



## Scientific Knowledge and Political Action: On the Antinomies of Lukács' Thought in *History and Class Consciousness*\*

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*ABSTRACT:* Lukács' theory of reification as developed in *History and Class Consciousness* represents an interesting approach to revolutionary subjectivity that goes beyond the objectivism of traditional Marxist accounts. However, his Weberian leanings hindered the concretization of his profound initial insights, and ended up generating antinomies he could not solve. Fundamentally, the basic contradiction of Lukács' theory of reification lies in the gulf between the source of reification (in the real subsumption of labor under capital) and the posited ground for its overcoming (in the formal subsumption). From a Marxian perspective, the overcoming of alienation can only result from the historical movement of the contradictions immanent in the real subsumption of labor under capital, as the historically specific form in which human productive subjectivity develops.

### *Introduction*

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS to 20th-century Marxist social theory is Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (hereafter HCC). As Arato and Breines point out, this work "was recognized by critics and sympathizers alike as a major event in the history of both Marxist and bourgeois thought" (AB, 1979, ix). Moreover, the book's impact transcended its own

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epoch, to the point of constituting the foundation stone of a whole tradition of heterodox Marxism which came to be known as “Western Marxism” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974). Yet, despite broad recognition of the book’s importance, we can hardly say that HCC currently constitutes an influential presence within critical social thought. Quite to the contrary, it seems fair to say that, with the various forms of “post-Marxism” dominating the scene, Lukács’ work has been either forgotten or, at best, has had its revolutionary intentions domesticated through a very selective choice of what are considered to be its relevant aspects. Thus, his work on aesthetic theory is privileged over HCC, which places the problematic of revolutionary class consciousness at the center of the inquiry.

Still, it can be argued that, aside from the current state of radical academic labor — itself an expression of the present form of capital accumulation that takes concrete shape in the political retreat of the working class — there are other reasons behind the indifference towards HCC. Fundamentally, these relate to weaknesses in that work that several critics rightly detected a long time ago (including Lukács himself in his 1967 self-critical preface). In particular, most authors highlight Lukács’ idealistic form of appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic as the source of his shortcomings.<sup>1</sup>

While I agree with the general thrust of these criticisms, I believe that the questions addressed by Lukács (even if wrongly answered) are still decisive for the critique of political economy and remain unanswered by those who raised those objections. Basically, Lukács’ re-appropriation of Hegel served to emphasize the importance of the *dialectical method* (HCC, 1). More concretely, Lukács saw the methodological distinctiveness of Marx’s scientific enterprise as giving it its revolutionary character as proletarian science (HCC, 27). Therefore, the emphasis on method was not an abstract, academic discussion but was directly concerned with the political action of the working class. It was a matter of establishing the “genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action” (HCC, 2). This, I believe,

1 Thus, as Jay suggests, there is “a reduction of subjectivity to consciousness implicit in Lukács’ position” (Jay, 1984, 115). For criticisms of Lukács’ idealism from a structuralist and a Kantian perspective, respectively, see Stedman Jones, 1971 and Colletti, 1973. A more sophisticated and balanced criticism can be found in Piccone, 1972. Kilminster, 1979, offers an interpretation which, even despite Lukács’ self-criticisms, denies that an idealist bias exists in HCC.

is the central message in Lukács — the one we have to recover as the main task of the practical criticism of capital.

Thus, it is not on the Hegelian influence in Lukács that the critique should focus. On the contrary, I will try to show that Lukács' shortcomings inhere in what most commentators tend to see as his most important contribution to Marxist dialectical social theory: his notion of reification and its dynamics. The most fruitful critique of Lukács' thought should, I believe, aim at this level. Fundamentally, the basic antinomy of Lukács' theory of reification resides in the fact that he grounds the source of reification in the real subsumption of labor under capital, yet bases its overcoming at the level of the formal subsumption. The externality between these two moments dooms the attempt at mediation to failure. I will argue, further, that this antinomy originates in Lukács' flawed analysis of the capitalist labor process derived, in turn, from his appropriation of Weber's theory of capitalist rationalization.

### *Reification and Bourgeois Society*

Any serious criticism of Lukács' notion of reification as developed in HCC has to acknowledge, in the first place, that this theory presents some very important insights that distinguish Lukács' approach from that of other Marxists, including the "Western Marxists." In general, the revolutionary action of the working class is seen as ruled by a free consciousness, the absolute opposite of working-class subjectivity subordinated to capital. In other words, the consciousness of the working class is understood as *essentially* free, yet oppressed by something external to itself — *e.g.*, by the power of the bourgeoisie which, in concentrating the ownership of the means of production, thus limits the affirmation of the proletariat's essential freedom. It is one of the merits of HCC to have developed the insight that the very social existence of the proletariat determines its consciousness as reified. The question of emancipation thus acquires a deeper meaning than in traditional Marxist accounts. On the one hand, as Postone points out, this entails a characterization of the domination of capital "that is deeper and broader than that of a system of exploitation based on private property" (Postone, 1993, 73). And it also implies a broader and more profound conception of the transcendence of capitalism. For, in contradistinction to traditional Marxist accounts,

for Lukács it is not merely a question of an “economic collapse,” but rather of the transformation of human subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

The point to be investigated thus turns out to be whether or not this reified consciousness carries within itself its development into its own overcoming. Abstractly considered, I think Lukács’ approach moved in the right direction. However, the flaws in his notion of reification hindered the concretization of this profound initial insight, and ended up generating antinomies that he could not solve. It is necessary, therefore, to give this concept a closer scrutiny.

### *Reified Objectivity and the Labor Process*

Lukács’ point of departure in his analysis of the “phenomenon of reification” is Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, which shows that relations between people take the form of relations between things. Lukács here seeks to follow Marx’s insight that investigation of the social forms of bourgeois society must begin with the commodity, since all the contradictions of modern society lead back to the commodity structure (Fine, 2001, 95–96). This structure thus constitutes for Lukács “the model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society, together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them” (HCC, 83). Lukács considers the commodity, therefore, as the basis of all forms of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* characteristic of capitalist society.

The fetishistic nature of the commodity structure, Lukács goes on to argue, is manifested in both an objective and a subjective form. The objective aspect corresponds to the autonomization of the movement of the products of labor, which appear to have a life of their own, constituting a “second nature” governed by laws. This illusion, Lukács argues, building on a Hegelian notion of appearance, is not a subjective misconception but, on the contrary, a form of social objectivity. Fetishism, at this level, is actually inherent in the commodity-form of the product of labor. However, when Lukács moves to the subjective aspect of this initial moment of reification, he introduces, in an unmediated fashion, a determination that actually corresponds to the capital-form: estrangement of the activity of the laborer as a consequence of the commodity-form of *labor-power*, which results from

2 Still, it should be noted that Lukács does not break completely with traditional accounts, which he comments on approvingly (HCC, 173), but only tries to complement them.

the separation of the laborer from the objective conditions of labor. In capitalist society, Lukács argues, the human individual's labor-power "must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article" (HCC, 87).

Be this as it may, these two aspects of reification do not exhaust its determinations. On the contrary, for Lukács they are just the manifestation of deeper processes that constitute their foundation. His argument consequently moves to the consideration of these deeper processes. It is here that the Weberian leanings of Lukács' concept of reification come to the fore (Clarke, 1991, 315–316). According to Lukács, the ground of this reified form of objectivity inherent in the commodity-form is to be found in the materiality of the capitalist labor process, which is subject to a "real process of abstraction" (HCC, 87–90). On the one hand, this abstraction of labor is understood as a process whereby the worker is reduced to a partial organ of the collective worker specialized in a single very simple task. In this sense, Lukács is roughly following Marx's analysis of the technical division of labor characteristic of capitalist *manufacture*, a division that results in the one-sided development of the productive subjectivity of the laborers in charge of performing the direct labor of the immediate process of production (Marx, 1976, 486). This process, moreover, is certainly intensified with the advent of *large-scale industry* (Marx, 1976, 547–548). On the other hand, this reference to the capitalist labor-process serves Lukács to show what he actually is interested in: highlighting that "the *principle* at work here [is] the principle of what is and can be calculated" (HCC, 88). Lukács thus turns to Weber in order to develop what he sees as the tendency of capitalist society to subject every aspect of social life to the rule of formal or instrumental rationality with its reliance on quantification and calculability. This is the basis of the analytical and mechanical fragmentation of every activity into its component parts. This, in turn, gives the economy the appearance of having an autonomous existence and of being ruled by objective quasi-natural laws. Furthermore, this form of false objectivity extends to society as a whole, structuring it as a system constituted by different subsystems — politics, culture, private life, etc. (Bernstein, 1984, 10). Thus, Lukács' notion of reification acquires a more developed (Weberian) meaning. It now refers to the compartmentalization of human individuality that comes to lose all sight of the functioning of the totality of the social process.

The only thing that matters to modern individuals is calculation of the formal adequacy of the means at their disposal to given and indifferent ends.

We can see now how Lukács' argument progressively leads him to the terrain of the forms of subjectivity that this reified social existence generates. In fact, the very structure of his exposition demands from him a deeper investigation of reified subjectivity. And in effect, the subsequent pages of HCC move in this direction. Yet, before reconstructing Lukács' theory of reified subjectivity, a critical assessment of his analysis of the objectivity of reification is in order.

### *Limitations of Lukács' Characterization of the Capitalist Labor Process*

Basically, two main limitations in Lukács' notion of reification can be pointed out. First, in his analysis of the capitalist labor process everything is reversed. Already in the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx had discovered the specificity of capitalist society in alienated labor, meaning by this the real inversion between subject and object whereby the species-powers of the former are turned into attributes of the latter (Marx, 1975, 272). Now, this form-determination of social life pertains to the *formal subsumption* of labor under capital and, therefore, obtains regardless of the particular material form of the labor process (Marx, 1976, 548). Actually, the fact that all the capacities of human beings are turned into powers of their materialized general social relation in its autonomous movement of self-expansion, belongs to the most general determination of capital as self-valorizing value. What is certainly true, and what Marx did argue, is that as capital takes possession of the powers of the immediate process of production and progressively transforms its materiality up to the point of giving it the form of large-scale industry, this inversion is expressed even materially in the peculiar form of the labor process itself. In other words, concerning the workers who remain engaged in performing direct manual labor, the inversion of subject and object characteristic of capitalist production acquires a "technical and palpable reality" in the materiality of the labor process: the material subject of the immediate process of production is not the worker but the system of machinery. This is why Marx argued that, when in the concrete form of large-scale industry the production of relative surplus value is

achieved through transformation of the instruments of labor into machines, “the use value, *i.e.*, the material quality of the means of labor, is transformed into an existence adequate to fixed capital and to capital as such” (Marx, 1973, 692). In short, the conversion of the conditions of labor into the material subject of the process of production *is a concrete form of alienated labor, and not the other way around.*

But the story told by Lukács is quite different. In his account, the materiality of the labor process as such constitutes the foundation of the inversion between subject and object characteristic of bourgeois society. Moreover, he then grounds the transformation of the labor process in Weberian fashion, in the all-embracing process of capitalist rationalization. Thus, it necessarily follows from Lukács’ account that the specificity of capitalist society no longer resides in the conversion of the product of labor into the alienated subject of human life, but rather in the rationalization of the labor process. Hence, and surely despite his own intentions, Lukács ends up identifying capital with its material form of existence, just as bourgeois political economy did.<sup>3</sup>

In the second place, what Lukács finds as *the* determinant of reification is in fact a one-sided absolutization of a concrete material form of the production process; one, moreover, that tends to disappear as capital fulfils the realization of its historical *raison d’être*. To clarify this point, it is necessary to briefly discuss the determinations of the production process of large-scale industry.

The unity of the specific process of production of large-scale industry entails basically three moments: 1) production of the capacity to exercise the conscious regulation of the labor process of the collective worker — *i.e.*, science; 2) application of this capacity in the practical organization of the immediate process of production; and 3) direct labor in the immediate process of production simply as such. These material changes in the process of production necessarily entail the transformation of the subjectivity of the wage laborers. The new figure of the collective worker of large-scale industry attains its unity through a complex internal differentiation reflecting the distinct moments of the process of production (on this see Iñigo Carrera, 2000a; 2000b).

3 Markus, 1982, raises a similar objection against Lukács’ analysis of the capitalist labor process. However, he sees at the basis of this shortcoming a fusion between two supposedly distinct Marxian notions, alienation and reification.

Regarding the part of the working class that remains in charge of performing the still-necessary manual labor in the direct process of production, the transformation of their productive subjectivity takes the concrete form of its degradation. The labor of this partial organ of the collective worker is thus reduced to the performance of increasingly simpler operations. Although the technical necessity of the specialization of the laborer in a single operation comes to an end as far as the materiality of the labor process is concerned, the miserable capitalist limits within which the former is held mutilate the individual productive subjectivity of the worker in an even more hideous fashion than in the case of the worker within manufacture (Marx, 1976, 546–7). The antagonistic nature of production, determined as a process of valorization of capital, perpetuates the division of labor in the factory, attaching the worker to a specialized machine and converting him/her into a living appendage of the instruments of labor. Furthermore, as Iæigo Carrera (2000b) points out, the essence of this concrete form of the production of relative surplus value compels capital constantly to revolutionize the technical basis of the system of machinery, thus expelling from the immediate process of production entire masses of this kind of worker. And with every leap forward in the development of the productive powers of labor, the intervention of their particular capacities in the labor process becomes more redundant as they are replaced by a function objectified in the machine. However, to the extent that this movement does not fully eliminate the necessity of some subjective expertise of the manual workers, “it generates a multitude of new spaces for the exploitation of living labor on the basis of a further deskilling of the material attributes of their labor-power” (*ibid.*, 6).

It should now be clear that when Lukács discusses the reification caused by the structure of the capitalist labor process he unconsciously refers exclusively to this partial organ of the collective laborer bearing a degraded productive subjectivity. And it is clear why, focusing on this “immediacy of reification,” the worker is unable to find a way out of this reified social existence. Thus considered, the materiality of capitalist production does not embody any potency that can allow the workers to take the conscious organization of social life into their hands. Far from moving in the direction of the overcoming of the alienation of human powers as attributes of the material product of social labor, the development of the productive powers of social labor



in its capitalist form seems to condemn the workers to reproduce their alienated general social relation *ad infinitum*. Lukács is therefore obliged to conclude that, as far as the real subsumption of labor under the rule of capital is concerned, “the contradiction will remain unresolved and will be reproduced by the dialectical mechanics of history at a higher level, in an altered form and with increased intensity” (HCC, 197). This is why, as we will see, he mistakenly turned to the formal subsumption of labor under capital in search of the source of revolutionary subjectivity.

Still, this image emerges only if we lose sight of the aforementioned unity of the production process of large-scale industry and absolutize what constitutes just a vanishing moment. Bearing in mind this unity and its contradictory historical development, a different picture results.

First, insofar as the subjectivity of the capitalist becomes impotent to personify the conscious organization of the now directly social labor under the rule of his/her capital,<sup>4</sup> the other side of this increasing deskilling of the laborers engaged in the immediate process of production must be the expansion of the productive subjectivity of the laborers in charge of the remaining moments of production: the development and exercise of the scientific capacity to consciously organize the production process.<sup>5</sup> The existence of the collective laborer thus transcends the boundary of the “factory walls.” Needless to say, as a concrete form of the accumulation of capital, this development of the workers’ subjectivity can only turn against them as a hostile and alien power borne by the product of social labor. However, as I will argue later, a point is reached in this historical movement when the progressive development of this expanded subjectivity clashes against the limits imposed by the alienated social relations of capitalist production, making the latter “blow sky high.”

Second, in this brutal and devastating way — which also tends to fragment the working class in the course of capitalist development — this determination carries within itself the emancipating potency

4 Both the scale of the process of production and the necessarily scientific character of its organization render the subjective capacity of the capitalist unable to be in charge of the conscious regulation of the labor process (Marx, 1976, 1024).

5 In actual fact, the development of large-scale industry constitutes a third type of subjectivity through the production of a surplus population relative to capital’s needs of exploitation. Although it is a crucial aspect, I cannot deal here with the consequences of this for the revolutionary action of the working class.

of abolishing the need for direct intervention of the human hand in the immediate process of production, thus making Lukács' source of reification vanish. As Marx states in the *Grundrisse*,

To the degree that labour time — the mere quantity of labour — is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production — of the creation of use values — and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination [*Gliederung*] in total production on the other side — a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production. (Marx, 1973, 700.)

Lukács' mistaken account of the real subsumption of labor under the rule of capital did not allow him to see the essential contradiction immanent in this alienated mode of development of the species-powers of humanity. Consequently, neither could he realize how the historical movement of this contradiction drives capital to its own dissolution by giving the workers the potency to transcend the alienation of their consciousness. For him, the development of the materiality of the labor process scientifically organized through the system of machinery could only perpetuate the subsumption of labor under capital until the end of time.

### *Reified Subjectivity, Contemplation and Scientific Method*

Thus far we have developed a critical reconstruction of Lukács' notion of reification and its forms of objectivity. Still, one of the distinctive features of Lukács' theory is that it focuses, in addition, on the forms of subjectivity produced by reified social life. It is to this analysis that we now turn.

We have seen how Lukács grounds the existence of a reified objectivity in the rationalization of the capitalist labor process. According to his account, the laborer is separated from the conscious organization of the labor process and becomes a partial organ of a rationalized collective work process that confronts him/her as a pre-existent and self-sufficient objectivity. Furthermore, the mechanical

analysis of the objective conditions of labor into their component parts impinges on the personality of the worker, since “this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject” (HCC, 89). Thus, reified social existence must also have effects on the level of subjectivity, since all forms of social life generate as the necessary complement to their forms of objectivity a corresponding *form of consciousness*. In this case, therefore, a reified consciousness emerges which reaches the immediacy of every individual in bourgeois society, *including the members of the proletariat*. The determinations of this reified consciousness involve two inter-related aspects.

In the first place, the immediate consciousness of individuals in capitalist society makes them relate to the forms of objectivity in the form of *contemplation*. Since the fragmentation of the subject by virtue of specialization renders impossible the grasping of the whole, the labor process of large-scale industry confronts the worker as a process “mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention, *i.e.*, a perfectly closed system. . . . [this] must likewise transform the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world” (HCC, 89). The subjection of the worker to the automatic movement of the system of machinery produces the de-activation of the subject and, therefore, its contemplative stance towards reality. Thus, human action is restricted to a purely “technical” form of intervention in the world, and human praxis is reduced to the taking up of an orientation with respect to a reality that is seen as an alien objectivity subject to formal laws and regularities beyond human control (Feenberg, 1971, 110). This form of “non-active action” can only reproduce this reified social existence without achieving what Lukács considers an actual transformation of reality in the profoundest sense. This latter can only be the product of what Lukács calls *praxis*.

It seems to me that this characterization of reified consciousness in terms of its contemplative stance towards reality is quite problematic; it expresses the romantic leanings of Lukács’ concept of reification which, in turn, constitute the germs of certain “ultra-leftist” tendencies present in his approach (Clarke, 1991, 318). Instead of emphasizing the fact that in capitalism human life-*activity* takes an alienated form, Lukács’ notion of reified consciousness tends to involve an abstract and false opposition between activity

and passivity. Thus, this view risks seeing in every intensification of the class struggle a “revolutionary wave,” since any collective form of working-class resistance that appears to go beyond economic demands and, therefore, seems to aim at the “totality” of bourgeois society tends to be identified with activity (*i.e.*, with the negation of reified consciousness). Conversely, the relatively “disciplined” production of surplus value is identified with passivity. In this way, the question is reduced to a mere *quantitative* difference in the scope and intensity of the struggle and revolution is reduced to an abstract imperative: become active! In reality, both aspects are concrete forms of existence of the contradictions of the alienated form of human life-activity, *i.e.*, the accumulation of capital.<sup>6</sup>

More interesting is the second aspect of this reified consciousness, which Lukács discusses in relation to its theoretical expressions. For here the problematic is posed not in terms that might lead to the reduction of transcendence of the reified forms of subjectivity to a matter of “degree of militancy,” as happens with the misleading abstract opposition between activity and passivity, or between praxis and contemplation. In discussing this second aspect of the reification of consciousness, Lukács is led to the *qualitative* distinction between the respective *determinate forms* of consciousness incapable of transcending reification, and the form that is indeed able to overcome it. At issue here is the historicity of scientific method and its relation to the transformative power of human action. I think this second aspect of Lukács’ discussion qualifies the first and, in this way, helps to avoid its shortcomings.

According to Lukács, reified scientific thought takes at face value and uncritically reproduces the *immediacy* of reification, which generates the appearance of society as governed by nature-like laws. The procedure of reified thought thus surrenders to the immediate facticity of social life, and simply attempts to construct law-like generalizations on the basis of the regularity and repetition of “brute given facts” and their quantification. By being unilaterally concerned with establishing quantifiable relations among “things,” reified social science is completely indifferent to the qualitative determinations of social forms and hence is unable to discover the real “inner connec-

6 See Iñigo Carrera, 2000b, and Postone, 1993, 314–324, for an analysis of the specific determination of class struggle as a concrete form of the accumulation of capital, instead of being conceived as its abstract negation.

tions” among them. By its very nature, it cannot do away “with the false separation of objects (and the even falser connections established by unmediated abstractions)” (HCC, 163). Although I think the way he grounds this insight into the “fragmentation of the subject” brought about by the system of machinery is misleading, with this critique of reified thought Lukács is getting at an all-important aspect of the revolutionary praxis of the working class. In order to achieve the willed radical transformation of the world, the scientific knowledge of the proletariat must transcend the historical determination of science as a concrete form of the reproduction of capital and, therefore, of the alienated consciousness that is impotent to transcend its alienation. This historical determination is expressed in the very *form* of the process of scientific cognition of reality, *i.e.*, in its *method*.<sup>7</sup> Here, another important aspect of Lukács’ thought comes into play. In the next section, I will discuss Lukács’ insights into the dialectical method.

### *Dialectics and Revolutionary Action*

By realizing that formalistic thinking is the necessary form of scientific consciousness specific to the alienated social relations of capitalist society, Lukács was thus able to grasp what must be the determinate form of cognition that transcends the determination of science as a concrete form of the reproduction of capital — dialectical knowledge (Bernstein, 1984; Feenberg, 1971, 93; Goldmann, 1977, 18–24). In contradistinction to representational thought, in its attempt to appropriate in thought the determinations of the object, dialectics does not follow any logic whatsoever. On the contrary, its very form consists in reproducing in thought the immanent development of the life of the object of cognition at stake, that is, it consists in the “intellectual reproduction of reality” (HCC, 9) by following the movement of contradiction. In this way, Lukács argues, knowledge is able to go beyond the immediate fetishistic appearances of bourgeois society and grasps every real form as a determinate moment of a *concrete totality*. This dia-

7 Sohn-Rethel, 1978, poses this question in an even clearer and more insightful manner, by explicitly tracing representational thought to the determinations of the commodity-form, thus avoiding Lukács’ Weberian explanation. However, Sohn-Rethel’s unmediated identification of intellectual labor with labor of appropriation is misleading. For an alternative account of the “inner connection” between the alienated form of capitalist social relations and the form of science as representational thought, see Iñigo Carrera, 1993.

lectical reproduction in thought of the determinations of social life, far from being an easy and straightforward intellectual enterprise, requires a “complex process of mediation whose goal is the knowledge of society as a historical totality” (HCC, 169). Thus, we have arrived at the two interrelated concepts that, according to one of the most important commentators, play a central role in Lukács’ discussion of the dialectic: the categories of “totality” and “mediation” (Mészáros, 1972, 61). According to Lukács, it is their combination that gives dialectics its critical and revolutionary essence. Only by way of dialectical knowledge is the proletariat able to recognize the necessity of revolutionary action in the totality of its determinations, that is to say, beyond any appearance. And only in this way can science and human action transcend their alienated separation to unite in a revolutionary praxis of the working class capable of abolishing capitalist social relations. In other words, only in a dialectical form can science become synonymous with practical criticism.

At least at this general level, I think that Lukács’ argument is full of interesting insights and moves on the right track. However, as I will argue in what follows, some difficulties emerge due to the peculiar way in which Lukács advanced towards a concretization of these abstract aspects of the “theory–practice” relation. In particular, Lukács failed to account for two questions that the very structure of his argument demands. First, Lukács has to account for the assertion that the subject of science as practical criticism (*i.e.*, dialectics) is the proletariat. Up to this point, this was just stated but not demonstrated. And second, since Lukács himself argued that the reification of consciousness reaches every individual in bourgeois society, the need arises for an explanation of the determinations of capitalist society that enable the proletariat to actualize this potentiality, that is, to elevate itself to the dialectical standpoint. In order to address these questions, we will move to the investigation of Lukács’ concrete unfolding of the “dialectic of immediacy and mediation.”

### *The Historical Tendencies of Reification and the Point of View of the Proletariat*

Lukács’ argument in HCC stresses that, at least in its immediacy, the standpoint of the proletariat is not different from that of the bourgeoisie; it is a reified consciousness and, hence, cannot go be-

yond the immediate appearances of capitalist society in order radically to transform it (HCC, 150).

Still, this assertion seems to be in contradiction with the results of Lukács' critique of classical German philosophy. According to this critique, the proletariat must be the subject of dialectical knowledge and, only as such, is capable of solving practically the antinomies of bourgeois thought (HCC, 148–149). The key lies in the fact that this negation of reified consciousness is only a potentiality and corresponds to what Lukács termed *imputed* or *ascribed* class consciousness. By this he refers to the degree of awareness of its social determinations that a class can attain according to its social existence (HCC, 51). But the immediate empirical consciousness of the proletariat does not necessarily coincide and, as a matter of fact, cannot coincide with this "true" revolutionary consciousness (Perkins, 1993, 170–172). The question to be addressed, therefore, is the following: what are the determinations of social life that give the working class the potency to transcend its determination as a bearer of an alienated consciousness, thus abolishing the distance that separates the empirical and the ascribed class consciousness? In the argument of HCC this potency exists as an immanent "objective possibility" in the social existence of labor-power as a commodity. The structure of this commodity embodies a dialectic of quantity and quality that engenders the said "objective possibility" of revolutionary class consciousness (HCC, 166). To put it briefly, this dialectic consists in that, from the perspective of the subjectivity of the laborer, the quantitative determinations of the process of capital accumulation turn into qualitative determinations of the life-experience of the direct producers. In Lukács' account, this "transformation of quantity into quality" constitutes the first moment in the development of revolutionary class consciousness (Arato, 1972, 58). Yet, this is only the beginning of the process of de-reification, through which the "fetishistic forms of the commodity system begin to dissolve" (HCC, 168). From this initial determination, Lukács argues, a dialectical "complex process of mediation" starts to unfold, moving from this elementary self-consciousness to the reconstruction of the "society as a historical totality" (HCC, 169) in thought — that is, to the attainment of dialectical knowledge. In short, the determinations immanent in the *formal subsumption of labor under capital* set into motion the process of acquisition of full awareness of the proletariat's social situation.

Now, what is the hidden content discovered by that consciousness which attains the perspective of the concrete totality? According to Lukács, this process reveals the proletariat *as the concrete subject* acting behind the appearance of society as possessing autonomous objectivity (Arato, 1972, 61). In particular, this essential truth is unfolded when we move to the sphere of production, *i.e.*, to the determination of the worker as the source of surplus value and, hence, as the “living substratum” of the reproduction of capital. This discovery produces a “*transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action*” (HCC, 175) because now all “things” are dissolved into “aspects of processes” engendered by the laboring activity of the workers themselves. Furthermore, since “these manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought” but “forms in which contemporary bourgeois society is objectified,” their abolition can only be the result of thought which is translated into revolutionary action (HCC, 177). In turn, this revolutionary praxis “cannot be divorced from knowledge” (*ibid.*), which can only have the form of dialectical knowledge since it is the expression of the social process of transcending immediacy, *i.e.*, of mediation, and therefore a social process that is itself dialectical. And since this knowledge implies cognition of society as a “concrete totality” it cannot be an attribute of the isolated individual but of the collective class subject whose constituting activity reproduces society, *i.e.*, the proletariat.

*Formal Subsumption and Class Consciousness:  
Lukács’ Retreat from Dialectics into Logical Representation*

As has been already anticipated, the main shortcoming emerging from HCC concerns Lukács’ grounding of the source of working-class revolutionary subjectivity in the formal subsumption of labor under capital simply as such. Basically, the following problems can be found in this assertion.

Regardless of the peculiar form of Lukács’ argument, it should be noted that it deprives the existence of capital (and hence its supersession) of all historical necessity based on the material development of human species-being. The alienation of the productive powers of human labor as an attribute of its material product is thus reduced to a contingent tragedy in human history. Capital is conceived of as just another social form of the exploitation of human labor whose



specificity, grasped only formally in terms of the apparent freedom of the immediate producer, can only reside in the quantitatively boundless scope of the extraction of surplus labor (Iæigo Carrera, 2000b). Hence, the significance that capital has from a materialist perspective, *i.e.*, its reason to be, is left out of the picture. And this implies being blind to the fact that this inverted mode of existence of human life is the necessary form through which the constitution of the society of consciously associated individuals takes place.

Second, as Postone (1978, 781) points out, the determinations implied in the mere existence of labor-power as a commodity can, at worst, lead to the development of “trade-union” consciousness. At best, they can develop into the self-recognition of the workers as the producers of surplus value and, therefore, into a “communism of distribution” (*i.e.*, into the absolute centralization of capital in the form of state property). But the formal subsumption of labor can never produce in the workers a consciousness that is fully aware of all its social determinations and that therefore recognizes its own alienated nature and the historical social potencies acquired in that inverted form. As a matter of fact, Lukács’ own discussion of the determinate content of revolutionary consciousness confirms what has just been said. It must be recalled that, for Lukács, the key to the constitution of revolutionary consciousness resides in the discovery, brought about by analysis of the *reproduction of capital*, that the source of capital’s valorization lies in the exploitation of labor’s productive power. This discovery would reveal to the working class the essential truth hidden beneath the reified world of capitalist appearances — that “in reality,” the *workers* are the *subjects* of the historical process (HCC, 180–181).

Yet, I think that from a careful analysis of the process of capitalist reproduction, exactly the opposite “essential truth” follows. The “dissolution of the reification of capital into an unbroken process of its production and reproduction” only shows how the determination of social capital as the alienated concrete subject of the totality of the process of reproduction of human life acquires its plenitude. Not only has social capital been constituted as the concrete subject of the processes of *production and circulation* of social wealth; it has even taken possession of the process of *social consumption*. Thus, it is the autonomous movement of the reproduction of social capital that produces and reproduces human beings themselves as its antagonistic personifi-

cations (capitalists and workers). Moreover, *under the concrete appearance of being free human beings (and therefore of bearing a free consciousness and will), the workers perform forced labor for social capital; that is, they personify the alienated mode of existence of their social powers* (Marx, 1976, 716–724). In the last instance, Lukács’ notion of the overcoming of reification stops short at this appearance. To put it in a Lukácsian terminology, capitalist society is characterized by both a “reified appearance” and a “reified essence.” To the contrary, Lukács counterposes extrinsically a reified appearance to a *free* essence (the immediate process of production of social wealth in its “true” reality). I previously praised Lukács for having taken as his point of departure the insight that the consciousness of the proletariat is not free but reified. Unfortunately, when he tried to move from the “immediacy of reification” to its more mediated determinations, he abandoned this potent insight and ended up with a conception of working-class consciousness as the “interpenetration” of a reified pole (its immediate appearance as the objects of capitalist reproduction) and a free one (its mediated essence as its actual concrete subjects). Through this “dialectical” *logic*, which *represents* the movement of contradiction (*i.e.*, the affirming through self-negation) with the unity of two opposing immediate affirmations (Iæigo Carrera, 1993), Lukács was unable to discover the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity as the immanent result of the historical movement of alienated consciousness. Instead, as Clarke comments, in order to “find a basis on which reification can be overcome” he had to resort to “the worker’s ‘humanity and his soul’ which alone remains unmarked by reification” (Clarke, 1991, 318). Thus, for Lukács the revolutionary consciousness of the working class is not an alienated consciousness that becomes aware of its own alienation (therefore, the determinate negation of the alienated social relations of capital) but an abstractly free consciousness that discovers its essential freedom behind the cloak of capitalist oppression (hence, an *abstract* negation of capitalist alienation).<sup>8</sup> In this way, he was obliged to conclude that “any transformation can only come about as the product of the — *free* — action of the proletariat itself” (HCC, 209, my emphasis). Moreover, Lukács’ too general and vague “dialectic of immediacy and mediation” does not give us a clue about the actual social determinations of the existence of the proletariat

8 See Schmidt, 1975, 34, on Lukács’ conclusion that the proletariat is both *within society* and *outside society*.

that can concretize its imputed abstract possibilities. The gap between empirical and imputed class consciousness persists, and the passage from one to the other can only be made by an abrupt unmediated leap. Thus, it is no wonder that in the following essays Lukács eventually offered a Leninist solution to this dilemma. Class consciousness came to be seen not as an attribute borne by every member of the proletariat but as an abstract disembodied collective consciousness (HCC, 317–318). By a magical twist, he then made the party the subject bearing authentic class consciousness (HCC, 315). In this way, the two opposing poles constituting Lukács' notion of working-class consciousness (reification and freedom) were then assigned to two different social agents: the proletariat which by itself was unable to actualize its objective possibility and remained trapped within reification; and the leaders of the party who, without explanation, were claimed to be the bearers of dialectical knowledge and, hence, of freedom (HCC, 320).<sup>9</sup> Revolution is now seen as the product of the “dialectical interaction” of these two poles, of “class and party” (HCC, 322).

A thorough critique of Lukács' Leninism would require another paper. Here, I can only mention two of its main limitations. On a historical level, as Federici suggests, Lukács “uncritically accepted the Leninist party . . . precisely when this kind of party was losing its political relevance” (Federici, 1972, 144). More substantially, the general content of the conscious revolutionary action of the proletariat suffices to understand why it can definitely not take the form of the institutionalization of the separation of the conscious organization of that action from its execution proper. And this is not just a matter of an abstract moral superiority of radically democratic forms of social organization over hierarchical ones. It is but a consequence of the materiality of the social transformation at stake, namely, the production of the consciousness about the social character of human transformative action as the general social relation reproducing human life. In other words, it is the consequence of the necessarily *conscious* nature of such a collective process of social transformation, which

9 Hudis, 2001, offers a trenchant criticism of Lukács' Leninism. Löwy, 1979, gives a more sympathetic account which tries to qualify the general view of Lukács as an apologist of the existing communist parties. He basically argues that we should interpret Lukács as referring to a sort of “ideal-type” of communist party and not to any really existing organizations. Aside from the methodological deficiencies of such an approach, it should be noted that Lukács' conception of the party is flawed, even accepting these qualifications.

can only be such precisely for being the organic unity of the conscious transformative practice of *each individual*. Only in this way can such action acquire the plenitude of its transformative powers. The monopoly over the conscious organization of social action by some individuals (let us say, the “intelligentsia”) can signal just one thing — that the rest of the members of society are acting unconsciously, uncritically accepting the appearance that the would-be leaders really *are* acting consciously, no matter how democratic the mediations between those two poles, or how much the leaders are predisposed to “learn” from the spontaneous movement of the masses.<sup>10</sup> When Marx spoke of communism as the *conscious association of individuals*, he really meant it. And this is not just a matter of “feeling like” associating with others or of instinctively doing so under the pressure of external circumstances (even less is it a question of ethical duty), but rather of being fully aware of the social necessity of this association in the totality of its determinations. On the other hand, this is why the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of the political action that accomplishes the said transformation of the *whole* process of human metabolism (dialectics) must be by its very essence a collective class product whose production involves *all* individuals concerned.<sup>11</sup> In other words, only because of this can dialectics establish the “genuine bond of consciousness and action.” By adhering to Lenin’s theory of the party, Lukács could not but *sever* that bond.

### *Putting the Determinations of Class Consciousness Back on Their Feet*

In a nutshell, I think that Lukács’ contribution to social theory in HCC (including both its merits and limitations) can be briefly and fairly characterized as an attempt to add a theory of subjectivity to the lifeless mechanistic materialism of orthodox Marxism. Still, as

10 See Shandro, 1995, for an original but futile attempt to save Lenin’s theory of the party.

11 Thus, it is in the very essence of dialectical knowledge to require the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of human purposeful activity in the singularity of each individual action. This is why, by its very form, dialectical cognition is inherently self-critical. Furthermore, this can help explain why Marx, as an individual (albeit an extremely brilliant one!), who lived long before the emergence of the material conditions for the revolutionary transformation of reality, could only discover the most general determinations of the revolutionary action of the working class. Regarding its more concrete forms, he consistently rejected the idea of giving any “blueprints” about the society of the future (of course, the same holds for the organization of the revolutionary action that creates it).

stated above, Lukács' intellectual enterprise consisted in a reflection designed to *complement* an orthodox account that was left more or less untouched as an accurate analysis of the development of the economic "objective conditions" of revolution. Lukács thus decided to put the problematic of consciousness at the center of his inquiry and saw Marxism as a reflection on both the forms of objectivity and of subjectivity characteristic of capital. This doubtlessly represents an important advance compared with the versions of Marxism that fetishistically absolutized the movement of the forms of objectivity of capitalist society. Yet the very starting point of Lukács' endeavor contains the germs of its subsequent failure. For already the idea of *complementing* the traditional analysis of the "objective conditions" of revolution with an independent account of the determinations of subjectivity makes evident the *externality* between the two dimensions of capitalist social forms thus conceived.<sup>12</sup> This externality is made more pronounced by the particular way in which Lukács formulates his answer to this problematic. While all reflections on what we may interpret as his views on the objective conditions generally refer to determinations belonging to the real subsumption of labor under capital, his theory of revolutionary class consciousness refers exclusively to the determinations of the formal subsumption.

The key to avoiding the shortcomings of Lukács' misleading formulation rests in the realization that, from a materialist perspective, what is at stake is not the separate development of the determinations of the objective and subjective conditions for revolution. This latter approach can only result in *the separation of what actually is inseparable*. For both the "objective conditions" and the "subjective conditions" for the abolition of capital are two sides of the same *material* conditions grounding the necessity of revolutionary transformation putting an end to the alienated existence of human beings. As Marx expresses it, "the conditions which allow them to exist in this way [as fully developed social individuals] in the reproduction of their life, in their productive life's process, have been posited only by the historic economic process itself; *both the objective and the subjective condi-*

<sup>12</sup> This failure to mediate these two necessary moments of the critique of political economy may underlie the selective appropriation of Lukács' work mentioned above by those theorists working in the tradition of Western Marxism. Once the analysis of the forms of objectivity and subjectivity is torn asunder, only one further step is needed to autonomize the theorization of the latter in the form of cultural criticism.

tions, which are only the two distinct forms of the same conditions" (Marx, 1973, 832, my emphasis).

Thus, what is needed is a truly dialectical account of the development of the "historic economic process itself," that is, of the historical movement of alienated labor (*i.e.*, capital). A detailed analysis of the development of the alienated human subjectivity of course exceeds the scope of this paper. In what follows, I would like to sketch out what I think should be the general aspects and tenets of this alternative approach.

First, for the real meaning of a critical approach that attempts to grasp the problem of alienated consciousness from a materialist perspective, it is necessary to recover the Marxian insight that the key to the development of human beings (and so of their consciousness) lies in the fact that "what they are . . . coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production" (ME, 1978, 150). In other words, it is about the development of *human productive subjectivity*.

This first premise leads us to the second central element of this alternative line of thought. The specificity of capital does not reside solely in its formal determinations but embodies a specific material determination as well. More concretely, capital is the historical epoch that transforms the productive powers of free individual labor into powers of directly and consciously organized social labor. Of course, these two aspects — the material and the formal — do not have to be conceived as standing in an external relation to each other. What needs to be grasped is the "inner connection" between form and content and the contradiction immanent in that relation. It is here where Lukács failed.

Thus, although capital is the historical producer of the powers of directly social labor, it achieves this by subordinating this conscious organization to the autonomized movement of social life alienated as an attribute of the material product of labor, *i.e.*, through the production of relative surplus value. This essential contradiction of capitalism needs to be analysed in its historical unfolding, in order to investigate the different forms of existence of the alienated subjectivity of the working class and the determinations of this existence that embody the necessity of their transcendence. Unfortunately, dialectical analysis of the material conditions that develop the neces-

sity of the constitution of working-class revolutionary subjectivity, rooted in the real subsumption of labor under capital, is missing in HCC.

Some authors interpret (and welcome) this as an expression of the non-deterministic character of Lukács' theory (Arato, 1972; Feenberg, 1981). In this way, the argument goes, the emergence of revolutionary consciousness becomes "open" to the life-experience of the workers instead of being just the mechanical result of the "objective laws of capitalist development." And in effect, the development of revolutionary consciousness can only be the result of workers' subjective life-experience (where else can consciousness, inasmuch as it is an expression of human productive subjectivity, develop?). But the point is that the workers' subjective experience is not lacking in social determinations but is the concrete form of the specific way in which they reproduce their natural lives, *i.e.*, of the historically determined social relations of production. It happens that in capitalism these social relations take on an alienated form and that human beings are therefore determined as their personifications (that is, as their conscious bearers). Thus, paraphrasing Marx, the development of their own productive subjectivity (and therefore of their consciousness) occurs "behind the backs of the producers" and hence takes the form of an autonomous "deterministic" process that controls and produces them instead of their consciously ruling the realization of their species-being. Hence, like it or not, through its political action the working class personifies powers that now belong to the alienated general social relation, namely, the accumulation of capital.<sup>13</sup> The *qualitatively* different forms of consciousness that emerge in the course of the workers' political action are thus the necessary forms of subjectivity that are set into motion as the personifications of the determinations of the reproduction of social capital that take concrete form in the struggle of the working class. Depending on the particular role played by the class struggle in the movement of social

<sup>13</sup> By this I mean the constitution of capital as the alienated subject of social life. Throughout the course of capitalist development, this alienated process involves the unity of the corresponding forms of *objectivity* and *subjectivity*. Objectively, it takes the form of impersonal "economic forces" and an apparently transcendental state power. Subjectively, it exists as an alienated subjectivity that appears as bearing a free consciousness and will that clash against the apparently external coercion imposed by those modes of social objectivity upon the affirmation of freedom. As we have seen, Lukács came close to this formulation but when dealing with revolutionary consciousness eventually fell prey to this mystification.

capital, a consciousness that stops at more immediate or more mediated appearances tends to be formed. Thus, working-class struggle may even appear as the negation of class action itself (feminism, the civil rights movement). More mediated forms of consciousness may come to recognize their class character and even become highly radicalized so as to appear as “revolutionary” (and consequently see the rest of the working class as the collaborationist “enemy within”). Still, those forms of subjectivity cannot transcend their being concrete forms of alienated consciousness, impotent to move beyond any appearance in the capitalist mode of production in order to account for their own alienation in the totality of its determinations. The relevant distinction is thus between forms of alienated consciousness that stick to the appearance of being abstractly free but subject to some form of external oppression, and one that recognizes its own alienated nature. However general in its scope and fierce in its intensity, the political action of the working class cannot be determined as revolutionary except as an expression of the latter.<sup>14</sup> This means that *the liberation of working-class subjectivity from all trace of its alienated existence is itself a concrete form of that alienation.*

What, then, are the conditions of alienated social life that produce the historical necessity of their own revolutionary abolition by the struggle of the working class? As already stated, the answer to this question must be sought in the historical movement of the production of relative surplus value. Through the constant revolution in the material conditions of labor, capital progressively transforms the subjectivity of the workers according to a determinate tendency: they eventually become universal laborers, that is, organs of a collective subject capable of consciously ruling their life-process by virtue of their capacity to scientifically organize the production process of any system of machinery and, therefore, any form of social cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

14 Only dialectical knowledge embodies the critical power to discover this social determination.

15 It might seem that I am substituting the intellectual laborer for the manual laborer as the revolutionary subject. Quite to the contrary, my point is that the key does not consist in abstractly opposing intellectual and direct manual labor in order to privilege one over the other, but in grasping the contradictory forms in which capital historically develops these two necessary moments of the labor process. Through the very exacerbation of their separation, capital tendentially abolishes the qualitative and quantitative weight of manual labor in the process of reproduction of social life. Thus, capital's transformation of the labor process eventually reaches a point in which the separation between intellectual and manual labor cannot materially obtain as a form of organizing the life-process of humanity. Hence, intellectual and manual labor reunite in the individual subjectivity of every



This mutation of their productive attributes is the necessary prelude to the constitution of the laborers as truly social individuals through their self-abolition as workers and the construction of the free association of individuals.<sup>16</sup>

Under those circumstances, the further development of the material productive forces of society comes into conflict with the relations of production. Translated into our mode of expression, this classical Marxian insight can only mean the following. The human being is produced as a productive subject who is fully conscious of the social determinations of his/her individual powers and activity. Thus, he/she no longer sees society as an alien and hostile potency that dominates him/her. Instead, he/she experiences social life (*i.e.*, productive cooperation) as the necessary condition for the development of the plenitude of his/her individuality. But this form of human subjectivity necessarily collides with a social form (capital) that produces human beings as *private independent individuals* who consequently see their general social interdependence and its historical development as an alien and hostile power borne by the product of social labor. It is only when these material determinations of the development of human productive subjectivity emerge in the course of history that the proletariat acquires the social powers necessary to abolish their alienated general social relation. Hence, what this line of thought suggests is that *the revolutionary political consciousness of the working class can only be a concrete expression of their productive consciousness.*

### *Concluding Remarks*

Now, outside Hardt and Negri's fantastic world of *Empire* (HN, 2000), a superficial glance at the current forms of proletarian productive subjectivity suffices to realize that the unity between theory

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partial organ of the now directly social productive body, but with the former having the form of objectified social knowledge (*i.e.*, science), instead of being the product of the immediate subjective productive experience of the laborer (as in the case of precapitalist social forms). Moreover, from what has been argued it should be clear that this process also involves a transformation of scientific method, which gives knowledge the form of dialectical cognition. In *Capital*, this process remains implicit and is just mentioned in passing as an abstract possibility (Marx, 1976, 616–619). It is in the *Grundrisse* where the question is addressed with greater clarity (Marx, 1973, 690–712).

16 This notion of the fully developed human individual is present in Lukács' work. However, its development is idealistically represented as an ethical question instead of as concerning productive subjectivity. See Lanning, 2001.

and practice is far from being the general social relation organizing the life-process of “fully developed social individuals.” Quite to the contrary, its present mode of existence is evidently that of its opposite: disunity. Moreover, as Jacoby rightly points out, this separation cannot be overcome by a magic spell nor wished away (Jacoby, 1970, 21). Thus, it seems that workers will still have to go through many years of struggles “not only to bring about a change in society but also to change yourselves” (Marx, 1979, 403) in order to develop the social powers to put this inverted social existence to an end. And this, not because those struggles will by themselves develop the workers’ revolutionary consciousness, but because they will force capital to revolutionize the material conditions of social life and, *therefore*, their consciousness and will, up to the point of determining them as revolutionary.<sup>17</sup>

As a necessary moment of the class struggle, a most urgent task arises for that partial organ of the collective laborer responsible for producing the critical scientific knowledge of capitalist social forms (*i.e.*, communist intellectual laborers). What is required is dialectical research into the present-day concrete forms in which the alienated development of the productive subjectivity of the workers towards its fully developed universality realizes itself through its own negation.<sup>18</sup> That is, by fragmenting the different partial organs of the collective laborer, and by keeping the productive attributes of the laborers (even when they are expanded as in the case of intellectual laborers) miserably bound to being those required by the material forms of the production of relative surplus value.

Needless to say, this does not entail an abstractly theoretical interest but is the necessary method for discovering the form of political action that could mediate the immediate needs of workers with

17 Hence, it is not, as Lebowitz suggests (1992, 143; 1998, 174), a matter of two different grounds for the development of the workers’ revolutionary consciousness: on the one hand, the labor process and, on the other, the class struggle. Rather, it is a question of the development of their productive subjectivity taking concrete form through their political action.

18 One of the shortcomings of Negri and Hardt’s theory of the “immaterial worker” is precisely the way in which they extrinsically impose the determinations of the fully developed social individual onto a contemporary collective laborer that still represents its negation. Only in this way can they claim that this time we (at last!) have reached the final stage of capital. Capital is claimed to have become a social parasite from the material point of view and we now have to await the final “political recomposition” of the multitude. Are they not relapsing, despite their post-modern rhetoric, into the orthodox separation of the objective and the subjective conditions of revolution?

the “historical interests of the proletariat as a whole,” *i.e.*, the development of the productive subjectivity of the global collective worker. In the 1840s, Marx and Engels put forward in the political program of the *Communist Manifesto* the form of political action necessary to accelerate the process of social transformation: the revolutionary centralization of social capital as the property of the national state.<sup>19</sup> Thus, they could argue that the process of emancipation of the workers was global in substance but national in form (ME, 1989, 123). Yet, it seems to me that in the era of the so-called “globalization” of capital the updating of that political program should start by modifying that statement. Today, the political action of the class must be international in both substance and form. The necessarily collective enterprise of discovering the adequate concrete political forms for contemporary proletarian internationalist action immanent in the present forms of the global accumulation of capital, constitutes an urgent and unavoidable task.

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<sup>19</sup> Thus, the traditional opposition between reform and revolution misses the point. The common understanding of those two terms is the ideological representation of different moments of the progressive transformations of capitalism towards the free association of individuals personified by distinct forms of the political action of the working class, which emerges when we abstract those transitions from its concrete determinations. As Chattopadhyay (1992, 94) insightfully states, “in this profoundly dialectical sense, capitalism itself is the transition to socialism.” Thus, even the “dictatorship of the proletariat” does not immediately involve the transcendence of capital, but is the most developed form under which the latter reaches the plenitude of its historical potencies for the development of the productive forces of society as its own alienated attribute (*ibid.*, 95). On the other hand, precisely because of this it is a necessary moment of the political action of the working class aiming at revolutionizing capitalist society.

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