

# Systematic Theory Building and Empirico-Historical Argument in Marx's *Capital*

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**Abstract:** Marx's conception of the ideal average provides an approach to a productive re-discussion of Marx's epistemological practice in *Capital*. As a specific approach to systematic theory-building underlying Marx's *critique of political economy* it opens a way, with the implied distinction between systematic theory building and empirico-historical exemplification and analysis, it makes it possible today to reconstruct Marx's «materialist dialectics». More specifically it is claimed, that Marx's insights into the «limits of dialectical presentation» should be interpreted in a way that makes his «dialectics» compatible with modern, post-fregean logic. This is then taken as the basis for the argument that there is a need for and a possibility of specifically analysing the *lacunae* and *blind spots* in Marx's elaboration, making them starting-points for a further elaboration of his unfinished theory of the domination of the capitalist mode of production in modern bourgeois societies, as well as for new perspectives of criticizing modern bourgeois economics. Furthermore, it is argued, that this reading of *Capital* makes it possible also to think the mutual over-determination of different structures of domination within modern bourgeois societies, which are articulated with, but remain distinct from the capitalist mode of production.

**Keywords:** Theory and History in Marx; Limits of Dialectical Presentation; Materialist Dialectics; Materialist Feminism; Political Ecology.

Those in the know will tend to think that this is just another attempt to disentangle the knots which have made the debate on “the historical” and “the logical” in Marx's *Capital* so difficult and – at least in important respects – so inconclusive. I shall at once assure them that this is not what I shall try to do.

I shall rather try to start the debate from a different angle – indicated by my choice of words in the title of this essay: instead of getting involved, once again, in the difficult, but unproductive debate on the value of Hegelian logic after the impressive development of modern formal logic since Boole and Frege, on the one hand, and on the “historical” character of Marx's *critique of political economy*, I shall start from a certain under-

standing of Marx's theoretical reconstruction<sup>1</sup> of the "ideal average" of the capitalist mode of production (*MECW* 37, 831), as it dominates modern bourgeois societies – and I shall develop an argument on how Marx's specific way of systematic theory building makes it possible for him (and his eventual followers) to make use of the results of empirical and historical enquiries in a theoretical constructive way, without ever falling into historicism and empiricism.

## 1. Asking for Marx's Specific Way of Systematic Theory Building

Reading Marx's *Capital* in this sense as a contribution to systematic theory building has three immediate implications: *first*, it goes beyond just asking for Marx's theory by asking for a kind of theory building that is objectively justified independently from Marx's personal views and eventual short-cuts and errors; *second*, it is based upon the assumption that this theory brings out something real (especially regularities and explanations) which can be grasped beyond mere sensory impressions or immediate practical experience, and, *third*, it implies that this theoretical construction has to be understood and applied to reality in further research by starting from its most developed level, i.e. by reading its theoretical developments from the point of view of its most elaborate and most complex determinations.

This line of argument on Marx's theory-building, according to which each new level of theory-building in Marx's *critique of political economy*<sup>2</sup> sheds retrospectively a new light on all of the preceding levels<sup>3</sup>, has important consequences, which seem to go radically beyond pre-dominant Marxist traditions.

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1 Which takes up the final result of Althusser's (2015, 434 ff., esp. 436-437) critique of this very notion correcting its rather common empiricist misunderstanding.

2 The perspective taken and pursued here makes two substantial assumptions: *One*, it assumes that Marx, in his *critique of political economy*, has indeed realised a breakthrough in the analysis of a specific field of historical reality, namely by reconstructing the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production in its "ideal average", as well as its domination in modern bourgeois societies (as they continue to exist today); and, *two*, it accepts the diagnosis that Marx's later *critique of politics* (cf. Balibar *et al.* 1979) is relatively autonomous from this critique on which the Marxist tradition has overly concentrating its efforts of continuing Marx's scientific work.

3 Cf. independently, Wolf (2006, esp. 179 ff.), and, applied to the relation between *Capital* and *Grundrisse*, Bellofiore (2013). Stefano Breda (2017) has presented a systematic elaboration of such an approach to re-reading *Capital*, as it were, "backwards".

To begin with, what Marx has discussed under the heading of the “limits of dialectical presentation” should be more fully understood as a determinate number of specific points where Marx’s systematic theory has to refer back to basically contingent empirico-historical facts which it cannot, in principle, fully reintegrate into its systematic argument. In this perspective, it is very well possible to determine which contingent *lacunae* and systematic *blind spots* in Marx’s actual argument (or in Engels’s redaction of it) could be elucidated by additional conceptual developments and should therefore be included in a more complete systematic theory of the capitalist mode of production, i.e. in a theory which succeeds in systematically elaborating further concepts of «capital», «capitalist accumulation» and «capitalist exploitation» which Marx had not yet included in his systematic reconstruction of the categorical forms of this mode of production. Moreover, after acknowledging the finite and specific character of Marx’s theory of the capitalist mode of production, as it dominates modern bourgeois societies, it is not a problem anymore for upholders of Marx’s theory (whether they call themselves “Marxists” or “Marxians”) to understand or to “concede” that the historical, i.e. effective reality of modern bourgeois societies is not only determined – in many cases – by an “articulation of different modes of production”<sup>4</sup>, but – in a much more elementary way – by an over-determination of different structures of domination<sup>5</sup> (which have nothing of a mere supra-structure [Überbau]<sup>6</sup> or of anything secondary<sup>7</sup>).

As I insist on arguing that these elementary moves actually serve to bring out what has been valid in Marx’s (and Engels’s) theorizing in the first place, my claim goes beyond some actualizing of Marxian theory. What I claim is nothing less than to bring out and develop the valid core of Marxist scientific theory today – thereby, at once, opening new potential horizons for political deliberation and helping to define the political task of making them real.

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4 As Jean-Philippe Rey has first systematically articulated it within early Althusserianism (Rey 1969), cf. the discussion in Terray (1969 and 1972), as well as in Godelier (1969).

5 Of which I take *international dependency* and *gender hierarchy* to be the most elementary structures, cf. Wolf (2012; esp. 387 ff.), while ecological materiality is better understood as being present within all structures of historical reality, including the domination of the capitalist mode of production, cf. Wolf (2012). On the massive presence of ecological concerns within Marx’s later research cf. Saito (2017).

6 As it has been attempted to think within the first lines of constructing a Marxist “orthodoxy”, especially by Karl Kautsky (cf., retrospectively, Kautsky 1927).

7 As it has been thought in the line of Marxist contributions on “primary” and “secondary” contradictions (e.g. by Lenin and Mao, cf. Althusser 1969, 94 ff.).

## 2. The Issue of the Limits of Dialectical Presentation as Characteristic of Marx's 'Materialist Dialectics'

Marx's specific way of making use of "dialectics" in his method of presentation presents a number of riddles – which I think may best be solved by rethinking them as a way of presenting the results of his scientific enquiries by making use of a non-contradictory notion of «contradiction» (cf. Wolf 1983; 1991). Accordingly, it is not to be read as an attempt to construct an alternative to modern "logic"<sup>8</sup> by studying the exemplary case of modern political economy, but rather as an alternative to modern *theories of history and society* which fail to address the specific dynamics constitutive of modern societies under the domination of the capitalist mode of production, as these are, in reality, driven by class antagonism (as well as by other elementary antagonisms of domination and resistance).

Marx has had – to make a long story very short – two *good* reasons for making use of Hegelian dialectics in his presentation of the *critique of political economy*, and one rather *bad* one. I shall first address the *good* reasons. To begin with, Hegel's elaboration of classical logic has offered a reasonably clear and complex way of dealing with relations (which had not been addressed as such in the kind of Aristotelian logic, as it was still being taught in German universities at the end of the 18th century) and thereby

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8 As it has been attempted by a whole group of efforts to present traditional "Aristotelian logic", or the specific development given to it by Hegel, as an *alternative* to "modern mathematical logic" (exemplified by Freytag-Löringhoff 1955 or by Wolff 2017), instead of reconstructing these specific "logics" as specific ways of applying modern logic to areas, in which it makes sense to talk about real antagonisms (to be distinguished from always self-destructive formal contradictions). Although they are not formally impossible, they do not present any real answer to the elementary philosophical question of equal access to argument which I take to be constitutive for rational discourse (cf. Wolf 1983) – and they do open a really problematic "window of opportunity" for authoritarian language games of the Humpty-Dumpty type, allowing the authorised speaker to decide upon sense and meaning in an arbitrary fashion. Accordingly, Wolff's central argument against Frege – that he (in his distinction between «*Begriff*» and «*Eigennamen*») has "misunderstood" the traditional notion of «*Begriff*», which had always already included its individual "instantiations", should be turned the other way round: By radically separating the reference to individuals and their classification under concepts Frege has made it possible radically to separate logical analysis and argument from all references to the subjects who actually argue in specific situations by referring to other individuals and to individual cases. Thereby, Frege has not only overcome, once and for all, the spectre of "psychologism" as it has been haunting the traditional philosophy of logic, he has made it possible of constructing types of logical analysis which can acknowledge the principle of equality of all possible subjective carriers of argument, cf. also Mras (2001) problematization of Frege's «radically de-subjectivised concept of 'thought'» who raises interesting problems, but fails to see this central point.

made it possible to very lucidly present the conceptual development of the «forms of value», as they effectively presented themselves at the “surface” of commodity exchange, and the theoretical reconstruction of money<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, Marx makes reasonable use of Hegelian dialectics in referring back within the entire theoretical construction of the *critique of political economy* to the underlying class antagonism, reconstructing the sequence of its dialectical “forms of movement” as the method of presentation of his results of inquiry, while at the same time refusing to give it any “dialectical sublation” which could avoid its necessarily destructive overcoming. This gives Marx’s “materialist’ dialectics” a double edge: due to its capacity of reconstructing – from historico-empirical materials analysed – customary and new “forms of movement” for this class antagonism, combined with its theoretical insistence on the impossibility of ever “closing the circle” in the way of evasion to “higher spheres of reality”<sup>10</sup> characteristic of idealist dialectics – thereby, in principle, combining the capacity to reconstruct the historical forms in which capital is ever again reproducing its domination within modern bourgeois societies with the theoretical insight into the provisional and precarious character of all these reconstructions of the domination maintained by the capitalist mode of production<sup>11</sup>.

The *bad* reason, on the other hand, has been, most unfortunately, rather closely linked to the second good one: Marx’s insight into the irretrievably antagonistic character of modern societies as it is continuously deriving from their being dominated by the capitalist mode of production, seems to have engendered in Marx a permanent tendency of expecting their final, revolutionary implosion – continued in the tendency of Marxists to discover general or final crises of “capitalism”<sup>12</sup> at each and every critical turn of capitalist reproduction.

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9 How far this usage of Hegelian logic by Marx in his reconstruction of the “forms of value” has been rendered obsolete by the development of an explicit logic of relations within modern formal logic should be discussed in reconstructing Marx’s argument in this respect within such a logic (cf. Kirchhoff and Reutlinger 2006).

10 Hegel’s own practice certainly is more complex in this respect: on the one hand, it has justly been stressed that he has refused to construct a specific way of “sublating” the antagonism of modern bourgeois society embodied by the existence of the «working poor» (*Pöbel*; cf. esp. Ruda 2011); on the other hand, however, he has propagated the modern state as in principle capable of overcoming *all* the contradictions engendered by modern bourgeois societies.

11 In the dominant practice of classical German social democracy in the years before the First World War this division had been reified to the point of giving rise to what has been pertinently been dubbed «revolutionary attentism» (Groh 1974).

12 The spread of the usage of the term “capitalism” – which is rare and non-theoretical in Marx (cf. Wolf 2009, 1) – in Marxist literature has at least indicated a remarkable loss of interest in effectively addressing the specific historical situations of the complex,

This outlook may, indeed, provide a good starting point for political deliberation – at least on actions within (at least potentially) “revolutionary situations” or on strategies for contributing to creating such situations or preparing for them, but it is failing to take into account the effect of “inertia”, according to which the structures of domination effective in place tend to reproduce as such, even by transforming themselves in “passive revolutions” – which has to be understood and studied in any scientific analysis of societal reality.

The “dialectical method of presentation”, as Marx makes use of it in a materialist way, differs from Hegelian “idealist” or “spiritualist”<sup>13</sup> use of dialectics at least in one central point which Marx himself has designated as the “limits of dialectical presentation”: the dialectical development of the concept of «capital» as it is methodically «unfolded» cannot be closed upon itself, but has to remain dependent on a number of historical *facts* which remain outside the scope of its theoretical development – even though, in later stages of Marx’s theoretical argument, they may be, at least partially, re-integrated into it: the existence and availability of gold in a sufficient quantity to serve as money<sup>14</sup>, the historical availability of labour power as a commodity<sup>15</sup>, and in sufficient quantity and quality<sup>16</sup>, or simply the exis-

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overdetermined modern bourgeois societies, instead of remaining on the general level of the capitalist mode of production dominating them. Lenin’s and other soviet Marxists’ insistence on the soviet model of socialist transition (theoretically justified by the assumption of a “general crisis” which seemed to make it superfluous to dwell on the specificities of particular societies) made it seem justified to talk about a perspective of socialist transition in general – whereas, as notably Balibar has shown, real transitions and transformations can only occur on the level of particular, indeed singular, formations of society. *On the other hand*, Lenin’s stressing that «the most essential thing in Marxism, the living soul of Marxism, is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions» (quoted from Tse-Tung 1965, 251, fn. 10), and the comments by Althusser (1969) effectively suffers from asking something from theoretical analysis as a definite result which can only be produced, as an approximative anticipation, within political deliberations on strategies.

13 This is a distinction which has played an important role in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hegelianism (cf. Guyer and Horstmann 2018). Still, I am not convinced by Andreas Arndt’s (cf. e.g. in Arndt and Jaeschke 2000) insistence that this is a decisive distinction.

14 To acknowledge this role of gold in Marx’s development of the concept of «capital» does not imply that it would be impossible, within an extended framework of the systematically structured theory initiated by him, to think of a kind of money not directly based upon a money-commodity (cf. Breda 2017, 303-389).

15 With the important counter-examples of classical Athens (Wood and Wood 1978) and classical Rome (Marx’s famous letter to the Editor of *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*, in *MECW* 24, 196), where the existence of a large mass of poor without any property, as well as of large fortunes capable of paying their labour-power, did not produce a transition to capitalist wage labour.

16 As it is erroneously isolated and “absolutised” in Malthusian and neo-malthusian approaches, which ignore or neglect the important «gift of nature to humankind» (Lipietz



tence of a sufficient development of the productive forces to make surplus labour possible<sup>17</sup>, can at once be referred back to as such facts which lie outside the “limits of dialectical presentation” carefully respected in Marx’s exposition of his theory of capital. This can also be said, in a closely comparable way, to the relations between the accumulation process of capital and the capacity of the Earth to sustain the reproduction of human life, as it is indirectly reflected in the fact of an “absolute ground-rent”: although these relations seem remote, already the crises of agrarian fertility experienced before the general availability of industrial fertilisers in the later 19th century, or that of sufficient forest supply to satisfy a fast growing demand for wood, as it has become visible in Western Europe already in the 18th century, have clearly shown its undeniable reality.

This fact of including an awareness of its own limitations due to its dependence on pre-given “facts” which it cannot theoretically reconstruct or practically reproduce as its own results, does not take away the systematic character of Marx’s critique of political economy. Quite to the contrary, the awareness of its historically given limits heightens the very awareness of the task of systematically reconstructing the general structures and tendencies constitutive of the capitalist mode of production as such. Marx has called this the «dialectical development» of the concept (of «capital», in the case of his *critique of political economy*) – which seems to invite a Hegelian misunderstanding. The problem here is constituted by the very notion of the «concept» Marx makes use of in reflecting his theory – which, although it is taken, indeed, from Hegel’s *Logic* with its blurring over the elementary distinction of proposition and «concept» most clearly introduced by Frege<sup>18</sup> and, more importantly, its in-built neglect of the singular

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2000) which consists in its flexibility to cope with human usage of its ecological capacities – which remains, however, clearly, if not minutely, limited in significant ways.

17 This condition is often played down, because it seems almost self-evident in the economic relations existing since the age of the tributary empires, cf. Amin (1976 and 1989). And yet it should not be taken for granted: In dark ages of declining productive powers it may very well be a critical reality blocking any move towards capitalist relations of exploitation. And feminist writers have pointed to the illusion underlying even this self-evidence: if the reproduction of labour power would have to be completely achieved by the consumption of commodities (goods and services) bought at their value, it still would be dubitable today that a relevant amount of surplus-production could be achieved. Only by not calculating all the goods and services provided within the household, with especially the labour of women occasioning no labour costs, the relative cheapness of labour power, which has been the central historical condition for the emergence of the domination of the capitalist mode of production in modern societies, has become possible in historical terms.

18 E.g. in the three papers on *Function and Concept* (1891), *Meaning and Reference* (1892a) and *On Concept and Object* (1892b) published by Frege in German.

(according to Frege, then, to be addressed by proper names, or by “descriptions”<sup>19</sup>), does not take over the properly “idealist” impulse of Hegel’s *Logic*, that is: of considering dialectical mediation (or the infinite judgment of immediately transiting from the finite to the infinite)<sup>20</sup> as the only possible result of a “dialectical contradiction”, which has, therefore, always already to be anticipated). Instead, is notion, in Marx’s usage, conscientiously limits dialectical mediation to its specific forms, as they can actually be found in the material that has been investigated<sup>21</sup>. This makes it possible, as I should like to defend here, to articulate Marx’s underlying materialist approach not in terms of «concept» – with all its harking back to Hegel’s dialectics – but in terms of “theory”: accordingly (as it has indeed been done very broadly) Marx’s *Capital* can be quite adequately be read as a *general theory* of the capitalist mode of production in its domination of modern bourgeois societies, and Marx’s “developing of the concept” of capital can (and should) be read as systematically articulating the respective levels of this general theory which consecutively sheds unrealistically simplifying assumptions and takes up additional and specific determinations (found out by preceding empirico-historical research) of this general theory. I tend to think that in such a perspective it is easier to understand Marx’s double notion of «systematically building» his theory of the capitalist mode of production on the basis of the results of his research (and not deductively<sup>22</sup>, although this research is eminently «theory-guided», its methodology is beyond the classically established deductivist/inductivist

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19 The difficulty this distinction has raised for philosophers from Bertrand Russell (1905) to P.F. Strawson (1959) has been the impossibility of completely reproducing acts of pointing out, naming, introducing or recognizing individuals to any “complete” description. Putting the problem this way, presupposes, however, as I tend to think, a profound misunderstanding of the so-called “deictic” function of speech acts: It immediately functions as such and needs no proper “grounding” by descriptions – which just have the function to replace proper names, whenever something can be gained from adding a context of meaning to their purely deictic function. Aristotle’s reluctance to admit «singulars» to scientific treatment seems to go back to the same group of problems – i.e. not accepting the own right of the practical activities of human beings which unavoidably take place on the level of such “singularities”.

20 These two most elementary operations in Hegel’s dialectics have been clearly exposed by Hermann Schmitz (1957).

21 In this respect Marx clearly follows a realist epistemology, which acknowledges the existence of real structures and tendencies of development which are experienced within human practice, although he is very far from being an empiricist (cf. Lindner 2013).

22 Marx importantly stresses that his theoretical presentation only *seems to be* a construction *a priori* (MECW 35, 19), implying, as I take it, that it is a result of experiential and historical research – although this certainly is not and cannot be restricted to the collection of sense data and their inductive generalization, as “empiricism” would have it: It includes an active and constructive elaboration of theories (including their constitutive



dichotomy) and of reading his own theory backwards, when applying it to an analysis of real developments, than in a perspective of the “development of the concept” which ties him, at least verbally, to the Hegelian illusions of ever completing such a development or of simply and continuously “unfolding” what is already somehow contained in the notion this very development starts from.

### **3. The *Lacunae* and *Blind Spots* in Marx’s Elaboration to be Addressed by Further Elaborating his Theory of the Domination of the Capitalist Mode of Production in Modern Bourgeois Societies, and the new Perspectives of Criticizing Modern Bourgeois Economics It Provides**

Marx’s presentation of *Capital* is not only incomplete, even after Engels has attempted to complete it as far as possible (cf. Rojas 1989). It also contains a small, but significant number of contingent *lacunae* to be filled in by further theoretical research, as indicated more or less clearly by Marx himself, as well as some systematic *blind spots*, of which he did not seem to be aware.

The most relevant *lacunae*, to my mind, *on the one hand*, seem to be linked to his theory of labour power: In *Capital I*, Marx switches – without any explanatory argument, maybe even without noticing this transition – from defining the value of labour power in terms of the commodities consumed in its process of reproduction (*MECW* 35, 180-181; cf. 398, with fn. 1, 519) to considering the male worker, relying on his family in his individual reproduction process (*MECW* 35, 399 fn. 1); and in *Capital II*, he begins to distinguish between the metamorphoses of variable capital and the metamorphoses of labour power but omits to address the metamorphoses occurring in the reproduction process of labour power itself. *On the other hand*, if we look more closely at Marx’s sketches on the problematics of capitalist credit<sup>23</sup>, we shall find a comprehensive new perspective opening for looking at Marx’s theoretical development of the very concept of «capital» which makes it possible to deeply rethink such issues as the reality of value production, the class character of capitalist domination or the role of the state, and of politics, within the very processes of the reproduction

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concepts, of course), claiming to reconstruct the very structures and tendencies to be found in reality.

23 As Stefano Breda (2017) has convincingly done it, disentangling Marx’s still inchoative and sketchy argument from its simplifications imposed by Engels’s redaction.

and accumulation of capital<sup>24</sup>. Looking at these sketches more closely and reconstructing the underlying systematic problematics will allow a new reading of *Capital* – simply by shedding new light on Marx’s argument on the preceding more simplifying levels of abstraction.

The systematic *blind spots* Marx himself seems to have been unable to address specifically, when developing his argument in *Capital* (in *Volume One* as well as in all further manuscripts for *Capital*), concern, *first*, the role of gender domination and the modern family in the reproduction of labour power, and *second*, the ecological conditions of reproduction, as contained, as it were, at least to some degree, in the use value of commodities, as well as in the conditions for a healthy reproduction of the societal labour force and in the availability of “the Earth” as a living space for human beings and as a source of “natural products” to serve as use values in their production and consumption processes. *Third*, there is the problem of the constitutive role of politics and of the state in the very reproduction and accumulation process of capital which Marx had failed to address: already in his account of money he seems to fail to address the additional role (and the resulting leeway for action) accruing to state-run central banks. And in his account of the struggle for the “normal working day” he has to rely on the function of «compulsory laws» (*Zwangsgesetze*) (*MECW* 35, 167 ff.) imposed by the state, without a systematic development of the regulatory and political function of the modern state as a relatively autonomous agency. Indeed, there are so many points in *Volume One*, where Marx’s exposition of his theory has to rely on some function of the state, that an entire debate has emerged in the 1970s which tried to find the groundwork for a developed Marxian theory of the state in *Capital I*. This “state derivation debate”, however, lastly only has succeeded in exposing the unelaborated character of Marx’s critique of political economy in this respect – by falling back, in the end, into re-reading the main positions of modern political philosophy, from Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke to Kant and Hegel, via Pufendorf and Rousseau, into Marx who, indeed, had been referring back to them all – without ever really elaborating his critique. And such an elaboration, according to the way in which Marx has worked as a materialist scientist, could not have been achieved just by reading the philosophical classics, even critically, but would require a critical review of historical experiences with effective state action<sup>25</sup>, resulting in a theoretical reconstruction of the specific forms and tendential effects of the guarantees, form definitions

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24 I can here refer to the details in Breda’s path-breaking study.

25 Of which Marx has at least delivered a first instalment in his analysis of the struggle for the limitation of labour time (cf. Wolf 2004). – The very enormity of this

and interventions emanating from the modern state within the very process of the reproduction and accumulation of capital<sup>26</sup>.

As I already have argued, Marx's construction of his critique of political economy is based on the procedure of "dialectically developing" its concepts – which I have translated and, as it were, re-defined, as systematically building his theory and reading it backwards in analysing real processes (and actions): this also defines a specific task of building in new, additional categories into Marx's development of the critique of political economy, namely (1) a more comprehensive notion of the «role of the state on all levels of "Capital"», i.e. as well in the production process, in the reproduction process and in the comprehensive process of capital<sup>27</sup>; (2) the elaboration of the metamorphoses of variable capital and of labour power Marx had left out in his presentation, including their gender and ecological dimensions, which would help us to understand and to articulate the hidden presence of class struggle even in the most "superficial" relations between capital and labour; and (3), the full inclusion of the ecological aspects of the reproduction processes of modern societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production, as they present themselves for capital and labour, in distinct, as well as in common ways<sup>28</sup>.

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requirement may serve as a first explanation for Marx's attempt to build his theoretical reconstruction of the capitalist mode of production without systematically including the mediating and implementing role of the state – as an admissible simplification to be resolved in the "planned book" on the state (of which never a single line has been written). At the very latest, however, when the empirically grounded, but theoretically misleading debates on "monopoly capitalism" (Hobson, Lenin, Hilferding) began to address the issue of "state monopoly capitalism" (Vargas), this very "heroic abstraction" of leaving the modern state out of the reconstruction of the general concept of «capital» has turned into a stumbling block and hindrance for an adequate theoretical development of Marxist theory. – Heide Gerstenberger (2016) has elaborated a first comprehensive and critical overview of the historical developments and debates to be critically reviewed for that purpose.

26 In addressing this task, it will be helpful to look back in some detail to the «state derivation debate» (cf. Elbe 2010, 319-443).

27 Such an exposition could start by elaborating the role of the state in stabilizing the money form of the commodity, and go on to determine the ways the state functions are presupposed by the methods of surplus production developed by capital, including the achievement and stabilization of the very class compromises that have made it possible and interesting for capital to rely significantly on the methods of relative surplus production – with all its important repercussions on the development of the material reproduction of the working-class which have ended the general tendency towards a growing immiseration of the working class and thereby, at the very least, heavily complicated the issue of the «revolution in the West» (Gramsci 1917) and provoked Lenin to embark on the ad-hoc theory of a «workers' aristocracy» (cf. *LCW* 23, 102-118).

28 A realistic evaluation of the impact of capitalist accumulation on the ecological systems of the planet Earth – more or less speculatively integrated into the concept of the

At the same time, I should like to add here, acknowledging this task, i.e. the task of completing the theoretical development of a comprehensive theory of the ways in which the capitalist mode of production dominates modern bourgeois societies<sup>29</sup> – opens new critical perspectives of the Neo-classical turn of political economy, as well as of its Keynesian corrections: as e.g. in Walras's foundational argument the perspective of the "auctioneerprices" (*commissaire-priseur*) gradually establishing prices by taking bids is clearly taken<sup>30</sup> by the theoretical argument, a development of the dominant line of political economy which bypasses the important intuitions Marx has had about the workings of credit and financial capital in an economy based on the modern impersonal firm of "shareholders" (or comparable functional roles, reducing capitalists to managers of their invested money). Only a specific critique of this new turn (cf. Hunt, Lau-tzenheiser 2011, 247-248) of the "utilitarianism" of the vulgar economy despised (and, accordingly, neglected) by Marx will be capable of developing a comparable critique of the Neo-Classics, as Marx has been capable of doing it with regard to Classical Political Economy. And, likewise, after properly understanding the constitutive role of the state within the reproduction process of the capitalist mode of production, it will be possible to understand more profoundly what Keynes has been proposing, also making use of the critical debates on his theoretical achievements, as initiated by Sraffa and Kalecki<sup>31</sup>.

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«biosphere» (Vernadsky 1926) – will have to distinguish general impacts on humanity, specific impacts on singular populations, and specific impacts on particular classes or other societal categories. It is, therefore, neither helpful to oppose a «class ecology» to the general «ecology of humankind» (Paust-Lassen, Wolf 2001), nor to ignore the issue of addressing and countering these specific impacts.

29 Which provides an alternative to the various attempts at "historicizing" Marx's general theory of the capitalist mode of production – starting with Engels's misleading "historico-logical" reading of *Capital*, and continued in a broad variety of "stage theories of capitalism" (most prominently monopoly capitalism, organised capitalism, state monopoly capitalism, but also e.g. Negri's and Hardt's "empire") which all have in common that they divide into evolving "stages" of history, what should be integrated into Marx's theoretical construction of the *critique of political economy* as further, additional moments of the development of the very concept of «capital», according to Marx's method of a materialist "dialectical development" of its categories.

30 Walras (1873), strongly simplified by Samuelson (1941); for a critical perspective cf. Kraft (2005).

31 In this respect, ample material for an in-depth debate has been provided by Riccardo Bellofiore (2018).

#### **4. The Mutual Over-determination of Structures of Domination within Modern Bourgeois Societies**

The concrete historical reality of modern bourgeois societies is deeply gendered, determined by international relations of hierarchy and by a very dynamic ecological “underground” actively present within all relations of domination and exploitation. It is, therefore, quite counter-intuitive to assume that all these relations can be reduced to or developed out of the categories of «capitalist domination». In actual real societal processes and actions we find these structural categories “always already” overdetermining each other.

Although it will be necessary, for the sake of their adequate scientific reconstruction, to study each of them in their “idealised” specificity, this should not lead to the error of superficiality as committed by the “intersectionality” approaches<sup>32</sup> – which do point correctly to the plurality involved, but tend to restrict their analysis to relations of relative power and discrimination, and therefore neglect the central dimension of historical reality constituted by domination. Accordingly, they do not address the task of determining the relative causal weight of the diverse structures and processes<sup>33</sup>, while they tend to isolate the different “sections” from each other, instead of looking at the situation specific ways in which they are “overdetermining each other” – thereby encouraging, in actual practice, a concentration on each specific field which neglects or refuses to take account of the real combinations as they are frequently occurring, e.g. between class, race and gender, or, as it still often the case, omits the consideration of class relations, as they seem to be part of the established order of reproduction – and therefore considered to be without any interesting subversive potential (cf. Gorz 1980) or are said to be just another discursive effect (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Of course, the difficult task to be addressed here is the analysis of the specific ways in which these forms of domination interact within the different historical formations of society, with their specific histories and struggles, e.g. in the US or in the EU (with its more autonomous nation states). Unfortunately, it does not seem feasible to study these processes of overdetermination, as it were, in general or in respect to their “ideal average”: there is no alternative to studying them in their concrete histor-

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32 Cf. the critical oversight, recapitulation and review by Becker-Schmidt (2007).

33 Which cannot be determined in general, as the late Engels has it, but have to be understood in their situative reciprocal action, as Mao has begun to articulate it (cf. Althusser 1969, 95, fn. 6).

ical processes – with all the consequences of fuzziness and unpredictability resulting from their complexity. Scientific research, therefore, without taking recourse to deliberative assumptions and anticipations about possible futures, will only be capable of studying such developments retrospectively in the hope of contributing, at least, starting points and “food for thought” for scientific «future studies» and, before everything else, for political deliberation processes which will have to be developed specifically in their broadest possible sense: not in the sense of privileging unfounded decisions, but rather in the sense of opening the horizon of political deliberation for integrating relevant scientific insights, as well as for a specific understanding of given situations of action stemming from practical experience.

### List of abbreviations

LCW = *Lenin Collected Works* (1960-1970), 45 Voll.

MECW = *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (1975-2015), 50 Voll.

MEGA<sup>2</sup> = *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (1975-).

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