jason Barker in Justin Clemens Encore socializma

Ključne besede: umetna inteligenca, Alain Badiou, Jacques Lacan, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Karl Marx, materializem, socializem, Voltaire

To besedilo je resna parodija predavanja Alaina Badioua o Edmundu Husserlu in matematiki v praznem avditoriju na ladji za križarjenje, kot je prikazano v filmu *Film Socialism* (2010) Jeana-Luca Godarda. Avtorja izhajata iz elementov in implikacij Badioujevega

predavanja, kot tudi iz znanega »Impromptu na Vincennesu« (1969) Jacquesa Lacana in njegovega seminarja 1972–73, s čimer poustvarita primerljivo – ali neprimerljivo – prizorišče predavanj na namišljeni ladji za križarjenje v Egejskem morju. Jason Barker predava *in propria persona*. Prikaz tega prizora je sestavljen kot ruska Matrijoška, saj sledi starodavni splošni logiki fiksijskega »najdenega in urejenega rokopisa«. V tem primeru je fikcija to, da je prepis Barkerjevega predavanja leta 2210 obnovila, digitalno prepisala, uredila in zabeležila umetno inteligentna enota AI SYSBRO 68 po tem, ko se je ladja za križarjenje zaradi napake pilota nekje v naši bližnji prihodnosti – 2020? 2023?, podatki ostajajo nejasni – potopila, čemur je zaradi podnebne propada sledila še planetarna apokalipsa. Pojasnila UI bota so poskus, da bi omreženim rojakom, imenovanim AI ALLSYS, razložil nekatera imena in izraze, ki se pojavljajo na predavanju. Vendar pa zaradi svoje popolnoma a- oz. ne-človeške narave, UI ni vedno najbolj zanesljiv ali natančen urednik. Ostalim UI govori o ljudeh, ki jih imenuje »LJUD«; nima nobenih »izkušenj« ali »znanja« o človeku, razen prepisanega koda in kodnih izrazov, ki jih lahko poveže z drugim kodom v svoji zbirki podatkov. Spomniti se moramo, da kod ni jezik: medtem ko prvi nima vrzeli, drugi vedno manjka na svojem mestu. Manifestna tema besedila je problematičen odnos socializma in revolucije. Grožnja manka vrzeli se pojavi kot *telos* tehnologije in popolna katastrofa neskončnega napredka.

Frank Engster

Money, Measure, and Time in Marx's *Capital*. The Technique of Measurement and the Productive Power of the Valorisation Process

Keywords: money, value, measure, time, productive force

A theory of capitalist money causes almost unsolvable difficulties as it requires the systematic development of its individual functions – and this requires nothing less than the development of the capitalist mode of production. Moreover, with this entanglement of money's functions on the one hand, and the mode of production on the other, the "money riddle" must be solved, the riddle of its universal and yet finite quantitative validity as it is in this validity that seems to lie the mysterious force that is essential for the capitalist mode of production. The solution of this money riddle is to reveal the entanglement between the capitalist mode of production and the functions of money by *measure* and *measurement*: capitalism that is a valorization process which is measured and increased by money. What by money in the last instance is measured is the productive force of this valorization, and this productive force is a temporal relation. Money, by quantifying social relations with its functions, becomes the technique at once for both empowering and resolving an "economy of time" (Marx). The enigmatic nature of money hence lies in this solution: to quantify the productive force of the valorization process in an economy of time.

Frank Engster

Denar, mera in čas v Marxovem *Kapitalu*. Tehnika merjenja in produktivna moč uvrednotenja

Ključne besede: denar, vrednost, mera, čas, produktivna sila

Teorija kapitalističnega denarja povzroča skoraj nerešljive težave, saj zahteva sistematično razvitje njegovih posameznih funkcij – kar pa ni nič drugega kot razvitje teorije kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina. Zaradi prepletenosti funkcij denarja na eni strani in produkcijskega načina na drugi, je treba rešiti uganko denarja, uganko njegove univerzalne, a kljub temu končne kvantitativne veljavnosti. V tej veljavnosti tiči nedoumljiva, svojevrstna sila, ki je bistvena za kapitalistični produkcijski način. Uganko denarja lahko rešimo tako, da preko *mere in merjenja* razkrijemo prepletenost kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina in funkcije denarja: kapitalizem, tj. proces uvrednotenja, ki se meri v denarju. V zadnji instanci je merjena produktivna moč uvrednotenja in ta produktivna moč je časovno razmerje. Posamezne funkcije denarja proizvajajo tehnike, ki s kvantifikacijo družbenih razmerij uveljavljajo in obvladujejo »ekonomijo časa« (Marx). Rešitev enigmatične narave denarja je torej sledeča: kvantificirati produktivno silo uvrednotenja v ekonomiji časa.

Uroš Kranjc

The Absent Cause and Marx's Value Form

Keywords: Karl Marx, Structural Marxism, New Reading of Marx, Jacques Rancière, Hans Georg Backhaus, money, time, value-form, subjectivity

Marx's analysis of value-form remains a pertinent critique of contemporary capitalist mode of production. The question "why this content assumes that form" persists even more so in the 21st century, perpetuating the question of value fetish in our societies – just think of the credit valuations in times before the Great Recession, the surge in fetishized and commodified personalities of social media or the rise of cryptocurrencies. The article introduces an inquiry into the relations between "Structural Marxism" of Louis Althusser, in particular it focuses on Jacques Rancière's contribution to *Lire le Capital* and treats it as a forerunner to another current, the project of "New reading of Marx" ("Neue Marx Lektüre"), initiated by Adorno's students, Hans Georg Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt and Alfred Schmidt. It reintroduces the concepts of "structural causality" and "absent cause" as a specific algebraic property in the structure of social exchange intertwined with the topological adherence of surplus-object- moments of money commodity in the "dialectic of the value-form". The unity of concrete and abstract labour is posited as an absent cause in a structure, which is called "*subtractive structure*", echoing Alain Badiou's operation of subtraction. The article puts forward the following thesis: *A structure of Two implies a Third*. It tracks both objects, the labour and money commodity, alongside the two totalities –

production and exchange – and relates them to this principle. By thinking together these two different logical schemas, the article advances the contemporary economic question of intertemporal analysis in the process of subjectivation.

Uroš Kranjc

Manjkajoči vzrok in Marxova vrednostna forma

Ključne besede: Karl Marx, strukturalistični marksizem, Novo branje Marxa, Jacques Rancière, Hans Georg Backhaus, denar, čas, vrednostna forma, subjektivnost

Marxova analiza vrednostne forme ostaja pertinentna za kritiko sodobnega kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina. Vprašanje, »zakaj ta vsebina privzema to obliko«, še toliko bolj vztraja v 21. stoletju, s čimer še naprej ohranja aktualnost problema vrednostnega fetišizma v sodobni družbi. Samo pomislimo na kreditna vrednotenja pred nastankom »Velike recesije«, pojav fetišskih in poblagovljenih osebnosti socialnih omrežij ali vzpon kriptovalut. Pričujoči članek odpira dialog med »strukturalističnim marksizmom« Louisa Althusserja in nemškim »Novim branjem Marxa«. V ospredje postavlja prispevek Jacquesa Rancièreja k delu *Brati Kapital*, ki ga hkrati jemlje za predhodnika nekega drugega toka, in sicer krožka študentov zbranih okoli Theodorja Adorna, pobudnikov »Novega branja Marxa« – Hansa Georga Backhauusa, Helmuta Reichelta in Alfreda Schmidta. Naš prispevek na novo opredeljuje koncepta »strukturne vzročnosti« in »manjkajočega vzroka« kot specifični algebraini lastnosti strukture družbene menjave ob pridruženem topološkem momentu objektnega-presežka denarnega blaga v »dialektiki vrednostne forme«. Enotnost konkretnega in abstraktnega dela je tako postavljena kot manjkajoči vzrok strukture, ki jo imenujemo *odtegnjena struktura*, v navezavi na operacijo odtegnitve v filozofiji Alaina Badiouja. Prispevek se opera na sledečo tezo: *Struktura dvojega implicira tretje*. Oba objekta, delo in denarno blago, sta tako podrejena navedenemu načelu v konstituciji dveh totalnosti – produkcije in menjave. Vzajemno mišljenje obeh diferentnih logičnih shem odpira možne odgovore na sodobne ekonomske aporije in težave t.i. intertemporalne analize v razmerju do procesa subjektivacije.

Lea Kuhar

Towards an Object-oriented Critique of Political Economy

Keywords: objectification, Marx, value form, class struggle, correlationism

In the article I investigate the role of objects in Marx's critical theory. I focus on the way in which Marx's understanding of objects evolves from his earlier works towards his later works. In the first part I analyse the general theory of objectification developed by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. In the second part I focus on *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, where I believe Marx comprehends

capital as a specific mode of social objectification. In the last part I analyse the distinction between the object of Marx's scientific discourse and the object of his critical discourse. I argue that Marx's theory of objectification is possible only from the position of class struggle, which is a position in the social structure that cannot be objectified. I claim this is the reason why Marx's critical theory allows one to think the moment of contingency in what seems to be the deterministic structure of the capitalist mode of production.

Lea Kuhar

K predmetno naravnani kritiki politične ekonomije

Ključne besede: opredmetenje, Marx, vrednostna forma, razredni boj, korelacionizem

V članku raziskujem, kako Marx v svoji kritični teoriji obravnava predmete. Osredotočim se predvsem na vprašanje, kako se njegovo razumevanje predmetov razvija od zgodnejših do poznejših del. V prvem delu analiziram splošno teorijo opredmetenja, ki jo je Marx razvil v *Ekonomskih in filozofskih rokopisih 1844* in v *Tezah o Feuerbachu*. V drugem delu se osredotočim na *Grundrisse in Kapital*, za katera trdim, da v njih Marx pojmuje kapital kot specifični način družbenega opredmetenja. V zadnjem delu analiziram razliko med predmetom Marxovega znanstvenega diskurza in predmetom Marxovega kritičnega diskurza. Trdim, da je Marxova teorija opredmetenja mogoča zgolj iz pozicije razrednega boja, ki je pozicija znotraj družbene strukture, ki ne more biti opredmetena. To je tudi razlog, zakaj trdim, da Marxova kritična teorija omogoča mišljenje kontingence znotraj na prvi pogled deterministične strukture kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina.

Elena Louisa Lange

The Transformation Problem as a Problem of Fetishism

Keywords: transformation problem, value theory, fetishism, the New Interpretation, Fred Moseley

In recent decades, critical discussions and even rejections of the labour theory of value, Marx's central theorem, have been riding a boom, even within Marxian theory itself. What is overlooked in these approaches is Marx's fetishism-critical method, for which the labour theory of value presents the key heuristic. But even approaches that attempt to retain Marx's labour theory of value in face of its arguably biggest challenge – the transformation of values to prices of production – often ignore the critique of fetishism related to the concepts of cost price and profit. Instead, they declare the transformation problem redundant by demonstrating the quantitative congruence of values and prices. We however argue that this *quantitative* “proof” disregards the *qualitative* problem associated with the “rupture” between value and price, and therefore the epistemological insights to be gained from it – an insight that even Marx did not seem to be fully aware of.

Elena Louisa Lange

Transformacijski problem kot problem fetišizma

Ključne besede: transformacijski problem, teorija vrednosti, fetišizem,
Nova interpretacija, Fred Moseley

V zadnjih desetletjih so se znotraj marksistične teorije razcvetele kritične razprave in celo zavrnitve delovne teorije vrednosti, Marxovega osrednjega teorema. Ti pristopi spregledajo Marxovo metodo kritike fetišizma, za katero delovna teorija vrednosti predstavlja ključno hevristično orodje. Celotni pristopi, ki poskušajo ohraniti Marxovo delovno teorijo vrednosti navkljub njenemu verjetno največjemu izzivu – transformaciji vrednosti v produkcijske cene – pogosto ne upoštevajo kritike fetišizma, povezane s pojmi stroškovne cene in profita. Namesto tega prikazujejo kvantitativno skladnost vrednosti in cen, s čimer trdijo, da je problem njune transformacije povsem odveč. Trdimo, da kvantitativni »dokaz« ne upošteva kvalitativnega problema, povezanega s »prelomom« med vrednostjo in ceno, in s tem epistemološkega uvida, ki ga ta omogoča – uvida, za katerega se zdi, da se ga niti sam Marx ni popolnoma zavedal.

John Milios

Value, Fictitious Capital and Finance. The Timeless of Karl Marx's *Capital*

Keywords: Marx, monetary theory of value, fictitious capital, financialization, crisis

Marx's monetary value theory constitutes a radical break from the Classical (Ricardian) notion of value; it conceives value not as a "quantity" of labour contained in the commodity but as a *social relation* expressing the immanent regularities of the capitalist mode of production. Starting from his value-form analysis in Part 1 of Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx finally develops, in Volume 3, the concept of "fictitious capital", which depicts the role of interest bearing capital and the financial sphere. Marx's analysis allows for an understanding of contemporary capitalism, financialization and crisis: financialization cannot be isolated from "real" economy; it should be conceived as a "technology" of exercising capitalist power and hegemony over the labouring classes and the society as a whole. Marx's analysis provides the terms to rethink the contemporary neoliberal form of capitalism and its crisis as expressions of the contradictions inherent in the organization of capitalist power.

John Milios

Vrednost, fiktivni kapital in finance. Brezčasnost Marxovega Kapitala

Ključne besede: Marx, monetarna teorija vrednosti, fiktivni kapital, finančializacija, kriza

Marxova monetarna teorija vrednosti predstavlja radikalen prelom s klasičnim (ricardovskim) pojmovanjem vrednosti. Vrednosti ne razume kot »kvantitete« dela, vsebovanega

v blagu, temveč kot *družbeno razmerje*, ki izraža imanentno regularnost kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina. Marx prične razvijati analizo vrednostne forme v prvem delu prvega zvezka *Kapitala* in jo dovrši v tretjem zvezku s konceptom »fiktivnega kapitala«, ki prikazuje vlogo obrestnega kapitala in finančne sfere. Marxova analiza omogoča razumevanje sodobnega kapitalizma, financializacije in krize: financializacije ni mogoče razločiti od »prave« ekonomije, temveč jo je treba razumeti kot »tehnologijo« izvajanja kapitalistične moči in hegemonije nad delavskimi razredi in družbo kot celoto. Marxova analiza ponuja izraze, ki so potrebni za ponovni razmislek sodobnih neoliberalnih form kapitalizma in njegovih kriz, ki so izraz inherentnih protislovij v organizaciji kapitalistične oblasti.

Nelson da Silva Junior

The Politics of Truth and its Transformations in Neoliberalism: the Subject Supposed to Know in Algorithmic Times

Keywords: algorithmic technologies, power, truth production, language, subjectivity production

The development of technologies for public segmentation and selected distribution of information added new possibilities to the old art of persuasion. These technologies not only achieve an unthought-of level of individualization of information in mass media history but also can give the most acceptable cluster of information to each individual or group of individuals at a time. These technologies can be said to constitute a new kind of power, where the production of truth in algorithmic times engages thus the conduction of subjects and groups in an unprecedented close way. To try to isolate and to understand the effectiveness of these algorithmic tools, I explore Michel Foucault's thoughts on power modalities. To conclude these reflections, I underline the renewed interest of thinking power dynamics based on a conception of language as an element that precedes the subjects. That puts the critical approach of social alienation on a different ground from rhetoric and persuasion, and closer to an analysis of the ontological effects of discourse.

Nelson da Silva Junior

Politika resnice in njene preobrazbe v neoliberalizmu: subjekt, za katerega se predpostavlja, da vé, v času algoritmov

Ključne besede: algoritmične tehnologije, oblast, proizvodnja resnice, govornica, proizvodnja subjektivnosti

Razvoj tehnologij za segmentacijo javnosti in izbrana distribucija informacij sta stari večini prepričevanja omogočili nove možnosti. Ne samo da te tehnologije dosejajo še nezamišljivo raven individualizacije informacij v zgodovini množičnih medijev, ampak lahko tudi dajo najbolj primeren skupek informacij vsakemu posamezniku ali skupini

posameznikov. Za te tehnologije lahko rečemo, da tvorijo novo vrsto oblasti, kjer produkcija resnice v algoritmičnih časih vključuje vodenja subjektov in skupin na doslej nedosegljiv neposreden način. Da bi poskusil izolirati in razumeti učinkovitost teh algoritmičnih orodij, raziskujem misel Michela Foucaulta o modalnostih oblasti. V sklepu teh razmislekov poudarim ponovno zanimanje za mišljenje dinamik oblasti, ki temelji na pojmovanju govornice kot elementa, ki predhaja subjekte. Kritični pristop družbene odtujenosti je na ta način prestavljen na področje, ki ni retorika ali prepričevanje, marveč je bližje analizi ontoloških učinkov diskurza.

Aleš Erjavec **Art and Criticism**

Keywords: art criticism, criticism, Terry Eagleton, Hal Foster, Charles Baudelaire, global criticism

In the article the author offers a brief sketch of the history and different meanings of criticism as they were formed over the last three centuries. He points out the original meaning of the usage of the term and then points to the narrower meaning, especially that found in art criticism. He then claims that a large portion of art criticism has retained its essence and meaning unchanged since its beginning and that this is also true insofar as it has not changed when art is compared with new media and Chinese art. The author also notes that art criticism represents an important constituent part of art proper.

Aleš Erjavec **Umetnost in kritika**

Ključne besede: umetnostna kritika, kritika, Terry Eagleton, Hal Foster, Charles Baudelaire, globalna kritika

V svojem članku prikaže avtor kratek potek zgodovine in različnih pomenov kritike kot so se ti oblikovali skozi zadnja tri stoletja. Pokaže na izvorni pomen tega izraza ter nato na razvoj kritike v angleškem družbenem, kulturnem in političnem prostoru, kjer je kritika vedno bolj postajala kulturna kritika. Opozori na njun današnji pomen. Čeprav je kritika danes izgubila jasno vsebino, to ni zmanjšalo njene tehtnosti in pomena pa naj je šlo za kritiko novih medijev ali kitajske umetnosti. Avtor tudi opozori, da tvori umetnostna kritika pomembno konstituanto umetnosti kot take.

Curtis L. Carter

Criticism as a Form of Cognition

Keywords: art criticism, cognition, *Erlebnis*, *Erkenntnis*

The question of the cognitive role of art criticism persists in twentieth and twenty-first century aesthetic theories. My approach to this topic is first to consider art criticism in reference to two aspects of cognition as represented in the German terms, *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis*. These concepts will represent the main forms of cognition as it relates to art criticism in the discussion offered here. Following this section, the focus will be on the views of three American philosophers, Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, and Noël Carroll, whose writings attend prominently to art criticism in twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Of particular interest will be how *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* are employed in the different approaches to criticism (evaluation, description, interpretation) and the priorities assigned in the writings of these aestheticians.

Curtis L. Carter

Kritika kot oblika spoznanja

Gljučne besede: umetnostna kritika, spoznanje, *Erlebnis*, *Erkenntnis*

Vprašanje kognitivne vloge umetnostne kritike se ohranja v estetiških teorijah dvajsetega in enaindvajsetega stoletja. Moj pristop k tej temi je najprej obravnavati umetnostno kritiko v odnosu na dva vidika spoznavanja, kot sta predstavljena v nemških izrazih *Erlebnis* in *Erkenntnis*. Ti razdelki bodo predstavljali glavne oblike spoznanja, kot se nanaša na umetnostno kritiko ter pričujočo razpravo. Po tem razdelku se bo usmerilo na poglede treh ameriških filozofov: Monroea Beardsleya, Arthurja Danta in Noëla Carrola, čigar spisi se tehtno vključujejo v umetnostno kritiko dvajsetega in enaindvajsetega stoletja. Posebnega zanimanja bo deležno vprašanje o uporabi *Erlebnis* in *Erkenntnis* v različnih pristopih h kritiki (vrednotenje, opis, razlaga) in prioritetam, kot so jim pripisane v spisih teh estetikov.

Peng Feng

Flattery or Abuse: Art Criticism in China

Keywords: China, art criticism, politics, commerce, academics

Chinese art criticism has a long history. However, modern art criticism in China did not begin until the second half of the 20th century. After 40 years development, art criticism in China has changed from political criticism into commercial criticism. The pressures of ideology are replaced by the worries about capitalist co-option of criticism. Flattery and Abuse are the inevitable results of commercial and political criticism. Only academic criticism can help art criticism get out of this crisis.

Peng Feng

Hvalnica ali zmerjanje: umetnostna kritika na Kitajskem

Ključne besede: Kitajska, umetnostna kritika, politika, komercialnost, akademska sfera

Kitajska umetnostna kritika ima dolgo zgodovino. Vendar pa se moderna umetnostna kritika na Kitajskem ni pričela pred drugo polovico dvajsetega stoletja. Po štiridesetletnem napredovanju se je umetnostna kritika spremenila iz politične kritike v komercialno kritiko. Pritiski ideologije so nadomestili skrbi glede kapitalističnega kooptiranja kritike. Le akademska kritika lahko pomaga umetnostni kritiki, da izide iz te krize.

Wang Jie, Meng Fanjun

Aesthetic Anthropology: Constructing A New System of Contemporary Aesthetic and Art Criticism

Keywords: aesthetic anthropology, core issue, basic methodology, contemporary Chinese film criticism

The past two or three decades have witnessed increasing interconnection between anthropology and cultural studies, theory of aesthetics, and art criticism. A trend is under way to combine ontology and methodology. In addition to Grosse, Frye, Strauss, and others, Chinese scholars such as Yuanpei CAI, Xiaotong FEI, and Huixiang LIN also have made significant contributions to aesthetics and offered aesthetic considerations in classic anthropological works. Many contemporary researchers have made significant achievements in aesthetics using the concepts and methods of anthropology, a movement which constitutes the building blocks of a new discipline. We are lucky to be among those who inherit, become involved in, and benefit from this trend. The time has come for a systematic summary and reflection on this historical trend in aesthetics, which may help solve complex aesthetic problems in this era and beckon scholars down a promising path of aesthetics and art criticism. The goals of this article revolve around the core issues and basic methodologies of aesthetic anthropology, and then summarize and extend its application to art criticism, with an aim to perfect the theoretical structure and methodology and stress its practical, operational value. By virtue of self-reflection and others' criticism, we respond to trends in this emerging field while underscoring the vitality, practical value, and future creativity of aesthetic anthropology that has drawn ideological inspiration from Marxist aesthetics.

Wang Jie, Meng Fanjun

Estetska antropologija: konstruirati nov sistem sodobne estetike in umetnostne kritike

Ključne besede: estetska antropologija, temeljna metodologija, sodobna kitajska filmska kritika

Zadnja dva ali tri desetletja smo bili priče krepitvi medsebojne povezanosti med antropologijo in kulturnimi študiji ter teorijo estetike in umetnostno kritiko. Uveljavlja se težnja povezati ontologijo in metodologijo. Poleg Grossa, Frya, Straussa in drugih, so kitajski učenjaki, kot so Yuanpei CAI, Xiaotong FEI in Huxian LIN, veliko prispevali k estetiki in ponudili estetiške premisleke klasičnih antropoloških del. Mnogi sodobni raziskovalci so z uporabo pojmov in metodo antropologije, gibanjem, ki je doseglo velike dosežke, veliko prispevali k estetiki, pri čemer so uporabili pojme in metode antropologije, gibanja, ki tvori gradnike nove discipline. Srečo imamo, da smo med dediči, tistimi, ki so vpleteni, in tistimi, ki pridobivajo s temi trendi. Mnogi sodobni raziskovalci so dosegli pomembne uspehe v estetiki. S tem ko smo med onimi, ki dedujejo, smo vpleteni in pridobimo s tem trendom. Čas je nastopil za sistematičen povzetek ter premislek o tej zgodovinski težnji v estetiki, ki lahko pripomore k rešitvi zapletenih problemov v našem času ter popelje učenjake po obetavni poti estetike in umetnostne kritike. Cilji tega članka so artikulirani glede na osrednje teme in temeljne metodologije estetske antropologije, nato pa povzamemo in razširimo njeno aplikacijo na umetnostno kritiko, da bi tako izpopolnili teoretsko strukturo in metodologijo ter poudarili njeno praktično in operativno vrednost. S samorefleksijo in kritiko drugih se odzivamo na trende v tem vznikajočem polju, pri čemer so poudarjene vitalnost, praktično vrednost in bodoča ustvarjalnost estetske antropologije, ki se je ideološko navdihovala pri marksistični estetiki.

Qingben Li

China's Internet Movie and Its Industrial Development

Keywords: micro film, socialist cultural production, one belt and one road

During the past ten years, China's micro film genre has undergone a rapid development because of the technological changes related to intermedia practices. Focusing on three types of micro film production, we will try to explore some characteristics of China's micro film genre. This chapter takes *A Murder Case Triggered by a Steamed Bun* as the first type of micro film, which is a parody of the movie *Wuji*. The second concerns conspiracy, including intertextual and intermedia conspiracy, and will be illustrated by the micro films *Imminent* and *The Only Choice*. The last type of micro film production focuses on social welfare, and is represented by the title *I will give you happiness when I grow up*. All these productions call into question how to coordinate and harmonize the conflict that

arises between social welfare on the one hand, and market efficiency on the other. The author believes that Chinese micro film productions will be regulated into China's Model of socialist cultural productions, which is different from the time when the government managed everything during the Planned Economy, and is also different from the cultural policy models in the West.

Qingben Li

Kitajski internetni film in njegov industrijski razvoj

Ključne besede: mikrofilm, socialistična kulturna proizvodnja, en pas in ena cesta

V zadnjih desetih letih je kitajski mikrofilmski žanr hitro napredoval zaradi tehnoloških sprememb povezanih z intermedialnimi praksami. Z osredotočenjem na tri zvrsti mikrofilmske proizvodnje bomo poskušali raziskati nekatere značilnosti kitajskega mikrofilmskega žanra. Ta članek uporabi film *Primer umora, ki ga je sprožil na pari kuhan cmok*, kot prvo zvrst mikrofilma, ki je parodija na film *Wuji*. Drugi zadeva zaroto, vključno z intertekstualno in intermedijsko. Ponazorili ga bomo z mikrofilmoma *Neizogibno* in *Edina izbira*. Zadnja zvrst mikrofilmske proizvodnje se osredotoča na socialno pomoč, predstavlja pa ga naslov *Osrečil te bom, ko odrastem*. Vse te produkcije postavljajo pod vprašaj usklajevanje in harmonizacijo spopada, ki vznikne med socialno državo na eni strani in tržno učinkovitostjo na drugi. Avtor je prepričan, da bo kitajska mikrofilmska proizvodnja regulirana po kitajskem modelu socialistične kulturne proizvodnje, ki se razlikuje od časa, ko je vlada vse vodila s planskim gospodarstvom, se pa tudi razlikuje od modelov kulturne politike na Zahodu.

Tyrus Miller

My Twentieth Century: Zeitdiagnose and Modern Art in Badiou, Sloterdijk, and Stiegler

Keywords: Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk, Bernard Stiegler, twentieth-century, aesthetics, art, subjectivity, form, technique

Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk, and Bernard Stiegler offered three distinct, but interrelated anatomies of the 20th century or, as Badiou expressed it, simply "The Century." These included Badiou's *The Century*, Sloterdijk's *You Must Change Your Life* and *What Happened in the Twentieth Century?*, and Stiegler's two-volume *Symbolic Misery* (I: *The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, II: *The Katastrophē of the Sensible*) and his related short book *Acting Out*. This paper considers their argument for the central role of art and aesthetics in the political, economic, cultural, and artistic legacy of the twentieth century, and their corollary arguments for the need to reconstruct and reorient our aesthetic understanding going forward into the post-20th-century future. It also highlights their discussions of

the changing relationship between the *subject* of aesthetic experience and the subject of collective politics. Although each construes differently the specific content and causes of the 20th century mutation in subjectivity, as well as its aesthetic dimensions, they notably share a common focus and general structure of their *Zeit*-diagnostic arguments and prognostic conclusions.

Tyrus Miller

Moje dvajseto stoletje: *Zeitdiagnose* in moderna umetnost pri Badiouju, Sloterdijku in Stieglerju

Ključne besede: Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk, Bernard Stiegler, dvajseto stoletje, estetika, umetnost, subjektivnost, forma, tehnika

Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk in Bernard Stiegler so ponudili tri jasne, a medsebojno povezane anatomije dvajsetega stoletja ali, kot je to preprosto izrazil Badiou, »Stoletje«. Te so vsebovale Badioujevo *Stoletje*, Sloterdijkovo *Spremeniti morate vaše življenje in Kaj se je zgodilo v dvajsetem stoletju?* ter Stieglerjevo *Simbolno bedo* v dveh zvezkih (I. Hiperindustrijska doba, II. Katastrofa čutnega, in s tem povezana knjižica *Izvedba*.) Pričujoči članek začena s premislekom njihovih trditev o osrednji vlogi *umetnosti* in *estetike* v politični, ekonomski, kulturni in umetnostni dediščini dvajsetega stoletja in njihovih korolarnih argumentov glede potrebe po rekonstrukciji in preusmeritvi našega estetskega razumevanja, ki se nadaljuje v prihodnosti postdvajsetega stoletja. Poudari tudi njihove razprave o spreminjajočem se razmerju med *subjektom* estetskega izkustva ter subjektom kolektivne politike. Čeprav vsak drugače konstruira specifično vsebino in razloge za mutacijo subjektivnosti dvajsetega stoletja kot tudi njene estetske razsežnosti, sta jim skupna fokus in obča zgradba njihovih *Zeit*-diagnostičnih argumentov in progno-
stičnih zaključkov.

Mojca Puncer

Participatory Art, Philosophy and Criticism

Keywords: philosophical criticism, art criticism, ontology of the artwork, ethical turn of aesthetics, Jacques Rancière, criticism of participatory art in Slovenia

The paper addresses the critical reflection of participatory art practices in light of the need to find new ways of analysing art that would no longer be associated only with the visual. Starting from the point of view that participatory art cannot be properly evaluated within the traditional framework of art criticism, which uses purely aesthetic and formal conceptual tools, the author is resorting to more general concepts within the field of philosophy. In this project Rancière's rehabilitation of aesthetics and his critique of the ethical turn of aesthetics prove particularly helpful, as do the consideration of the

historical failure of aesthetics as a philosophical treatment of art and its consequences for critical discourse on contemporary participatory art.

Mojca Puncer

Participativna umetnost, filozofija in kritika

Ključne besede: filozofska kritika, umetnostna kritika, ontologija umetniškega dela, etični obrat estetike, Jacques Rancière, kritika participativne umetnosti v Sloveniji

Prispevek se osredotoča na kritiško refleksijo participativnih umetniških praks v luči potrebe, da poiščemo nove načine analiziranja umetnosti, ki ne bi bili več povezani zgolj z vizualnostjo. Avtorica izhaja iz predpostavke, da participativne umetnosti ni mogoče ustrezno ovrednotiti znotraj tradicionalnega okvira umetnostne kritike, ki uporablja zgolj estetsko-formalna konceptualna orodja, zato poseže po splošnejših konceptih s področja filozofije. Pri tem ji je v pomoč zlasti Rancièrova rehabilitacija estetike in njegova kritika etičnega obrata estetike, pa tudi upoštevanje zgodovinskega neuspeha estetike kot filozofske obravnave umetnosti in njegovih posledic za kritični diskurz o sodobni participativni umetnosti.

Tomaž Toporišič

Is Art itself a Criticism? Linking Wilde to Derrida, Rancière and Badiou

Keywords: criticism, art, inaesthetics, deconstructive criticism, emancipated critic

Our essay starts with the famous quotation from Oscar Wilde's dialogue *The Critic as Artist*: "Criticism is itself an art." We will link this seductive idea with two contemporary philosophers: Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou. Derrida asserts that there is not one single intrinsic meaning to be found in a work, but rather many, and often these can be conflicting. In *La Vérité en peinture* he uses the example of Vincent van Gogh's painting *Old Shoes with Laces*, arguing that we can never be sure whose shoes are depicted in the work, making a concrete analysis of the painting difficult. In *Inaesthetics* Badiou claims that art produces its own truth and thus he redefines a relation of truth over beauty within the contested field of aesthetics. He thus describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art. Aesthetics has historically brought philosophy to art; Badiou reverses the situation. Can therefore Art itself produce its own criticism?

Tomaž Toporišič

Ali je sama umetnost kritika? Povezovanje Wilda z Derridajem, Rancièrom in Badioujem

Ključne besede: kritika, umetnost, inestetika, dekonstruktivistična kritika, emancipatorni kritik

Naša razprava se začne z znamenitim citatom iz dialoga Oscarja Wilda Kritik kot umetnik: »Kritika sama je umetnost.« To zapeljivo idejo bomo povezali z dvema sodobnima filozofoma: Jacquesom Derridajem in Alainom Badioujem. Derrida zatrjuje, da v umetniških delih ne moremo najti enega samega, sebi lastnega pomena, ampak so za ta dela značilni številni pomeni, ki si pogosto nasprotujejo. V spisu *La Vérité en peinture* (Resnica v slikarstvu) Derrida uporabi primer slike Stari čevlji z vezalkami Vincenta van Gogha in trdi, da nikoli ne moremo biti prepričani, čigavi čevlji so prikazani v tem delu, kar otežuje konkretno analizo slike. V knjigi *Mali priročnik o inestetiki* Badiou trdi, da umetnost ustvarja svojo lastno resnico znotraj estetike: tako opisuje strogo znotrajfilozofske učinke, ki jih prinaša neodvisna obstojnost nekaterih umetniških del. Estetika je zgodovinsko vnesla umetnost v filozofijo, Badiou pa položaj obrne. Ali lahko torej umetnost sama po sebi ustvari kritiko?

Ernest Ženko

Film, Philosophy, and Intercultural Film Criticism

Keywords: film, criticism, philosophy, Fredric Jameson, cognitive mapping

Film, contrary to the other “traditional” arts that have been developing over centuries, is a creation of modern times, and when it emerged it was not only a modern technological achievement but also a medium intended for the masses. Torn between art and popular entertainment, from its very beginning film was a source of oppositions, dichotomies, and fierce struggles. Some oppositions exist on the level of production, others on the level of reception, and above all they are present in the field of film criticism, which itself is split between journalistic criticism and the more philosophically and theoretically informed academic variety. This essay focuses on intercultural film criticism and scrutinises different variations of its relationship with philosophy and points out that so-called “classical” film criticism, based on psychoanalysis, semiotics, and Marxism, as well as film criticism of the “analytic-cognitivist” variety, cannot properly address this topic. It also shows that the approach developed by Fredric Jameson offers a much more adequate option, which not only addresses the film medium in the geopolitical context, but also enables, through film, an understanding of contemporary global society.

Ernest Ženko

Film, filozofija in medkulturna filmska kritika

Ključne besede: film, kritika, filozofija, Fredric Jameson, kognitivno kartiranje

V nasprotju z drugimi, »tradicionalnimi« oblikami umetnosti, ki so se razvijale skozi stoletja, predstavlja film dosežek modernosti, in ko se je pojavil, ni bil zgolj sodobni tehnološki dosežek, temveč tudi medij, v osnovi namenjen množicam. Razpet med umetnostjo in množično industrijo zabave, je bil film od vsega začetka vir nasprotij, protislovij in hudih bojev. Nekatera nasprotja obstajajo na ravni produkcije, druga na ravni recepcije, predvsem pa so prisotna v polju filmske kritike, ki je razcepljena na žurnalistično kritiko in na njeno bolj filozofsko in teoretsko podprto akademsko različico. V pričujočem članku se avtor osredotoča na medkulturno filmsko kritiko ter sledi različnim vrstam odnosov, ki jih slednja vzpostavlja s filozofijo ter obenem poudarja, da t. i. »klasična« filmska kritika, temelječa na psihoanalizi, semiotiki in marksizmu, kot tudi njena »analitično-kognitivistična« različica, ne moreta ustrezno obravnavati te problematike. Pokaže tudi, da je pristop, ki ga je razvil Fredric Jameson, veliko ustrežnejši, saj ne obravnava zgolj filmskega medija v geopolitičnem kontekstu, temveč omogoča skozi film tudi dožemanje sodobne globalne družbe.

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3. Granger, *op. cit.*, str. 31.
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