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Notes on the Implications of the Psychoanalytic Concept of Subject in Marxist Communism

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Marx understands that the fact of the expropriation of the means of production made into private property is what constructs the market as a means of universal life, once it forces people to accept it as the only means of livelihood, as intermediary between the life of one day and the life of another day. It was from this that the peasant and artisan population was obliged to submit to conditions imposed by capital: without the intermediary of money, it is not possible to subsist. And, in order to obtain money, it is necessary to sell something, because money circulates only in the sphere of trade, when applied in production it loses its condition of “money” and becomes capital.

That’s how money sustains the mediation of trade. Thanks to it one can buy whatever one wants... and buying and selling are acts of trade. Any object can be traded for another as long as money acts as intermediary between them. An object is sold, the money is used to buy another object. That is the only possible way of acquiring money. But what is there left to sell to those people who have been stripped of everything? A part of themselves. It is this very “themselves” which is parted and divided. That is how the universal nature of the market arises. It is a market

that is not born of human nature, of exercising a kind of economic rationality that is inherent to that nature. The market is the result of a political act of extreme violence, resulting from the decision of some to change the ownership regime. It is from this act that is built a structure, a structure that is called capital.

The fact of private property, the result of expropriation, therefore of property that is born of disrespect for property, although it proclaims an absolute respect to property; well, in this change of the status of property, Marx locates a human mode of production (once it is a historical factor), of the man that the bourgeois society requires. The formulation of the notion of man as being produced by capital, supposes, as a reference, another formation: communism. And communism is the future. Marx, therefore, invents the present, not from the past, but from the future. It is a future which he refuses to idealize.

Communism is not, for us, a state (Zustand) that must be implanted, an ideal to which reality [will be] subjected. We denominate communism the real movement that suspends and overcomes (aufhebt) the current state of things. The conditions of this movement are detached from the premise currently in effect. Moreover, the mass of simple workers – of the massive manpower excluded from the capital or any satisfactions of their necessities, as limited as they may be – and, therefore, the loss, not purely temporal, of that same work as a secure source of life, presupposes, through competition, the world market. Thus the proletariat can only exist in a world-historical plan, as well as communism, which is the action of the proletariat, can only reach reality as a universal-historical existence; universal-historical existence of the individual, that is, existence of the individual immediately linked to universal history. (MARX, 2007: 59)

The “man” which capital produces, according to Marx, is a reduced man. Reduced bodily and spiritually to a machine. Marx is profoundly touching in his descriptions. In the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts, he says that the worker is obliged to sell his humanity and himself only to produce the expansion of wealth. And that is fatal.

Work does not produce goods only; it produces itself and the worker as goods. (Marx, 2004: 60)

Work as merchandise, in the form of labor negotiated on the market, is the axis around which Marx demonstrates his conception of man as a historical fact and not as a product of the spirit. Why? Because the labor separated from the worker is sold by him and bought by the capitalist. And what this labor does, produces, is not recognized by the worker as a product of his work. This non-recognition, which we call alienation, is the result of the division of work and purchase, by the capitalist, of the labor of the worker.

The product of work is embodied work, says Marx, objectified. We may say, it is substantialized work. The object is whatever enables the work. These objects constitute the world. Thus, the relationship that the worker has with these objects is the relationship he has with the

world. And more: once he gives himself to the process of producing goods, the relation with himself is also established by the relation he has with the object.

This formulation is already made in the 1844 Manuscripts. The language in them is entirely philosophical, but the question is the same which goes through Capital, although written in economic terms. No wonder Marx used to refer to Capital as “my economy.” This is how he formulates it in the Manuscripts,

(...) the object that work produces, its product, is seen as a strange being, as a power independent of the producer: the product of work is the work that has been fixated on a object, became a thing [reification] (sachlich), it's the objectification of work. The effectuation of work is its objectification. This effectuation of work appears in [political economics] as the de-effectuation of the worker, the objectification as the loss of the object and slavery to the object, the appropriation as unfamiliar, as alienation. The effectuation of work appears so much like de-effectuation that the worker is de-effectuated until he dies of hunger. (MARX, 2004: 80)

The work is accomplished when it is transferred into the object. Thus, work is not a thing, but an operation that transfers the energy of the worker, his labor, to the object on which it is performed, transforming it. The living work, says Marx, is objectified into dead work; it becomes a thing.

As the work is accomplished, the contrary happens to the worker; in other words, the worker is spent. Life fades away, it is transferred to the object.

Due to this, the object is not recognized as objectified work, but as a thing itself. Hence, the way man appropriates his work, alienated in the object, is like a kind of estrangement. This is the same mode of production of the psychoanalytical symptom: the symptom is a formation of the unconscious result of the work of the impulse that the subject recognizes as something that is strange and in which he does not see himself implicated. The beginning of the work of analysis is precisely to bring the subject to recognize himself as implicated in the symptom about which he complains. I believe that this is one of the paths that can be explored to articulate what Lacan says about Marx inventing the symptom.

The externalization of the worker in his product has not only the meaning that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but, far beyond that, that it exists outside of him, independent of and strange to him, becoming an autonomous power before him, that the life that he gave to the object faces him in a hostile and strange way. (MARX, 2004: 81)

But the estrangement does not appear only in the result, but also, and, mainly, in the act of production, within the productive activity itself. How could the worker face the product of his activity alienated from it, if in the act of production he didn't feel as a stranger to himself? (MARX, 2004: 82)

“Capital is the loss of self” (MARX, 2004: 81). (It is the) The loss of self and the encounter of the symptom. For it is the symptom that is in the “self” of the subject. In this substitution, the “himself”

becomes estrangement.

What is most intimate and irreducible, what would be a reunion with one's self on the same level, presents itself as implacable otherness. The estrangement and the exile from one's self are founding marks of modernity.

Each man is an abyss, Woyzek, it even gives one vertigo to lean over him. (BÜCHNER, 2003, p. 24)

What bridges the abyss is the symptom. It's not the symptom as a sign of any pathology, the medical symptom, but the symptom as a tie, as a way of entwining the subject in the world. The symptom guides the formation of social ties. In capitalism, the social tie is made in the form of estrangement. Maybe that's why Lacan may say that it was Marx, and not Freud, who was the inventor of the symptom. This estrangement in the relationship, not only with the other, but also with one's self, is pointed out by Marx. And he does that locating its cause in the organization of work and in the fact that labor has been transformed into goods.

The symptom, in capitalism, will be presented as estrangement caused by the fact that the worker is alienated from his work. The production process focused on the production of surplus value is configured in the economy of time. As we know, there is an articulation between time and value in the production of an excess (surplus), which is an excess precisely because it is not counted in the expression of the value represented in the equivalent. The surplus pierces the form of the value – that is why wealth is produced there – because this economy of time, once it is entirely geared toward production of a variety of quantity, variation of the amount of invested capital at the beginning of the process in relation to the capital present at the end of the production process, may be referred to as an economy of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is an excess beyond the pleasure principle, while the gain is an excess beyond the value.

Jouissance takes place in the body and is represented by the symptom, a product of the unconscious. The law regulates the forms of *jouissance* of the other's body. Here the contract prevails. The body of the worker is given in the form of labor, under contract, to the capitalist. Thus, while the body of the worker is de-effectuated, the work is effectuated, transferring the man's life to the object. The object comes to life, it's the lure of the goods; and the world becomes estrangement. It's worth saying, the world becomes a symptom. Therefore, the social bond is formed as a symptom, hence, from the unconscious. Alienation becomes a way of establishing a position in the world. This position is not decided consciously; it's not a subjective decision, unless one considers as subjectivity what belongs to the subject of the unconscious.

The estrangement that is dealt with here is an estrangement which is seen as routine practice and not as a voluntary decision; it is a practice which does not depend on intentions, but is executed as work. And the work is determined by the mode of production. There is a relation

between the production mode and the unconscious: the work of the symptom in the production of *jouissance*, of an excessive amount that does not bond as a significant representation. We may think of value as a significant: both take place in a temporal chain, that is, both take place as a structure. *Jouissance* is beyond the significant, although without the cut of the significant, *jouissance* cannot be produced because the psychic apparel is not even configured. *Jouissance* can only be approached by language, although it pierces language, as surplus is beyond the value; it pierces the form of value.

Life is transferred, through work, into the object and, in consequence, into the world, because the world is the place of objects. The exteriority that presents itself as the world is constructed from the object. This is the object which, in psychoanalysis, is lost. This means that the absence of the object is felt, and that makes the world a place of absence. The world is estrangement and, if it is estrangement, it is a symptom, and, if it is a symptom, the subject doesn't want to know about it. The subject does not recognize himself in its production. The product of his work is not recognized as such.

This is the same mode of production of the psychoanalytical symptom. The symptom is a formation of the unconscious, result of the work of the impulse that the subject recognizes as something that is strange to him and in which he does not see himself implicated. At the start of clinical work, the beginning of an analysis, for example, there is always a first period in which the subject comes to recognize his contribution, the contribution of his desire for the production of the symptom about which he complains. The symptom is a form of *jouissance* based on repetition. The symptom is a form of *jouissance* based on repetition. It is through the path of repetition that the tie is formed. The tie is what defines the man, in other words, man is the production of the symptom and it is the capital that authorizes him as such.

Man is nothing but a worker and, as a worker, his human properties are his only insofar as they are for capital, which is alien to him. (MARX, 2004: 91)

By treating labor as merchandise, Marx remarkably reaches the comprehension of the creation of wealth in the capitalist production mode. It is a mode of production in which the humanity of man is sacrificed to the capital. Why? To produce more wealth... to produce more and more.

Thus, if labor is merchandise, it must have a use value and an exchange value. The use value is its consumption; and the exchange value is the social time necessary to produce it. Labor is what it must spend, and replace, to remain alive. When the capitalist buys, on the market, the worker's labor, he consumes it, consumes his use value on production. The consumption of the use value of labor lasts a certain time... And on what is it consumed? How does this consumption take place? Through work, it is worth saying, in the production of value. The laborer produces value, that is, he works during a certain time, for example, 12 hours. In this period he produces in 4

hours “his own” value. That is, the equivalent to the value of its labor, what is necessary to survive until the next morning to go back to work, and so on each day...

Well then, if in 4 hours labor produced its own value, what happens to the 8 hours left, when the labor continued to be employed, and therefore, continued producing value? This excess value is the use value of the labor, the surplus, the gain of the capitalist which is not confused with the profit that he obtains on the market through purchase and sales. The surplus takes place in the production of merchandise.

Thus, labor is consumed to produce beyond its value, an over-value, a value that didn't exist until that moment. That is capitalism's source of wealth. The more the application of technology to production is extended, the greater the surplus value produced and appropriated. Merchandise is an object, a thing. As Marx says in the beginning of *Capital*, “merchandise is, before anything, an external object, a thing” (MARX, 1980: 41) - - “*Die Ware ist zunächst ein äußerer Gegenstand, ein Ding*” (MARX, 1962: 49). The value of this thing, of this object, finally, of the merchandise, is the expression of human abstract work and is executed, not in consumption (as it is in the case of use value), but in trade. The marks of the worker in his own particularity and style - which are of no concern to capital - are deleted in the market. The worker is not allowed to constitute a style in which he could recognize his mark. That would be a waste of time, in the assembly line. Thus, the worker brings with him an energy expenditure that is abstract and empty in its loss.

Life is guided by the market. Where will the worker recognize himself as a man? Where will he find his humanity? Following the form of value, this place would be the place of the equivalent, of money, consequently. And money performs the function of representing, with its embodiment as money, the abstract human work. The human starts to recognize himself as resistance of the Other: an image in the mirror returns to the little human a unified image of a body which is experimented in parts: in the eyes, in the stomach etc. So, this recognition takes place from that image. This operation has its correlate in the symbolic: this operation that Lacan called “mirror stage” has significant support, which puts us in the structure's scope. The form of value repeats this structure: money in its function of equivalent, substitutes the image in the mirror. What does the equivalent, money, while representation of value, allow to be constituted? Is that the question asked by Marx when he says that the consequences, to humanity, of abstract human work becoming universal, hasn't been thought of?

The unifying image in which the child starts recognizing himself is not the “self” of “himself”. It is an image, not an essence. Where will man represent himself in order to recognize himself in the world? He will not. He will constitute himself around estrangement. And the measure of the human will then be represented by money. It is a Medusa that petrifies itself in the mirror and gives back the unrecognizable image of horror. It is the reification undertaken by capital directed to the production of surplus value. If this structure has remained since the XIX century, one cannot talk

about new subjectivities, in the XXI century. The world is just getting stranger, and for the same reasons.

The surplus, as we know, is the difference between the value present at the beginning of a productive process and the aggregate value by way of the labor that turns up in the end. The question is structured in the temporal variation of quantity, therefore in the execution of abstract human work. There is an expense that objectifies itself with excess. That is the particularity of the use value of labor that is executed in consumption: the consumption of labor is the surplus production. This must be taken under consideration in any reflection in regards to communism. This is because communism is not a matter of income redistribution and reordering of private property. The surplus production, understood as an expense that objectifies itself in excess, is a form of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* which is spent with the production of a surplus value; this is a way of living... what for? For nothing... According to Lacan in XX Seminary, "*jouissance* is something which is worth nothing". (LACAN, 1985: 11)

The capitalist production mode is a *jouissance* economy in which the worker is the one who must spend himself in producing a surplus appropriated by capital. Every economy is an economy of *jouissance* to the extent that it involves the circulation of surplus. That's what Marx points out as an essentially human mark: the production of a surplus. The problem is that, under the prism of capital, it became the only objective of production. The surplus produced is not intended to be symbolic anymore, but to a pure reality, the reality of *jouissance*, reality of surplus. It is the real *jouissance* that reifies man transforming him into factor of production. Life is spent in a measureless *jouissance*: the surplus production. *Jouissance* is put at its own service in a kind of incessant self indulgence. Switching to another production mode implies changing this *jouissance* economy, this way of producing. It implies regulating the pleasures of the body in some other way.

Lacan speaks of *Potlatch* as another way of dealing with *jouissance*; Marx talks about communism. He defines communism, in the Manuscripts, as a movement of transformation and not an ideal to which society must be submitted... those are his words, Marx's. *Potlatch* is a practice in some societies outside of classical Western history of redistribution of accumulated surplus. Someone who has accumulated a surplus that threatens the subjective inter-relations is honored and donates whatever is accumulated to relatives and friends. Thus, there is a "total" consumption, therefore the destruction of signs of luxury and power. There is a symbolic limit to *jouissance*.

Communism has its own pretexts. It supposes that work, an effect of labor transformed into merchandise, is universal. It is from that universal place that the particular is headed. It is only because he has been made universal that the worker is able to change the world. That is because the worker is not interested in taking the state to become stronger as a class. Communism does not point towards a collective construction in the shape of a kind of cooperative. In this point, the movement is contrary to the rising of the bourgeois. The bourgeois was interested in the State, in

other words, it needed the State – mainly because of imperialism when the capital investments were protected by the power of weapons. Well then, the bourgeois needs the State to guarantee its interests and to become stronger as a class. The worker is interested in extinguishing himself as a worker, and in this process of extinction, drag with him the way in which the world is constructed.

If the proletariat takes the State and then strengthens itself as “working class”, it extinguishes itself as worker and is reborn as a bureaucrat, for its interests will be those of the State itself. That is what happened in the Soviet Union. The worker is not interested in becoming stronger as a social class because he is interested in disappearing precisely as a class. Thus, his interest is in his own destruction. Extinct as a class, he comes upon his particularity as subject. That is communism’s bet; and here I do not add “today”. It’s not a matter of communism today, for that bet is indicated and written in 1884, in the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts.

The political struggle must not aim at the redistribution of wealth, but at the reordering of *jouissance*. That would be a radical and singular political intervention in human history. This is much different from what was done in the so called “real socialism”, which transformed the worker/politician into a bureaucrat wedded to the State. That’s where a political practice comes from, that instead of extinguishing itself and the State, sought to keep opulence, protected by an abstract Raison d’État. The revolutions that sought inspiration in Marxism as a speech that would give a meaning to their revolts, did not change the relations of the worker with his work, merely redistributing, at best, the services of goods and power.

We therefore conclude that, unlike what is said, both by the right and the left, Marx did not propose a world in which the way of life would be a collective for the common good. He fights for a world in which the universal man, created by capital, could experiment himself as a private being. This is a world in which, according to the particularities of each person, each could take responsibility for the radicalism of his own individuality. What he advocates is the radicalization of the subject as a particular experience and not slavery to ignorance and the brutality of many to assure the individuality of few. The problem would never be justified or solved by the inversion of a minority for a majority.

Communism would be a radical experience of the individual, as a subject, that would allow man to recognize his humanity, his particular gifts until the limit of death and not the limit of the boss. Provocatively, we would say that what Marx proposes is a topology: he stretches so much the surface of the individual that he ends up turning him inside out. Marx proposes such a profound radicalization of the liberal construction of the individual that he undresses what is, actually, a construction of the bourgeois associated with bureaucracy: the totalitarian State. Communism is a movement, says Marx. We would add the following: it is a movement of the non-being directed, not to the being, but to desire.

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