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FULFILMENT OR SLAVERY? SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PARADOXES OF THE CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF WORK IN ECONOMICS AND OTHER HUMAN SCIENCES.

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ABSTRACT. A critical examination of the manner in which work and labour have been conceived by economists in the neo-classical theories of production, in effect seeing work as a « disutility », reveals some remarkable paradoxes and even contradictions both between this neoclassical conception and certain other areas of economic thinking and even more obviously with the manner in which work has been conceived in certain other areas of human science, in particular in contemporary psychology and in classical political theories (of human rights). The inescapably value-laden nature of abstractions in respect of human beings and activities in the human sciences is first laid bare drawing on the insights of Gunnar Myrdal and of critical social theory. In the light of this the paradoxes and contradictions are subjected to a philosophical analysis which on the one hand seeks to explain the time-resistant persistence of the neoclassical conception in terms of the enduring but rarely made explicit power of the master-slave relationship as a framework of thought and interaction in so many areas of human affairs and in particular in the business world; and on the other hand some explicitly normative suggestions are made as to how in the light of certain moral philosophies we *ought* to be conceiving of work if in the human, sciences we are to do proper justice to human dignity and human rights.

Key words: *Work; neoclassical theory of labour; production functions; forced labour; slavery; wellbeing at work; normative discourse; value-laden social theory.*

Introduction

“Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end”¹. Immanuel KANT “*The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*”.

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¹ KANT I (1969) “*The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*” translated from the German by PATON H J; Hutchison University Library London, p.91

That work is an inevitable part of life today there can be little doubt: how many of the people who are reading this are not working on a regular basis or if not actively working or seeking work? Merely to survive and to have a minimal standard of living today means to be at work to earn a “living” for the vast majority of humanity at least in the developed or the developing world. But for something which is so ubiquitous it is remarkable not only how ill-defined work is: but also to find that in the human sciences which study and theorise and seek to understand the phenomenon of work that there are what at first sight and (as we shall argue) also in the details some diametrically opposing conceptualisations of work. This is perhaps most obviously the case as between the conception of work as “disutility” or “pain” in the classic economic conception of work and the conceptualisation of work which we find in psychology and in much of sociological theory as being a source of fulfilment for people as rational creative beings. Today there is an extensive field of psychological research concerned with well-being at work. Moreover in the political theory of human rights as developed by Locke, Rousseau and the Enlightenment thinkers and as embodied in almost every charter of human rights we speak of a “right to work” seen as an essential element once again to a dignified fulfilled human existence². Even within Economics there is the paradoxical situation whereby in the basic microeconomic theory of consumption and production work is invariably presented as a source of disutility (and leisure as “utility” by contrast); while in macroeconomic policy discussions the creation of work/jobs is seen as a good. Of course this contrast can perhaps easily enough be explained in terms of the fact that it is *involuntary* unemployment which is an evil to be combatted (rather than leisure per se) but nonetheless there is a detectable unease within economics over the conceptualisation of work as pure disutility and certainly between economics in general on the one hand and other human sciences on the other.

This paper will seek to explore and analyse in detail these contrasts which are so evidently in contradiction to each other. We think that the study is important because the sharply contrasting conceptualisations could easily lead to very different conclusions as to appropriate policies and practices in relation to work and the workplace.

A Word on Methodology

Before we embark on the critical appraisal of these contrasting conceptions of work, their roots and effects, a brief methodological prologue is in order. What we are attempting here is a critical philosophical analysis of certain concepts which are being used on a daily basis in Economics and other human sciences. We hold that the clarification of concepts can make a very valuable contribution to the

² See for example Article 15 of the European Charter of Human Rights which since the Lisbon treaty of 2009 is a binding part of the European Union law (acquis communautaire). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:EN:PDF> accessed 09/04/2012

discourse and exchanges of human scientists (or of any scientists for that matter). There is nothing whatever to be gained by arcane controversies which are essentially at cross purposes because the protagonists are using the same words with different meanings; or empirical research which is not clear about what exactly it is trying to observe³. We are of course aware that since the time of Immanuel Kant we know that our cognitions of the material world are inevitably active constructions but it remains the case nonetheless that communication among human beings becomes entirely impossible unless there is at least some modicum of shared meaning. The purpose of critical conceptual analysis such as we develop here is precisely to elucidate both the common elements and the contrasting elements in the different conceptualisations of work that are current today and thereby to contribute to an improvement of the mutual understanding of all concerned, theorists, empirical researchers and policy makers.

Mention of the potential contribution to policy discussions leads us to another methodological prolegomenon on the role of normative discourse in this article. Economic readers or those schooled in hard empiricist approaches to human science such as behaviourist psychologists will be taken aback at the fact that in the end we will venture some explicitly normative recommendations as to how work *should* or *ought* to be conceived in human sciences. It is well known that the shunning or the banning of normative discourse in human science was a by-product of logical positivism, a philosophical position whose untenability has been demonstrated and accepted at least by philosophers for half a century (even though its influence lingers on remarkably in so much of empirical human sciences)⁴. Hence we do not intend to make any philosophical apology for engaging in normative discourse. What is less well appreciated by very many positivist inclined human scientists (and here economists are very much to the fore) is that in Economics and in any human science the conceptual abstractions of the theorist are *inevitably* value-loaded, that is to say that they embody implicit normative judgements. This point is by no means a novel or original one. It was eloquently and mercilessly expounded by the great Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal in the late 1960s⁵ when he showed that insofar as we are creating abstractions from dimensions of the human being or human condition for purposes of theorising we are in effect passing judgements to the effect that this or that aspect of the human condition is of no significance for the purposes of the analysis in question. But whereas in the case of natural sciences that judgement is rarely normative (a value judgement) in the case of the human sciences since what are

³ To quote a memorable phrase of the economist Mark Blaug such empirical research is « like playing tennis with the net down ».

⁴ On the untenability of logical positivism see for example O'SULLIVAN P (2011) « *Economic Methodology and Freedom to Choose* » Routledge London, Ch 2

⁵ See MYRDAL G (1958) « *Value in Social Theory* » edited by Paul Streeten, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London; passim but see in particular the introduction by Paul Streeten.

abstracting from its aspects of *human* reality/activity the judgement can often be normative and so always *potentially* involves a value judgement. A very similar point is of course central to the tradition of Critical Social theory: the theoretical constructions of the social world inevitably embody the interests and so ultimately the values of their constructors.

In view of these considerations we agree with Myrdal that there can never be a purely value-free human science and that the best we can hope for is that theorists frankly exhibit their values in full transparency. This we shall do when we come to the section of the paper where we do indeed take a normative stance in relation to certain conceptualisations of work.

Economists' Conceptions of Work and Labour

Labour in the Theory of Production

We begin our critical analysis with an examination of the conceptualisation of work in the oldest of the human sciences to deal systematically with the topic: Economics. In the conventional neoclassical micro theory as found in the textbooks of Economics human work will first be encountered in the theory of production in the guise of *labour*. Human work is conceptualised as labour time or labour power and is considered to be a crucial input of the production process. Labour alongside land and capital equipment is said to be one of the factors of production, that is to say as an input which does not get entirely used up in the initial period or process of production (as does a raw material input) but is available for use (albeit in a somewhat depreciated state) in future production. Economists go on to model the production process using the device of the production function. A production function is a mathematical model of any production process built up from engineering data on inputs and resultant outputs and presents output as a function of the various inputs used and their manner of combination. A typical simple production function takes the form

$$Q = f(L,K)$$

where Q is output, L is labour input K is capital input and f is a mathematical functional operator indicating the particular form of the function for the process in question. As an example one format that is often used by economists in theoretical and empirical applications is the Cobb-Douglas function

$$Q = AL^{\alpha}K^{\beta}$$

where A is a constant term, L is labour input and K is capital input.

It is interesting now to consider this conceptualisation in the light of the Myrdalian methodological warning that normative value judgements are potentially involved in any abstract modelling by human scientists. In effect here the abstraction of the production function is treating labour and capital equipment (or land) on the same

footing for purposes of modelling; and so in effect the specifically human dimension of work or of human labour is being ignored and abstracted from. We are losing sight of the fact at least for purposes of the modelling that these “labour” inputs which are being mathematically treated as substitutable with capital equipment (and/or land) are sentient human beings. If the theory is then used as a basis for policy discussions or practical advice to businesses there is always the real danger that the human dimension will be forgotten; and that is where hidden normative value judgements relating to the appropriate treatment of man by man and about the dignity of the person are being passed. In these days of obsession with profitability and the resultant drive for ever lower costs (as satiated consumer demand stagnates) this can mean for example a drive to lower input usage, to economise on inputs or, as the euphemism has it, to “downsize”. What has been lost in what has become a business and even governmental obsession with lower costs is any awareness that there is a huge difference in terms of impact on human suffering between a reduction in the usage of capital equipment on the one hand and reduction in the usage of labour on the other. To stress the blindingly obvious: a machine does not “suffer” if left out of work whereas a sentient human being will typically suffer if thrown out of a job and that suffering can be long and painful if the period of unemployment is for whatever reason a prolonged one. This point may be patently obvious but it is repeatedly and systematically overlooked in the policy or consultancy advice of neoclassical economists and their followers. *The neoclassical abstraction involves an instrumentalisation of labour and so a hidden value premise to the effect that it is acceptable to treat human beings as mere instruments.* If there was any doubt that this is in effect a value judgement one needs only to consider the third variant of Kant’s Categorical Imperative that has been quoted above “*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end*”. The neoclassical theory of production is doing exactly the opposite and so whether right or wrong it is adopting a normative standpoint (contrary to Kant) regarding the treatment of human beings; it is presuming in effect that it is acceptable for purposes of economic analysis and policy formation to treat human beings purely as instruments of production on a par with machinery or real estate.

Later in this article we shall trace the roots of this hidden value judgement to the enduring appeal of the master-slave relationship. But for now let us note two further extensions of the instrumental conception which can leave no doubt as to its centrality in economic thinking. There is first of all the widely used conceptualisation of labour as human capital. Capital in Economics refers to any (real) input of the production process that is not entirely used up in the initial period of production; and so each of the classic “factors of production” (as just defined above) can be considered to be a form of capital. We can speak therefore of land as natural capital; of machinery as capital equipment; and of labour as human capital. There are no doubt some useful

theoretical insights that can be achieved through the conceptualisation of labour as human capital and in a sense it is this insight into the “capital” dimension of labour as an input of production which has given rise to the whole branch of management theory known as human resource management. However it remains a brutally instrumental conceptualisation of labour and it has been subjected to a significant degree of criticism as such in the whole literature on reification and recognition in Human Resource Management. As Gazi Islam has shown in a recent work⁶ while at a micro level human resource management practices may often be highly laudable and ethical (for example HRM departments which seek to eliminate various types of unfounded discrimination in the workplace) at a macro level there may be more serious ethical issues in regard to the dignity and individuality of the person arising from the broad conceptualisation which sees people first and foremost as productive resources rather than as persons. As he has put it

“no matter how much utilitarian benefit work may provide employees in terms of salary or other benefits, if the work relation compromises fundamental values of human dignity, autonomy or respect, it may be ethically problematic”⁷

While this tradition of critical social thinking draws our attention to the fundamental ethical issues about dignity of the person in much of contemporary human resource management it is worth noting that the full force of the critique applies more and has probably been mainly aimed at work in the private sector. At least in the advanced economies and especially in the social market economies of the European Union the situation of those working in the public sector has diverged significantly from that of private sector workers and in a manner which is much more consistent with respect of the human person qua person in the public sector. Those working in the private sector being instrumentalised tend to work longer, encounter less respect of workers rights and above all have a much more precarious employment as private businesses insist and indeed openly lobby for a right to hire and fire workers at will as though they were so many machines or robots in the pursuit of profitability in a highly competitive global marketplace. Ironically as some recent studies show private sector workers are not even paid more to compensate for the “disutility” of this much greater precarity⁸.

Before moving on from the instrumental conceptualisation of work and labour it is worth noting one other very blatant manifestation thereof in economic

⁶ ISLAM G (2012) « Ethical issues of Reification and Recognition in HRM: A Critical Social Theory Perspective”, contained in O’SULLIVAN P et alii (2012) “*Business Ethics: a critical approach integrating ethics across the business world*” Routledge London Pgs 74-85

⁷ ISLAM G (2012) op.cit. pg 75

⁸ See for example the research study done for the UK Dept of Trade and Industry on this topic in a country where more than anywhere else in the EU one might have expected a premium for private sector employment : CHATTERJI M and MUMFORD K (2007) “*Public-Private Sector Wage Gaps for British Full-Time Male Employees: Across Occupations and Workplaces.*” Dept of Trade and Industry UK Office of Manpower Economics

thinking, albeit one which is much less common today than in the past. When questions have been raised regarding the valuation of a human life (an issue which for example comes up in the cost-benefit analysis appraisals of public sector projects which impact on safety such as road improvements, better hospitals etc) in the early days of such analyses the suggestion was quite seriously made that human life should be valued at the value of the output foregone (Gross Domestic Product reduction) from the loss of life of the person in question. This is the instrumental conception of human labour par excellence; and that economists could have seriously entertained it is a testimony to how pervasive the conception of human beings not as persons (or as ends in themselves as Kant would put it) but simply as instruments of production has been in Economics. Today economists have to a significant extent moved beyond the idea of valuing human life as GDP or output foregone to an approach that is based on the idea of willingness to pay since (under pressure of moral critiques) they have come to see that the extension of the instrumental abstraction into the area of valuation of human life leads to morally unacceptable consequences in respect of the practical treatment of human beings but in other areas of Economics the instrumental conceptualisation still reigns supreme. As an *abstraction* that may be acceptable for certain analytical purposes but the story of the treatment of valuation of life within Economics shows very well the hidden value judgements that lurk beneath any abstraction in human science as Myrdal had warned us and their potential to lead to practical consequences which are seriously unacceptable in moral terms if indiscriminately applied or extended.

Labour in the Theory of Consumer Choice

In another area of microeconomic theory we come up against the notions of work and labour in a quite different guise which leads to certain intriguing paradoxes. The economic theory of deliberate choice which underpins the economic understanding of the demand for consumer goods can also consider the individual person's decisions both as to how much they may wish to work as opposed to taking leisure; and more broadly as to how they may choose to hold their assets (portfolio choice theory). This whole theory is based around the idea of utility (satisfaction) maximisation under constraints. In the conceptualisation of the basic decision of how much work to do in this theory work itself is quite blatantly considered to be a source of disutility; and people get paid wages/salaries precisely for the displeasure or dissatisfaction to which they are subjected in having to work. It is true that this economic theory can allow for a small degree of satisfaction from work to the extent that it uses the notion of different levels of dissatisfaction / satisfaction in different occupations as part of the explanation of wage differentials; the more unpleasant a type of work is the better it will be paid, the more personal satisfaction that may be gleaned from a line of work the less it will tend to be all else held the same (a reason often cited for relatively low professorial salaries!) But it remains the case that fundamentally this

theory sees work as essentially a disutility and otherwise it would have great difficulty in explaining how wages and salaries come to be paid.

Labour in Macroeconomic Theory

One final area where work and labour are central topics in Economics is in the area of macroeconomic theory and policy where huge efforts have been devoted to the analysis of the determinants of employment and unemployment of labour. What is at least superficially bizarre is that the very same economists who in their microeconomics conceptualise work as a disutility in the discussion of *macroeconomic* policy speak of full employment and the creation of new jobs as self-evident goods. Yet how can the creation of new jobs be regarded as a good thing when work is a source not of utility (satisfaction) but of disutility (dissatisfaction)? The paradox can no doubt be resolved by recalling that we live in a world of economic necessity rather than in a vale of plenty and hence that all that annoying work we have to do is but a means to ensure survival and a decent standard of living; a kind of necessary evil but an *evil* nonetheless for the economist.

Ideas of Labour and Work in Other Human Sciences

What cannot but strike any scholar who has studied across a number of different human sciences is the remarkable and paradoxical contrasts between the manner of conceptualisation of work as developed by economists and the conceptualisations that we find in other human sciences and in political philosophy. That there should be these contrasts and that they should raise ethical issues should not in itself be surprising if we bear in mind Myrdal's methodological insights regarding the inevitably value-laden abstractions potentially present in all human sciences but the contrast between the conceptualisations in respect of work and labour is nonetheless very striking and sharp.

In psychology for example work has been thought of as self-actualisation and hence as a primary source of fulfilment as a human being. Through the production of objects or of services that are useful to ourselves or to others we are realising and actualising a capability which is highly distinctive of human qua self-conscious freely choosing and creative beings as opposed to mere animals or plants. Through work and through technological progress we can actively transform and improve the world while bettering our material conditions. In this psychological approach which is shared incidentally to a significant extent by sociologists work is being seen as something which is central to human self-expression and hence to our psychological well-being. In sharp contrast to the economic conception of work as disutility work is seen as central to our well-being as humans; and this not just because of the economic necessity which makes it necessary for us to work to earn a living but because work is valuable in itself for

human beings as being the primary source of realising one's potentiality as a creative being.

Moreover in all of the Natural Rights political philosophies which stipulate those basic natural rights inherent in each person qua human being and which are at all times to be respected as fundamental and as essential to a fulfilling and fulfilled human existence the *right to work* is invariably included as one of the fundamental rights⁹.

Thus we find when we look outside of Economics to other humanities disciplines such as psychology, sociology and political philosophy a very different conceptualisation from the purely instrumental conception of labour and of work as disutility of the economists. Indeed there is a growing contemporary research literature into the topic of well-being at work, that is to say an investigation of how a person's working experience can be rendered even more fulfilling and psychologically rewarding.¹⁰

The tension between these sharply contrasting conceptualisations of work as between the various human sciences to some extent is reflected in the day to day practice of human resource management departments in so many large organisations. On the one hand many HR professionals genuinely see their role as that of improving the working environment and experience of employees so that they can achieve a degree of personal fulfilment and career development at work¹¹ but on the other hand this same department of the firm will be expected to handle redundancies and layoffs which at least if they are related to a simple cost cutting exercise by the company cannot in any way be dressed up as personal development or fulfilment for the employees. Many HR professionals working in the private sector are finding that due to this contradiction at the heart of their role they are increasingly despised by the employees and the position can for many become a source of huge personal stress.

The Moral Dilemma of the Theorist of Work

It will be evident at this stage that there are some sharply contrasting if not contradictory conceptualisations of work present in the various human sciences today in respect of the notion of work both on the level of theory and of practice. This means that the theorist is faced with a choice as to which conceptualisation, which set of theoretical constructs to use. Of course one fundamental and primary

⁹ This has been true of all declarations of rights from the time of John Locke's original introduction of the theory of natural rights up to the European Union's recently adopted Charter of Fundamental Rights. See LOCKE J (1988) »*Two Treatises of Government*«. introduction by Laslett P, Cambridge University Press. Also see footnote 2 above for details of the EU charter.

¹⁰ As just one example see STEILER D, SADOWSKY J and ROCHE L (2010) «*Eloge du bien-être au travail*» Presses Universitaires de Grenoble

¹¹ In France in recent years sadly this has often meant developing a working environment less likely to lead to suicides in the workplace !

requirement of any good theoretical construct is that it should seek to offer us a true insight into the phenomena under study¹² and so our conceptualisation should in the first place be insightful. But as Myrdal has shown us there can also be hidden normative value judgements present in our abstractions when they pertain to human beings and so as between conceptualisations which offer a high degree of insight into the reality of work the theorist will face a *moral* choice or dilemma; there can be a question as to which conceptualisation it is morally more appropriate to use. That there is such a moral choice underpinning the way we theorise in the human sciences will be shocking to some but in the light of what we have seen above in this article the choice is literally inevitable or inexorable; every theorist will implicitly be making such a choice.¹³

This of course leads directly to the question of which moral principles or code to use when making the inevitable normative judgement, a judgement which becomes explicit once we have become aware (as here) of the inevitability of the presence of such a judgement. What is interesting now is that almost all of the leading moral and/or political philosophies on which we might propose to draw to make the relevant judgement point very clearly in the same direction.

Perhaps this is most evident in the Categorical Imperative of Kant already quoted at the beginning of this article. If human beings are always to be treated as means and never merely as means then it follows straight away that the instrumental conceptions of work and labour that we have found in contemporary economics are morally unacceptable, they are immoral and should be abandoned in favour of conceptualisations of work and labour that do justice to the dignity and integrity of the human person. This would no doubt mean a conceptual revolution in neoclassical economics; but it is in principle feasible as the evolution under moral pressure of mainstream economic treatments of the valuation of human life discussed above clearly show.

Essentially the same normative conclusion will follow from Natural Rights theory, a theory which focusses on the dignity of each individual person and on their right to fulfilment through work as we have seen above.

It is in utilitarian moral philosophies that perhaps the most appropriate conceptualisation from a moral point of view is not so immediately obvious.

Utilitarian moral philosophy of course appraises the moral worth of an action (or type of action in rule utilitarianism) in terms of the eventual impact of the action(s) on the sum total of human wellbeing. Some of the most famous protagonists of classical and neoclassical economics would argue that in a market system under free enterprise capitalism where every business ruthlessly maximises profits while paying no attention to any other moral values the eventual results produced by the

¹² See O'SULLIVAN P (2011) op.cit Chapter 3

¹³ One is reminded of Jean-paul Sartre's insistence that not to choose is itself a choice.

system will contribute to a maximum level of wellbeing for all in the community. This argument has been classically associated with Adam Smith who expounded it at length in “the Wealth of Nations”,¹⁴ but it has been reformulated with some force and in a more legalistic manner (focussing that is on managers’ legal obligations to shareholders) by Milton Friedman¹⁵. Agreement or faith in the validity of this broad argument as to the overall impact of free enterprise capitalism where firms focus narrowly and exclusively on profits could be seen as a reason for defending the validity of the economic abstraction which sees human beings as mere instruments of production ignoring at least for purposes of economics their humanity and dignity; a capitalist system which treats individuals as mere instruments of production will ultimately lead under *laissez-faire* to the well-being of these individuals. But we know that there are some very serious limitations to the *laissez-faire* argument in respect of capitalism, the most important of which is that in face of monopoly power and abuse of dominant position capitalism fails to achieve the maximum well-being, a point already clearly recognised by Adam Smith himself over 200 years ago but all too readily forgotten by contemporary popularisers of his work; and Smith even regarded monopoly abuses as quite likely under capitalism¹⁶.

In any case a philosopher will be aware of a more fundamental defect in the Smithian line of argument interpreted in utilitarian terms. If in classical and neoclassical economics we build the theoretical models on an instrumental abstraction regarding work and labour then the end result of that theorising whatever it may be can be called into question on *moral* grounds for having adopted a morally unacceptable view of human beings throughout and in the first place. This suggests that we need to come back to review in utilitarian terms the initial abstraction itself which would treat human beings as mere instruments. Put bluntly whatever may be the supposed arguments to the effect that such treatment will lead indirectly to their wellbeing through the invisible hand of the market system, will treating human beings as mere instruments of the production process contribute *directly* to the wellbeing or happiness *of those individuals*? Will those individuals be happy with or be prepared to be treated essentially as mere instruments in the macroeconomic processes of a market system?

¹⁴ SMITH A (1776): “*An Enquiry into the nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations*”, Penguin London reprint 1982.”

¹⁵ FRIEDMAN M (1970) “The social responsibility of business is to increase profits” in *New York Times Magazine*, 13 September 1970

¹⁶ It should be emphasised that Adam Smith thought that under free enterprise capitalist systems there would indeed be an inherent tendency to monopoly as kartels or monopolies can make significantly higher profits ; hence a system geared to the pursuit of profit by businesses acting in their own self-interest to the exclusion of any other social goals cannot but produce a tendency to monopoly. In this respect Smith curiously is in direct agreement with Karl Marx who also spoke of the inherent tendency of capitalist systems to monopoly and concentration of industrial power.

Unless one is to make out an argument along the lines of universal masochism (which is quite simply implausible) the only way in which such an implicit normative judgement could be defended would be through adoption of the *master-slave* framework in some form or other. That is to say that some authority (which one??) would make the judgement as master(s) that certain people's happiness is better served by their enslavement to the masters in question and so that in utilitarian moral terms they may be considered as simple instruments of production to that master. It appears therefore that unless one is prepared to defend slavery it is difficult to see how in the end the instrumental conception of work and of labour that we find in Economics could be defended even in utilitarian terms.

It appears therefore that in the light of any of the three major moral philosophies which characterise Western moral thinking, Natural Rights, Kantian Categorical Imperative or even Utilitarianism the presumption that labour and human work are to be considered in a purely instrumental fashion are morally unacceptable. In the case of natural Rights and of Kantian theory the instrumental conception is simply directly inconsistent with their central principles or norms; while in the case of utilitarianism we saw that the instrumental conception could ultimately only be defended by adopting a master-slave framework in the conceptualisation of human work and labour.

Earlier in this article we have seen how there are sharply contrasting conceptualisations of human work to be found in different human sciences: in Economics and in certain macro aspects of Human Resource Management the instrumental notion reigns supreme; while in psychology, political theory and in many micro level applications of Human Resource Management the human work is seen as the achievement of an individual person to be treated at all times with dignity and as ends in themselves and for whom work is a source of fulfilment and self-actualisation.

It follows therefore that when passing the inevitable moral judgment which is present in the moment of constructing abstract theories and conceptualisations in respect of human work and labour and in the light of any of the three major moral philosophies (Natural Rights, Kant or Utilitarianism) we should adopt systematically the latter conceptualisation (of psychology etc) which treats human beings "always as ends in themselves and never merely as means" or instruments.

The Enduring Influence of the Master-Slave Framework

What has become apparent from the above analysis is that underpinning the conceptualisation of work and of labour as instrument of production is an implicit reliance on a master-slave framework for the theorisation of work. This is no doubt for most theorists an implicit or unconscious normative judgement since Myrdal has noted how under the influence of positivism in Economics theorists have tended to presume that they are engaging in a "value free" purely positive

discourse and it does not even occur to them that there may be hidden normative premises lurking behind their abstractions and modes of theorising¹⁷. But in this article we have not only shown how the master-slave framework is clearly implicit in the instrumental conception of work of Economics, we have also shown that alternative conceptualisations which consider human beings as ends and not merely as means are possible and may even be gaining ground within the human sciences. Given that there are alternative conceptualisations possible each theorist cannot but admit that he has made at least implicitly or subconsciously a *choice* of framework; and that since this choice pertains to human beings that it involves some sort of normative judgement.

Therefore to the extent that a conceptualisation of work and labour as instruments and which presupposes implicitly a master-slave framework for the theorisation of work remains widespread and influential today in the works of economists and in certain areas of human resource management where reification can be detected, an obvious question to pose in conclusion is how do we account for the remarkable persistence of this effective master-slave conceptualisation half a century after slavery was supposedly formally abolished by law throughout the whole of the world¹⁸ and centuries after it was formally abolished in the advanced countries.

First of all it will be useful to emphasise just how widespread the influence of the master-slave framework remains both in theory and more tellingly perhaps in practice. To the extent that theories of management adopt a hierarchical conception of the company with lines of command analogous to those of military command there are vestiges of the master-slave framework unmistakably present. Certainly it is true in most cases that a person has a choice whether or not to work in the first place and so a choice whether or not to work in a hierarchically organised company. But if once inside the company there are strictly defined lines of command and obedience between superiors and subordinates, between managers and workers, then in effect there is one free decision (to work or not for the hierarchical company) followed once inside the hierarchy by a master-slave relationship in which the superior/manager commands and the subordinate/worker does what he is told obediently¹⁹.

Even more poignant and perhaps surprising to some is the realisation that while slavery may have been legally abolished over most of the developed world

¹⁷ On this point the influence of Friedman's 1953 article on the methodology of economics where he argues on positivist logical grounds for a hard science of economics devoid of any norms or value judgements has had a huge influence on economists for decades. See FRIEDMAN M (1953) « *Essays in Positive Economics* » University of Chicago Press : chapter on Methodology of Positive Economics

¹⁸ Through the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> accessed 22 April 2012 See Article 4 « *No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms* ».

¹⁹ In effect a kind of Faustian bargain

more than a century ago and has been officially abolished throughout the whole of the world since the promulgation of the United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery (1956)²⁰ yet in reality certain types of forced labour which are in effect modern forms of slavery are still remarkably prevalent today. One may wish to engage in logic chopping as to whether or not these contemporary forms of forced labour are slavery or not in the strict sense of the UN Conventions but there is no doubt whatever that they are permeated to the core with a purely instrumental conception of the human beings involved in the forced labour and that the dominance/subordination typical of the master/slave relationship in general is undoubtedly present. The International Labour Office (ILO) adopts the following definition of forced labour: “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily²¹». Following very closely this definition by forced labour we mean any work or services which people are forced to do against their freedom of choice by the threat the superior physical force and which they cannot leave without penalty or the threat of penalty. Hence in view of the initial threat of physical force and the ever-present threat of various types of severe penalty if one ceases to do the work in question forced labour has all of the hallmarks of slavery apart from the outright ownership of the slave by the master. The forced labourer is stripped of all human dignity and treated as a mere means, an instrument of production and no more, by the master or employer of the forced labour; hence in moral terms in the light of any of the three moral philosophies we have considered above when looking at the abstractions of economists forced labour is clearly morally reprehensible. We could indeed see it as the logical terminus of reification and of the economic conception of labour as an instrument of production.

But how prevalent in reality is forced labour today and what are its major manifestations? First and most obvious even if often cloaked in the silence of *omertà* is human trafficking. By this we mean the transfer of young people, adolescents and even children from poorer regions of the world by “employment agents” who promise them good jobs and a significant increase in standard of living in richer parts of the world...only for these unfortunates to arrive in more developed countries without any proper immigrant status, hence remaining at the mercy of the would-be “employment agents” who force them into prostitution or very poorly paid or even unpaid factory or farm work with the threat that otherwise they will be reported to the local authorities or in many cases with the threat of physical violence. Figures for the exact numbers of people who are trafficked in this way are by definition difficult to estimate but a conservative estimate from the International Labour Office (ILO) suggests that in 2004 there were some 9,8million

²⁰ See <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/slavetrade.htm>

²¹ See BELSER P (2005) « *Forced labour and human trafficking: estimating the profits* » ILO working paper 42, International Labour Office, Geneva, pg 2.

peoples in this position of which 1,7million in prostitution²². Lest any people in advanced countries might imagine that this is exclusively a third world phenomenon there are among these cases from advanced countries. Cases of young girls from Eastern Europe forced into prostitution have been embarrassingly uncovered in Britain, Ireland and Italy in the past decade.

A second form of forced labour is bonded labour. Here a person who is typically an adult but in a condition of severe need or poverty takes out a loan which is repaid by working unpaid or at a pittance for the lender for an unspecified period of time that is at the whim of the lender. In many cases the borrower may initially imagine that they will be able to repay the loan in monetary amounts but with backstreet lending rates of interest often well in excess of 100% annual percentage rate the unfortunate borrower quickly finds that there is no hope of monetary repayment and they are forced in effect into working off the loan for the lender. Needless to say this “working off” is typically arbitrary and extortionate (like the backstreet interest rates that initially underpinned the loan); and the labourer far from being treated as a human being with dignity and rights is reduced to a mere instrument of forced production, a sort on indirect cash generator to repay the loan. The ILO has documented the broad extent of debt bonded labour in a wide range of Asian countries²³.

A third form of forced labour which we cannot but mention even if it is more difficult to tie down its extent is that which arises from forced marriages in the arranged marriage systems which are prevalent in many Asian and African societies. It is well known that in societies where arranged marriage is prevalent (India, Pakistan, Cambodia for example) young girls may often be forced into marrying men whom they would not otherwise choose simply to bring economic advantages to the girl’s extended family. No doubt many arranged marriages are between people who happily consent to the partner they eventually choose from an array of candidates prevented by the parents; but unfortunately it also happens especially in poorer parts of Asia and Africa that very young girls (often aged 13 to 15) are married off without any choice on their part to better off men who will then bring economic comfort to the girl’s family. Not only is the young girl here instrumentalised into a piece of pure human capital for the benefit of the family, the reality in many if these societies is that they will in effect become slaves of the man they marry in everything but name.

In these same societies child labour is also a prevalent phenomenon. The child labour phenomenon has been widely documented in recent years²⁴ and has

²² See BELSER P (2005), op.cit., pg.4 and passim

²³ See for example ILO (2011) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_172671.pdf or ILO (2005) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_081967.pdf accessed 05/05/2012

²⁴ See for example the ILO report (2010) « *Accelerating Action against Child Labour* », ILO Genève available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_126752.pdf accessed 05/05/2012

even become a point of reproach to many multinationals from advanced countries (Nike, Gap and even Adidas for example) so we do not need to dwell on the explanation of the phenomenon. What is relevant for us here is to note that where young children below the age of 12 (and who thus cannot be considered to have developed a faculty of full and free choice) are being pushed into working long hours of work that too must surely be considered a form of forced labour at least in those cases where the child is deprived of education as a result of the long hours of working.²⁵

It will be clear from the above examples that forced labour is extensively present in a variety of different manifestations and this in both advanced and less developed countries. This is practical testimony to the enduring influence of the master-slave framework as an implicit conceptualisation for human work and labour and that this is present throughout the world. One final manifestation of the master-slave framework that we should note and that is not a matter of forced labour but rather of inherited servitude status is of course the caste system which is still predominant in India and in certain monarchical societies which retain a special status for (extended) royal families. These systems whatever nice gloss or rationalisation one may wish to put on them are inescapably based on the idea that certain people by virtue of their birth (bloodline alone) are destined to be masters while others by virtue of their birth (bloodline alone) are destined to serve those masters.

If the durability of the master/slave framework both in the theories of Economics and of Management studies and also in the widespread practical realities of forced labour and caste systems in the world today is thus undoubted one may wonder about the deeper roots of that durability in a world which officially in wide ranges of political declarations and in its legal systems declares slavery to be not only in principle evil but also to be abolished. Is there some inherent drive or lust for power over others so deeply rooted in the human psyche that it makes it very difficult for human beings to get beyond that framework of thinking for once and all? Or is all of the political talk and declaration about the abolition of slavery merely empty ideological twaddle which serves the interests of a ruling class to keep those less privileged in a quiescent subjection (as followers of Marx might argue)? These are questions which it would be well beyond the scope of this article to answer although we may return to them in the future²⁶.

²⁵ An argument might be made that in a poor family in a poor country the alternatives for the child are even worse and that if at least the child is educated (considered as a human right) the child labour might be regarded as something that an enlightened child or parent would agree to. This is in our view a defensible argument and has been applied by Adidas in factories where Adidas employs child labour. See for example http://www.adidas-group.com/en/ser2007/d/d_2_4.asp for Adidas own statement on this.

²⁶ We are considering to research a more detailed article on the whole phenomenon of forced labour which will combine a consideration both of its psychological and political roots and document in more detail its presence in certain countries today.

Conclusion

In this article we have sought to reflect on the remarkable differences which persist in the conceptualisation of work and labour both within Economics itself and between Economics and other human sciences. We have seen the inescapably value-laden character of these abstractions to the extent that they involve abstracting from certain dimensions of the human condition and we have in particular seen the purely instrumental conception of human work and labour which permeates Economics and much of Human Resource Management. Given the inevitability of some moral value judgements in the construction of conceptualisations of human work we have drawn on a number of different moral philosophies (Natural Rights, Kantianism and Utilitarianism) to show how each of these will point inexorably towards an abandonment of the purely instrumental conceptualisation of labour in favour of a framework where human beings are treated with dignity also as “ends in themselves”, a conceptualisation which can be found in many of the psychological treatments of work and labour as a source of fulfilment and self-actualisation for human beings. The article concluded with some reflections on how the master/slave relationship implicitly underlies the instrumental conception and on its continuing practical manifestation especially in forced labour in all its forms. The deeper reasons for the durability of the implicit master/slave framework in a world that has officially abolished slavery would properly be a matter of further research.

WORK AND LEISURE IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY

RUUD WELTEN*

ABSTRACT. In contemporary western society, the role of work has been thoroughly changed since the last decennia. In the contribution, I will focus on the role of work in our society by investigating in what way work today can be understood as a radicalisation of reification (*Verdinglichung*). I state that the discourse about work today is no longer governed by terms of production or economic activity, but is, in fact, a discourse on consumerism and leisure.

Key words: *Work, leisure, consumerism, reification, Marxism, phenomenological sociology*

Reification and Liquidity

Over the last decennia, the role of work in present-day Western society has radically changed. Classic types of work, like factory work, still exist of course. In the following article, however, I aspire to improve on formerly apt but now inadequate concepts concerning work and its role in our society. Today, work is no longer discussed in terms of production or economic activity. In fact, the discourse on work has become a discourse on consumerism and leisure time.

We live in a consumer society.¹ I will elaborate on this diagnosis, more specifically on the role *work* plays in a consumer society. The term ‘consumer society’ does not really refer to the fact that we all work hard in order to buy commodities; it does not mean that everything is plentiful; nor that we are obsessively buying all that we can. I think--and I want to examine this idea--that in this consumer society of ours, work itself has become a commodity. In order to do so I shall investigate if and how work may be understood as a radicalisation of *reification* (*Verdinglichung*).

Consumerism is a flammable mixture of reification and liquidity. On the face of it, these terms seem to rule each other out: reification is the freezing, or solidification, of something fluid. According to Zygmunt Bauman, today’s most influential protagonist of liquidity as the characterisation of our times, liquidity

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¹ cf. Hannah Arendt: "It is frequently said that we live in a consumer's society", *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press 1968, p. 126.

refers to contingency, uncertainty, the slipperiness of identities in everyday life and its institutions and expectations.² Liquidity refers to the near-disappearance of the boundaries of our social identities and values. Today, I will argue, work is liquid, not solid. Modernity is a time of constant flow, of liquidity not for its own sake but ‘to clear the site for new and improved solids’.³ This is the role of reification: to clear the site.

The notion ‘reification’ goes back to the Marxist term ‘fetishism’. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Marx appropriated the term fetishism and linked it to the commodification of things.⁴ According to Bauman: ‘Writing from inside the budding society of producers, Karl Marx censured the economists of his time for the fallacy of “commodity fetishism”: for their habit of overlooking or hiding human interaction, by design or by default, behind the movement of commodities; *as if* the commodities, on their own, entered relationships with each other with no human meditation.’⁵ ‘Consumerism’, which is a key term in Bauman’s work, goes back to ‘commodity fetishism’ and was subsequently relabelled ‘reification’: *Verdinglichung*, a term often used in our times to express complaints toward the world we live in. The fact that the term was coined by the most influential Marxist philosopher of the Western world, Georg Lukács, is often forgotten. Still, the diagnosis ‘reification’ is of great importance: reification is the commodification of everything in our life world.

Georg Lukács and Reification

The reification argument, based on Marx’ fetishism, was famously advocated in 1923 by Georg Lukács in his *History & Class Consciousness* and is revived today by authors such as Slavoj Žižek and Axel Honneth.⁶ According to Lukács, the idea of fetishism in capitalist society cannot but lead back to the very basis of Marx’s economic analysis of humankind. This entails that in a capitalist society, our relationship with things as economic commodities has corroded our relationships with other people. In the chapter ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, Lukács admonishes humankind: we need to guard against reification.⁷ He argues that in a capitalist society, humanity is no longer in charge of economic or other kinds of values but has, contrarily, become an economic value itself. To quote Lukács on the essence of this commodity-structure: ‘Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a “phantom objectivity”, an autonomy that

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Malden, USA, Polity Press, 2000.

³ Bauman, p. 3.

⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital I* (I, I section D) "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret There". <http://www.marxists.org/>

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Polity Press, London 2007, p. 13

⁶ cf. Axel Honneth, *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, The Berkeley Tanner Lectures, Oxford University Press, 2008

⁷ cf. Eva L. Corredor, *Lukács after Communism. Interviews with Contemporary Intellectuals*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 7.

seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.’⁸

The question Lukács poses in 1923 is: ‘How far is commodity exchange together with its structural consequences able to influence the *total* outer and inner life of society?’⁹ I want to elaborate on this question, keeping in mind that our society today (I mean that of the Western welfare states) is completely different from a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society in which work was primarily a means to obtain money in order to live. However, Lukács’ *analysis* may be more relevant in our consumer society than it ever was in the days of Marx. It is clear that according to Marx, in a capitalist society work has been alienated. As Lukács says: ‘(the labour of the labourer) becomes something objective and independent of him. Something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man.’ It is this objectiveness that I want to investigate here. I do not speak on behalf of Lukács but I will follow his line of thought, according to which our consumerist society is the epitome of reification.

There is no exaggeration in saying that today’s humanity can be understood in terms of economic exploitation. Humanity has become an object. The criteria for having a ‘meaningful’ life are not constituted by existential values, Aristotelian purposes, modelled after the virtues of our vocations, a striving after happiness, but they are valued on the market place. In our times, we do not speak of labourers or even personnel, but of ‘Human Resources’ that have to be managed, like tools. In a society like ours, we recognise this ‘in-humanisation’, and we try to escape it. We ‘use’ work, not to produce, but to regain our humanity. In such a society, work is not the dialectical counterpart of the material world of things that need to be transformed into commodities, but a commodity itself.

Strictly speaking, this diagnosis takes leave of the reification thesis as it held in Lukács’ days. In our time, reification is omnipresent. It has fully eroded humankind’s former ideas about itself. This radicalisation is not only typical of the colonialist dynamics of reification (the on-going power to conquer new fields of reality, which is only possible in a liquid world, in which boundaries are not solid anymore), but also, in terms of Lukács, inherent to the universality of it. Once reification has become an autonomous, all-embracing power, nothing in human reality is safe from it. No-one-no human person or subject--is in charge of reification: reification is in charge of us. This is suggestive of the most important objection Marx raised against capitalism: that it was a fully autonomous, omnipresent power nobody controlled, and that enslaved us.

To follow the reification argument through time, we must accept that the consumer society is not just operational in some parts of society and that it does not depend on behaviour or ways of thinking and acting, but that it is the structure of

⁸ Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History & Class Consciousness*, p. 83

⁹ Lukács, p. 84.

the totality of our society. This is at the heart of Lukács' argument. In other words: in a consumer society, *everything* is present as a consumer issue. This is not the result of any psychological or ethical attitude towards the world, but characteristic of the way we experience the world we live in. It is a phenomenological matter. Reification is a characteristic of *consciousness* itself, rather than a characteristic of how we deal with the objects and people around us.¹⁰

Human values shift from existential fields of experience to solid non-experimental forms of consumerism. It is this magic possibility that Bauman describes as liquidity: in (post)modern times (Bauman prefers the term Liquid Modernity rather than 'postmodernism'), values easily float from one (existential, experimental) sphere to another (consumer goods and commodities). Tourists, for example, do not fulfil a need by visiting the tower of Pisa in Italy, nor is it the ultimate goal of an arduous journey, nor even an 'experience': it is simply what consumer society expects tourists to do in order to have a happy holiday. Tourists 'do' Pisa. In Lacanian terms, the visit is a *symptom* of happiness, not an experience. Happiness, understood as 'touristic fun', is a reified experience: it is an object of consumerism, deprived of all 'human' struggles. Pay and you will be happy. The tour operator is not to blame either, these conditions result from the totalisation of the commodity structure in our society. In Lukács terms: 'Where the commodity is universal it manifests itself differently from the commodity as a particular, isolated, non-dominant phenomenon.'¹¹ This difference between the commodity-structure of a single phenomenon and that of the totality of society is of crucial importance. Consumerism as radicalised reification, as hyper-commodity-structure, is not only a feature of consumer behaviour, but of a paradigm by which we understand the world and our relations to others--and, as we shall see, towards ourselves.

The Dissolution of Work as Work

In a capitalist society, the worker is alienated. This is Marxism's most famous thesis. Lukács distinguishes between the subject-side of alienation and its object-side. Traditionally, 'subject' refers to a human being, whereas 'object' refers to a thing. Work is traditionally understood as an activity of a subject: work is a human activity. Work has an intentional structure, which means that it is thought as an activity with a telos: a goal. The teleological, intentional character of work is omnipresent in the works of the major thinkers of our history, from Aristotle to Marx. In capitalism, says Lukács, the subject-side of work--the qualitative aspect of human work--has become alienated, which means that human qualities are eliminated: 'If we follow the path taken by labour in its development from the handicrafts via cooperation and manufacture to machine industry we can see a

¹⁰ cf. Richard Westerman, "The Reification of Consciousness: Husserl's Phenomenology in Lukács's Identical Subject-Object", *New German Critique* 111, Vol. 37, No. 3, Fall 2010.

¹¹ Lukács, p. 85.

continuous trend towards greater rationalisation, the progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and individual attributes of the worker.¹² The connection between the subject and the produced object has weakened. To the subject, the object has become a commodity: an object of trade. Lukács states that the ‘fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject’.¹³ In a consumer society, this process has radicalised. In such a society, the subject is no longer understood in relation to his or her production. Lukács was advocating a way to make people aware of this alienation (which resulted in his notion ‘class-consciousness’). Today, ages separating us from communist ideology, we *know* that we are alienated--we are perfectly aware we do not milk our own cows anymore--and in order to maintain our humanity we constitute ourselves as subjects that are thought solely in terms of objectivity. This only results in a new level of reification, which we now call consumerism. Work is no longer a productive activity, it has become an object, a *social identity* itself. In other words: we do not work, we consume work.

The fact that work itself has been reified, that work has become a commodity-thing, does not primarily mean that work is alienated in the classical Marxist sense, in which labour is just a mechanical means in the machinery of capitalism. Rather, it means that due to the radicalisation of reification, *work as work* has disappeared. With ‘work as work’ I mean work as production, which is often referred to as ‘labour’. In liquid modernity, we do not work to produce, but to identify ourselves. Work is systematically deprived of its productive role. I admit that the disappearance of work as work is partly the result of the rationalisation (efficiency) of mechanical production. In Lukács’ time, mass consumption was in need of mass production. In a digital era, a lot of work has been taken over by nonhuman production. But this is not what I mean. Where work still exists, it gets done in Third World countries or industrial parks, far from the visible world. Factories are seldom situated in human spaces like cities, they are outside our cities. They are alien to the human world. Saying work as work has dissolved does not mean that it does not exist anymore, but that it has become invisible. We consume; anonymous powers are doing the work.

We consume: production takes place beyond our scope. This is a radicalisation of Marxist alienation and it has resulted in a demand for transparency on the basis of consumer concerns: ‘Show me the origin of your products!’, ‘Prove to me no child labour was involved’. Our consumer society features distrust, and distrust arises when production processes are hidden. If we were living in a society where we could witness production processes every day, we would not ask these questions. We are ‘conscious consumers’--not ‘conscious producers’. Work ethics has been replaced by consumer ethics. This consumer ethics is one of transparency

¹² Lukács, p. 88.

¹³ Lukács, p. 89.

and sustainability, precisely because we only ever face the products, and never the producers any more. So on the one hand we live in a world in which the origin of products remains unknown. But, on the other, we do know about the existence of the invisible ones: the industrial labourers, the cleaners, those who mostly work at night, in the dark, badly paid, in third-world countries. This kind of work exists, but it is no-one's purpose in life to hold a job like that. It is unwanted work, which had better remain invisible, hidden, like an embarrassing secret. But like tourists, conscious consumers demand visibility, transparency, to assuage their nagging sense of guilt about this secret, underpaid work force. Who is to blame for its fate? The multinationals, the system, the marketeers and the managers, all of them perceived as anonymous powers?

In this new situation, in which production has become invisible yet consumers demand visibility, responsibility is being reified as people deny their responsibility and defer it to the commodities. These are now responsible. We want 'responsible products' (certified!), rather than 'responsible behaviour'. We talk of 'responsible food', 'responsible travel', 'responsible banking' and 'responsible chocolate': responsibility has been reified. *Responsibility has become the quality of objects*, precisely because we *consume* responsibility--like we do when we buy insurance policies. Subjects no longer claim to be healthy, responsible, etcetera, but objects do, products do: 'buy me, and prove you are a responsible, conscientious consumer'. This is a mysterious transsubstantiation. It is the objects that tell us: 'Eat and drink me, and you will be saved.' This is what I call the radicalisation of reification. *All values are on the object-side*. They are objectified and as such they are part of the consumer system, like any other product. The affluent society, as described in the late 1950s¹⁴, which was still a society of the so-called affluence of objects, has become a society in which human praxis, work, labour, has become a luxury, even superfluous.

Visibility

The invisible labourers are excluded from our consumer ethics, like the slaves in ancient Athens were excluded from ethics in any shape or form (as Aristotle says). Visible are only those that 'have a job'. The division is not the result of either visibility or invisibility of the produce, but based on social behaviour. Those who 'have' work are among the blessed in the Weberian sense of the word. According to Weber, one of the famous ideas in Protestant Ethics is that the ultimate telos is: to be counted among the chosen. Thinking of work in terms of its external features, 'having a job' is indeed a sign of success and as a sign or token it is valued not in terms of results but of in terms of social status. Today, the meaning of work is not to be found in the products that result from it, nor in the satisfaction it gives as an immediate experience of activity or as the fulfilment of a mission. Work is valued on the basis of its external, visible features: by its

¹⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society*, André Deutsch, 1958.

symptoms. Remember the Tower-of-Pisa tourist that just wanted to have the *symptoms* of fun. Today, human lives are valued in terms of consumer goods and so is work. What is important is not the project of human life, the investment in relations or possibilities, in talents or hopes, but the project of the life of consumer goods. As Jean Baudrillard already famously stated in 1970: 'We live by object time: by this I mean that we live at the pace of objects, live to the rhythm of their ceaseless succession. Today, it is we who watch them as they are born (think of the famous Apple launchings of new products R.W.), grow to maturity and die, whereas in all previous generations it was timeless objects, instruments or monuments which outlived the generations of human beings.'¹⁵

It is the object that is leading in our lives, not the Cartesian subject or the subject of the metaphysics of modernity. In order to understand consumer society, we have to move away from subjectivity (the *ego*, the *pour-soi*, the transcendental subject, the *Dasein* or *Das Ich*) and towards the object. This is the most peculiar feature of the consumer society: that it is a society of objects, not of subjects. Of course subjects still exist, but they are no longer in charge of developments, history, or human values. To put it in Marxist terms: the subjects are enslaved by the objects. In a consumer society experience, formerly the key to any phenomenology of subjectivity, no longer plays a part. The criteria that define experience are the criteria of objects. What matters are the fixed features of objects. Objects are demanding: they entice and seduce us. They are alluring, because they are carrying with them a promise of experience. If I buy a Porsche Carrera, I attain a symptom of happiness: a sign of ultimate happiness. Happiness has become a symptom, rather than *eudaimonia* along with its virtues and human struggles.

All this is about visibility. So today, work as work is invisible, whereas work is *mere visibility*. There are companies and organisations that employ lots of 'workers' but do not produce any real product, most notoriously Enron. Think of investment banks or certain kinds of consultancies. These are organisations that give the impression that work is being done, without there being any possible reference to a 'real product'. The problem such companies create is a *phenomenological* problem rather than an ethical problem--which is what most business ethicists would claim it is. But such companies are not being immoral, they are being amoral.

That work as work has dissolved implies a transformation of subject-work (work as the activity of a subject) to object-work (work as a series of objects that signify a certain status): it implies that work itself has been reified. The consumer society is a world of visible objects to consume: food and tools, cars and furniture, yes, but also advice, facilitation, care, beauty, friendship (now called networking), human contact. Former human categories like joy, happiness, love, beauty, care and responsibility have been reified. This means that we no longer produce them with care, patience and reciprocal human investment, but that we

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society. Myths and Structures*, Sage Publications, 1998, p. 26.

consume them.¹⁶ All of these former values come with a price-tag and a *money-back guarantee*. Not only does this imply that human values are valued on the marketplace: it means that subjectivity itself has become reified.

Supreme Visibility: Leadership

It is a sociological fact that the lifework concept is rapidly fading from our society and that the job for life is a thing of the past. Work is now shallow and volatile. Richard Sennet observes: 'By one estimate, a young person entering the workforce in 2000 will change employers twelve to fifteen times in the course of his or her working life.'¹⁷ This is partly the result of economic circumstances--facts that human beings (fluid as they are) tend to accept as imperatives. Today, the imperative for work is: diversify rather than invest in an Aristotelian virtue (i.e. improve your skills, motivate your vocation, or take responsible for your product); be 'interesting' and, to that end, work on you CV by taking as many different jobs as you can in as many different countries as will have you; never pause; make sure to 'have' experience. Human development today is measured in terms of the bullets on the CV. If you are any 'good', if you *have* success, you will often change jobs, preferably every few years. Young workers that tiptoe onto the shop floor, former MBA-students, will never become part of a firm: that is not what they want. They work to move on to a better job, on a higher level. The contemporary myth of *leadership* illustrates this perfectly. MBA's, companies and business leaders are immersed in a vocabulary of leadership, mostly used by consultants and supported by academic research. Leadership is reduced to know-how, deprived of experience. Today, MBA-students and young employees are told to be leaders, not labourers, because labourers are followers. Leadership is an extreme form of modern individuality. It is motored by the myth that 'everyone can become a leader' and that only leadership will fulfil your talents and capacities. Leadership is understood as taking full responsibility towards your true self. The model of the leader of today is not the boss, the one who is in charge of the production process, but the authentic self that has reached a higher degree yet. The leadership myth tells you that you are, first of all, a leader of your own life. Leadership is the imperative of the maximisation of self-development, detached from any form of social usefulness, productivity or praxis, precisely because it is part of a discourse about the self.

However, traditionally the leader is the one person that is *not* working, or at least, not thinking about himself in terms of labour. The leadership myth today uses terms like 'inspiration', 'charisma', 'spirituality', 'authenticity' or 'efficiency', 'supporting others', 'to get things done' (mainly by others). The imperative is: be authentic, be yourself--which is: a leader. Leadership is the new paradigm of

¹⁶ As Bauman writes: "Bonds and relationships tend to be viewed and treated as things meant to be consumed, not produced; they are subject to the same criteria of evaluation as all other objects of consumption." p. 164.

¹⁷ Richard Sennett, *Together. The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, Allan Lane, p. 7.

spirituality, without any link to the actual business world. We are trained to be leaders in a world that is not governed by leaders any more. Leadership is imploded self-realisation. Once craftsmanship was social self-realisation, but this type of leadership has no social function, other than being *conspicuous*: 'Look, I'm a leader. I have realised myself.' Where work as work has become invisible, leadership has become *nothing but* visibility.

We have seen that to Lukács, reification is thought as a total structure in which the commoditisation has corroded human relationships. Today, it is the relationship towards our *self* that has been commoditised, reificated.¹⁸ Leadership is marketable authenticity. Lacking authenticity, we use 'work' to become authentic. The subject (the worker) has become an object (a leader as a sign of success). The obsession with authenticity only confirms the lack of it, like transparency unveils the mistrust of our society. No labourer, craftsman or professional in the early twentieth century was reflecting on himself in terms of 'authenticity'. Marx said about labourers: 'They don't know it, but they are doing it'. Theirs was unelected authenticity. In our times, authenticity is a product, like soap, or a trip to Pisa.

Work as Leisure

Premodern labourers in a primitive society that stopped working, hunting and fighting simply would not survive. If we stop working, at worst we'll die because we no longer make money and therefore cannot afford to buy the bare necessities of life anymore. The first, primitive version of work is what I call 'work as work', while the second, money-making version of work is in fact a *negation* of work. It is leisure. Unemployment is the involuntary negation of work, whereas leisure is the voluntary negation of work. We expect to find the meaning of life in our leisure time because then we have 'time for ourselves'. To Marx, for instance, free time is 'one's own time', 'time for free development'.¹⁹ In a capitalist society, according to Marx, only free time gives us the opportunity to engage in 'free activity'. We might find the meaning of life in work, because working, we 'have something to do'. Ultimately, in a consumer society work and leisure are in the same category: they are commodities we consume. Work has now become play. We work, not because 'the work has to be done', but because we need the money—thought mere money is not enough—and because 'we want to do something meaningful' with our lives—a phrase that unveils the fact that the meaning of work is already superficial. From that angle, 'working' means 'busying oneself', which is an activity that may collapse into boredom and dissolution any

¹⁸ It was Roland Barthes who described how Einstein was not that much an example for our life practice, but an icon, a thing, marked by solidity, "The Brain of Einstein", in: *Mythologies*, Paladin, 1973.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: "Free time, which is both idle time and time for higher activity, has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject" (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857-gru/index.htm> p. 382)

time. In short: *We do not work, we consume work. Work is valued in the same terms as leisure.* That work as work disappears first and foremost means that work is governed by the demands of leisure: it is imperative to spend as little time as possible on work. Get your diploma with a minimum of effort, if possible by doing nothing at all: the creed of leisure. In a consumer society, work and leisure are not dialectally opposed (as is the case in a production-society, a society of labourers), but share the very same criteria. The same imperatives count for both:

- work, like leisure, provides opportunities for ‘self-realisation’. We are out to do something ‘meaningful’, plus we want ‘individual growth’ and then we want to have a look around the planet while we are doing those things as well, because: ‘we have but one life’. Actually, this sounds like tourists talking. And that is precisely what the consumer-ethic involves: work, like travel, is about discovering the planet and its possibilities, in a touristic way;
- work (like leisure) has to be fun;
- working (like leisure) is socialising (the unemployed are the lonely ones, the losers). If you ‘have’ work, you ‘have’ colleagues. Networking is one of the most important imperatives of work today, like holiday fun, shared with holiday friends;
- those who work, are able to ‘realise’ themselves--this they used to do in their ‘own’ time. Also, work is understood as distraction. A distraction from what? From daily chores like finding and preparing food, which were once work. Today, work is no longer associated with bodily effort, sweat, pain or exploitation, but with self-realisation. This, in Marx, is precisely the category reserved for those who are in charge of the means of production: for the capitalists. This is the ‘conspicuous leisure’ famously described by Thorsten Veblen.²⁰

In short, nowadays work is estimated in terms of ‘happy work’. ‘Happy work’ is modelled after the characteristics of leisure. A ‘happy worker’ is a satisfied consumer. He has what he wants and is, himself, a symptom of happiness.

Life-Project

The Weberian promise of work as that which gives meaning to life, as vocation, has not been redeemed. We experience this loss, suffer, and try to regain meaning by being radically subjective, like in the example about leadership. But the result is a subjectivity that is not thought as a life-project, but as a commodity to consume: to show off with, as proof of success. It is about being someone, being something, being visible. In our liquid society, work is not a solid factor that accompanies our life. As Bauman says: ‘Work can no longer offer the secure axis

²⁰ Thorstein Veblen (original edition 1899). *The theory of the leisure class : an economic study of institutions*. New York : Macmillan Company.

around which to wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and life-projects. Neither can it be easily conceived of as the ethical foundation of society, or as the ethical axis of individual life. Instead, work has acquired - alongside other life activities - as mainly aesthetic significance. It is expected to be gratifying by and in itself, rather than be measured by genuine or purative effects. Hardly ever is work expected to “ennoble” its performers, to make them “better human beings”, and rarely is it admired and praised for that reason. It is instead measured and evaluated by its capacity to be entertaining and amusing, satisfying not so much the ethical, Promethean vocation of the producer and creator as the aesthetical needs and desires of the consumer, the seeker of sensations and collector of experiences.²¹ This is the ‘aesthetic significance’ that I described as ‘visibility’. Such a situation can only arise where work is not valued as an activity, but as a commodity. And as we already know, a commodity is something we strive for in order to consume it.

We have shifted from a lifelong project, a Heideggerian ‘Entwurf’ or Sartrean ‘project’, discernible in the idea of work as the fulfilment of life or a ‘job for life’, to short-term consumption. To those in liquid modernity, work is no longer a life investment as in ‘lifelong career’, but a means to obtain the goods that will fulfil our expectations of happiness. This expectation is no longer understood as an incentive for a life-enduring programme, but as an incentive for consumption. And the creed of consumption is ‘I want it, and I want it *now*’: without any time investment, without the patience of the craftsman, without the skill that takes a lifetime to develop. Instead of travellers that grow and flourish underway, consumers are tourists that travel to consume, determined to see as many sites as possible as quickly as they can. As is the case with regard to refreshments, the sense of happy expectation lasts about as long as the devouring of the refreshment does.²² ‘Ideally,’ says Bauman, ‘the consumer’s satisfaction ought to be instant and this in a double sense. Consumed goods should bring satisfaction immediately, requiring no delay, no protracted learning skills and no lengthy groundwork; but the satisfaction should end the moment the time needed for their consumption is up.’²³ Consumption, in other words, knows no virtue. It is not patient, makes no plans, is radical immanence, in such a way that desire and fulfilment are felt at the very same moment. It is like eating a hamburger, not until one is satisfied, but until one is saturated. Perhaps that is the status of work today: something that is no longer structured by provision (‘Can I help you?’), by being meaningful to others, by desires, by strivings or by investments in time. No sign of any Aristotelian *telos*, sustained by virtues. We seem to have reached the ultimate purpose of efficiency, because work does not take/cost time anymore. Work as work, as activity, has dissolved. What is left are the remains of work: tokens, signals, symptoms, outer signs of work. We live by ‘proofs of attendance’, even without ever being present.

²¹ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 139.

²² Bauman, p. 118.

²³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor.*, Open University Press, 2005, p. 25.

Bad Faith

In a consumer society, (human) subjectivity is no longer understood as an activity, as intentionality, but as representation of the being-in-itself. We are imprisoned in roles, not only at work, but also in the imperative roles of leisure: thou shalt have fun, thou shalt go and realise thyself. What has changed so radically is the phenomenological structure of humanity itself. Consumerism is not a challenge to alternative ways of living without consumption, but rather a direct threat, because all alternatives to consumerism are likely to become newly reified commodities in the blink of an eye.²⁴ Consumerism is a trait of conscience, is first and foremost a way of being-in-the-world. This is why I argued earlier that consumerism is a phenomenological issue, not an ethical one—or at least, such would be the most radical outcome of a thesis that claims that human subjectivity has been transferred to mere objectivity.

Phenomenologically speaking, this analysis stands in a tradition that Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about in *Being and Nothingness*. For if one understands oneself in terms of objects, instead of in subjective terms, one acts in bad faith.²⁵ Sartre shows how self-reflection always tends to make us think that the self is an object. Remember Sartre's famous waiter, who first has to create an identity, an object, namely a 'waiter', in order to become one, and ignores that human consciousness can actually never become an object.²⁶ To Sartre, this is the fundamental to the lie: that we lie to ourselves instead of to others. The waiter, in Sartre's example, behaves like a waiter, which is only possible on the condition that a representation of work (the work of being a waiter) is already given. This might be understood as the project of becoming a waiter, to strive to be a waiter 'as best one can', without ever ontologically 'being' or 'becoming' one. This is in fact close to Aristotle's virtue, which does not refer to a personal trait but to a representation, a model if you will, of praiseworthy behaviour. From a phenomenological point of view, the role of that model is important. According to Sartre, when we act in bad faith we

²⁴ This is why consumerism must be understood, using terms of Lukács, as totalization. As Baudrillard describes, every attempt to break out of consumerism, recedes into 'metaconsumption'. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society. Myths and Structures*, Sage Publications, 1998, p. 90.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Washington Square Press, New York, 1984, p. 86.

²⁶ "Let us consider this waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually reestablishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe. There is nothing there to surprise us. The game is a kind of marking out and investigation." Sartre, p. 101.

regard ourselves as objects: we 'are' and we have 'identities'. This reminds us of Lukács' point of view about a society in which we understand ourselves in terms of objectivity. Though they were archenemies in life, these philosophers' arguments against capitalism are quite similar. However, the waiter model is still connected to the Aristotelian excellence²⁷ that is inherent to the professionalism of the waiter but in a consumer society, models have become mere presences, mythical tokens. It is not the work ethic that counts, but rather the work aesthetic: work should not be 'useful' or 'meaningful', but 'fun', 'entertaining' or it should 'suit me', like a coat or a pair of trousers would. The structure is that of Sartre's bad faith.

What I have sought to explore is the way we understand what work means to our life, focusing on its loss of meaning. I do not, however, propose to go back in time: I want to move forward. Today, we face the challenge of regaining our subjectivity. If we do not succeed, we shall remain reified, like the bodies in Pompeii that the tourists visit day in day out.

²⁷ T. Storm Heter, *Sartre's ethics of engagement: authenticity and civic virtue*, London [etc.]: Continuum, 2006.

TECHNOLOGY, VOCATION AND THE MEANING OF WORK TODAY

JOSÉ RUIZ FERNÁNDEZ*

ABSTRACT. ‘Work’ is an expression applied in a wide range of situations. Within that semantic looseness, there is a particular sense in which we qualify some actions as work. We may say, for instance, that someone that is handling documents in an office is working, although we would say that the same person is not working when taking care of his children at home. In these contexts “work” is not linked to specific events, purposes or motives of our actions. We take a practice as work because what we do occurs within a certain meaningful context. Work, as we experience and understand it today, is linked to the whole life-world that we inhabit.

My intention in this paper is to show a parallel between what might be called the technological keenness of our time, and a certain semantic content of the expression ‘work’ that I will briefly try to analyse. In order to illustrate that parallelism, I will shortly reflect on how we tend to assume a relation between work and personal vocation.

Keywords: technology, work, life-world, Ortega y Gasset, Heidegger.

Introduction

‘Work’ is an expression applied in a wide range of situations. The span of what that word covers is so wide that it makes no sense to start questioning what is it that work originally is or refers to. Within that semantic looseness falls a particular way of speaking in which we qualify an action as work. We may say, for instance, that someone that is processing documents in an office is working, although we would not say that that same person is working when taking care of his children at home. I may say that I was working while doing this presentation in a congress and discussing it with you, but I may not use that same expression to qualify my discussing the same matter with a friend while going for a walk. What is it that we deal with when we qualify an action as work in these contexts? What do we have to do in order to be working? Certainly, we cannot set to work in the sense that we can lift our right arm or close our eyes¹. Nor we can identify work with a definite intermingling of finality, causation, intentionality and constitutive

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¹ Work, we could say, does not qualify as a basic action in Danto’s sense Cf. Danto, Arthur C., “Basic actions”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2-(2), 1965, pp. 141-148.

rules in long action-chains. Working is not linked to definite intentions, motives or purposes. Nor is a certain property contained in certain events or happenings. In the contexts that we have referred to before we take an action as work because our practices are taking place within a certain meaningful context. When we qualify an action as work, a feature of the life-world in which the praxis occurs, a feature of the world dimension that we inhabit, comes into play.

Although the point I am trying to make might be already clear, I would like to clarify it a little further by drawing a parallel. Let us consider how we qualify certain actions as artistic practices. What is it that makes for artistic practice? What is it that leads us to say that a certain painting of a canvas was artistic, but that making a shoe was not? Not the events that happened, to be sure. The same visible happenings that are taken as art could also be taken as a mere technical exercise where a copy was produced. When we qualify a practice as artistic we do not distinguish a definite property in an event, nor pretend that there was a definite purpose involved in that practice. We hold certain practices are artistic because they count as such in our worldly meaningfulness. The expression ‘world’ is to be understood here within the semantic orientation that Heidegger gave to it in *Being and Time*, without committing to all the theoretical contexts involved there. Using a Husserlian expression we could also say that our experience and understanding of art is rooted within our specific ‘life-world’. This dependence on a world dimension makes art historical. This is so, I believe, in a threefold sense:

1. The etymological variants of our word “art” have had different meanings in different periods of time (‘ars’ in the Middle Ages and ‘techné’ in ancient Greece, for instance, meant something different to our word “art”, i.e., a technique involving skills that can be taught and learnt²). The uses of the expression, which itself has suffered a diachronic change, have been different from an historical point of view. This is a conceptual level.

2. The extension of those conceptual variants has been different, that is, they have applied to different activities and products (for the ancient Greeks poetry, in its highest sense, was not a techné, though painting, sculpture, geometry and shoe making was³). This is a level of historical change that affects reference: an extensional level.

3. The most important feature, however, is that art, as we now understand and experience it, has simply not occurred in other large periods of time. Although we may say that the Palaeolithic paintings in the Altamira caves or the Parthenon in Athens are magnificent works of art, they were surely not the result of artistic practice in the sense we talk of art today, that is, more or less, a creative activity of an individual that builds up an original aesthetic dimension. This is certainly not a matter of being better or worse. It is a matter of experiences being rooted in

² Cf. Tatarkiewicz, W., *Historia de Seis Ideas*, Tecnos, 2011, pp.39-78.

³ Cf. Tatarkiewicz, W., *Historia de Seis Ideas*, Tecnos, 2011, pp.79-102.

different situations. As much as our experience of art is foreign to the ancient Greeks, their experience of poetry is simply not accessible to us because it was rooted in a situation that is not ours. Thus, when *we* qualify a practice as artistic, *we* are linguistically articulating the world dimension that we inhabit. Our specific artistic experience is linked to our world dimension. From an historical perspective, this represents a change in the experiential level.

What counts for us as work is historical in the same threefold manner that I have expounded in relation to art: conceptually, extensionally and, above all, experientially. What I am most interested here is this last aspect, that is, the fact that in some contexts of use the word “work” conveys today an experience that is rooted in our specific life-world and, therefore, something that might not have occurred in contexts different to our own.

What am I going to deal with in this paper? My paper is divided into three parts. First, I will introduce what I mean by technological keenness as a feature of a possible life-world. Second, I will make a brief semantic analysis of some uses of the expression ‘work’ today. Third, I will try to advocate a connection between the technological keenness that I will introduce and our current understanding of work by making some reflections on our understanding of vocation in connection to work. To draw and defend this connection is the main purpose of this work.

1. Technological keenness as a feature concerning a life-world.

In order to clarify what I mean by *technological keenness* I will use a contrast. I will first introduce what I mean by *technological action* and *technological activity*. I will do this using some ideas that the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset developed in a series of conferences given in 1933 with the title “Meditation on technique”⁴. In contrast with technological action and technological activity I will then introduce what I am going to understand here as technological keenness freely making use of some ideas contained in Heidegger’s lecture “The Question Concerning Technology”⁵, which was given around 20 years later than Ortega’s.

Ortega defines technique in the following terms: *the inventive reform that man imposes on nature with the purpose of satisfying his necessities*⁶. His understanding of some of the terms in this definition is rather wide: ‘inventive reform’ covers even accidental findings of new possibilities (like the primitive acquisition of the means to make fire). The ‘necessities’ to be satisfied by technique are not assumed as elemental natural necessities, but anything that man aims at or desires. ‘Inventive reform’ and ‘imposition on nature’ are essential traits of what Ortega understands as technique: technique is not immediate action taking

⁴ Cf. Ortega y Gasset, J., *Meditación de la Técnica*, in *Obras Completas V*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1994

⁵ Cf. Heidegger, M., *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Garland Publishing Inc. New York and London, 1977.

⁶ Cf. Ortega y Gasset, J., *op.cit.*, p. 324.

place to satisfy a desire (entering into a cave to get protection from the cold or taking an apple from a tree, for instance), but an action that brings about a possibility which was not immediately given and that contributes to meeting a need (building a shed, for instance). Ortega's conception of technique applies thus to very different human findings. It can be related to the casual findings of the primitive, to the innovation of the craftsman or the inventions projected by a modern engineer.

To technique, understood in this sense, that is, to heuristic technical invention, I will refer here from now on as *technological action*. To the instrumental use of the fruits of technological action, that is, to the application of technique within a framework of means and ends, I will refer from now on as *technological activity*.

I will now focus on another trait that Ortega attributed to technological action. Technological action is intentionally oriented toward difficulties that arise while pursuing man's desires; pursuing, thus, what man wants or needs when dealing with himself in his own life-world. That vital horizon of desires and aims is for Ortega pre-technical⁷, that is, it is a condition and not a result of technological action. Certainly, technological action and technological activity open up possibilities that condition what necessities may arise in our life, but technological action remains intentionally oriented toward a vital horizon that is not technically produced. "Technique, says Ortega, is not the first thing... it does not define the program, the goal"⁸. There are primary aims, pre-given in our life-world, that motivate technological action and that technological action is meant to serve.

Within the background set by the concepts of technological action and technological activity and in contrast with these concepts I will try to clarify now in what sense I will speak here of technological keenness, not as a modality of action, but as a feature of a life-world. As I said, in order to do this I will freely use some motives from Heidegger's paper "The Question Concerning Technology".

In that paper Heidegger is not so much concerned with technology, understood as inventive action or instrumental activity, but with a mode of revealing that supposedly holds sway throughout modern technological activity and discloses the real in its own accessibility or, we may also say, discloses what is real in a particular world dimension. I will leave aside all the formal semantic horizon of Heidegger's thinking and questioning, which I find problematic, and will limit myself to pointing out two characteristics of the world dimension that Heidegger thinks technology discloses in order to introduce two concepts that are of interest to me.

The first concept is this: within a life-world, what is given might appear from the beginning as something at our command, as something open to potential regulating and securing. "Standing-reserve" [Bestand] is the name that Heidegger gives to the feature of inner-worldly things appearing at hand, standing there just

⁷ Cf. Ortega y Gasset, J., op.cit., p. 342-345.

⁸ Ortega y Gasset, J., op.cit., p. 343.

so that they may be on call for further ordering⁹. Within such a life-world a river, for instance, would immediately come into sight in light of the possibilities offered to projects that involve technological activities: as a possible supply of energy, as a possible tourist resort, but also, and no less, as a space to be preserved because of its aesthetic qualities or biological diversity. What we encounter might have different traits but appears in any case as something at our command.

Regardless of whether we agree that standing-reserve is a trait dominating our own life-world, we have to understand that the concept points to a typical trait of a possible life-world, that is, to a feature of a world dimension which man eventually might dwell.

The second concept I want to introduce is closely connected to the aforementioned. It refers in any case to a different level of sense.

In the world we inhabit not only everything might appear as being at our command. There might also be a challenge for us to organize the real for the sake of technological activity, that is, in the context of instrumental planning. In other words, the world in which we are rooted might be such as to there being a standing desire or motivation that orientates us towards instrumental arrangements. It would be thus a world dimension in which our actions could be motivated and justified by the sheer keenness for organized planning. There is no need to think of this keenness as something explicitly conceived or represented. It may prevail as a quiet but pervasive motivation doing its work in the background. The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber, and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather, says Heidegger, is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not¹⁰. He is made subordinate to the demand for cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper within planned activities that are already at work. In other words, the life-world of that forester is such that, without necessarily reflecting on the matter, it is for the sake of the already planned and ordered that he is driven to do what he is doing. Even if the forester does not know what ends are served by that paper he contributes to produce, he is driven in doing what he does for the sake of fitting into the planned order of things that he encounters. He might even feel justified in doing what he is doing because of his conforming to that order.

What Heidegger means by the word “Enframing” (Gestell), that is, a “challenging that gathers man into ordering”¹¹, has some similarity to the motivation or keenness that I am most interested in highlighting. Let us now see that there is an essential connection between this technological keenness and the prevalent appearance of worldly things as something at our command, that is, as standing-reserve. Technological keenness pushes man towards instrumental ordering so that

⁹ Cf. Heidegger, M., *op.cit.*, p.17.

¹⁰ Cf. Heidegger, M., *op.cit.*, p.18.

¹¹ Heidegger, M., *op.cit.*, p.19.

what we might encounter is set from the beginning in view of possible instrumental planning, that is, as something that is on call for further ordering, as standing-reserve. Heidegger expresses this essential correspondence saying that Enframing (Gestell) is “the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve”¹². Assuming this logical or essential correspondence, I will use from now on the expression ‘technological keenness’ to refer jointly to that trait of a life-world in which within a motivation for planning things tend to appear in view of possible ordering. I do not want to conceive of this trait as an absolute, though, but as a tendency that may prevail in different degrees. Furthermore, I do not yet wish to assume that technological keenness is a feature of our historical situation. I am merely introducing a concept that could find application in a particular life-world.

Let us go back for a moment to our concepts of technological action and technological activity. Ortega thought of technological action as intentionally referring to those difficulties that arise in view of what man desires. Technological action and technological activity are essential to man, but they do not define the basic human program, goal, or motivations. Ortega conceived of these goals, motivations and desires as previous conditions ingrained in our life-world. They motivated and gave a sense to technological action and technological activity. Now, the concept of technological keenness that I have introduced is the concept of a life-world such that technological action could be motivated in view of no other thing than an ever-lasting and ever-renovated instrumental planning. It implies thus the idea, not of a more frequent, subtler or pervasive technological activity, but of technological action and activity being renovated and maintained for their own sake. The idea, thus, of a life-world where invention and planning is so motivated that can be perpetuated in an enclosed instrumental logic that does not transcend itself. I insist, however: technological keenness is not to be taken as an absolute, but as a trait that might prevail in different degrees, in different moments, in the world that we inhabit. I do not wish to over-simplify things assuming here something like an “epochal” all-subsuming feature.

2. About the meaning of work today.

I turn now to the question about the meaning of the expression ‘work’ today as used in certain contexts. Let me make it clear that I do not intend to deliver an exhaustive analysis, nor do I think I would be able to provide one. I just want to point at something that seems connected with a particular use of the word. But before that, I would like to point to other different uses that will allow me to draw a connection between a certain understanding of work and technological action.

We say that it takes a lot of work to walk up the hill or to beat a friend playing chess. ‘Work’ is used here meaning there is some effort to be made in order to achieve something. Now, that which we want to achieve might be

¹² Heidegger, M., op.cit., p.23.

something that we want to achieve for its own sake: we are taking a walk up the hill because we enjoy it and we do not want to avoid the effort, we are playing chess because we like playing and we do not want to avoid thinking. In other cases, that which takes work to achieve involves something that we would rather have removed. It takes a lot of work to stay fit; I want to, but I'd rather not have to go jogging everyday. It takes a lot of work to walk to a supermarket far away; I want to get some food, but I'd rather not walk the distance. We understand well how technological action applies to contexts where we wish for something that requires work that we'd rather have removed. We try to invent pills and instruments that supposedly are going to help us stay fit without making much physical effort (whether they work is another matter), and we certainly have invented tools that help us arrive quickly and easily to a supermarket. Work, specified now as effort to be made that we'd rather have removed is essentially connected to Ortega's concept of technological action, that is, to invention developed to solve the difficulties that arise to fulfill a pre-technological desire. It is this sense of work that is implied in the Latin distinction between *otium* (the time that we devote to doing just what we do for its own sake) and *negotium* (that is, nec-otium, negation of otium). This second sense of work, work as negotium, is also alive in modern languages. Work, we could say, is not what the peasant does when he is preparing a celebration, even if that takes an effort doing, but his taking care everyday of his land, that is, that what he does, employing an effort he'd rather have removed, in order to achieve something that he needs or desires. This sense of work, I insist, connects immediately with technological action.

Let us now turn to the use of the expression 'work' that I am most interested in considering. We may say that a truck driver shipping a load is working, although we would not say so of that same person when driving his children to school. I would say that I was working while participating in this congress, but my discussing the very same issues with an old friend while having dinner would not qualify as such. What is it that we are determining here when we talk about work? It is not that driving children to school is something that people always desire to do for its own sake. It is not that participating in a congress could not be wished for its own sake. Work, in the context of use that we are considering, does not oppose to *otium*, in the sense of something that we do for its own sake. Nor it is a property inherent to what occurs in what we are doing. The very same activity could count or not count as work depending on "the context". What is it, then, this context, what is it that a practice needs in order to count as work? Maybe no other thing than falling under a certain regulated order that is already set up. There is a set of typical activities that enter as possibilities for work, and work is also the organized frame of those possibilities. Work, taken in the use we are considering, might have very different semantic connotations, but it seems to essentially involve a certain enclosed field of social planning. And indeed, the work that we are talking about is planned in time and form. That work is immediately connected with how education is planned and how immigration is planned.

Furthermore, social order itself is secured by work, that is, the work that policemen, soldiers, lawyers, judges, functionaries, politicians or teachers deploy. Work is a planned field and our activities are qualified as work inasmuch as they fall inside it. There could be raised an objection here. Would it not be better to say that work is connected with the fulfilment of social needs, and in particular of our economical needs, so that planning is only a by-product of this primary determination? I do not think this would be accurate. Work, in the sense that we are using the expression now, is not linked with extrinsic goals and needs in the sense that work as *negotium* was. I may think that taking care of children meets a social need, but it is still not work. I may think that there are some works that do not contribute to anything useful or good, and there are certainly many people working that do not know what positive goal they are contributing to. All that does not prevent us from stating with security that they are working. It cannot be said that work is essentially linked with our economical necessities, either, for although many people work primarily to gain a salary that allows them to cover necessities, there are people that work without the apparent need to cover such necessities. Besides, people might cover economical necessities without doing work in the sense that we are talking now. In the order that is typical of capitalist societies, regulated salary, benefits and movements of capital are not the aims of work, but elements belonging to the planned order where work takes place¹³.

Assuming that the inclusion within a certain planned order is essential to our discriminating between actions belonging or not belonging to work, in the sense introduced before, I now raise the following point. If it were true that nowadays spontaneous recognition and justification were attached to work, to work understood in that instrumental sense, and not in view of what work might help to attain, it would then be true that work would be occurring now within a life-world determined by technological keenness.

I think there are different signs that suggest that this is indeed the case, at least to some degree. It seems to me that we tend to accept, as something natural, that codes of conduct applied to work, that is, that procedures and rules organizing work practice, could be called ethical just because they are into force. This strange lexical fact is, in itself, quite symptomatic. It reveals a certain invisibility of any ethical dimension that work would be submitted to from the beginning. It also seems to me that there is social recognition linked, not just to the possible accomplishments attained through work, but to the sheer fact of being working. Whether we think that all types of work help attain something useful, relevant or good, we tend to think that man should work, that is, that it is a good thing to participate in those planned activities that constitute work. There are surely other signs that could be mentioned. Now, I will limit myself to considering very briefly

¹³ Let me point out that, within a modern communist society, a planned order could determine the sense attached to work no less than in a capitalist one. The difference here would concern, not the degree of planning, but the particular form that the planning takes.

how our own understanding of personal vocation may also constitute some evidence that technological keenness conditions our understanding of work today.

3. Vocation and work.

The expression ‘vocation’, in its current use, unifies two traits that are in a certain tension. First, we have the idea of a practical orientation that is imposed on us, that we encounter without us taking the initiative: in vocation we are called (in latin “vocare”) to follow a path that was not previously projected at will. Second, we have the idea of self-fulfillment: we try to find our vocation as that which, in a certain sense, most deeply belongs to us and we can call our own. Vocation is linked here to being true to oneself, to authenticity and, thus, to individuality. This second trait of our understanding of vocation, which Charles Taylor has recently considered¹⁴, makes it a notion dependent on the typical world dimension that we designate as modernity. The ancient Greeks or medieval peasants never were concerned about vocation in the way we might be. In any case, it is not this connection that is of interest to me now, but the connection between our understanding of vocation and work in the sense introduced before.

It seems to me that there is a tendency to implicitly assume that work is the adequate way in which vocation has to be fulfilled. Someone might enjoy reading novels, spending time walking in nature or going out to bars, but even if he deeply enjoys all that, he would hardly assume that he found his vocation there. Someone might deeply enjoy discussing philosophy among friends, taking care of his garden, or educating his children... but he might still not take it as his vocation. If he were doing that very same thing within the regulated order of a job, as a philosopher, as a gardener or as an educator, he might easily come to think that he has found his vocation there. He might be more ready to visualize himself as someone destined to doing that which he loves so much. I do not claim that this tendency is an absolute, but I think it is real to the point that some people make it a problem of not having found their place in life because they did not fulfill a vocation in work.

Charles Taylor, in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, points out that the choices we make in our world are to a large degree dictated by a technology-based society and the bureaucratic system we live in¹⁵. If the point I wanted to make is not misguided, the decisive issue might not be that technological activities limit our choices, but that we already inhabit a life-world where our choices, our self-understanding and our self-fulfillment is shaped within a motivation towards planning, that is, within the background of a quiet technological keenness. This background seems to encompass also our experience and understanding of work today¹⁶.

¹⁴ Cf. Taylor, Ch., *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

¹⁵ Cf. Taylor, Ch., *op.cit.*, pp 8-9.

¹⁶ Anastasiya Shpakovska checked and corrected a first draft of the paper that I had written in English. I would like to thank her for her competent work and generous availability.

WHY DO WE (NOT) WORK? FROM SURPLUS VALUE TO SURPLUS ENJOYMENT... AND BACK¹

DAN RADU*

ABSTRACT. The present paper examines the meaning of work within the logic of capitalism. We argue that the propeller of the capitalist mode of production is something what Marx calls “surplus value”. And we assume that in the idea of surplus value resides an explanation to how work, the way we work and the meaning of work do not respond only to economical requirements but they also involve psychological factors, the way our “libidinal economy” is constituted. To prove this idea, we are going to draw on the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan homology between surplus value and what he calls “*plus de jouir*”, that is, surplus enjoyment or surplus *jouissance*. We intend to point out that it’s the constitutive and – as we shall see - paradoxical nature of this surplus that on one hand drives us to work and on the other hand it creates the very conditions of Capital expansion, the prerequisite for the existence of work itself in a capitalist society. Moreover, we shall try to show in the end that the capitalism activates - exactly like the libidinal economy (and this is the sense of Lacan’s *homology* between surplus value and surplus enjoyment) - the same *jouissance* characterized by an aimless, infinite and self-referential circuit of production for the sake of accumulation and expansion (i.e., for its own sake). Therefore, if we are to rediscover a meaning of work which doesn’t follow the command of this pernicious surplus enjoyment, we might want to conceive work and social practices containing a dimension beyond capitalism.

Keywords: *Marx, Lacan, surplus value, surplus enjoyment, work, capital, capitalism*

When we ask ourselves today about the meaning of work, we often focus only on the purpose of work and neglect the other side of the coin (equally important), what makes the work possible for us (people living under given

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circumstances), the framework within which the activity we call “work” can exist for us and be valued as such. And we neglect it to such an extent that the notion of work itself is regarded as self-explanatory, something so much taken for granted that we are not supposed to reflect on it anymore. Of course, there are multiple levels of meaning which people attach to work today: work doesn’t mean the same thing for those who have a job as for those who have not (we’ve all been there at one moment in our lives), for the employer as for the employee or the self-employed, for a Romanian as for a Frenchman, an American or a Japanese, for those who are skilled as for those who are not and so forth. But what does it mean then, to work? Why do we work, to what purpose and under which circumstances and conditions? How is our work valued? Does this value come from a meaning socially accepted and generally valid or is it measured by each one of us in accordance with our own understanding of work, the nature of the work we perform, the satisfaction or the discontent we get from it? Is work an activity related exclusively to economics and political economy or does it involve supplementary cultural and psychological factors?

Certainly, to pursue the answers to all these questions would take us a long time and would probably mean to construct a general theory of work. Our purpose is however to confine the topic, i.e., the meaning of work, to some aspects which, because of their supposed familiarity, seem to be passed over by numerous economic analysis of nowadays. Therefore we propose viewing the concept of work in a broader picture, that of the world we live in and of its functioning model. And by saying “world”, we mean our proper world, with its specific characteristics and requirements, those of liberal democracy along with its predominant form, capitalist democracy, which constitutes in a way our standard of “normality”, regardless of any particular form of subversive action exerted within the “system”. It is quite clear that today’s labor practices in particular and social practices in general are defined in terms of Capital. Sure thing, the notion of capital itself is not to be self understood: it has been continually forged over the last five centuries and it has gone a long way since its emergence following the demise of feudalism. In time, we’ve known different forms of capitalism: from industrial to postindustrial capitalism and from mercantilism and free market capitalism to social market and mixed economy, ending with nowadays financial capitalism whose instruments and logic of “financialisation” have brought the world to the current predicament (a thing that has determined some people to proclaim or foretell “the end of capitalism”). There also have been a number of proposals and attempts to replace capitalism with a new economic system, among which the names of “socialism” and its “superior”, “mature” form, i.e., “communism”, have made history. There are an equal number of theoretical perspectives on capitalism, ranging from the classical school of economic thought to its opponent, i.e., the Marxist political economy, and from Keynesian economics to neoclassical economic theory. But all these forms of capitalism share a common trait: the production of what Marx called

“surplus value”, a notion whose enigmatic essence and ramifications might offer us an horizon of understanding a possible meaning of work within the logic of capitalism. It is our belief that in the idea of surplus value resides an explanation to how work, the way we work and the meaning of work do not respond only to economical requirements but they also involve psychological factors, the way our “psychic economy” (so to speak) is constituted. To prove this idea, we are going to draw on the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan homology between surplus value and what he calls “plus de jouir”, that is surplus enjoyment or surplus *jouissance*, insofar as the French term “jouissance” is often left untranslated in English to better express its sexual connotation and the fact that the psychoanalytic sense of enjoyment it is not simply a matter of pleasure or delight but it rather goes “beyond the pleasure principle” into a kind of troubling, excessive pleasure obtained by means of impossibility, phantasmatic transgression and repetition and incorporating elements of suffering and pain. Of course, we shall try to explain how this psychoanalytic concept is related to labor without abusing the jargon of psychoanalysis, accessible only to those familiarized with it. What we intend to point out would be that it’s this constitutive and – as we shall see - paradoxical nature of surplus that, on one hand, drives us to work and, on the other hand, it creates the very conditions of Capital expansion, the prerequisite for the existence of work itself in a capitalist society. We don’t imply that these are the only possible conditions of the existence of work, we just want to emphasize, once more, that it is the accumulation of Capital and, at large, the desire to get rich (what “rich” means here remains also to be up for debate) which constitute the *abstract rule* of capitalism and, at the same time, the general frame of work as expansion of productivity within the capitalist system. And we ask ourselves if there is something behind this desire to accumulate and get rich, something that triggers this desire and confers its meaning. We hold that this mysterious core of desire (or as someone else said once: this obscure object-cause of desire) is something marked with the seal of what Marx called “surplus value” and Lacan “surplus enjoyment”. This is why we start from the assumption that casting a little bit of light upon these two notions and most of all upon its structural and functional homology will open up an horizon of understanding of some possible meanings of work in the given context mentioned above.

So what is then the “surplus value”? We shall approach this key notion by taken up Marx’s considerations in its masterwork, i.e., *Capital*², and especially those from the third, fourth and fifth part of the book, dedicated to the production of absolute and relative surplus value. Marx himself considered his critique of surplus-value his most important contribution to the progress of economic analysis (Marx, letter to Engels of 24 August 1867), inasmuch as surplus value is the motive which sets in motion the logic of capitalism.

² Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, English translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965. For our paper, we used the online edition found at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>.

To introduce the notion of surplus value, Marx starts by examining the historical, social and economical conditions that led to the appearance of the capitalist mode of production. The first prerequisite is the emergence of a free trade market where the circulation of commodities aims at the transformation of money into capital. Whereas the formula of commodity circulation is C-M-C (commodity – money - commodity) - i.e., the sale of one commodity in order to buy another, the general formula of capital, on the contrary, is M-C-M - i.e., the purchase of a commodity for the purpose of selling at a profit. As Marx emphasizes, for the possessor of money, the aim of the circulation M-C-M is the augmentation of value in the form of profit-making alone: not profit, but ceaseless profit-making is what he aims at. As a result, “the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement”³.

The increase over the original value put into circulation is what Marx calls surplus value: “if now we take in turn each of the two different forms which self-expanding value successively assumes in the course of its life, we arrive at these two propositions: Capital is money: Capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the active factor in a process in which, while constantly assuming the form of money and commodities, it simultaneously changes in magnitude, differentiates itself by throwing off surplus value from itself; the original value, in other words, expands spontaneously. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus value is its own movement, its expansion, therefore, is automatic expansion. Because it is value, it has acquired the occult quality of being able to add value to itself”⁴.

Indeed, it is this “growth” which transforms money into capital, as a special and historically determined social relation of production. Surplus value cannot arise out of commodity circulation, for there we have only the exchange of equivalents. Neither can it occur by selling commodities for more than they are worth. Marx argued that, while there might be individual instances of selling commodities for more than they are worth, in the long run, the market would force the prices of commodities down to their true values and so the mutual losses and gains of buyers and sellers would equalize one another. To obtain surplus value, the money owner must find in the market “a commodity whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value” - a commodity whose process of consumption has at the same time the capacity to create new value (out of itself, functioning like a “magic hat”, so to speak), including its potential to create more value than its own reproduction costs. Such a commodity exists: it is human labour power, an abstract and self-referential commodity defined by Marx as “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description”⁵. Its consumption (i.e., its actuality) is living-labour, i.e., labor as an activity, and in this

³ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

process it creates new value. Moreover, as Marx argues, labor power is the sole source of surplus value. The whole Marxian theory of surplus-value is therefore based upon the subtle distinction between “labour power” and “labour”. “Labor” refers to the socially necessary labor that turns commodities into exchange values. What the capitalist pays the worker for is not the “labor” performed in the production of commodities (in this case, exploitation wouldn’t be possible), but the worker’s “laboring power” for a set period of time. And he buys it at a fair price⁶, i.e., according to its exchange value which, like the value of every other commodity, is determined by the socially necessary labour time requisite for its reproduction (i.e., the cost of maintaining the worker and his family). Having bought enough labour power, the capitalist is entitled to use it, that is, to set it to work for a certain amount of time - 8 hours, let us say. Yet, in the course of 4 hours (“necessary” labour time) the worker creates product sufficient to cover the cost of his own maintenance; in the course of the next 4 hours (“surplus” labour time), he creates “surplus” product, or surplus value, for which his employer does not pay, although, due to the existence of wage, the entire labor time appears as paid. The appropriation by the capitalist of surplus value as unpaid labour commands the entire field of production process and represents the essential element of Marx’s theory of exploitation, being the origin of class struggle under capitalism. Thus, the second prerequisite for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production is the existence of a socioeconomic setup where the labor power becomes a (self-referential) commodity, a situation that arises along with the division of society into two main classes: the bourgeoisie, represented by the owners of capital in the form of money and means of production, and the proletariat, formed by “free laborers, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realization of his labour-power”⁷. But this freedom is illusive, because the proletariat, who owns neither capital nor large reserves of money and cannot subsist except by selling his labour power is therefore under the economic compulsion to sell the only commodity he possesses, i.e., his labour power, also on a continuous basis. He cannot withdraw from the labour market until he gets the wage he wants. He has to work in order to survive.

On the other hand, only “productive” labor work, i.e., labor work which creates surplus value, is supported. The only reason why a capitalist hires labor force is that its conversion into wage labour has the quality (the use value) to produce surplus value. The emergence of surplus value from the process of production is the general and fundamental precondition for hiring workers and, in general, for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. Capital, therefore, is essentially the command over unpaid labor. According to Marx, all surplus value, whatever particular form (profit, interest, or rent) it may subsequently crystallize into, is in substance the materialization

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

of unpaid labor⁸. At large, it generates a socioeconomic context that Marx describes as follows: “At the historical dawn of capitalist production, – and every capitalist upstart has personally to go through this historical stage – avarice and desire to get rich are the ruling passions. But the progress of capitalist production not only creates a world of delights; it lays open, in speculation and the credit system, a thousand sources of sudden enrichment. When a certain stage of development has been reached, a conventional degree of prodigality, which is also an exhibition of wealth and consequently a source of credit, becomes a business necessity to the unfortunate capitalist. Luxury enters into capital’s expenses of representation. Moreover, the capitalist gets rich, not like the miser, in proportion to his personal labour and restricted consumption, but at the same rate as he squeezes out the labour-power of others and enforces on the laborers abstinence from all life’s enjoyments. Although, therefore, the prodigality of the capitalist never possesses the bona fide character of the open-handed feudal lord’s prodigality, but, on the contrary, has always lurking behind it the most sordid avarice and the most anxious calculation, yet his expenditure grows with his accumulation, without the one necessarily restricting the other. But along with this growth, there is at the same time developed in his breast, a Faustian conflict between the passion for accumulation and the desire for enjoyment”⁹.

With these words Marx describes in fact the paradoxical status of surplus value within the capitalism: on one hand, it is an excess produced during the process of labour by spoliating the enjoyment of others (i.e., the workers), in so far as the use value of labour power remains attached to the worker himself. Hence, the surplus value represents a loss of enjoyment. On the other hand, neither the capitalist can appropriate it as absolute object of enjoyment, since surplus value has to be partially reconverted into capital, in so far as the inner logic of capitalism necessarily requires the incessant expansion of capital. Here is how Marx describes this paradoxical situation: “Labour power is sold today not with a view of satisfying, by its service or by its product, the personal needs of the buyer. His aim is augmentation of his capital, production of commodities containing more labour than he pays for, containing therefore a portion of value that costs him nothing, and that is nevertheless realized when the commodities are sold. Production of surplus value is the absolute law of this mode of production. Labour power is only saleable so far as it preserves the means of production in their capacity of capital, reproduces its own value as capital, and yields in unpaid labour a source of additional capital. [...]It cannot be otherwise in a mode of production in which the laborer exists to satisfy the needs of self-expansion of existing values, instead of, on the contrary, material wealth existing to satisfy the needs of development on the part of the laborer. As, in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalistic production, he is governed by the products of his own hand”¹⁰.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 372.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 430-432.

In so far as the surplus value functions within the capitalism logic as an excessive compensation for an originary loss, its revendication as such (i.e., as “surplus” beyond the limit of its reinsertion in the circuit of capital that constitutes its “repetition automatism”) in a positive form (money, for example) is nothing but a phantasmatic operation that will ultimately lead to frustration and to the compulsive need to reinforce the claim: the more you approach the surplus as such, the more it eludes your grasp (the more you possess it, the greater the lack)¹¹. Here we can understand what Lacan calls the structural homology between surplus enjoyment and surplus value: “A subject is what can be represented by a signifier for another signifier. But is this not something traced out on the fact that as an exchange value the subject in question, in what Marx is deciphering, namely, economic reality, the subject of exchange value is represented for what? Use value. And it is already in this gap that there is produced, that there falls what is called surplus value. This loss is all that counts at our level. Henceforth, no longer identical to himself, the subject certainly no longer enjoys. Something is lost that is called surplus enjoyment”¹².

The subject that no longer enjoys although he is permanently hunting for enjoyment is the capitalist subject. He is a frustrated subject who denies what in psychoanalytic terms is called “the symbolic castration”, starving for enjoyment in his pursuit of an ever-increasing surplus. And he cannot reinforce his quest without him loosing what he has never actually possessed; so his loss is restored and reappears as demand for enjoyment, again and again in the agonizing cycle of repetition and in the suffering of his symptom. Ultimately, to obtain enjoyment, he has to resort to perversion in the form of phantasmatic transgression of the Law which governs the exchange (or “symbolic”) circuit. In perversion, says Lacan, “the surplus enjoyment is unveiled under a naked form”¹³.

Where is this perversion to be located within the capitalist logic? In what Marx calls “commodity fetishism”, which occurs when a commodity is valorized for its intrinsic properties, i.e., for its use value, neglecting the fact that its proper value is given only in context of exchange and thus with its exchange value. The same can happen with that what constitutes the fetish object par excellence: money¹⁴. On the social level, this fetishism of commodities has its origin in the

¹¹ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, Verso, London-New York, 2001, p. 24.

¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XVI*, p. 24, Cormac Gallagher translation of the unpublished Seminar.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Op. cit.*, p.51-52. We’d like to mention here the example given by Slavoj Žižek in his book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London-New York, 1989, pp. 27-28, as a perfect illustration of money as fetish: “Money is in reality just an embodiment, a condensation, a materialization of a network of social relations - the fact that it functions as a universal equivalent of all commodities is conditioned by its position in the texture of social relations. But to the individuals themselves, this function of money - to be the embodiment of wealth - appears as an immediate, natural property of a thing called ‘money’, as if money is already in itself, in its immediate material reality, the embodiment of wealth. Here, we have touched upon the classic Marxist motive of ‘reification’: behind the things, the relation between things, we must detect the social relations, the relations between human subjects”.

“peculiar social character of the labour that produces them”¹⁵. Inasmuch as the products of human labour acquire the objective form of commodities, the social relations between men takes on the phantasmatic form of relations between commodities and thus, instead of direct relations between people, we will have social relations between things: “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour”¹⁶.

The entire capitalist logic, its inner “law of motion” resides in this phantasmatic inversion, in the fact that the capitalist subjects have a distorted representation of the social reality to which they belong. Nevertheless, if we closely examine Marx’s response to capitalism, we realize that it is equally phantasmatic¹⁷. Marx actually believed that, removing the private appropriation of surplus value and the “exploitation of proletariat”, the capitalist productivity (i.e., the unconstrained expansion of productivity) could be kept and be utilized for “communal good”, namely the collective sharing of surplus value. He incited the proletariat deprived of enjoyment to get rid of frustration and recuperate the surplus value with the view to anyone’s enjoyment. What Marx missed was the actual logic of enjoyment: that enjoyment cannot occur without the “lack”, i.e., the discrepancy, the inequality that propels it (projecting the fantasy that the surplus enjoyment is accessible only to some and “forbidden” to the rest - *non licet omnibus adire Corynthum*). In fact, the Marxian incentive, namely the proletarian revendication of surplus value, has ironically contributed to the “success” of capitalism¹⁸. Indeed, in today’s capitalism society, due to and starting with the implementation of Keynesian economics, the workers have recovered the surplus value in the fetishistic form of objects of consumption released on the market. These are unnecessary objects becoming indispensable, for they command surplus enjoyment and tend to obturate the gap created by the loss of enjoyment (a “loss” that would lead to the acceptance of the symbolic castration and would free the desire in its proper form, that is, as desire of the Other). What is exploited and squeezed in every imaginable way today is precisely our enjoyment as an immediate source of surplus value (under the deceptive slogan “Enjoy!”)¹⁹. The fetish objects are giving this uncastrated subject the delusion of an absolute unity with himself, thus leading to the triumph of individualism. We seem to live in a world of individual enjoyments which tend to

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁷ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object Of Ideology*, Verso, London, 1989.

¹⁸ Cf. Guillermo Rubio, *Plus de jouir et plus de jouissance* in *Revue de Psychanalyse du Champ lacanien*, No. 5/June 2007.

¹⁹ Cf. Alenka Župancic, *When surplus enjoyment meets surplus value* in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, DUP, Durham and London, pp. 172-173.

completely dispense with the Other. The human bonds have become redundant, what really counts is everyone's individual striving for enjoyment. Within the logic of capitalism, human bonds are ultimately dissolved. The capitalist subject is left alone with its objects of enjoyment, deprived of the proper human desire, the desire of the Other. His activities, in general, and his work, in particular, receive a "meaning" only in strict correlation with an object of enjoyment imperatively conceived as a surplus, as an excess and ultimately as an "overdose" (that perfectly answers to the pernicious, self-destructive nature of enjoyment caused by its close communication with the death drive). A life of pure enjoyment is, in fact, a life that cannot be lived, commanding death as the "finality" of the endless repetition of one's drives (as Freud and Lacan mention so many times). Exactly like the libidinal economy (and this is the sense of Lacan's *homology* between surplus value and surplus enjoyment), the capitalism activates the same *jouissance* characterized by an aimless, infinite and self-referential circuit of production for the sake of accumulation (i.e., for its own sake). Therefore, if we are to rediscover a meaning of work which doesn't follow the command of this impossible *jouissance d'objet*, we might want to conceive work and social practices containing a universal dimension beyond capitalism. A possible solution? Rethinking the foundations of a community starting from exchange practices that do not pursue "surplus enjoyment", but "barring" it in a way that transforms enjoyment in itself²⁰. As Lacan says, *jouissance* has to become *jouis-sens*, that is "jouir du sens", enjoyment of meaning, "enjoy-meant", which doesn't represent however a sort of symbolical "reintegration" of the surplus (i.e., of the lack in the form of excess), but the "displacement" of its drive, which ultimately leads to what Lacan calls a "subjective destitution", i.e., a destitution of a subject held captive by the autistic drive of purposeless and endless "productivity" and by the fantasy that derives from it. Actually, the Lacanian wager is precisely that, by the deflection of the drive, it is possible to *sublimate* this dull, repetitive quest of surplus enjoyment. The process of *sublimation*²¹ is what ultimately work is about.

²⁰ Max Webber already noticed that, in order to flourish, the "spirit of capitalism" has to rest upon a certain "protestant ethic". However, Lacan's idea doesn't concern "asceticism" of any kind, but the "sublimation" of one's drives, as his Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, shows.

²¹ *Sublimation* is defined by Freud as a psychological process that allows drive to find satisfaction different from its original aim. Through sublimation, the sexual energy of the drive is deflected, transformed and redirected to goals of social action and cultural creativity.

A “WORLD OF WORK”? ON HEIDEGGER’S *PRAGMATA* AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

CRISTIAN HAINIC*, CODRUȚA PORCAR**

ABSTRACT. In his book *Body, Community, Language, World*, Jan Patočka questions whether Martin Heidegger takes interest in the world as such, or rather only in a special kind of world, viz., the world of human work. This enquiry is based on two main ideas that Heidegger puts forth: (1) that being cannot be predicated of, but only “understood practically,” and (2) that things should not be conceived of as objects, as opposed to subjects, but as *pragmata*, so as to better account for the intimate ontological relation between them and the life of human beings. While agreeing with Patočka’s hypothesis that the world as manipulative practice (the “world of work”) is itself underlain by a primordial “harmony” between human beings and world, our paper demonstrates that the latter is not only in accordance with Heidegger’s phenomenology, but also supported by it in many instances, the difference being that Patočka sees it as a perceptual and corporeal harmony, while Heidegger as an ontological one. The paper concludes that reducing the consequences of *pragmata* to a “world of work” is, thus, the result of an inaccurate interpretation which does not fully take into account man’s attunement to the world in Heidegger’s philosophy.

Key words / phrases: *pragmatism, hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger, things as pragmata, phenomenology of work*

1. Patočka’s Critique of Heidegger and “the Three Movements of Human Life”

In the 15th section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces things as *pragmata*, or as tools that serve the primordial interest of everyday Dasein to work.¹ The long-term effects this has in Patočka’s view are related to overcoming the Cartesian thesis adopted by Husserl, according to which *cogitatio* is guaranteed and easier to know than things knowable through a *cogitatio* that mediates them. This would result in saying that “Experience is always the experience of something but that something need not exist to make it so. For that reason, experience is pure

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¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 63 and 65. Henceforth, *Being and Time* will be abbreviated in the body of the article as *BT*, followed by the references’ page numbers.

being.”² Whether that experience is fully transparent to itself and whether human experience is essentially different from what can be given in object experience are, according to Patočka, questions that Husserl never raised, but which Heidegger now did by means of his *pragmata*. To answer these questions straightforwardly here: Heidegger’s response is *no* – experience is not transparent to itself, life is not transparent to itself, and, most certainly, being is not any more limpid. In the light of this paper’s purpose, however, it is not these answers that are interesting in themselves, but rather the manner in which *pragmata* have led to them.

In a nutshell, things as *pragmata* change the philosophical perspective on experience, life, and being in that they do not render the three observable, but *doable*, as human beings not only *are*, but are *for the sake of* something. In other words, experience does not observe itself, but rather *does* itself, and the same is the case with life and being. In Heidegger, the human being does what is possible for it, but its possibilities, however, are nonobjective, as they are not something to look at; rather, they are possibilities insofar as we *do*, realize, and identify with them. Although one does not grasp one’s own possibilities in their objective form, one does, nonetheless, understand his / her world in light of them. All in all, we “understand practically,” so to say, hence Heidegger’s pragmatism and the interest of pragmatists in his phenomenological hermeneutics. This idea has long been acclaimed, among others, by philosophers such as Richard Rorty and Mark Okrent, following that Heidegger’s pragmatism can hardly be mistaken now for an unexplored philosophical realm.

Furthermore, the essential primacy of practice makes mere seeing and observation not that an appropriate philosophical tool for the study of existence and in the same time also explains why there is so much opaqueness and obscurity in its study. The nonobjectivity (but not necessarily nonobjectificability) of existence and the latter’s tendency to conceal itself are, in Patočka’s opinion, the “great advantages” of Heidegger’s phenomenology over Husserl’s. In fact, in virtue of these, Patočka claims that Heidegger’s phenomenology can become the philosophical foundation of human sciences (*BCLW*, 97). Both Heidegger and Patočka agree that being cannot be transposed into objective being, such that we cannot observe our life (and how it is given to us), but rather realize it – “we are charged with living it.” To further stress this in Patočka:

“Object” is an unfortunate word for capturing our original posture with respect to things. An object is the correlate of a subject. Things as they are primordially given to us are not objects in the sense of being given, being presented to some subject; there is no contemplative relation of a subject to an object here. Things primordially are not objects – if they were given in *mere* presence, they would not be what they are. (*BCLW*, 103)

² Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1999), 93. Henceforth, *Body, Community, Language, World* will be abbreviated in the body of the article as *BCLW*, followed by the references’ page numbers.

Therefore, things cannot be conceived of as isolated atoms and reality itself has an ordinary inconspicuousness that offers the working context for all types of meaning, which must function and be indicated “smoothly” (an example both Patočka and Heidegger offer is that of the doorknob, which we grasp and use without knowing its mechanism or parts). The pragmatic nature of things generally means that they belong to the context of our practice. Therefore, a preliminary concept of “world,” in both Patočka and Heidegger’s approach, is “that wherein our understanding moves in its referring, as that with reference to which it lets appear the things we encounter, as long as they are in the mode of *how we interact with them*.”³ (*BCLW*, 117 and *BT*, 80-1)

But then comes Patočka’s enquiry which interests us here, namely that by using *pragmata*, one might object that even though Heidegger is presenting the world of humans, he only takes interest in a very special and derivative type of world, that is, the world of human work (*BCLW*, 125). Having established that the world as manipulative practice is a more accurate conception of the world than the world as objective and objectival layers, Patočka now asks whether there is still a more accurate approach than world as revealed within Dasein’s relation to *pragma*. Before summing up Patočka’s view on the matter, we should stress that the latter is based on Heidegger’s paradoxical account of life, which “unfolds” in pragmatic projection, in *vitam ducere*, in taking on possibilities, but nonetheless also has the character of an “already,” in the sense that whenever projection is underway, life *already* presupposes something.⁴ So, basically, Patočka was interested in solving this paradox, mainly by finding out what exactly that “already” from Dasein’s manipulative practice entails.

To concisely sum up Patočka’s view, that “already” has to do with corporeity, with bodily life. His hypothesis is that Dasein presupposes a sensory, perceptual harmony with the world as its “antecedent layer of heterogeneous possibilities without which existence would not be possible.” (*BCLW*, 135) Saying that Dasein’s being is always on the way (*unterwegs*) from somewhere to somewhere, that it is basically “dwelling in between,” is already a major step Heidegger takes towards the conclusion that Dasein is *movement*. However, Patočka argues, this movement is only one of the “three movements of life”⁵ that animate Dasein. In itself, it is first of all based on what Patočka calls the instinctive-affective “movement of anchoring” our existence by means of bodily experience. This first primordial movement lacks self-understanding

³ The original quote is available in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 2: *Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 115-6.

⁴ This paradoxical way of thinking is the core of Heidegger’s manner of asking and answering philosophical questions. In his early philosophy, Heidegger names this “the formal structure” of questions. In his later writings, he names it in various manners, all to do with “hearing” the call of language. For an example of how every question already presupposes its answer, see the second section of *BT*, 3-7.

⁵ Patočka also uses the “three movements of life” in his account of the idea of “history,” in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1996), 27-54. For the purposes of this paper, however, their occurrences in *BCLW* will suffice.

and is therefore self-concealing and somewhat inauthentic inasmuch as we turn away from or repress this instinctive sphere to the advantage of the second movement, which deals with “extending our existing into things.” (*BCLW*, 150-1) Basically, the latter “movement of life” is Heidegger’s so-called world of work, whose basic categories are those of the purposive, the utilitarian, and the pragmatic. This second movement, Patočka argues, has its own dose of inauthenticity, also, as it is an *interested* one and thus imposes some sort of blindness on Dasein in the continuous daily process of manipulative practice. Finally, the third “movement of life,” which we will be considering in the second part of the paper, is, according to Patočka, the movement of “existence in the true sense,” the movement of self-achievement – all that had been looked over, avoided, and excluded during the first and second movements is to be integrated back into life, in an attempt “to break through our earthliness” by means of his third movement. Patočka thus sees the first two movements as “self-realization in finitude, surrounding to the rule of a power – of the Earth,” (*BCLW*, 151) while he attempts to consecutively sketch a third life motion that would offer the possibility of human liberation by means of non-binding self-realization.

Judging from Patočka’s “three movements of life,” one would draw the preliminary conclusion that, indeed, as Heidegger’s *pragmata* only pertain to the second movement, the world that the German philosopher takes interest in is a world of work. It is the purpose of the following section to prove the opposite.

2. The Everyday Dimension of Being: Consequences of *Pragmata*

To sum up the previous section, despite Heidegger’s profound enquiry into the ground of existence, his phenomenology does not recognize corporeity as the foundation of life, which makes Patočka draw, of course, closer to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception. What Patočka is attempting is a philosophy based on the principle of movement, which means to be distinct from all previous resembling philosophies of movement because it aims at understanding movement independently of the dichotomy between subject and object. Accomplishing this means understanding humans as beings in and *of* the world, meaning not only *in* the world, as Heidegger would argue, but also rather a *part* of the world process. But what does this mean, exactly?

Existence may be understood as movement, in the sense that humans, as “individuated reality,” belong to a particular space in spacetime, but in such a way that we at the same time understand this localization of ourselves and of things, that is, we explicitly relate to the whole and we understand particulars through this relatedness (this we will compare to Heidegger’s whole of beings being revealed by Nothing). In this regard, Patočka concludes that the possibility of encountering things self-consciously (*viz.*, as opposed to the manner in which we do in the first instinctive movement) lies on the basis of human openness for being and understanding being. Simply seizing power over things, or accumulating power and might, is only quantitatively different from the self-unconscious processes animals perform. But in this third movement of understanding their place among things, humans are

themselves “called” to things, such that “in a manner of speaking, humans are *pragmata*, services; human life is a service in a sense different from that in which things serve us. Thinghood means *letting things be*, letting them come to themselves, to their being which is external to them and yet is theirs.” (*BCLW*, 170)

So, basically, the first “movement of life” has been exploited by Merleau-Ponty, the second by Heidegger, and the third is conceived as aforementioned by Patočka himself. While agreeing with Patočka in what regards the absence of an instinctive-affective primary movement in Heidegger’s *Dasein*, we will demonstrate in what follows that the third movement is, however, present and sound in Heidegger’s phenomenology, and that binding Heidegger’s *pragmata* to a “world of work” is an inaccurate interpretation.

The main argument we put forth in supporting this thesis concerns the ontological framework that Heidegger built, in which the subject belongs to the object and viceversa, each participating in the other’s enhancement, development, or simply put, “unfolding.” Consequently, understanding something is concerned with interpreting and transcending one’s self towards it, rather than with its direct intuition, as Husserl had it – it was Paul Ricoeur that best summarized the advantage of hermeneutical phenomenology over idealistic phenomenology, which supports that the ground of all intuitive experience is subjective, or immanent.⁶ Heidegger’s use of *Dasein* in his hermeneutical phenomenology therefore implies that human beings exist inasmuch as they relate to the objects and experiences within their world, hence the concept of “being-in-the-world.” To exist thus comes to mean “to ek-sist”, to be outside one’s self, oriented towards life events and experiences, or, if you will, towards *pragmata*.

This relation between *Dasein* (and, later on, mortals) and things is present throughout Heidegger’s entire corpus, out of which we outline only a few occurrences here: in the first section of his *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, *Dasein*’s being appears from the start as transitive,⁷ resulting, in the third section of the same work, in a continuous “state of having-been-interpreted” which belongs to it.⁸ Likewise, in sections 15-18 and section 40 of *Being and Time*, the disclosedness of *Dasein* is based on its attunement to and understanding of its world of *pragmata*, in “understanding as hearing” the latter (*BT*, 172 et. sq). Furthermore, in Heidegger’s later work on poetry and language, humans (or mortals) have the essential task of hearing language’s “*Saying as Showing*,”⁹ which

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 25-52, or, alternatively, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *Noûs* 9, no. 1 (March, 1975): 85-102.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology – Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12 et. sq.

⁹ The full quote is “The essential being of language is *Saying as Showing*” and it is to be found in Heidegger’s “The Way to Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982), 123.

is more often than not present in the work of art.¹⁰ It is safe to conclude, therefore, that Patočka's third movement of life, in which humans themselves become some sort of *pragmata* for things, is already present in Heidegger.

Our second argument comes to reinforce the first (that is, the ontological intimacy between humans and things) and, as announced, it claims that Heidegger's reflection on the Nothing brings forth the same relation to "the whole of beings" that is envisaged by Patočka. The third movement of life is a movement in which we do not relate to things in the world, but rather to the world as such (*BCLW*, 177). This movement of "self-achievement" should, thus, indicate the manner in which our life is dispensed throughout *pragmata*. Is there such an idea present in Heidegger? We answer this affirmatively, pointing at Heidegger's 1929 essay "What is Metaphysics?" But before we get into the details of the matter, let us see how Patočka accounts for this possibility:

Reality is never revealed to us as a whole. In understanding the whole we encounter particulars but the understanding of the whole, of being, conceals itself in understanding particulars. Those are always unveiled only from a particular perspective, it is an understanding always for one particular aspect only, in a specific perspective, in a specific situation. Concealment always goes hand in hand with unconcealment. Existents as a whole and the being which unveils beings and conceals itself is in essence a mystery (*BCLW*, 168).

This quote strikes us as somewhat Heideggerian, and it is not clear in the text whether Patočka paraphrases Heidegger or not, but he certainly adopts this position, namely that even if unconcealment occurs, it comes packed with a certain dose of concealment. The idea is, again, present throughout Heidegger's works, one of the most appropriate examples being the contradictory nature of truth as revealed in the work's conflict between setting up a world and setting itself back into earth.¹¹ However, for a more accurate dealing with the whole of the totality of beings, we suggest turning to Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics," where he writes:

"Nothing" is revealed in dread, but not as something that "is." Neither can it be taken as an object. Dread is not an apprehension of Nothing. All the same, Nothing is revealed in and through dread, yet not, again, in the sense that Nothing appears as if detached and apart from what-is-in-totality when we have that "uncanny" feeling. We would say rather: in dread Nothing functions as if *at one with* what-is-in-totality.¹²

Thus Nothing is our "gateway" to the whole of beings. To reach Nothing, a certain mood must capture us, that is, the mood of dread. This certain mood has the following effects:

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 72 et. sq.

¹¹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 43-45.

¹² Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Existence and Being*, trans. R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), 367.

Dread reveals Nothing. In dread we are “in suspense” (*wir schweben*). Or, to put it more precisely, dread holds us in suspense because it makes what-is-in-totality slip away from us. Hence we too, as existents in the midst of what-is, slip away from ourselves along with it. For this reason, it is not “you” or “I” that has the uncanny feeling, but “one.” In the trepidation of this suspense where there is nothing to hold on to, pure *Da-sein* is all that remains.¹³

What we have here contradicts Patočka’s critique in that, for Heidegger, “insofar as *Dasein* naturally relates to what-is, as that which it is not and which itself is, *Da-sein qua Dasein* always proceeds from Nothing as manifest.”¹⁴ Thus, after all, there is, in Heidegger, an *a priori* that presupposes any possible revelation of beings (of “what-is”), even though it is not human corporeity, as in Patočka, but a mood in which man’s relation to *pragmata* slips away into disclosedness. Even if this has been criticized in depth by many, not even the most fierce advocates of logical positivism¹⁵ can argue that Heidegger does not attempt to see what our relation to *pragmata* presupposes (which was Patočka’s initial critique). Furthermore, there is also something that reveals the whole of beings, as “asked” by Patočka’s third movement of life, which Heidegger calls “Nothing” in order to express the abyssal ground of being-transitive, being which can never really be pinpointed. Therefore, the conditions for the third movement of life are met in Heidegger.

Nonetheless, to be fair, Patočka hints at solving the problem that Heidegger poses in the end of “What is Metaphysics” by thinking human corporeity as the boundary between the pragmatic being of *Dasein* and existence in the sense of a pure relation to the totality of all there is (*BCLW*, 178). This, indeed, is remarkably original, although it shifts the balance from the ontological Nothing given within dread to ontical corporeity. That again, this is a different matter to be discussed. The purpose of this paper was to prove that Heidegger’s *pragmata* are not constitutive of a “world of human work,” but, on the contrary, they are the “access point” to what makes human relatedness with things and experiences possible.

3. Testing Out the Conclusion

Having reached this conclusion, we may now turn to the literature on Heidegger’s so-called “world of work” to see if our findings stand. Indeed, the ontological dimension of *Dasein*’s relation to *pragmata* is very well stressed by Todd Mei,¹⁶ who argues that work for Heidegger is essentially an activity of thanking and mutual recognition, and that the whole of work is primarily the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 366-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁵ Take, for example, Rudolf Carnap’s “all-time” critique in his “The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language,” heavily anthologized after it had been originally published in *Erkenntnis* 2 (1932).

¹⁶ Todd Mei, *Heidegger, Work, and Being* (London: Continuum, 2009), especially chapter 7, “Work, Recognition, and Thanking.”

actualization of ontological possibilities, resulting in the idea that being itself is not something necessary, but rather continuous actualization (through work, if you will). This ontology, we should further argue, naturally requires a practical structure in order to provide us with an everyday understanding of itself, and this is where *pragmata* and work come into play. In all case, in no way does it follow that the non-essential view on being is to be confused with manipulative practice.

What has pushed critics to argue that Heidegger's concept of world is a restrictive one after Patočka initially formulated this idea is probably his *post mortem* association to philosophical pragmatism. We should stress here that all occurrences of Heidegger as a pragmatist ultimately end up in *not* committing the interpretative mistake of reducing Dasein to work. Thus, if Mark Okrent¹⁷ used Dasein's selectiveness in handling entities in order to pragmatically account for the conditions of possibility of intentionality and for the implications in metaphysics of Heidegger's philosophy, this was only to conclude afterwards, in a Heideggerian vein, of course, that Dasein is essentially social, and to thus argue that Heidegger's position pertains to "transcendental pragmatism," which goes beyond everyday work.

But let us go deeper into the matter. Richard Rorty's contributions to philosophy are the ones that have helped most to "popularize" Heidegger in the Anglo-American world.¹⁸ Rorty believes that the hermeneutics developed by "the first" Heidegger is quite pragmatic, in that it rejects all standards of interpretation other than the freedom to improve the quality of our lives by making use of *pragmata*. The philosopher, therefore, is no longer a mere "spectator of time and eternity,"¹⁹ but, on the contrary, comes to show how, even though life has lost all "essences" upon which it clung, we may still make use of our practical orientation in the world so as to improve our quality of living. Still, Rorty views Heidegger's philosophy of the everyday not as an encapsulation in a "world of work," but as a means to destruct the history of Western metaphysics, similar to John Dewey's attempts.²⁰ The destructive dimension of philosophy is taken up as it is in Rorty's own writings, even though the latter accuses Heidegger of not being able to disentangle himself sufficiently from the history of metaphysics. This is not to say, though, that Rorty's own "radical pragmatism" succeeds in doing so any better, as Charles Guignon pointed out,²¹ since the very notion of "liberty," which is at the center of Rorty's philosophical views, may be traced back metaphysically with outstanding precision.

¹⁷ In the following we are referring to Mark Okrent's *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), especially Part II of the book.

¹⁸ See Charles B. Guignon, "On Saving Heidegger from Rorty," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46, no. 3 (March 1986): 401.

¹⁹ Richard Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language," in Guignon, Charles B., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 338-9.

²⁰ Richard Rorty, "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey," in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1978), 244.

²¹ Guignon, "On Saving Heidegger from Rorty" 417.

Finally, Heidegger’s idea of a non-essential ontology goes well beyond sheer pragmatism. To provide an example, we should mention his influence on the recent philosophical current of everyday aesthetics. Having declared himself an “anti-aesthetician,” he literally forced subsequent philosophers of art to reconstrue aesthetics in a way which would not contradict his opposition to the subject/object and form/matter dichotomies.²² Also, by equating understanding to interpreting, Heidegger deemed all art a part of the process of living, and not at all a finished act of theorizing.²³ He thus came as close as possible to Richard Shusterman’s relatively recent claim that the purpose of aesthetics “is not knowledge, but improved experience.”²⁴ This is not to mention the resemblance of Heidegger’s Dasein to John Dewey’s “live creature,” both concepts being used to depict total interpenetration of human life with the environment.²⁵

All in all, we believe Heidegger meets Jan Patočka’s conditions for a third movement in human life, in which man’s attunement to the world is so poignant that he / she cannot be told apart from their environment. What is more, his appeal to *pragmata* cannot be interpreted as an encapsulation of human life within a “world of work,” even though such a world is present in Heidegger, but only with the purpose of exemplifying a non-essentialist ontology of life and experience. Furthermore, by means of its deep intention to offer a hermeneutical – rather than a scientific – framework for tackling human experience, Heidegger has now come to be regarded as a fundamental author in fields of interest neighboring phenomenology and ontology, such as aesthetics and philosophy or art.

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²² This has been acknowledged quite clear in Katya Mandoki’s *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identity* (Chippenham: Ashgate, 2007).

²³ See Crispin Sartwell, “Aesthetics of the Everyday,” in Jerrold Levinson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 767.

²⁴ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd edition (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), XV.

²⁵ The similarities between Heidegger and Dewey’s philosophy of art have been tackled in a talk entitled “The Heideggerian Roots of Everyday Aesthetics: A Hermeneutical Approach to Art,” which was delivered by Cristian Hainic within the European Society for Aesthetics 2012 Conference in Guimarães and Braga, Portugal, June 25-27, 2012. The paper’s publication is forthcoming.

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WORK IS NOT FREEDOM; OR IS IT?

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ABSTRACT. The paper aims at connecting work with freedom, because the main philosophical problem concerning work is whether it is a free activity or not. Consequently, I explore the level of concepts and theories about work and also the level of objective conditions or processes constituting work.

The main goal and thesis is to demonstrate the ambiguity of both the concept of work and the idea of liberation *from* work, as well as the difficulty but, at the same time, the possibility of this liberation. From this standpoint, we should remember that neither the liberation *at* work is a continuous process at the present stage of world capitalism, nor the liberation *from* work would definitely exclude labour from the ontological constitution of man.

Keywords: *work/labour, Marx, Arendt, freedom, multitude, modern industrial revolutions, engineered singularity, present-stage capitalism.*

Preamble: the concept as such and its name

My intention is not to reveal the historical linguistic forms of the concept describing work, but to focus on the *content* of this concept, as its significances appear in two modern theories: of Marx and of Arendt. The result will be somehow strange: that *we still do not have names* for the historical contents of work. (The same situation is with the concept of people: some researchers have proposed a new name for it: multitude, “as a whole of singularities”)¹.

As we know, Arendt made a clear and definite difference between *labour* and *work*, the former corresponding to the activities aiming at preserving life, thus situated in the realm of necessity and at the same time being ephemeral services, while the latter being both the manner through which man constitutes his specific realm of artificial and lasting objects, and these objects. From this standpoint, she criticised Marx, by asserting that

the modern age in general and Karl Marx in particular, overwhelmed, as it were, by the unprecedented actual productivity of Western mankind, had an almost irresistible tendency to look upon all labor as work and to speak of the *animal laborans* in terms

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¹ Toni Negri, *Toward an Ontological Definition of the Multitude*, 2002, <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Towards-an-Ontological-Definition>.

much more fitting for *homo faber*, hoping all the time that only one more step was needed to eliminate labor and necessity altogether².

Arendt's position on labour is that it cannot be pulled out from the realm of necessity, being possible only to improve the life of workers and not to transform it in order for them to become decision-makers over the ends of their activity, thus in order to be able to live in the realm of liberty. Consequently, their condition of *laborans* and submitted persons would be inevitably necessary and unchangeable, while the real characteristic of the human nature being only the creation of works, including works of art, and the carrying out of political discursive action.

In fact and as we will see, Marx's theory put the problem in another, quite radical view. This view does not follow from the fact that he did not have the perspicacity to observe the above-mentioned difference between different types of activities. On the contrary: he simply considered that history is that which pointed out these differences and that they cannot drive to a *fundamental, essential* lack of possibility of so many persons to manifest what is really human within their own being. More clearly, the historical and social conditions led to the *exterior* conditioning of the will and effort of man in order to satisfy the needs, but this exteriority was subordinated to the social hierarchy, so that different social strata managed and controlled it differently: some strata had no other option than to submit to the exteriority, while others could manifest from a free standpoint toward it.

Obviously, this perspective of Marx did not need a different name for labour. He differentiated between productive and un-productive labour, between physical and intellectual labour, between time to produce and spare time, not only to rest and entertain, but also and mostly to develop the unique personal faculties, to create. But if he said – as it will follow – that only an activity that is not determined by the exterior, social and historical, conditions is free, this activity as such is and at the same time is not labour. *It is not* in virtue of its carrying out by the internal ends fixed by the agent, thus the ends of self-fulfilment. *It is* because it could manifest in a manner similar to working, thus to the discipline and effort labour involves. This activity fulfilled in the spare time *has no special name*.

Although the difference between the realm of necessity – “the empire of necessity” was the *metaphorical* formula of Marx³ – (of work *externally* imposed, namely not from the internal impulses to create) and the one of liberty had in view labour and, say, creation, the latter was not at all the result of a simple internalisation of the necessity by a person who could be free just through this understanding of the exterior constraints. From this standpoint, with Marx, freedom (the fundamental one, that before the necessity to preserve life) is not “the understood necessity”⁴, it is more than that, a

² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 87.

³ Marx used metaphors because he only sketched out his view.

⁴ An idea put forward by Hegel, “the understood necessity” was taken over and interpreted by Marx at a quite another level: that of the critique of utopian views concerning the liberation of labour force. Indeed,

surpassing of necessity by another state of things, or an integration of necessity into this new state (and not the integration of liberty into the constraints of necessity).

Marx does not say that freedom is beyond work, by simply naming it activity, but says that such an activity...begins beyond the work determined by an exterior compulsion. At the same time, he does not say that the very freedom begins where every necessity ceases, but only that it begins where the exterior necessity finishes⁵. He does not state that what is beyond the sphere of material production as such could and should be named work, but nor that it couldn't and shouldn't. In other words, everything takes place as if Marx could not name work this space of freedom, nor renounce to the possibility to do this⁶.

What does work mean?

As many concepts related to social philosophy, work is revised and revisable because of the historical changes in all its conditions and their theoretical interpretations.

Historically, it is:

* *Labour* – a synonym of *toil*, hard working; it was physical
(But intellectual and office employments could be tormenting too);

* *Constrained* (forced or compulsory) – since it is so hard; meaning that there are two types of social relations which determine people to work: *constraint* and *incentives*;

* *Necessary*;

* *Inevitable*;

These features or characteristics of work – as they were promoted by the cultural messages – are the result of the level of technology. The weaker technology is, the harder work is⁷. (And vice-versa: the more technology is advanced, the more the above-mentioned features of work are jolted).

On the one hand, work is at the intersection between *man* and *technology*. (But technology itself is *accumulated* work (of creation/innovation and fabrication), which allows the inference: the more technology develops, the more the importance of *living labour* decreases *in capitalism*).

if necessity or the objective conditions are not understood, people could force them, but never annul them, and the result is only an attempt, inevitably failed, to fit reality to the desires of the wretched.

This conclusion does not consider the objective conditions in an absolute manner, but it takes into account their role in the development of the subjective conditions of liberation.

⁵ That meaning that creation, the scientific research and artistic performance, for example, involve internal constraints, effort and discipline.

⁶ Paul Sereni, « Marx et Arendt – « Éléments pour une analyse de la production », *Contretemps*, mai 2007, p. 140, <http://www.contretemps.eu/sites/default/files/Contretemps%2019.pdf>.

⁷ See Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html>, Book one, part IV: “For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus...if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves”.

When technology was weak, the achievement of needs required constraint, though it never was the sole manner to determine people to continuously toil, *beyond* their physical and psychical powers. But constraint was the main means which shortened the term of achievements.

The weak level of technology – which is an ontological factor – and the necessity to obtain the most rapid and best results have generated the social division of labour – between physical and intellectual work –. Thus the social division of labour was first of all *technical* (generated by technical causes: the efficiency of work, the level of technology).

The *political* division of society – between the rulers and the ruled – has corresponded to the social division of labour.

The more technology develops, the more work is stimulated by incentives. If nowadays constraint is that which is rising, *it is for political interests, not for technical reasons*.

The examples of the first industrial revolution and the second industrial revolution illustrate the evolution of the social division of labour. While in the first, the division worker-engineer (as well as the ruled and the rulers) was still required by the level of technology, in the second the tendency is, metaphorically speaking, that the worker becomes his/her own engineer. The high level of competence of this new labour force and the high level of technology *allow the reduction of the physical work and the convergence between the physical and the intellectual*.

These processes are delayed by the political interests, and the continuity of an obsolete type of social division of labour *fragments* the knowledge and reduces the creativeness of the many. The public education, enframed by the interests of the leading strata, goes on *as if* society still needs slaves and overseers).

On the other hand, work also depends on *the social relations*. These relations generate the cultural messages (which are always ideological). For example, according to the mainstream capitalist ideological pattern, the forced character of labour would not be the result of power relations, i.e. of domination-submission because of the restrictive appropriation of means of existence by the few: but one could speak of the forced characteristic of work only in case of “physical violence”, “severe deprivations”, “sexual abuse”, and “restriction of people’s movements or locking them up”⁸. And indeed, in modern times, employment is a contractual relationship, according to which, if one sells his/her labour force in exchange for a wage, he/she consents to work according to the demands of the employer. In function of the criterion of the contract – which is *economic* –, only the *political* compulsion (which, au fond, is pre-modern), only the physically violent manifestation of the powerful, would be forced. This contradistinction is helpful in practical communication, but when it is put in an absolute sense, it becomes conservative.

⁸ *Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour*, <http://www.ilo.org/declaration/principles/eliminationofchildlabour/lang--en/index.htm>.

In fact, the above-mentioned contract is not a fair one: it is *asymmetrical*, one of its parts existentially depending on the other and the conditions this one imposes⁹, and thus the employees' consent is *only enframed by this asymmetrical relationship*. Consequently, "economic circumstances can compel people to barter away their freedom, and labour exploitation can occur in many forms"¹⁰. In this respect, during the *welfare state*, because workers were integrated into the system, they *felt* a lesser constraint, while after, they felt it more acutely.

But modernity brought another characteristic of work:

* *It became mostly paid, "rewarded"*. In fact, it is only paid, as a result of the contract/presumptive contract; the wage paid for the work of someone became the distinctive feature of the status "at work": "persons who...performed some work for wage or salary, in cash or in kind"¹¹. This definition already sends to questions: does a prostitute work since he/she is paid? Would any service be an instance of work since it is paid? And vice-versa, are not there activities/services which are not paid?

On the other hand, the supplementary rewards reflect the profitability of work for the employees, and/or for the system as such – as well as the social position within the power relations –, and not the gratitude of society for the exceptional contribution of some people to the social development; if things stayed in this manner, people would consider with sympathy the wages and bonuses of CEOs of the banks: as we all know, it is not at all the case.

(Historically, not the supplementary rewards, but the ordinary incentives were the elements which stimulated work; although Plato spoke about *oikeiopragia* – thus about the "specialization" of the citizens who do, everyone of them, his/her own work in a good city¹² – and this principle would send us to the idea of a "natural" division between the well-offs living in luxury and the others trying to make both ends meet, in fact he related it to the principles of *sophrosynē*, moderation, and *dikaioynē*, justice: which means that people have to refrain from greed, unhealthy for both the individuals who no longer understand to aspire to a human achievement (they aspire to a life of "pigs") and the cities full of discord as a result of the injustice of the distribution of means of a decent and significant life¹³).

The supplementary rewards – traditionally given to extraordinary actions performed, most of them, by leaders at different levels¹⁴ – have become in modern times:

⁹ The modern wage-earner can certainly move from a place to another, from an employer to another, but everywhere he/she lies in the same dependent position.

¹⁰ *Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour*, <http://www.ilo.org/declaration/principles/eliminationofchildlabour/lang--en/index.htm>.

¹¹ *Beyond Unemployment: Measurement of Other Forms of Labour Underutilization*, 2008, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_100652.pdf.

¹² *The Republic of Plato*, Translated, with notes, an interpretive essay, and a new introduction by Allan Bloom, Second edition (1968), Basic Books, New York, 1991, 433a-435b, pp. 111-114.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 585e-586b, p. 268.

¹⁴ "Those upon whose movements nearly all recorded history centers": John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958), 40th anniversary edition, updated and with a new introduction by the author, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1998, p. 2.

a) the private appropriation by the few of the anterior public goods or of the capacity of labouring of the many;

b) the impudent wages and the legal and illegal benefits of private and state bureaucracies, which they themselves fix and which are not at all opposed to bourgeois purposes, but on the contrary are consonant¹⁵; that's why abundance is not the simple result of technologies, but is a *socially enframed* status – where the excess of some¹⁶ is paid with the scarcity suffered by others (who cannot, on this ground, arrive at a creative life), as well as with the huge waste of resources and human creativeness –;

c) And to this type of “rewards” at the top, *philanthropy* and a “*global justice*” done from “giving what we can”¹⁷ correspond at the bottom.

The official definition of work as paid activity is certainly related to the necessity to separate employment from unemployment in order to measure them, but it reflects the restrictive viewpoint of the capital: which considers neither the mutual helping and barter, nor the work at home, nor the gifts and the disregard of private interests as useful and thus dignified to be ordinarily rewarded.

As a manner of integration within the social gearing, work is not singular. There are others such as *play* or *sport* or *entertainment*. Consequently, we have to name once more the synonyms/characteristics of work.

Is it *effort*? *But* sport supposes effort too, and on the other hand the effort is relative: if the washing machine has substituted a very painful hard work¹⁸, the sedentary work in front of a computer, say only 8 hours, is not exactly pleasant.

Is it *obligation* – simply opposed to pleasure? The entire history so far has been based on imposing on the many the obligation to work in conditions they did not choose. That's why the ideal of man was the scholar, the poet, the artist, the scientist – doubled or not by the well-to-do state –. *But* there are – and scientists and artists could passionately confess – activities, where the high discipline and effort do not exclude, on the contrary, involve, the biggest pleasure, as the realisation of the creative ability of the self.

¹⁵ See Peter Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2007, and Gretchen Morgenson, Joshua Rosner, *Reckless Endangerment: How Outsized Ambition, Greed and Corruption Led to Economic Armageddon*, Times Books, New York, 2011.

The latter is quoted here only for the description of CEOs and other private officials' behaviour.

¹⁶ The excess is not well-being, but *affluence as surplus*; see the already old, but topical, analysis of John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958), and Marshall Sahlins, *The Original Affluent Society*, 1966, <http://www.eco-action.org/dt/affluent.html>.

¹⁷ It is the NGO initiated by Thomas Pogge, a global justice theorist in fashion, who does not continue by far the more valuable capability approach (A. Sen, M. Nussbaum), but promotes the principle of donations “at least”, i.e. of the individuals and groups which compensate through their behaviour for the unjust institutions (to which they themselves contribute).

¹⁸ This is the reason of the statement of Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2010, pp. 31-40: “The washing machine has changed the world more than the internet has”.

Is it *earnestness* – an attitude that corresponds to the inevitability of a hard discipline – i.e. the assumption of the duties one has toward society, and first of all of the duty to carry out an activity which does not fit his/her aspirations but he/she must fulfil nevertheless? Opposed to this earnestness is the easy and pleasant sentiment one feels during a play. Thus even though Huizinga¹⁹ said that play is a serious activity with very precise rules which have to be applied, children and people are so enthusiastic when involving in it that generally everybody supports the tradition according to which work is opposed to play. *But* there are so pleasant tasks – and so easy for experts – that this distinction seems to be too simplistic.

And because Huizinga emphasised that *play is freedom without object*, i.e. resulting from the lack of private interest, from the enfranchisement from goals to fulfil existential or lucrative needs: on the one hand, work too – as knowing, doing, surpassing – could be *gratuitous* (the work with a very strong intellectual component), while on the other hand, a significant number of jobs are done only for salary. Otherwise, people who carry out these tasks reject them as if they were a mortal danger, and feel they live life only outside working, by enjoying entertainment – a classical state of alienation²⁰ – and being the proof of the theory of laziness²¹. (However, this theory is only a reflection in mirror of the situation of these people: in fact it would not so much reflect their concrete standpoint – for they dream at leisure time, but know very well that they have to work just in order to pay not only for this time but first for their existence – but the image and indignation of some humanistic and rebel intellectuals. For the problem is not to be lazy – and enjoy a frugal life or the evasion from the civilised society – but to change the intercourses which enframe work. Without this change and if we depend only on the technical progress that improves work, there will be neither work nor leisure time: the present situation of the division between some pleasant activities and many tasks made only for wages will last *sine die*).

Work as a part of life

Work is, as we saw, *technē* – possibility to do, know how, skill, technique, trade, method to rationally approach, process, making (method belonging only to work)²² – thus opposed to *praxis*, which means to make something precise. But, at the same time, work is, or could be, also *poiesis* – creation, fabrication, action that transforms, in a modern formula – problem solving. Following Nietzsche who

¹⁹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938), Beacon Press, Boston, 1955.

²⁰ K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Estranged Labor, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>.

²¹ Tom Hodgkinson and Matthew De Abaitua (eds.), *The Idler's Companion: An Anthology of Lazy Literature*, 4th Estate, London, 1996; Tom Hodgkinson, *How to be idle* (2004), HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2005. And the journal *The Idler*, <http://www.idler.co.uk>; Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 1883, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1883/lazy/index.htm>.

²² Consequently, it opposes *epistemē*, idea, theory – which represent a gratuitous knowledge.

considered that people *must understand life in a poetical manner*²³, Heidegger said that not the created objects have to be searched for, but creation as such, creativeness, the measurement of the space between “the sky” – the *ideal*, never ending, shadowed or unknown but at the same time glimmering the infinite possibilities – and “the earth”, the concrete praxis for the real needs.

The essence of man is just “to dwell in a poetical manner”²⁴, namely to always be worried about his ideal criteria and to always measure “the dimension” between the ideal and the world of necessity. “When this measuring appropriately comes to light, man creates poetry from the very nature of the poetic. When the poetic appropriately comes to light, then man dwells humanly on the earth”²⁵.

Marx formulated the same idea in a short note good for philosophers: work is a part of life that pertains to the empire of necessity. (The term “empire” is metaphorically used. Let’s change it with that of “realm” in order not to suggest some intentions of dictatorship). It is necessary for the achievement of the needs of life, but people *may* really be free to develop according to their own faculties and aspirations only freed from the constraints of needs.

But the needs are carried out with the help of technology and in concrete frames of productive and social relationships. In capitalism (“the sphere of actual material production”), workers feel free only outwards labour. *At the same time*, the progress of technology reduces the working time, and in this manner people have not only more time for entertainment and rest, but also for their spiritual fulfilment: they could reflect on and understand society and nature and man.

If so, they also could try to control the productive relations – thus in an unrestrictive manner – because they arrive to understand that only technology does not franchise them: in fact,

The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with

²³ Or things were quite opposite to this: even in Western Europe, full of self-pride grounded on the banal, but almost general knowledge meaning at the same time a higher level of civilisation than before, and thus capacity to give higher significances to the existence – Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876), in (Editor) Daniel Breazeale, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, § 9.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Preludes in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Edited by Bernard Williams, Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, § 42: “almost all people are similar due to the fact that they look for work so as to earn a monthly wage. Work is a means for everyone, and not a purpose in itself”. But “the good does not mean to transform someone into the function of a more powerful cell” (*Ibidem*, § 118). Only the artists and those who occupied themselves with contemplation considered labour as a pleasure (*Ibidem*). Creation (*poiesis*), namely the understanding of life in a poetical (artistic) manner, meant to no more live in the constraint of the urgent needs, or, in other words, living and experiencing creation as an urgent need.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells” (1951), Translated by Albert Hofstadter, in Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, (Edited by Manfred Stassen), The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2003.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 278.

Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most necessary. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite²⁶.

Therefore, toil is not freedom. But work could pass into the empire of freedom *if* its technological conditions as well as those related to the frame of productive relations change. This change is an *objective* process, but as everything belonging to the human, it is realised through people's actions, pressures, struggles.

Is it possible to appropriate the empire of freedom?

It is. Hannah Arendt told us that there would really be three realms of the human action: that of the private realisation of the needs of man – the basis, the natural support of the force of life –, namely that of *homo laborans*; that of labour as *technē* which realises “the durability of the world”²⁷ through fabrication, the man being *homo faber*, and whose evolution could be *poiesis*, the work of art, more than “utilitarian instrumentalism of fabrication and usage”²⁸; the work of art is the result of thought, and not only of cognition, and consists in useless things, “objects which are unrelated to material or intellectual wants”²⁹; and that of the public location of human activities, that of the *vita activa* and of the *political* and *discursive man*³⁰. People could in this way be more than beings pursuing the fulfilment of their needs in a separated and individualistic manner. The empire of freedom is for Hannah Arendt the public life of rational debates and construction of a common world.

I do not excessively interpret Arendt. At this moment, not her standpoint is important, but her model where man *could* surpass himself and his conditions. The real human condition consists just in this surpassing.

But Arendt did not discuss the separation between the people who work and those who master the public realm. She only observed that the activity of work “may not be able to establish an autonomous public realm in which man *qua* man can

²⁶ K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Part VII. Revenues and their Sources, Chapter 48. The Trinity Formula, III, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>.

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 136.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

³⁰ Also Ana Bazac, « Travail et action: la philosophie face au défi du caché », in *Analele Universității din Craiova, seria Filosofie*, nr. 27 (1/2011), pp. 117-134.

appear...it remains related to the tangible world of things it produced...the *animal laborans* (being incapable of) “distinction and hence for action and speech”³¹. This is a reason of the fatal and normal division and cohabitation between those whose destiny is the private joy of fulfilled needs after work or the private search for jobs in order to be able to consume, and on the other hand, those who decide at the public level of life. But this means that Arendt’s *man* is abstract: because not every human being, thus not all of them – and not at all for their psychological inability – can reach this superior realm.

Briefly, au fond Plato’s *oikeiopraxis* and Arendt’s view are akin. But would there be a solution?

Marx rapidly noted that together with the above-mentioned change of technological and social conditions of labour, the unrestrictive, thus collective control over these conditions would allow a profound transformation of the life regime of the many. *Man* will cease to be the abstract representation of those who have the instruments to create intellectual creations of science, art, reasoning and dialogue, and through this creation to feel the deep pleasure of the conscience of the permanent re-creation of their own self and thus, of their freedom.

The old social division of labour and the related fragmentation and reduction of the human horizons could cease: what is more, they would be absurd to continue if the high productivity of technology created abundance and a lot of time for all. As a result, people will experience a *continuing and permanent education*, as well as a *multidimensional development of their personalities through the change of their occupations*. The uniqueness of every human being and of all may reveal just from this richness of manifestations. But all of these could be only the consequence of the collective mastering of labour and means of existence. Only the collective control³² over the empire of necessity could liberate the realm of freedom to all:

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now³³.

³¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 212, 215.

³² And let us remember: on a world scale, because “in a country” (Trotsky) existing in a capitalist world system it’s not possible but to alleviate what is happening in the empire of necessity.

³³ K. Marx, F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845), Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook, A. Idealism and Materialism, 4. The Essence of the Materialist Conception of History. Social Being and Social Consciousness] History.. Private Property and Communism, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>.

Do we want to liberate from work?

Until people are able to master the empire of work and experience the constitution of the empire of freedom for each of them, they will be subordinated to the logic of separation between instances of work, thus between activities and the social management. This logic generates *unemployment*, visible and invisible *underemployment*, *inadequate employment* and *labour shortage*, briefly *mal-employment* if we could transfer the wording of mal-development to the concrete domain of capital-labour relationships.

And things will continue. In the realm of work, the future belongs to robots, to cybernetic automats, and bio and nano-cybernetic automats. Moreover, the scientific and technological development goes till the construction of *the engineered singularity*: through the discovery of artificial intelligence (AI), man becomes a new human being, formed by both traditional natural parts and artificial parts managed by artificial intelligence and finally, since rationality is that which generates the crowning of man as the dominant and superior being on the Earth, man himself is dethroned by AI³⁴. The engineered singularity is no more a human being, but a post-human one. Consequently, man would compete for jobs not only with machines, but also with a superior being. Thus, why would man liberate himself from that which he wants as the main support of his existence?

The development of technology generates – and this is an *objective* determinism – the reduction of jobs. But without jobs, people can no more pay the products made under a capitalist regime, i.e. where profit results only on the market, where products become merchandises, the only ones providing profit. (So, if people do no longer work, but only borrowing money, where will they give it back from?) Therefore, technology provides *objective* conditions for the weakening, or even annihilation, of capital. But these conditions are sufficient neither for the liberation of the many, nor for the social transformation of capitalism.

Historically, the modern labour force had such a hard condition inside the capitalist structure of economy that he had to struggle against this situation: the reduction of labour time was, as we saw, one of the main goals of this exploit³⁵. During especially the second half of the 19th century and till the outlining of the

³⁴ Ana Bazac, "Between aspiration and model: the social construct of the future man", in (Editor-in-chief Sifeng Liu), *Proceedings of 2011 IEEE International Conference on Grey Systems and Intelligent Services (GSIS), 15th WOSC International Congress on Cybernetics and Systems*, CD, ISBN 978-1-61284-489-3, Nanjing University, 2011, pp. 932-937.

³⁵ And see John Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (1985), Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Cambridge, Paris, 1999, p. 192: "If the length of the working day is the object of class struggle, it is hard to see why this should not also be true of the intensity of labour. Perhaps the subtleties of the pressure involved make it difficult to equalize degrees of intensity across firms and industries, so that political action by the working class would be hard to undertake, but one might at least expect that the workers in a given firm would be able to act in concert".

second industrial revolution in the 70s of the 20th century, workers accepted their place within the social order, but wanted to improve it. They fought to liberate themselves *within* the logic of work, or *at* work, and not *from* work³⁶, because this last goal was then unreachable. The entire labour movement, with the unions and labour parties, was the manner this fight came to be successful.

The *welfare state* and the rising of rights were just its result. And as this welfare state proved that it is insufficient, and as the trans-nationalisation of capital and the rise of the second industrial revolution took place, the struggle to liberate *within* work proved to be insufficient too and that neither the liberation *at* work, a process realised from below³⁷ or from the system of management³⁸, can really change the condition of the employees – thus give a *sense to their work*³⁹ –, nor the leisure time full of entertainment could give a *sense to their existence*. In Arendt's time, it was still possible to write that "The workers today are no longer outside of society; they are its members...the political significance of the labour movement is now the same as that of any other pressure group"⁴⁰, thinking from a liberal standpoint that this position of workers would be absolutely enough. But from the 80s or 90s on, it seems on the contrary that workers, namely the majority of the labour force, are again outside of society: the labour movement does no longer work since it/its bureaucracies is/are deeply integrated within the functioning of the political mechanism, and the working people have to accept the shrinking of the welfare state and of the rights, including the labour rights⁴¹, and it seems they can only protest. But they have not obtained yet either the liberation *at* work or a general wage as a support of the liberation from work.

Therefore, as the working people exploit themselves through the pension funds as investment funds and by participating in the competition for jobs, they assume the content of freedom as entertainment and thus the integration of this type of freedom in the realm of necessity, including the constraints at work. Nowadays the main slogan of the labour force is "let us win the race for jobs – at us, in our country", irrespective of the costs paid for this race. The idea of freedom seems to be substituted with the one of slavery, assumed and, certainly, at the same time rejected. But the world is in transition, and this transitory period is founded on the objective logic of capitalism: refuting all the political claims of the entire political class that it would be possible to create, if not the real necessary jobs, at least some jobs – including jobs in the bureaucratic sphere –, the logic of private profit shows the directions of work. By laying-off new and new cohorts of people working in production or in the bureaucratic sphere, capitalism shows that neither it nor society and the human being as such need

³⁶ André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail. Critique de la raison économique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, p. 150.

³⁷ See the self-management in the 70s.

³⁸ See the *management by objectives*, or the *lean management*, or the *Toyota style management*.

³⁹ André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail. Critique de la raison économique*, p. 98.

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 219.

⁴¹ See Ana Bazac, "Which are the significances of the change of Labour Code of a European peripheral country?", <http://www.alternativy.ru/en/node/1528>.

fictive work, created for political reasons – in order to calm the social opposition or to arrange relatives and clients in good positions –, but *veritable* jobs. But this “need of truth” requires another organisation of society: on a world scale.

A step, two steps toward liberation

One of the main means of liberation and at the same time goal of people is the freedom of communication. The entire process and the devices of communication are integrated within the capitalist economy, being one of the main manners of bio-politics, thus of a bio-power dominating even the biological life of people. Consequently, communication is the ground of battles in order to keep it as bio-power or to produce with it the common goods that enfranchise people from their disenfranchised status. People need information not at all in order to “amuse to death” through forms without content⁴², but on the contrary as *a space to know and choose*, the first step toward liberation from the empire of necessity (this one meaning not only needs but also political constraints). That’s why it is so important both to keep communication free from the political restriction and to criticise communication in a society of control⁴³.

Communication allows a community *to validate*, through discourse, a human act, but obviously it is only a step to an ethics founding the human liberation⁴⁴. This process of validation – and it is once more imperious to have the means to confront the mainstream ideology which digs up the track of the discursive relationships – is related to the constitution of the power of the multitude⁴⁵. The world working people – with and without jobs – innovate and practise non-conformist, horizontal nets of communication, just opposed to the vertical, from up to bottom, flows reflecting the social hierarchy.

Nowadays, the multitude appears as a force just in the space of communication which precedes and constructs the space of action, of opposition. This latter space is rather latent, because of the *fragmentary* tradition of communities and certainly because of the *heterogeneous* state of the world labour force. This is why the impulse to organise and feel *more proletario*, in an internationalist manner⁴⁶, has not been followed yet by the majority of the

⁴² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985), Penguin Books, Revised Edition, New introduction by Andrew Postman, 2005.

⁴³ Gary T. Marx, *What’s New About the “New Surveillance”? Classifying for Change and Continuity*, 2002, <http://surveillance-and-society.org/articles1/whatsnew.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Enrique Dussel, *Principles, mediations and the “good” as synthesis (From “discourse ethics” to “ethics of liberation”)*, 1998, <http://www.ifil.org/Biblioteca/dussel/textos/c/1998-296.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., Lond., England, 2001.

⁴⁶ Samir Amin, “Foreword: rebuilding the unity of the ‘labour front’”, in Andreas Bieler, Ingemar Lindberg, Devan Pillay (eds.), *Labour and the Challenges of Globalization*, With a foreword by Samir Amin, London, Ann Arbor, MI, Pluto Press, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008, pp. XIV-XXIII.

populations. But the experience of the decrease of the social rights, the practice of rebel communication, and the rapid scientific and technological development *could* generate the new subject of the multitude⁴⁷.

Instead of conclusion

Why is there no solution for the unemployment crisis? Or why do all the sections of the political class worldwide not provide any solution for this crisis? This is because the solution requires *another* social organization, *another* social system. But we are only on the threshold of the constitution of this solution⁴⁸. And one salient aspect pertaining to the constitution is its subjective condition, the *class*⁴⁹ conscience of those who at the same time need jobs and want to liberate themselves from the compulsion of the exploited work: this class conscience reclaims that the goal of the many be *not the abolition of work* as such – which might mean creation – but the abolition of the capitalist relations. This means to show in a clear, rational/discursive manner what has already been realised in the objective process: the weakening of capital through the reduction of the purchasing power of the many.

Both the spring of technology and the productive and social relations constitute the conditions of freedom in front of work. But, briefly said, freedom *within* work (pay attention: and the abolition of paid work) *is/are* rather the result of the development of technology, while freedom *from* work – rather the consequence of the change of the productive relations. In these processes, the quality of man as subject is challenged and re-constructed: *the multitude as subject infinitely divided into subjects*⁵⁰. On the other hand, the liberation *from* work should not be a taken for granted principle: since creation/*poiesis* could manifest also through working, it is rather not the liberation *from* work which has to be a superior goal to that of liberation *at* work, but the liberation from a *compulsory* work, determined by the powerlessness of the many to control the general means of

⁴⁷ See Toni Negri, *Toward an Ontological Definition of the Multitude*: “multitude is a whole of singularities...multitude is the name of a multitude of bodies”.

From the viewpoint of *bodies* – and not only of their care for the daily and permanent preservation and wellness, but mostly of their concrete socially determined suffering, which interposes between their ability to realise *poiesis* and their concrete powerlessness to do this –, Arendt’s perspective seems once more limited.

⁴⁸ A comparison could be useful. When the ancient system had enough labour force, the value of each person belonging to this force was not too high. When this value increased, namely the productivity of slaves and freemen became lesser than their number that would have compensated for this productivity, the system entered its structural crisis. Slaves were freed, but vainly, the system could no more improve within its old framework.

In the present globalised capitalism, “slaves” are enough, their potential productivity, as well as their real productivity with the help of technology, is very high. But the system could no more integrate within this contradictory situation: when it needs and at the same time does not need these “slaves”, and when it needs and at the same time does not need – and wastes – the high productivity and values.

⁴⁹ Indeed, without a *class conscience* – i.e. beyond professional and social group conscience – any kind of liberation will no longer be possible.

⁵⁰ Fractals could be usefully applied here.

existence. Only this type of work limits or even annuls the capacity of work to be *poiesis*, and of the working people to be unique creative beings.

If we consider society as a whole in its evolution, we can hardly dismiss the proud statement about the progress of civilisation, i.e. the higher level of human freedom, including the modern freedom *within* work. But the analysis points out the complex situation where the “technical” immediate subject of the material exchange necessary to the human reproduction, the workforce, is subordinated – thus *transformed into an object* (and an object is “free” like an object, or the content of its freedom is given by the *real* modern subject) – by capital which becomes the *real* subject, though mediated, deciding the aims and means of labour. This doubling of the subject is the ground of both liberation (of the labour force and, generally, of people) and subjugation, and their intertwining supports different theories. What is important here is that both the liberation *within* work and the liberation *from* work result only as initiative of labour (as a “technical” process emphasizing the *ground* of productivism, but not remaining at the level of production, and as labour force), and *no liberating alternative could emerge from capital*.

But this alternative is necessary, since society is uncontrollable under the control of capital, with all the organisational paradigms viewed as *deus ex machina*⁵¹. Consequently, the alternative presupposes trans-national unity of labour⁵², which takes over and surpasses the trans-national pattern of capital.

In fact, we experience the “negative ontology”⁵³ constructed by capital, with the help of the working people, where the structuring matrix of man’s life (and time: of work and of creation of needs) is universal and universally dangerous. Technology is the means of this perilous structuring and it seems it would autonomously lead evolution: this is what suggests “the obsolescence of man” and the inherent development of the engineered singularity. Only if philosophy re-starts to think from this catastrophic situation, it may contribute to the change of this ontology.

To speak about the liberation of the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon) who suffers the oppression and exclusion from the benefits of totality means certainly to question totality as such, its internal consistence and its structuring of the social relationships. Only as a result of this questioning of totality, *the subject of liberation* – who does not demand aid and “global justice” – begins to construct a new ontology, first of all with new meanings to the necessity. In which sense is labour – a historical fact and concept – necessary (to capital first of all) while the

⁵¹ István Mészáros, *A tőkén túl. Közéletek az átmeneti elméletéhez*, (1994), Első rész, L’Harmattan – Eszmélet Alapítvány, Budapest, 2008, pp. 164-165.

⁵² Andreas Bieler, Ingemar Lindberg and Devan Pillay, “What future strategy for the global working class? The need for a new historical subject”, in Andreas Bieler, Ingemar Lindberg, Devan Pillay (eds.), *Labour and the Challenges of Globalization*, With a foreword by Samir Amin, Pluto Press, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, London, Ann Arbor, MI, 2008, pp. 264-286.

⁵³ Günther Anders, *L’obsolescence de l’homme. Sur l’âme à l’époque de la deuxième révolution industrielle*, (1956), Éditions de l’Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Paris, 2001, p. 111.

technological spring is/will be so huge? On the other hand, what remains to the subject if it totally liberates from work? The yet ordinary opposition in many theories between man and technology neglects the fact that the latter is *past, accumulated labour*, and this opposition between living labour and accumulated labour is fundamentally historical and social. At the same time, the more the accumulated labour in the form of technology develops, the more it is the result of the “general intellect” (Marx). Without the cooperation of this general intellect, the spring of science and technology would not be/will not be possible. If so, they both (science and technology) are common goods, and their development means a new kind of work, unforced, mostly immaterial, a cluster of inventions (such as art, *universitas* and *libido sciendi*⁵⁴).

⁵⁴ Yann Moulier Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitive. La nouvelle grande transformation*, Éditions Amsterdam, Paris, 2007.

POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

GOZO ZENO*

ABSTRACT. Framed in the Social Constructionism approach, the Narrative Therapy, acts as a suitable extension of the Family Systemic Therapy. Embedded in the post-modern orientation, this new therapeutic approach and methodology focuses on the inherent narrative feature of most human encounters. To tell stories, respective to switch to a linguistic-narrative register, also means to reframe in real time a specific happening, situation or problem. That can be made by the client¹ as well as by the therapist². By changing the narrative framing of a happening, the therapist aims the alteration of the approach in the way of a better adequacy of the therapeutic vision (consequently the attitude) and also of the practical implementation of that vision. We are talking about an alteration of the narrative accent that will carry on to the cognitive transmutation – premise of every change.

The new systemic orientation's main investigation axis (practical and therapeutic) situates on the semantic level of re-interpreting the "texts" (stories) brought into therapy by the client.

In this paper we propose a widening of the perspectival field of therapeutic theories, enriching the possible interpretations of inter-human narrativity and communication. We shall expand, thus, the area of ethical, deontological and humanistic investigation that the constructionist approach allows. We shall also investigate the way in which the human being is inscribed in language and contained by it and how this language is stencilling and moulding his/her feelings, thinking and the perception of reality (mainly the social one). From here we may discover a number of conditionings that may embed the individual into a narrative world (redundant usually), most often un-reflected, but whose repercussions are one of the most profound and most spread. Our reflection tries to indicate at least some interrogations and subjects of investigation useful for escaping the homeostatic and circular thicket of the narrative reflexes.

Key words: *narration, epistemology, psycho-therapy, systemic, semantic.*

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¹ In this paper we use the term "client" in a generic way, understanding by it a female client, a male client, a couple or a family. Without any discount, all the accords throughout the text are thus made in the masculine form.

² In this paper we use the term "therapist" in a generic way, understanding by it a female therapist, a male therapist or a therapeutic team. Without any discount, all the accords throughout the text are thus made in the masculine form.

Argument

Belonging to the larger mainstream of the post-war modernism (in this case, of the North American pragmatic orientation), Family Systemic Therapy was born as a reaction to Psychoanalyze and Psychiatry. Its third version, the Social Constructionism, arrived, at the end of the twentieth century, under the incidence of post-modern ideas (such as giving prevalence to punctual and circumscribed narrations by leaving aside or denying overall algorithms, the meta-narratives or discourses so characteristic to modern ideology) "imported" from the philosophy of the "old continent". Currently, there are enough therapists asking themselves about the possible directions followed by the future evolution of their professed concepts. Whatever they are, the fact is that we will still need psychotherapy in the future, perhaps even more than today.

Although the alternatives given by a certain language are limited – given the language games people play and socially co-construct – the way they are used opens a very wide range of exploration possibilities. The major request of narrative therapy and social constructionism is therefore the awareness of those multiple possibilities which are inherent, regarding how the linguistic and narrative structures are used (that are already given by a certain semantic field) and how we apply our own inspiration, insights or knowledge to transcend those rules, to construct new ones and exploit them in a beneficial therapeutical way. Finally, we point toward a more complex approach, a multi-level usage of language. By meta-positioning ourselves in rapport to the usual, common and stereotypical language games we could actually rewrite the dysfunctional stories. As a result, we could use a language in a more appropriate way, we could have a better communication and understanding and a deeper inter-human encounter of feelings, thoughts and ideas despite the fact that: “The untold diversity of all language games does not come to our awareness because the clothes of our language are levelling everything.”³ What we want to underline is that, by therapy, those “clothes” of our language are at list interchangeable or, even more, that they can be put aside to unravel deeper structures of our cognitive universe.

We are talking about a de-robing action, an undressing or decantation applied precisely to the linguistic “clothes” that hide and hinder the intimate and genuine meanings and intentions of the conversations. The necessity of such an action resulted from the base of the problems that people bring in therapy (and not only). Or, the problem arises precisely out of the impossibility of derogation applied to understanding, out of a rush of comprehending maintained in the most intimate way by the pressure given by the tendency to jump to conclusions. Generally people do not allow themselves time to listen, comprehend and analyze what has been said, as if they were constantly on the run to draw conclusions and to put things right. Nevertheless, the human thinking and talking, is filled to the brim with ambiguities, with double and hidden meanings. In order to understand

³ Wittgenstein, 1990, p. 570.

somebody, we have to give us time to ponder upon what has been said. Thus, we may see beyond what has been said and understand the intentions, which are inherent to the speech. Here is the great contribution of social constructionism and narrative therapies, both indicating toward a deeper understanding, of not only what and how we speak, but also of how the human discourses build up. It is therefore recognized that the language we use is built up – constructed – socially and, therefore, we all are immersed in a vast linguistic ocean. We are all confined in the mother tongue and, more generally, in language as a tool we use to transmit and to share thoughts, feelings, meanings and to initiate, to build up, to maintain, to tear apart or to end relations. In this context, of being linguistically embedded, we can agree with Richard Tamas's statement: "Because human experience is linguistically pre-structured, yet the various structures of language possess no demonstrable connection with an independent reality, the human mind can never claim access to any reality other than that determined by its local form of life."⁴ So it is not surprising that we are not only embedded but, more than that, we are trapped and enclosed in language and in our narratives in an auto referential manner: "Texts refer only to other texts, in an infinite regress, with no secure basis in something external to language."⁵

In addition, people just cannot escape the linguistic trap. We could imagine that the only alternative to elude such a limitation is to learn, and subsequently, to use another language. However, by doing that, we only place ourselves in another realm that contains our thinking and its expression as well as its possibilities and limitations. On the other hand, by adopting another language, we have the chance to get out of a semantic realm (our own) and, by that, to see its limitations, conventions and restrictions. So (by learning another language), we could apply this understanding to the new adopted language too, in order to realize that this one also has limitations, conventions and restrictions. Taking a step even further, we could generalize and think that whatever language we will adopt, it will close us up in a certain realm of conventions. Once we have realized that, we can return to the initial language in order to work with its limitations and restrictions and to use an aware approach toward its conventions and possibilities.

Short Systemic digression

In Family Systemic Therapy, currently there is a conceptual base and an appropriate language for the practice of assistance, counselling, and healing situations and problems regarding individuals, families or groups. At the same time, therapists have become more aware of their own theoretical and pragmatic assumptions, as of their manners throughout they can contribute to (co)construction and even to maintenance of problems. Regarding the therapist's activity, the

⁴ Tamas, 1993, p. 399.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

problem of power and control was reconsidered and it was found necessary and more appropriate a non-directive style and/or a non-hierarchy one, which puts the therapist on the same level (or at least the same latitude, although not the same longitude) with his clients/patients. In the new approach – the social constructionism - between the two parties (therapist - client) establishes a dialectic process persistently and perseverant, trying an opening of a new conceptual alternative at the narrative level: “The therapy attempts to dissolve the problem which should disappear by itself through the story. It invites the therapist and the family to discover together new narratives, a new meaning and new solutions by which the problem could disappear (*dissolving therapy*).”⁶

The power issue, continued in both First and Second Systemic, is replaced by the so-called "metaphors to live by" which are nothing more than narrations or conversation adapted to current therapeutic practice, and, since they gave it substrate and substance, they become *par excellence* the medium where it manifests.

The remark that the difficulties and/or the problems (the familial ones too) have their origin in the language, in the way of telling a story (life story, eventually), in the way of narrating happenings and their connexion to the cognitive, ethic, deontological and acting-behavioural levels has been of a prime importance for the new psychological and psycho-therapeutic approach. Of course that this allows references to the analytical philosophy and its interest on the language, syntax and grammar. We can often see that the definitions and the conceptualisations people use, one way or another, can initiate, create and maintain or, on the contrary, they can elude, surpass or avoid an issue, a view, a situation or context. In other words, the language is not only the creator of meanings and understandings but also a creator of huge and apparently unavoidable, insurmountable or difficult problems, mental and relational, familial, social and even political.

New concepts have shown that the First Systemic⁷ is (from an historical and epistemological point of view) of the past, being overcome by the constructivism⁸ and the social constructionism. It seems that nowadays the cybernetic paradigm itself tends to be replaced; so as Hoffman (1990) wondered whether the concept of "Systemic Family Therapy" would not lose its meaning in the coming years. Pare (1996) proposes replacing the concept of "system" with "culture", which would allow a higher congruence between psychotherapeutic theory and psychotherapeutic practice. Placed in a similar position, Anderson and Goolishian claim that: "(...) systems are fluid, constantly changing, never stable and never completed."⁹ In consequence we can agree that "Therefore, adherence to a system cannot be considered as fixed: it changes since the problem definition changes."¹⁰ And, because of this, the adopting of the term “culture” (referring to family contexts)

⁶Meynckens-Fourez/Henriquet-Duhamel, 2005, p. 203.

⁷ See Gozo, 2010, pp. 27 – 102.

⁸ *Idem*, pp. 207 – 301.

⁹ Anderson & Goolishian, 1998, p. 101.

¹⁰ *Idem*, p. 101.

seems to be more adequate and containing than the one of "system" that, inevitably, makes us think to Norbert Wiener's cybernetic or at the Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general theory of the systems.

The newly applied concept of culture (family culture), is wider and allows existential and ethical explorations, much more profound than the one of system that seems to be enough-containing and sufficient to describe only a state of fact conforming to some laws, rules or functioning norms, inherent (to the system). The family as a system (as it was considered in the first and second systemic) can be studied in a physicist manner, allowing its observation (as a dear method of systemic specialist, method borrowed of course from the behaviourism of the first half of the twentieth century). The systemic specialist (of the first and second systemic orientation) arrogated the observer role, placed in the exterior of the family system that should be observed; in an objective manner, the therapist saw, took notes and analyzed the family in front of him (in his exterior). Detached and impartial (qualities or, better, qualifications, got through the long years of professional training and experience, through his socio-professional status and, last but not least, through the heavy problems of the clients and their inability to face them), the systemic specialist was, aware or not, settled in a position of control, manipulating realities and difficult issues of the families.

New challenges for the systemic perspective

Thus, the very classical notion of "system" (or at least its understanding) finds itself nuanced and put on new platforms of interpretation. Other authors are in favour of the thesis saying that it is needed to replace therapy as applied science with something that resembles more to literature; the therapist converting himself into a "teller of stories" that would help clients to understand themselves and their life in order to live more authentic and worthy. In this manner: "Narrative therapy attempts the reconstruction of a history, to give birth to a narration which emphasises another meaning of the living."¹¹

Of course, such elaborations are interesting; they suggest that the field of psychotherapy is very flexible and adaptable to new epistemological orientations, open to renewal and innovation. On the other hand, patenting the new procedures requires the direct involvement of therapeutic practice. In the end, the pragmatic effective approach remains the review criterion and the safest indicator of the applicability and reliability of new orientations that tend to be on a higher cultural level than the systemic (cybernetic) one.

The initial optimism of those practicing Systemic Therapy believing (because of unexpected development of the corpus of theories and applications) that in several years the major problems presented in therapy could be catalogued,

¹¹ Meynckens-Fourez/Henriquet-Duhamel, 2005, p. 205.

comprehended and solved (at least at the theory level), is currently considered at least exaggerated. Systemic therapists have become much more circumspect and cautious (if not sceptical) to the efficacy of theories and techniques available to them. The current focusing of psychotherapy (family systemic orientation) goes on the significance line, stressing a hermeneutic tendency (Goolishian and Anderson, 1997), emphasising the values and possibilities of the interpretation and comprehension rather than a cybernetic one. Remaining on the interpretative level, we remember here that the notion of "cybernetic" was forged by Norbert Wiener, developing it from the Greek *kibernao* that means the steersman of a boat, respectively the conductor or captain, the one that sets direction, one who always knows the destination, knowing, in the same time, that he can get everyone through. He is the one that finds a *poros*, a passage, a way out of the dilemma in which the family finds itself cast because of a problem.

All this does not mean that from now on, the psychotherapy would fall within semiotics incidence, but we cannot forget that the basic "tools" of psychological therapy are the dialogue or conversation, and these require mutual respect, openness to the other, mutual understanding and orientation towards finding the "fairness" of those said. In the new approach we will have rather a reading of signs, an interpretation, on the therapeutic side as well as on the client's side for better understanding not as much of each other but rather of the mechanism and functioning of humans in difficult situations and how they express that. The starting point of therapeutic conversation is no longer that of a suspected malfunction, disorder or even pathology that would require being investigated (possibly "repaired"). It is rather the semantic change of meanings, coupled with an inherent hermeneutic approach, which reframes inappropriate life perspectives.

From the perspective of social constructionism, "(...) the quintessence of what we are and what we shall be is dialogical."¹² The client is treated now as a system producing meaning, as a locus of a fluid network of ideas and feelings that interact on a basis of social correlated behaviours. He is no longer seen only as a "problem generator" or as a source (systemic, true) of those problems, but he consciously assumes his contribution to their *dissolution*, of course, being helped (by the therapist) to develop new meanings by discovering and exploitation of the *un-told* (we are referring here at the therapeutic frame, where the client, on purpose or not, aware or not, hides some details to the therapist and sometimes to himself). Undoubtedly, the driving idea of post-modern Systemic focuses on establishing conversational exchanges in which not only the problems, but their whole organizing system dissolves. That makes us think of a more exposing mission of the hidden "threads" of distorted narrative, missing correlation with a constantly changing reality, old-fashioned stories (re)told under the coloration of emotional memories. This drastic position was reached after we went through two systemic

¹² Anderson & Goolishian, 1998, p 128.

approaches, and confronted them, with the same effort of searching for practical efficiency. The new therapeutic orientation is not trying to impose change anymore, nor to repair psychological problems or errors, functional, structural or systemic; but as Alfons Vansteenwegen wisely notifies: "Its goal would be to have a therapeutic conversation so as the history (the co-constructed speech) not to wear anymore what was considered as a problem. Change occurs in the development of new meanings within the therapeutic conversation. Fixed ideas are examined, analyzed, expanded and changed. The therapist takes part in the creation of language and meanings that leads to the solution of problem and to the dissolution of *the system defined by the problem*."¹³

It is noted the emphasis on the conversational and the alternatives that it can offer: expanding the client's ideational field, redefining some previously frozen perspectives, discovering stereotypes, truisms or paralogisms, exposing the conceptual redundancy of the obsessions of comprehension. Such a therapeutic conversation intends the restructuring of client's emotional and conceptual universe using narrative machinery that comes to refresh a clogged speech, bogged down in its own circularity, maniacally reiterated with every new story. Problem putting itself changes radically with the new approach: it aims to relax the structures in which the problem can be defined in one way or another. Or, once changed the point of view on the situation, the client, together with the therapist, may redefine the existential field in which he manifests, rewriting the main ideas, re-drawing the major axes of addressing his life problems that are difficult and hard to solve. The level at which this takes place is the one of paradigm changing - understood as general guidance and support of a theory or vision of life -, the one of reaching and moving the general life's approach and of its problems.

The new constructionist approach does not stress the paradigmatic axis of searching and eventually founding (in the "therapeutic couple" frame) the solutions, but directs on the semantic axis of exploration of narrations meanings, the client's and (why not?) of the therapist as well. Decryption and semantic interpretation become crucial for framing and reframing the problem presented, as well as interpretative openness to new and unexpected options, both theoretical and practical. This guidance presents as a stimulus to re-evaluate and re-write a narrative case closed and sterile, blocked and stuck, that just go forward under its own inertia. Client's blocking is given precisely by the impossibility of breaking some mental patterns, to circumvent a particular way of seeing things - always the same, constant and equal to itself. The client simply has no freedom or the choice to raise the same question in another term. Entrenched in stiff formulas, prisoner of his own cognitive and linguistic universe, the individual simply puts himself in difficulty by the self-imposed arrest through some rules and formulations, impotent

¹³ Vansteenwegen, 1998, p. 233.

and ineffective. Semantic re-formulation operated during the process of therapy (of a social-constructionist form) can help him/her conquer a mental clarity, a gnoseologic clarification to enable a (re)writing or at least a re-drafting of its own life scenario.

Didactic/methodological outlining

By learning the mother tongue, we undergo a complex didactic but also a methodological process. The didactic part consists of the learning and respectively teaching (gr. *didaskhein*) process which gives us the basics of a specific linguistic field: words, pronunciations, grammar. So: “The way language works, then, is that each person’s brain contains a lexicon of words and of concepts they stand for (a mental dictionary) and a set of rules that combine the words to convey relationships among concepts (a mental grammar).”¹⁴ It is a larger or smaller dictionary coupled with an encyclopaedia, a huge vocabulary we receive together with the syntactic and semantic rules to use it. To learn and integrate this is a complex process that takes years to accomplish and it is perfected throughout our whole lifetime (by learning new words or a new language for example).

That didactic learning is accompanied by a methodological part, which implements the ways (gr. *hodos*) for using and applying language, i.e. its field of application. We learn, besides vocabulary and pronunciation, when, where, to whom, in which situation, in what register or in what context to speak or to say one thing or another. And that pragmatic contextualisation of the learned language is the methodological part of the learning process that we undergo as children and adolescents. Both the didactic and methodological part are needed for the mother tongue to be operational, adequate, efficient and adapted to social communication, behaviour and insertion.

Those two aspects of communication are necessary to attain a purpose. Every action has an underlying intention, which can be explicit or implicit, but very present and either tactically or strategically oriented. Therefore, in the end, we have that trio: the didactical, the methodological and the purpose that we learn to use in order to inscribe in, and to adapt to the society which can fulfil our needs and answer to our wants. The fact that we have learned some formulas for using our linguistic abilities and we take them for granted is something we usually do not reflect upon. Although for thinking we have an inner language – our very own “mentalese”, as S. Pinker specified – the exteriorisation of this means that: “Knowing a language, then, is knowing how to translate mentalese into strings of words and vice versa.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Pinker, 2007, p.76.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 73.

Once having learned to express ourselves, we just use language and the subsequent rules in a quasi-automatic way, without any questioning or analysing the process involved or the deeper meanings (etymology for instance), the intentionality and the ways of human communication. And, because that (linguistic) using works out so well, nobody see any reason in putting it under a few question marks. Usually we do not care about how we were moulded, how our thinking, feeling or talking came into place and, once expressed, became so “natural”, obvious and unrestrained. Our mental processes are performed and pre-programmed by the very mother tongue that we use and its rules and possibilities, but also by its limitations and restrictions. Nevertheless, psychotherapists encounter every day people who have problems (in family, at school, professional or social ones), the great majority of which being caused by an inappropriate and inadequate use of language (syntactical, semantically or/and pragmatically) and communication because, as Paul Watzlawick put it: “The image of the world is, in a very concrete and basic sense, the product of communication.”¹⁶ That could be another strong argument in favour of the epistemological opening and widening realised by the social-constructionist approach (besides the strictly psychotherapeutic one).

Some epistemological developments

Contemporary man needs a bifocal view, directed, on one hand, towards the relation with -, and the insertion in a world moving more and more alert, becoming more complex and, on the other hand, an introvert re-channelling, on himself, with the purpose of keeping an inner equilibrium that allows the “well functioning”, simultaneously with the adaptation and accommodation to the very dynamic reality in which he lives. Maybe, one of the possible key would be the one that Emil Cioran indicates: “To realize that what you are - is not you, that what you own - is not yours, to assume complicity for nothing, not even with your own life - that means to see clear, that means to reach the null root of all things.”¹⁷

At a first glance, such a “solution” may seem radical and maybe, in his cynicism, Cioran wanted it that way: it’s suggests the reaching of the “point zero”, a *terminus* that is equivalent (in its uncertain but open potentiality) to a new beginning, cleaned of the hard and gravel of the obsolete narrations. Once more it is foreseen the importance of the basic ideas of the social constructionism that tries leavening a “new man” freed of any scenarios or narrations that make him circumambulate (or even to be stuck in a moment) within a perimeter that is closed, delineated, full of frustrations, stress, worries, sorrows, difficulties and/or un-fulfilment. Texts edification, characteristic of *homo sapiens*, represents its cognitive and conceptual “placing”, as the speech reifies, for each of us, the reality in which we then install (or see us installed in) and is rapidly becoming the

¹⁶ Watzlawick, 1980, p. 49.

¹⁷ Cioran, 1996, p. 63.

reference frame of the lived world or the one that we are lived by. As it was also specified by Edgar Morin: "Like this, everything is contained in language, but language itself is a part contained in the whole which he contains. Language is in us and we are in the language. We are doing the language which creates us."¹⁸ In such context which reminds us of a hologram (where the whole is contained in the parts), postmodern psychotherapy can be equated to a multilayer text with multiple meanings containing several levels:

1. Client's everyday life (client's empirical data that are the least known);
2. Client's narration on his own life (told in the therapy sessions too);
3. Inner therapist's narration, based on client's narration (and on what he/she has learned or was trained);
4. Reinsertion of the therapeutic narration in client's story;
5. Client's implementation of the new narrative to his life, his difficulties and problems.

We see that the constructionist therapy, apparently an innocent storytelling, an amiable therapist-client dialogue, is much more complex and intricate than it seems at a first-glance. To reach this, it was indeed necessary to have that clear epistemological opening (undertaken by constructivism and postmodern hermeneutic vision, both overcoming the limitative paradigm of the first systemic approaches).

All the emerging problems are put in a context with serious and imperative justifications: affective or pulsional, familial, social and professional. All these are considered as objective given, independent of the subject that finds himself outcast in the event. Apparently, we have a cause placed outside the subject and a problem of the subject. If we overcome, though, this so well known formulation of the problem and we place ourselves on a semantic and hermeneutic position, things will get a different interpretation. From this perspective the problems appear on a background which is placed on a linguistic level. Intrinsically related to the background, the problem appears as the detaching shape and, through that, outlines itself, defines and certifies, though without abandoning its origin. For, as Christian Godin pertinently states: "(...) the language is not a window opened through the world, but a screen on which our own images are projected."¹⁹ And, we may say, a screen out of which our own images detach, delineates, get *ontos* and are reified with each new verbal projection. This whole activity of projection takes place most of the time in the dark room of the personal cinema, protected from a serious and thorough confrontation with reality (at least the one that can be received by the senses, deprived or lacking judicial and interpretative force).

The epistemological shift of the analytic philosophy and of the late twentieth century Systemic, outlined the idea that the language can be comprehended as an objective reality, as a matrix formatting meanings, where man uses to live and to

¹⁸ Morin, 1991, p. 172.

¹⁹ Godin, 2007, p. 550.

construct himself. Of course the language, formally understood as a mediator of communication and, thus, as inter-relational tool, has some dimensions that facilitates the human-human meeting. But in the same time the language works also as a forger - “*traduttore, traditore*” -, that in-purifies, hinders, handicaps, disadvantages the communication and understanding. Firstly because between the inner and the outer language, between what the individual thinks (his own mentalese) and what he says, between subjective and objective language, there can be huge differences (mainly related to cultural and vocabulary limits). Secondly, because what one says, the other one does not understand in the same way - we associate different significance to the same word - (and this, often originates in different cultural levels). Then, there can be the affective colour of what is told, the emotional contamination of meanings, the figurative interpretation applied to the concrete or the other way around, intentional distortions – ways of (miss)using the language, ideological travesty and intellectual masking, in games of power, control or influence. As counter-balance to all these, and maybe to some other aspects of the difficulties and problems that the language raises, we may remember Ludwig Wittgenstein phrase: “What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.”

On the other hand yet, psychotherapy uses the word, i.e. the translation into language of what we feel, think, believe or intend (which is valid for the client and for the therapist too). Precisely here lays the epistemological and methodological accent of the debated approach, in the way of a paradigmatic tropism that clearly distances from the usual and widespread approaches. And so, not that much what the client (he or she) or the members of families do, but what they understand by what they say, what they interpret and how they express their problems or how are they linguistically inscribed, becomes relevant. The psychotherapist mission, in this case, turns into a job of archaeologist of knowledge that searches, at the level of words, language and narrations, possible conditions for a change of perspective in grammar, semantics and pragmatics. Modifying the language and the narrative of the individual, towards some, more adapted and more adequate, he has, as a consequence, the opportunity of a better insertion into communication and inter-human relations (familial, social or professional). All these have as a premise the (re)framing that the individual does to his own mental universe, his ideological horizon, to the stories that he is telling, to the language that he is using and the ways he does it. The narrative re-indexing aims a re-writing of one’s own dictionary (with better explanations for instance), an analysis, and based on this, a recomposing of the personal encyclopaedia (in the same way as the editions are revised and improved) and a methodological adapting of language to the social contexts. Thus the scope of the debated approach is an interventionist one, towards the expression in a social frame and the involvement into a discourse, which, inevitably has a political character as well. Because, as Michael White states referring to those individuals:

“As much as they involve in these externalizing conversations, their personal histories give up speaking to them anymore about their identity and their “real” relationships, they are not anymore accurate transcriptions of their life. The individuals experiment a *separation*, alienation towards these stories. In the space created by this rupture, they find themselves free to explore other *preferable findings* apropos of what they can be, where they can *insert, later on, their own life.*”²⁰

Shifting outside the discourse repositions the talking individual in his own place of origin, as the narrations born out of the social meetings and they have to return there, otherwise they risk remaining in an impotent circular auto-referential, that re-closes and re-justifies itself continuously. The opening we are talking about is indicated already by the therapeutic act, there where the questions and the dialogue themselves take the intervention’s place. Above the social systems are juxtaposed the linguistic systems and, from a social constructionist point of view, the two of them build themselves together and are both sided beneficial.

Each environment or human situation (being familial, professional, racial or social one) creates a linguistic context too, a prescription referring some verbal and ideational formulas, validated in that circle. And, as well as we use the mother tongue without reflecting to its rules, to its inherent grammar, but we just simply talk, in the same way we use a specific ideational universe filed with ready-made formulas, strewed by stereotypes, verbal reflexes, widely used formulations, ordinary and shared beliefs but un-reflected and lacking any proof or logic, ways of conceiving expressions or concepts only by virtue of tautological inertia. The instructive-educative process (in its widest meaning), that we are obliged to from our early childhood, gives us, not only the modality of using a specific mother tongue respectively it’s syntactic rules, but also the semantic norms of understanding it, and directive pragmatic lines for its implementation. And, in the same way we do not necessary question ourselves about the grammatical logic inherent to any discourse that we speak, we also not necessary question the semantic implications or the pragmatic results of those. Our moral judgements (that are so at hand to us) rather conform to our emotionality, as already Alfred Ayer stated. They do not have a mandatory logical character, touched by rationality and careful reasoning of the problem’s data, of the issue or the context, but they are pure expression of the emotions usually disguised in intellectual clothes. In this manner, our emotiveness has a prescriptivist character rather than a descriptivist one. Our moral judgements are not simple (descriptive) observations of a perceived given, but set themselves into practical orientations, estimations, criticism or implicit meanings incumbent to a pragmatic intentionality, if not even a command or, at least, a recommendation concerning thinking, feeling, attitude or behaviour of an individual.

The linguistic idiosyncrasy, often paralogic, rebarbative and specious insinuates in our speech, in our relating and observations that get the allure of a well executed copy but lacking the authenticity of the investigation of a hermeneutical

²⁰ White, 1998, p. 169.

nature addressed to the significance and intentionality of that told. Where are they coming from (the words)? Where do they go? What do I really want to say and what am I up to by what I say? Why can I not keep silence sometimes? What pushes me (from behind or forward) to make myself visible, to talk, to argue, to counter-argue? Why should I always be right? Why do I express opinions in an apodictic way (mostly in sensible situation), and I do not consider alternatives? Beside these few possible and necessary interrogations, we may imagine others, which concern rather the communication *per se* or the relation with the interlocutor. Here are some of them: Why don't I stay calmly to listen to what he/she has to say? Why, while he/she is speaking, I search for cracks, (counter)arguments, niches where I can creep in to take the leadership of the communication (which, sooner or later, tends to become a soliloquy)? Why can't I control, or at least manage, my emotional impulses (while strongly debating)? Why do I think (and proceed like that) that the truth is unilateral, with only one valid facet, and that is precisely on my side? Why is it so hard for me to admit the plurality of opinions and of truth as well? Why is it so difficult to tolerate interpretative and ideological alternatives? Why the other one's conjectures would not be as good as mine were?

Certainly that all of the above are only few of the many questions that could raise after this "neuro-linguistic programming" that is aimed by the social constructivism approach and by the narrative therapies. As attempts of reconstructing of the mental and linguistic universe, of purifying of any discourse's conditions, *clinamen* (inclination) towards relational reframing through re-establishing and rewriting the relation starting from the personal verbal-ideational load, the contemporary movements from the social constructionist field inscribe themselves in the accent, stressed by postmodernism, on the abandon of the big narrations. From such a perspective, we can analyze and conceptualize better everything related to individual's verbiage, to how he can see the relation with the world and with others from the point of the narrative telling. We may stress, therefore, the micro-analytic level, with punctual focuses of an orientation pragmatic, consequentialist and utilitarianist.

Being closed and confined into language, without having any possibility of an exteriority to it (as Karl Jaspers mentioned), and the fact that communication has not got a counter - because we cannot not communicate (even when I keep silence I communicate something, in other words, I communicate that I don't want to communicate)²¹ - as the axioms of communication of the Palo Alto School state, means that the narrative approach tries to find solutions to a problem right from the inside of narrativity. Such an action is possible only by rearranging the items of a given group of words, expressions, ideas and concepts. Rearranging them by efficiency and functionality criterion in a utilitarian way seems to be much proper and judicious than the so fallacious searching and opposing in the name of truth. It is useless to be fond of our conjectures; by any means, they are not peremptorily

²¹ Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, 1972, pp. 45-48.

(maybe only in the personal imagination saturated with “wishful thinking”). Giving up in front of this evidence is not, as it might seem, un-avowable but, on the contrary, it gives the possibility to open in front of the other and of the communication towards self, towards the way in which we involve in problems and their solving.

Conclusions

Finally, we are all caught in a continual process of apprehending, a travail from which our narratives undergo modifications, additions, completions, repairing, criticism, tearing, extending, deepening, resizing, politicizations or "infecting" and "contaminations". It remains incontestable the fact that all this information and learning processes take place through texts/narratives. To put it in a simpler language: constructionist therapist's aim is to virus the cognitive system of the client, to derail him out of his story, to bring him on the realm of unexpected and unexplored cognitive possibilities, full of promises and fertile in potentials.

Of course there is - in the social constructionist/narrative therapy – the danger of narrative just for the sake of narration, an "art for art's sake" slippery and extremely pernicious. We want to emphasize, therefore, the responsibility of social constructionist therapist that works on the client's stories only through some other stories. The orientation discussed is open to positive changes on both parties, to implementing some appropriate vision for personal and socio-cultural conditions; consequently finding effective and satisfactory communicational actions and a mutual agreement and understanding are essential in this context. Easy language games or linguistic artistry are not in our interest, they remain just sophistic artifices; what we consider are those narratives which re-establish the interpersonal situations on their natural track, without friction and roughness, those stories that ease understanding and intercede the integrating coexistence between humans.

If we start from Wittgenstein's statement from *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: „All sentences are equal”²², and we understand that an axiology of the syntactic is not possible, we have to concede that we may have a deontology of semantics and even an ethic of pragmatics. The inter-human communication, following and using all the three levels, has to discern, attentive and in full awareness, between the domains of comprehension and applicability of each incumbent dimension. The fact that, from a syntactic point of view, the sentences are interchangeable does not mean that there is no semantic and pragmatic implication of them; we can remember here the (communication) axiom proposed by Mihai Dinu: “communication is irreversible”²³. In other words the communication leaves traces, infusing in the soul and mind of the interlocutor, to emerge from there, filled with unexpected meanings and significance.

²² Wittgenstein, 1990, p. 82.

²³ Dinu, 2000, p.104.

Such thing points towards a special stress on what is told, a focussing on the purpose of the enunciations and the possible implications and references of this. All this considerations prompts to the responsibility of the speaker and of its speech, to ponder the moral weight attached to the narrativity which is so basic to us. We are here in antipode to those who believe that the reason they have a mouth is to talk with. On the contrary, if one has a mouth, meaning the possibility of a language, it is to think with and through it, to carefully weight its valences, effects and implications. Only this way we open wide the access towards unexpected possibilities and opportunities of the narrativity and, in the same time, we see the grotesque limitations of the un-reflected verbiage unaware of its consequences.

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONSTITUTION OF OBJECTS

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the various ways in which our representations can affect, can interfere with, can mirror themselves in, or can even establish our perceptions. In the present study we will conduct our inquiry from within the Kantian paradigm, trying to follow the avatars of the Kantian vision in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and David Bohm.

The aim of this paper is to explain how objects acquire a distinct identity within the web of determinations that modulate our consciousness. The functional equilibrium of our reality depends on our capacity to generate and sustain meaningful objects through the constant interplay and reciprocal conditioning among the so called “sense data”, the concepts within our intellect and the synthetic, productive, recognizing and reproductive function of our imagination. What unites the three thinkers is a unitary vision upon the connected phenomena that provide for us coherent and cohesive experiences with objects, and to this end we will discuss in turns notions such as the transcendental object X at Kant, the intentional object at Husserl and the object at Bohm. Last but not least, another ambition of this study is to provide links and arguments in favor of the idea according to which the Kantian vision upon the phenomena involved in creating and sustaining reality, though modulated and improved by phenomenology and by quantum physics, is still the indispensable and fundamental basis of any argument regarding the structure of reality.

Keywords: *transcendental object X, threefold synthesis of imagination, intentional object, unity of consciousness, constitution of objects, law of overall necessity, revalorization of the lived-world*

Today the relationship between a philosophy grafted upon observations and experiments made by the quantum physics and phenomenology is no longer that of a noncommutative algebra but is still one that needs more detailed and more explicit channels of communication (in order for one to be able to enlarge the field

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of research and the general theoretical perspective). The complexity and the general openness of a larger (inter- or trans-disciplinary) methodological assumption depends on the clarity that the researcher is able to cast upon the lines of continuity within the history of the metamorphoses of an idea. The papers that established a *direct link* between the philosophy of David Bohm and that of Kant and Husserl (considering the fact that Bohm does not speak of a direct influence upon his work as coming from these two major figures of classical philosophy) are not at all a „trend” or a „topos” in the contemporary theoretical and scientific discourse. The ambition of this paper is to demonstrate something left unclear or ambiguous by previous studies – namely the fact that the general understanding of how reality functions at Bohm has strong antecedents (theoretical groundings and complex elaborations) in the philosophy of Kant and Husserl, especially in what concerns the way in which representation and perception are understood to condition each-other. What is to be gained at the end of this short incursion into the mechanisms of perception and representation and their relationships to the objects that constitute our reality is a clearer perspective (because mirrored more complexly in various fields of research and because depicted at the level of different philosophical paradigms) on the phenomena of perception and representation and a confirmation of the validity, of the endurance (the capacity to withstand and pass various paradigmatic tests) and of the quality of Kant’s insight into the mechanisms of perception and of representation within the equation of a continuously sustained reality.

The object is *on the one hand* the entity which withstands the weight of all our representation, intuitions, projections, fancies etc, and, *on the other hand*, it is the entity which acts at the conceptual level where, like a conceptual „DNA” (and like an all-absorbing and all-integrating conceptual locus), it establishes the path and the algorithm for all the future syntheses, thus generating the conditions of thinking in a possible experience together with the fundamental concepts for thinking empirical objects in general.

In the first case we are speaking of the *empirical object* (mainly as David Hume had outlined it in its major characteristics – the physical object which excites or stimulates the senses and which „impresses” or „inculcates” itself in man’s intellect) and of the object as *noematic nucleus*, that is, the *intentional object* which *also* includes to some extent (from the point of view of the content) that which after the process of „objectivation” we would call „the physical object” .

In the second case we are speaking about the transcendental object at Kant („the placeholder X”), an object which we can regard as a logical necessity meant to sustain the unity of the synthesis of representations (along with the transcendental apperception, this transcendental object provides the necessary synthetic unity to „the play of appearances”¹).

¹ Here we understand by „appearances” *the representations of sensibility*.

The key towards understanding the role played by the transcendental object is to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the passage which tells us *that the concepts without intuitions are empty and the intuitions without concepts are blind*. The transcendental object is the constant „empty” concept which fills itself with intuitions; it is not something intuited (as well as it is not something empirical) but it is „only” a logical necessity meant to give coherence and cohesion to the flow of intuitions.

In this study we will try to detail this dual nature of the object within a Kantian paradigm, starting from the relation between the transcendental object and representations of sensibility (or appearances) as it is described in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. *The ambition to contour a phenomenological model for the functioning of reality has to take into consideration this dual influence of the object upon the subject, as well as the series of acts through which the subjects constructs his objects* (hence the importance of bringing the Husserlian paradigm into discussion).

In its double function in the formation of reality the object performs a complex guidance – a guidance which ultimately constitutes the motivational stimulus and „reservoir”, as well as the fertile soil for all the acts (detailed by Husserl) through which the subject creates his reality.

This study is an attempt to outline the complex role played by the object (along its various hypostases) in the agglutination of a functional (cohesive and coherent) reality.

The final but perhaps the most important motivation for bringing the three thinkers together (Kant, Husserl and Bohm) is that what unites them is a unitary vision upon consciousness and the ambition to demonstrate how this unity achieves functional validity.

We will discuss in turns the particularities by means of which each of the three philosophers adjust, adapt, regulate or vary the „intensity”, the „frequency” and the „tone” of the processual nuances involved in the functional sustaining of this unity.

The Kantian perspective on the relation between the transcendental object and representations (the transcendental unity of apperception and the threefold synthesis of imagination)

In our attempt to depict how objects are created in our consciousness as distinct and complex entities we will start from the vision upon the transcendental object exhibited in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, where, according to Kant, the possibility of experience and of cognition of the objects of this experience rest on three sources of cognition: sense, imagination and apperception.

If we regard the concept solely as function (without determining the phenomenon), then the concept applies to a phenomenon in general. To the phenomenon in general Kant assigns a similarly general intellectual concept which he calls “a pure concept”. The phenomenon in general is the transcendental analogue

of a determined (recognizable) physical phenomenon and the transcendental object is the always-matching or constantly-corresponding superposable universal pattern for this phenomenon in general. The transcendental object is the transcendental analogue of the physical object. It always assures the logical necessity by virtue of which an abstract structure of thinking acquires meaning, and because of this it always functions as one unique entity with one identical function.² At Kant, the transcendental characteristics of the intellect are the functions of the intellect – functions which are not formed through experience and which exist before experience, precisely in order to provide the necessary functional structure (the necessary conditions) capable to make existence meaningful and sustainable. For this reason, Kant calls this functions “pure functions”, “pure concepts” or “categories” and sees them as being capable to assure the unity of the pure (that is non-empirical or *a priori*) action of the intellect.

Kant proved in this way that there exists as well a completely undetermined thought about a pure generality³.

Because of its constant and always-identical-to-itself (from the functional point of view) generality, the transcendental object cannot be determined precisely and remains a pure abstraction. As a pure abstraction, this object cannot enter our experience, nor become an object for our cognition (once again, because the transcendental object is not a real object or a given thing). It remains a pure concept in relation to which the appearances gain a (functional) unity that makes them coherent and cohesive throughout history.

The significance of the transcendental idealism, as Kant had envisaged it, is to be found in the fact that it consists of fundamentally related entities: every appearance (representation of sensibility) is related to a (corresponding) transcendental object. The functional unity of our consciousness depends on the unity of appearances – which unity is assured by means of a non-empirical trans-contextual⁴ entity which mediates (integrates, stabilizes and anchors into consciousness and further on into reality) from the pure level of the intellect (that is, *a priori*) the flux of representations, thus assuring a unified human experience (complexly integrated) of reality and of its peculiarities. Man needs such a placeholder X^5 as long as there is *nothing everlasting or at least constant* (in its identity) *in the empirical world* (being in constant transformation, the objects of the empirical world cannot serve as a unifying principle for representations in general). Thus, for methodological and logical reasons, Kant reasoned a non-empirical object grounded *a priori* which cannot contain any determinate intuition at all and concerns only the unitary experience of the objective reality.

² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the Romanian edition translated into Romanian by Nicolae Bagdasar and Elena Moisiuc, IRI, București, 1994, p. 147 A.

³ *Ibidem*, p.249 A.

⁴ Our term, not a Kantian reference.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 147 A.

The transcendental object X is a *pre-categorial concept* meant to sustain the formal unities, and it is the only unifying and relational entity that can make appearances thinkable (as objects of consciousness – that is, of intuitive cognition).

The transcendental object X determines and maintains the concept of an object in general for all possible representations.

An appearance becomes thinkable in the context of a synthetic unity of consciousness, a unity labeled by Kant „*the transcendental unity of apperception*”. The transcendental apperception is the functional horizon of meaning within which (in the virtue of which) the transcendental object assures the unity of appearances – more precisely, it is an *a priori*, pre-categorial and determined from without sensibility or experience supra-principle and general state of formal unity - „it is a pure, original and unchanging consciousness (it is thus a numerical unity) that 'grounds all concepts *a priori*'(A107) and thus all experience”⁶. Previously (at A103) Kant stated that the transcendental apperception is „one consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been successfully intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation”.

Considering the fact that both the transcendental object and the transcendental apperception - as atemporal sources of cognition - operate on another level of reality than the one directly accesible to our consciousness (a level patterned by different onthological densities than ours), the substance as well as the character of the selfsame unity through which they sustain the general functioning and the equilibrium within our daily reality (in the sense that they make every experience possible) remains unknowable.

In the Kantian vision upon reality, *the object as a distinct and manageable entity within our daily reach is something continuously constructed by our consciousness by means of the threefold synthesis of our imagination*. Far from being something given in advance which man has to assimilate “as such” or to which man has to simply adapt himself, the object gets constituted in the human cognition with the participation of both a sensible matter (the outer object that Hume talked about) and a conceptual frame (the transcendental object X).

Only when united by our imagination (that is brought within a formula of functional equilibrium and synchronization) will the sense and the intellect produce objects in/for us. If these two faculties would remain separated and if the imagination would fail to unite them, we could not exert any control over the objects in our environment as we would have only intuitions without concepts or concepts without intuitions – that is, representations that could not be related in any way to a determined object (entity).

In the following section of this study, in order to gain a clearer perspective on how objects become complex achievable entities that structure and orient

⁶ Jonael Schickler, *Metaphysics as Christology, An Odyssey of the Self from Kant and Hegel to Steiner*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Aldershot, 2005, p.23.

(*guide*) our daily values, ambitions or accumulative goals, we will detail the Kantian vision upon threefold synthesis of imagination (we will depict the three types of synthesis present in *The Critique of Pure Reason*).

The first synthesis in the „series” of the three Kantian constitutive syntheses is *the synthesis of apprehension in the intuition*. This synthesis „gravitates” around the concept of time, as Kant would always regard (throughout his work) the representations as temporal modifications of the mind - modifications constantly subjected to the formal condition of one’s inner sense. Only when grafted upon a temporal axis (or stem), can the representations enter the complex mechanisms of functional and integrated unity which sustain the sense of our reality: ordering, connectivity, complementarity, succession of relations and so on and so forth. More explicitly, this synthesis refers precisely to that small phenomenological interval which arises before any intuition is given to us, playing somehow the role that a permeable and selective membrane plays in biology – this interval or membrane gives representations the ordering they receive in our perception of the time and also, via processes such as ordering, connectivity, complementarity or succession, this interval provide for the representations the shape necessary for them to be able to be taken up by the next synthesis.

Because sense is a purely receptive faculty (and as such it cannot provide any ordering or relation for the representations that it captures), this synthesis appears as a necessary adjuvant, playing also the role of a corrector and of a stabilizer for the data provided by sense.

The second constitutive synthesis is *the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination*. This synthesis intervenes only after the representations were ordered and related to one another from a temporal point of view by the synthesis of apprehension. The synthesis of reproduction in the imagination assures the necessary continuity between our preceding representation and the incoming and ongoing new ones, by projecting upon the latter ones (while assimilating them) the conceptual patterns already formed in the intellect, with their entire constellation of nuances and specificities.

The synthesis of reproduction in the imagination constantly assures and sustains from a functional point of view an unconscious structure of integrative accumulation and organization. In virtue of this structure, every data that we perceive must fall under a concept in order to result into a meaningful notion. That concept is synthetically defined and structured on the basis of our previous experience with corresponding objects. The process undergoes the following succession: the concept is in the intellect, the sense captures the raw data and the imagination makes the synthesis between the concept in the intellect and the raw data provided by the sense. Imagination functionally integrates the raw data of the sense into the conceptual frame synthetically adapted and constructed in time (as one’s experience gains more and more cohesion and coherence) so as to correspond to those raw data. Or, to put it otherwise, the imagination applies the categories of the

understanding to sensibility, where the role of categories should be understood according to Béatrice Longuenesse's description: "Categories *before* synthesis are *nothing but* mere forms of analysis, logical functions of judgment. But these 'mere forms of analysis' *govern the synthesis* of what they are to analyze"⁷. The conceptual frame (the receiver or receptacle of that "raw" data) heavily depends on our previous experience and on our culture (informational load): thus for example, while regarding the same architectural edifice, an architect will see (in the sense of understand) it from a technical point of view, while a tourist will see it from a vaguely aesthetic point of view. Thus we can say that imagination is a productive, formative and constitutive force that mediates between empirical data and concepts by means of (and by the medium of) schemata – a dual device able to bring intellectual virtues and sensible data in a formula of self-sustaining equilibrium. More precisely (and here we will use Rudolf A. Makkreel's formulations and interpretations), imagination mediates between the conceptual *universality* of the categories and the empirical *particularity* of sensible intuition (or, to put it otherwise, it translates the particular nuances of the living pulsatile medium into the rules implicit in any conceptual organization) and thus it manages to construct a temporally coherent and cohesive progressive reality:

The central function of the imagination that is disclosed in the Objective Deduction is, however, productive. The *productive imagination* mediates between the understanding and sense to apply the transcendental unity of consciousness to 'all objects of possible experience' (*C₁, A₁₁₈*)⁸. This involves a productive synthesis of the imagination which applies the categories of the understanding to sensibility. In the B Deduction, Kant renames this transcendental synthesis of the imagination, a 'figurative synthesis (*synthesis speciosa*) (...). Kant gives no explicit reason why he chose to rename this synthesis a 'figurative synthesis', but the term 'figurative' aptly suggests the graphic, more special qualities that the imagination contributes to synthesis. Insofar as the imagination synthesizes it serves the understanding, but in that role it also brings to bear some of its own formative power.(...)here it is displayed the production of schemata. Schemata are a priori products of the imagination that mediate between concepts and empirical appearances. A schema, according to Kant, 'must be pure, that is, void of all empirical content, and yet at the same time, while it must in one respect be *intellectual*, it must in another be sensible' (*C₁, A₁₃₈/B₁₇₇*).

⁷ Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge, Sensibility and Discursivity in the transcendental analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Charles T. Wolfe, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998, p.12.

⁸ Here the author uses the abbreviation *C₁* for what is known as Kant's "first critique", namely the Critique of Pure Reason, and A and B for the main section of argumentation of this complex Kantian thesis. All the quotations from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* can be consulted in the following complete and professionally edited translated volume: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer (University of Pennsylvania) and Allen W. Wood (Yale University), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

Most discussions of the schematism focus on the schemata of the *pure* concepts of the understanding. These are the transcendental schemata that apply the categories to make them constitutive of our experience of empirical objects. The task of the imagination is to mediate between the conceptual universality of the categories and the empirical particularity of sensible intuition. It does so by applying the categories to the most universal condition of sense, namely, the form of time. The imagination schematizes by translating the rules implicit in the categories into a temporally ordered set of instructions for constructing an objectively determinate nature. The category of causality, for example, provides the rule for recognizing a temporal order as a necessary order. This can be schematized by the imagination as a progressive temporal sequence through which objects can be determinately related. The production of temporal schemata can be seen to constitute the basic synthetical transcendental function of the imagination⁹.

Together with Jane Kneller's explanations of an extremely significant Kantian passage, we can conclude that the power of imagination is an instinctive and natural force of synthesis that supplies the correct - *in the sense of „synthetically ballanced and adjusted”*- matter for the process of understanding, thus making human intellectual development a sustainable goal¹⁰:

It seems to me that here, as in all else, nature has made wise provisions. For if we had to assure ourselves that we can in fact produce the object, before the presentation of it could determine us to apply our forces, our forces would presumably remain largely unused. For usually we do not come to know what forces we have except by trying them out. So nature has provided for the connections between the determination of our forces and the presentation of the object [to be there] even before we know what ability we have, and it is often precisely this effort which to that very mind seemed at

⁹ Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, Paperback edition 1994, pp.29-30.

¹⁰ One should also note that before Kant and Husserl the Scottish philosopher David Hume depicted in accurate descriptions the power of *external entities* to set the imagination in motion – which imagination, thus stimulated will create patterns of behaviour and assimilation of the surrounding reality (patterns called by Berger and Luckmann „typizations” in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City, Anchor Books, New York, 1966). The difference in this respect between Hume and Kant lies in the fact that Hume regarded the phenomenon mainly as a *one way flow of stimuli and responses to this stimuli* but it is noteworthy that he too observed the complex capacity of imagination to organize and assemble the data provide by the sense into complex and conceptual structures that sustain reality in both its conscious and unconscious hypostases „Nothing is more free than the imagination of man; and though it cannot exceed that original stock of ideas furnished by the internal and external senses, it has unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision. It can feign a train of events, with all the appearance of reality, ascribe to them a particular time and place, conceive them as existent, and paint them out to itself with every circumstance, that belongs to any historical fact, which it believes with the greatest certainty. (...)It must be excited by nature, like all other sentiments; and must arise from the particular situation, in which the mind is placed at any particular juncture. Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is usually conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy. (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sect. V. Sceptical Solution of these Doubts, Part II., free on line edition on pdf).

*first an empty wish, that produces that ability in the first place. Now wisdom is obliged to set limits to that instinct, but wisdom will never succeed in eradicating it, or [rather] it will never even demand its eradication*¹¹. (...) Kant suggests here, first, that natural, ‘instinctive’ forces – forces not identified as rational – drive creativity and the development of our cognitive capacities. The ‘power of imagination, that blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious’(A₇₈/B₁₀₃), is the force that makes human intellectual *development* possible. Imaginative striving – we might call it a kind of ‘straining to understand’ what appears impossible – allows us to recognize in theory and then possibly to realize in practice what ‘seemed at first an empty wish’. Without this *natural* impulse surely no progress of reason is possible¹².

Unlike the synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, *the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination* is capable to grasp more than one representation at once and to relate them simultaneously to our previous experiences due to the „blind” character of the synthesis performed by the imagination (which precedes and anticipates any process of attaining awareness). *Thus we can say that the nature of this synthesis of the imagination has to do with the very way of being of reality in its normal, non-problematic, synchronized, natural and because of all these unconscious (or at least non-problematic) aspects. As a personal choice of the author of this study, we will place this „blind” and automatic (synchronized to the point of simultaneity) synthesis of the imagination (which, as we had seen, Jane Kneller calls „natural impulse”)* at the level of Edmund Husserl’s „natural attitude”. *The reason behind this association is that we believe that this instant and unconscious synthesis performed by the imagination constitutes the very phenomenological basis for distinct behavioural patterns (such as the natural attitude signaled by Husserl).* What unites these two cases (the „blind” character of imagination and the natural attitude) is the absence of a conscious element meant to pull somebody out of the *sufficiency* of normal daily situations and to thus allow that somebody to introduce a personal space of creation within the „natural” continuity of reality.

Thus we will use the word “natural” in a the Husserlian sense of the “natural attitude” and we will graft it upon Kant’s characterization of imagination as “blind” - that is as automatic, instinctive reaction („impulse”)¹³ to the medium.

The third constitutive synthesis is the synthesis of recognition in the concept. Intimately related to and conditioned by the transcendental unity of apperception, this is the synthesis that actually gives the first authentic contour to what is known as consciousness (as a unified manifestation of the self). This synthesis brings the apprehended and the reproduced representations into a

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment (Kritik der Urteilskraft)*, e.g. for paragraph 231 in the footnote from page 420, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1987, p. 420, our italics.

¹² Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, pp.31-32.

¹³ Thus, one hardly perceives something (through his sensibility) that that something has already fallen under the concept which he has for that “something” (in his intellect).

coherent and cohesive consciousness. We will assume within this study Brent Kalar's explanation of this synthesis:

This synthesis of reproduction is conditioned in turn by a further synthesis, that of 'recognition in a concept' (A 103; 230). According to Kant, merely reproducing the various parts of an object in the imagination is not enough to grant me a complete, unified representation of it. In addition to this, I must also *recognize* that these elements *belong together*. He writes that 'without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain' (ibid.)¹⁴. That is, I must recognize that my representations all belong to the same thing, otherwise I will not recognize a whole object by means of them; my various representations will instead remain disconnected, discrete elements in my stream of consciousness. What is needed is something to unify these various representations¹⁵.

But, in the equation of the Western understanding of human existence, the most interesting and important aspect pertaining to this third synthesis is the fact that it represents the very phenomenological basis for Martin Heidegger's vision upon existence as faithful stretching onwards, as constant projection of oneself into the future. According to Heidegger, man's motivation to exist is to be found precisely in the fact that he is always expecting things, always hoping things - as he is constantly pulled ahead of himself into purposes that he is trying to fulfil, into tasks that he is working on. This aspect was best detailed by David Couzens Hoy:

Let's see how Heidegger forces a temporal dimension on Kant's text.' without consciousness (...)in vain' [author's note: citation from Kant already given in the quotation above from Kalar] Heidegger adds that something could not be thought to be the same except against a backdrop that also remains the same. This empirical claim leads to the idea of a more general or 'pure' horizon of 'being-able-to-hold-something-before-us [*Vorhaltbarkeit*]¹⁶. This *Vorhaltbarkeit* amounts to a *Vorhaften*, a preliminary attaching or a prefigurative grasping. The 'vor' suggests a projection of a future in this fore-structuring of experience. Heidegger therefore concludes that the synthesis of recognition is time-forming and the time that it forms is the future: this synthesis, he says, 'explores in advance...what must be held before us in advance as the same in order that the apprehending and reproducing syntheses in general can find a closed, circumscribed field of beings within which they can attach to what they bring forth and encounter, so to speak, and take them in stride as beings'¹⁷.

¹⁴ The rest of this quotation, although not given by the author, is important as well and we will reproduce it in this footnote: "For it would be a new representation in our current state, which would not belong at all to the act [*Actus*] through which it had been gradually generated, and its manifold would never constitute a whole, since it would lack the unity that only consciousness can obtain for it."(A 103)

¹⁵ Brent Kalar, *The Demands of Taste in Kant's Aesthetics*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London & New York, 2006, p.43.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the problem of Metaphysics*, 5th edition, translated by Richard Taft, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1997, p.130.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Kant...*, p. 130.

Because the first two syntheses presuppose this third synthesis, Heidegger believes that he can even maintain that the future has logical priority over the present and the past¹⁸.

We can conclude this section of our study dedicated to Kant by saying that *the conditions of the possibility of experience are also the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience*. The conditions of possibility depend upon the threefold synthesis of imagination, upon *sense, imagination and apperception* and upon the way in which these combined factors manage to provide a vivid, distinct, continuous and authentic link between the transcendental object X and the outer empirical object.

Kant calls the conditions of thinking in a possible experience and the fundamental concepts for thinking objects in general, categories (or a priori necessary laws).

Each and every appearance must be connected to such a necessary law through the threefold synthesis of imagination which determines, associates and relates representations to a unitary, cohesive and coherent consciousness. Rudolf A. Makkreel too confirms the theory according to which there can be no constitutive syntheses, no unity of consciousness and no understanding independent of the categories:

Kant's final position that all intuitive and imaginative syntheses are dependent on concepts of the understanding is even more clearly articulated in the B Deduction of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There the Subjective Deduction is dropped so that the understanding and its categories can be given a fundamental role from the beginning. Kant writes at B₁₃₀: 'All combination – be we conscious of it or not, be it a combination of the manifold of intuition, empirical or non-empirical, or of various concepts – is an act of the understanding. To this act the general title «synthesis» may be assigned.' At B₁₆₁ Kant asserts that all synthesis, 'even that which renders perception possible, is subject to the categories.' This means that all syntheses of apprehension are to be interpreted as empirical applications of the transcendental synthesis made possible by the understanding. Kant is explicitly rejecting the view of the Subjective Deduction that there can be transcendental syntheses of apprehension and reproduction independent of the categories. Now both syntheses are considered as empirical applications of the categories¹⁹.

The Husserlian intentional object

Edmund Husserl maintained that the object as noematic nucleus is the object that is given to us directly, immediately – that is, in an „evident intuition”

¹⁸ David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2009, p.18.

¹⁹ Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, Paperback edition 1994, pp.28-29.

(through a series of acts – perceptual stimulation or elicitation, attention, expectation, anticipation, syntheses of confirmation and of information, associations, variations, objectivations and so on and so forth²⁰):

The heart of intuition, for Husserl, is ‚evidence’ (*Evidenz*), that is, self evidence. In *Logical Investigations*, he says an intuition is a ‚fulfilled’ presentation of its object, that is, evidentially fulfilled, as a hypothesis or expectation might be fulfilled by observations. In *Ideas I*, he says that in intuition an object is given ‚originarily’, that is, with originating evidence, which provides the justification of knowledge²¹.

The objectivity of an object (its immediacy and straightforwardness able to transcend and restore into evidence anything circuitous, ambiguous or evasive) reflects the unity (coherence and cohesion) of one’s experience, as the object is able to provide the necessary axis of stability around which gravitate all the constitutive noeses (listed by us in the above section). The result of this functional intentional unity thus created and sustained is the meaning:

Every objectivity, without exception, is an intentional unity, which means that it is an ideal transcendence with respect to the various noetic experiences in which it appears and is constituted. (...)the object, by virtue of giving the noetic experiences their sense, is the constitutive unity of this multiplicity of noetic experiences. This is true, as we know, for every object – for the object of perception and the categorical object of the judgment as well as for science, logic, and phenomenology.(...) Every object is an ideal unity pole with respect to the multiple flow of its corresponding constitutive noeses²².

In the Husserlian system, *this power of the object to assure the functional unity of appearances (at the level of consciousness) and to prevent a chaotic existence and an afferent disintegration of the world is the utmost guidance that an object can provide for its subject*. According to Paul Ricoeur the flux of consciousness would overwhelm and submerge the subject in the absence of this complex guidance performed by the object upon his subject *in all possible ways* (inwards [when it triggers various types of intentionality, thus revealing them as authentic potentialities], outwards [when it induces clues and suggestions about various regions and faces of the objects yet to be discovered] and in what concerns the noetico-noematic structure of the object) as it assures the very unity of the cogito. *Through this unity of the cogito the actively conscious man can overcome the datum, by turning any datum into an act of creation. This unity of the cogito sustains a coherent and cohesive*

²⁰ The relation between the object and the transcendental ego (in the Husserlian sense) is never reducible to a single act, on the contrary, it’s a complex phenomenon of constant interplay of various acts which compete with each other but also complete each other.

²¹ David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl*, Routledge, Abingdon - Oxon, 2007, p.325.

²² André de Muralt, *The Idea of Phenomenology: Husserlian Exemplarism*, originally published by Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, under the title *L’Idée de la Phénoménologie: L’Exemplarisme Husserlien*, 1958; the present US version was translated by Garry L. Breckon and published by Northwestern University Press, 1988, p.122.

self, well integrated into time and space (synchronized and coordinated with the spatial and temporal nuclei actively conditioning his presence in the medium – „the whole of time and the whole of space” in Paul Ricoeur’s words), a self capable to extend (stretch) his reason beyond his present understandings towards the possibilities of his essence. And that is precisely why Husserl compares and even links his notion of „eidōs” with the „Idea” in the Kantian sense. Together with Ricoeur, we could even say that one way in which Husserl assimilates (more or less metaphorically) the Kantian a priori is to be found in this „prior credit which he extends to the possibility of systems”(Ricoeur):

The hypothesis of the destruction of the world – that is, the hypothesis of a consciousness which is not unified, which ‘explodes’ into a chaos of discordant appearances – appears to be irresistible from the side of the object. It is all the more admirable that consciousness can create unity.(...) The flux of consciousness would submerge us without the transcendental guide of the intentional object, for this is what presents the true problems of subjectivity. These are problems concerning the types of intentionality (perceiving, imagining, etc.), problems concerning the regions of the object and their noetico-noematic structure(nature, animate body, man, culture, etc.). Ultimately one can say that the Idea of the world is the transcendental guide of egology. This Idea structures the ego and assures us that transcendental subjectivity is not a chaos of intensive subjective processes (CM, § 21). This problem of the whole of the world and of the whole of time with which we were just occupied finds its solution less in a datum than in the credit which the phenomenologist extends to the final unity of the cogito. Totality is an Idea in the Kantian sense; that is to say, still using the language of Kant, it is reason itself extended beyond the understanding. Though Husserl is not an intellectualist, he is a rationalist by this prior credit which he extends to the possibility of systems(...) ²³.

By “*object as transcendental guide*”, as Ricoeur underlines, Husserl implies the fact that the object is capable to valorize our creativity by directing it towards higher levels of consciousness. There, this object assures and sustains an integrated system of connections and projections, in its posture (stance) of “ideal unity pole with respect to the multiple flow of its corresponding constitutive noeses” (André de Muralt):

An object must first be proposed as an ‘index’, as a transcendental guide.(...)Husserl never undertakes to consider the creativity of consciousness unless led by a ‘transcendental guide’, the object. This guide ties creativity and binds its genius to a ‘something’ which can be expressed at a higher level of consciousness²⁴.

In the Husserlian model of reality, the object can act as an ideal unity pole meant to determine all the noeses gravitate around its conceptual axis, as well as it can be a guide meant to set the creativity of our consciousness on a viable incisive

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1999, translated by Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree, p.100.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *op.cit.*, p.99.

vector, precisely because the object of our intention is present conceptually in the act of intending (the cogitatum [the model of the thing meant/aimed at/focused upon] is present conceptually in the cogito). For this very reason intentionality can't be but intentionality of something. Only due to this state of affairs man possesses an "objectifying intentionality". That is why the horizons of possibilities are always (conceptually) "*pre-delineated*" and the possibilities themselves are always some "*pre-figured*" possibilities. We will use here Professor Ströker's explanation: „Even though the real, actually existing object is not inside but outside consciousness, its reality cannot be established apart from those acts of consciousness in which it counts as' an actually existing object, those acts in which it is referred to, believed, and in judgement explicitly posited²⁵."

Thus, the real physical object acts as transcendental guide, in the sense that it activates or triggers the modes of consciousness corresponding to that object:

Necessarily the point of departure is the object given 'straightforwardly' [*a.n.* in direct experience] at the particular time. From it reflection goes back to the mode of consciousness at that time and to the potential modes of consciousness included horizontally in that mode, then to those [*a.n.* modes] in which the object might be otherwise intended as the same, within the unity (ultimately) of a possible conscious life, all the possibilities of which are included in the 'ego'²⁶.

If in the Kantian vision upon the constitution of objects the main factor sustaining the coherence and cohesion of distinct entities was the „transcendental unity of consciousness" (appearances are connected to the necessary laws contained in the core-structure of this unity, through the threefold synthesis of imagination), in the Husserlian perspective we have a comparable but not entirely identical phenomenological instance: Husserl speaks not about a transcendental *consciousness* but about a transcendental *ego* seen as containing the necessary universal rules and other functional structures governing all other *possible* consciousnesses and experiences. Thus, the constitutive power belongs to this transcendental ego which is not one and the same thing with man – man reveals himself through objectivation as an active part of this world and also as "something" constituted himself by the transcendental ego (on the other hand, if man would be one and the same with the transcendental ego, then man would become a demiurge). An interesting difference between Kant and Husserl at this point would be that according to which Husserl individualizes more powerfully *the transcendental source of constitution* and thus makes it more personal, less abstract or formal and we could say that he invests it with a stronger power of signification. Being a more intimate transcendental structure than

²⁵ Elisabeth Ströker, *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology*, Stanford University Press, California, 1993, translated by Lee Hardy, p. 61, initially published in German under the title *Husserls Transzendente Phänomenologie*, Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, 1987.

²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations (An Introduction to Phenomenology)*, translated by Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/Boston/London, Seventh impression 1982 (First published in 1960), p.50.

the Kantian one – this ego is closer to man’s conception of passionate creation and transformation and thus it is a more motivating instance. Therefore, every object (immanent or transcendent) will point to a rule or to a corresponding functional predeliniaion in the transcendental ego:

Any ‘Objective’ object, *any object whatever* (even an immanent one), points [a.n. denotes. designates] to a [a.n. directive] *structure, within the transcendental ego, that is governed by a rule*. As something the ego objectivates, something of which he is conscious in any manner, the object indicates forthwith a universal rule governing *possible* other consciousness of it as identical – possible, as exemplifying essentially predelineated types^{27 28}.

Of course, one could ask himself both in Husserl’s and in Kant’s cases where exactly does this constitution of objects take place. If, in the case of the Kantian system it is suggested that the place where the imagination constructs by applying the categories of the understanding to sensibility is that particular space that is intuited to exist in-between the faculties, at Husserl however we have a clearer specification of the operations that take place in a free, neutral and available space and thus a clearer clue as to the existence of such a space: if, as Husserl claims, the pre-figurations resulting from the functional predeliniaions in the transcendental ego do not affect perception to the point that they entirely conditions it (in Husserl’s terms - “is never present to actual consciousness [*vorstellung*] as a finished datum”) – than there must be a space that makes possible this constant never-ending process of signification (and specification) by means of descriptive re-appraisals. This place was intuited by Democritus as well when he considered that the reality of movement becomes possible due to the existence of a empty space able to „host” that movement: ”Democritus’ starting point resides in the fact that he believes in the reality of movement, as thought is movement. It is his point of attack: the movement exists, as I think and thinking has reality. But if there is movement, then there must be a void as well (...)”²⁹. At Husserl, this place appears as a phenomenal place that constantly makes the imperfect explanations perfectible through re-specifications (clarifications or, as Husserl calls them, „*fulfilling* further determinations”):

The horizons are ‘predelineated’ [a.n. pre-figured] potentialities. We say also: We can *ask any horizon what ‘lies in it’*, we can *explicate* or unfold it, and ‘*uncover*’ the potentialities of conscious life at a particular time. Precisely thereby we uncover the *objective sense* [a.n. which is always only] *meant* [a.n. meant = indicated] *implicitly* in the actual cogito, though never with more than a certain degree of foreshadowing³⁰.

²⁷ Alternative interpretative translation: As object represented by the consciousness and permanently present to/in it, it then denotes the universal rule for another possible consciousness about the same object, possible in the frame of a typical completely pre-determined structure.

²⁸ Edmund Husserl, *the quoted work*, Second Meditation, Subchapter 22. *The idea of the universal unity comprising all objects, and the task of clarifying it constitutionally*, pp. 53-54.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nașterea filosofiei (The Birth of philosophy)*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 1992, p.116, our translation.

³⁰ That is, which is always aimed at/meant/focused upon only in an implicit way.

This sense, the *cogitatum qua cogitatum*, is never present to actual consciousness [*vorstellung*] as a finished datum [a.n. as a datum given once and forever]; it becomes ‘clarified’ only through explication of the given horizon and [a.n. of] the new/horizons continuously awakened [*der stetig neu geweckten Horizonte*]³¹. The predelineation [a.n. pre-figuration] itself, to be sure, is at all times imperfect; yet, with its *indeterminateness*, it has a [a.n. certain] *determinate structure*. (...) This leaving open [a.n. indeterminacy], prior to further determining³² (which perhaps never take place), is a moment included in the given consciousness itself; it is precisely what makes up the ‘horizon’. As contrasted with mere clarification by means of anticipative ‘imaginings’, there takes place, by means of an actually continuing perception, a *fulfilling* further determination [a.n. of the object] (and perhaps determination as otherwise) – but with new horizons of openness³³.

A “*fulfilling* further determination” constantly implies new horizons of possibilities (of openness) decipherable by a consciousness functionally grounded in the transcendental ego.

Such a consciousness is a consciousness capable to approach and reveal new and foreign regions of the meaning and of experience. In the Husserlian logic, the correct relation between the intentional object and the transcendental ego provides (results into) a stable (coherent and cohesive) flux of consciousness. This object triggers various types of intentionality (thus revealing them as *achievable possibilities*), provides clues in what concerns the hidden faces of reality and the noetico-noematic structure of the objects. When all these functions are synchronized (coordinated, brought within an integrated formula and assigned to a well defined vector) they are able to sustain the unity of the cogito. Through this unity of the cogito the actively conscious man can overcome the datum through acts of creation.

David Bohm perspective on the constitution of objects

David Joseph Bohm was an American-born British quantum physicist who also made contributions in the field of philosophy and neuropsychology. His main scientific ambition was to develop a practicable model of brain function and a workable theory for human cognition. His attempts to grasp the systematic nature of thought have resulted (among other interesting theoretical adaptations, reformulations and innovations) in what was known in time as the “holonomic brain theory”. We will not go into technical details belonging to other scientific fields involved in these theoretical models (psychology and physics) and we will focus only on the classic philosophical themes as presented in his extended collection of interviews entitled *Thought as System*. Here Bohm advocates the idea according to which *coherence and cohesion* of sensations, images, thoughts and feelings within the functional complexity of reality are direct reflections of the degree to which reflexes (such as the impulse to

³¹ That is, of the horizons constantly actualized in the sense of brought to life through thematizations.

³² That is, prior to the appearance of actual (and exact) determinations.

³³ Edmund Husserl, *op.cit.*, p.45.

synthesis on the part of our imagination signaled by Kant), senses, concepts and understandings have (or have not) entered a complementary relation with each-other. Such a relation is expressed in correspondence, compatibility, reciprocity, interrelatedness, interdependency and harmony. The quality and correctness of our representations depends on the capacity to construct, through the combined action of the factors that contribute to knowledge, temporally coherent and cohesive concepts – concepts able to absorb and integrate in a meaningful manner the outer objective reality as well as the inner subjective reality. According to Bohm, the test and the validation for such an authentically sustained integration, is the unity of all objects within one continuous and sustainable reality – a unity expressed at the level of a consciousness being able to operate in the environment and to organize it in virtue of distinct but adaptable (manageable) conditions of possibility, such as singularity, multiplicity, necessity, contingency, generality and particularity. The final and most significant expression of all these mutual determinations is the permanentness (the functional stability) of entities within their conceptual and representative systems – that is, the capacity of entities to traverse and shift contexts and to enter complex combinations and trans-determinations without losing their identity (functional continuity):

Question: (...)a table is so real to me in my feeling. But even if I go up and touch it or put a cup on it, all that I finally have is some sort of sensations. And the ‘tableness’ of it is only in the stepping back and holding something in my mind.

Bohm: Yes. The ‘tableness’ is built from your mind, out of the whole set of reflexes all tied together. The same is true of everything. Science has said that things come into the nervous system, and it is in the brain that they are somehow built into our sense of the reality of the world. The point is whether this reality coheres in our experience. If the reality that is so formed does not cohere, then we have to change it. The brain is forming a kind of representation of reality, which is able to guide you properly if it is coherent. And it’s clear that this sense of the reality of objects and things is *constructed*. As I said earlier, psychologists such as Piaget claim that very young children may not have the notion of the reality of a permanent object – they may feel that when it is not seen it just vanishes and that something else comes up. For example, he cites the case of a child about two years old who thought that the father who appeared at the dinner table was different from the father in the office; they were two people. Or else they may feel the unity of all objects. So that’s part of the thing, whether it is one or many. That’s another abstract concept which you have to get straight in forming the representations. Your representation puts certain things as one, certain things as many, certain things as necessary, contingent, general, particular. It organizes everything. And the meaning is very different according to how it is represented. At first, that child was seeing two fathers. Then he learned there was only one, and therefore he saw only one³⁴.

³⁴ David Bohm, *Thought as System* (Transcription of a seminar held in Ojai, California from 31 November to 2 December 1990. It has been edited by Professor Bohm) Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp.108-109.

As one can see, what *Thought as System* does is to offer a very pragmatic because more accessible reading of some basic aspects involved in the constitution of objects. David Bohm repositions *concepts* and unmantles rigid semantic areas – areas otherwise much too tributary to some stiff (resistant) and impenetrable philosophical loci. In so doing he enables a better focusing on the active phenomenological nuclei involved in the constitution of objects – precisely because he makes these nuclei recognizable as well for those who do not possess some specific vocabularies. A vision freed from a specific vocabulary (rigid terminology and hermetic specificity which make identification and understanding of phenomena conditioning our existence inaccessible to amateurs and to specialists belonging to other disciplines) opens up the metamorphic area of the concepts of the classical phenomenology, thus making it compatible with other branches of the scientific research. In this way the researchers acquire more efficient theoretical resources and methods of work.

As it is the case with Husserl's notion of Evidenz (the heart of any intuition), for Bohm, *the main attribute of our environment is its concreteness, that is, its capacity to be effectively (objectively) present*. The main focus point of a pragmatic philosophy should be how to turn these objective presences to good use by projecting upon them the power of our accumulated cognition (the mental process of knowing, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, intuition, knowledge and judgment), and by capturing them in this way in our spheres of influence.

To be creative and useful when constructing your reality means to be able to grasp *in real time* and *in real space* the way how *our thoughts set the world in motion* – because, as Bohm says, *thought is affecting what one sees and the representation enters directly into the perception, in the sense that it is projected into what is now and present*. The world is recognized and put to work (good use) through representations and to understand how this representations evolve towards (and intervene in) concrete determinations is an inevitable cornerstone in any project of constructing reality:

Bohm: This is the point I want to make: *thought is affecting what you see. The representation enters into the perception*. [a.n. our italics] Sometimes you know something is a representation – such as when you draw a diagram or have a photograph. But in many subtle ways the representation enters directly into the perception, and you may miss the fact that it is coming from thought. When you have the representation of somebody as an enemy, that goes into the perception of that person as the enemy, or as stupid, or as whatever.

Question: Is thought a mediation system, which allows us to be aware of things that are not now or not present?

Bohm: Yes, but *it is projected into what is now and present*. [a.n. our italics] And that projection may be a good guide, it may be accurate; it's approximate, but it may be good enough. In other words, to be useful in what you are doing it is actually important to project that – it is important to see this table as a table, and not to say this is just a

representation. When you are going to act toward, you have to act toward it as something that is present.(...)Therefore it's crucial to see this: *the representation affects the perception*. [a.n. our italics] That is crucial. And it is a tremendous source of illusion if we once lose track of the fact that this is happening³⁵.

It is obviously a classical Kantian issue at stake in here – an issue involving things such as the reproductive acts of our imagination and the “recognition in the concept”. When making the very same point – namely when sustaining that the *cogito* bears within itself the *cogitatum* (as that thing meant/aimed at by the consciousness) and that this is something inherent to the very process and nature of intentionality in its most pregnant sense (*a complex vision on intentionality grafted upon the Kantian idea that some mental conceptual patterns are always applied to the so-called „sense data”*) – Husserl (who, interesting enough, also sustains his arguments by taking *a table* as his example) too claimed that the representations that we have affect our daily perceptions, but he used a classical and less accessible terminology (in Husserl's terms, a *cogito* bear within itself its *cogitatum*, and this fact *represents the universal fundamental property of our consciousness, namely that of being consciousness of something*):

(...) the manifold *cogitationes* relating to what is worldly bear this relation *within themselves*, that, e.g., the perception of this table still is, as it was before, precisely a perception of this table. In this manner, without exception, every conscious process is, in itself, consciousness *of* such and such [a.n. that is, consciousness of a certain object], regardless of what the rightful actuality-status of this objective such-and-such may be, and regardless of the circumstance that I, as standing in the transcendental attitude, abstain from acceptance of this object as well as from all my other natural acceptances [a.n. accepting, that is, granting validity]. The transcendental heading, *ego cogito*, must therefore be broadened by adding one more member [a.n. by adding one more term]. Each *cogito*, each conscious process, we may also say, *'means' something or other* [a.n. aims at something or another, focuses on something or another]and bears in itself, in this manner peculiar to the *meant* [a.n. peculiar to the object that was the center of our attention/intention, upon which we focused ourselves], its particular *cogitatum*. Each does this, moreover, in its own fashion. The house-perception means a house - more precisely, as this individual house [a.n. that is, of this particular house, here and now] - and means it in the fashion peculiar to perception; a house-memory means a house in the fashion peculiar to memory; a hose-phantasy, in the fashion peculiar to phantasy [a.n. that is, peculiar to one's imaginative capacities]. (...) Conscious processes are also called *intentional*; but when the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness *of* something; as a *cogito*, to bear within itself its *cogitatum*³⁶.

³⁵ David Bohm, *op.cit.*, p.110.

³⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (An Introduction to Phenomenology), translated by Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/Boston/London, Seventh impression 1982 (First published in 1960), printed in the Netherlands, pp. 32-33.

Thus, we could conclude that it would be more pragmatic and also more extensively creative (from the point of view of the access points which a different terminology can provide) to formulate this preoccupation as David Bohm does - namely, as an effort to find ways to learn how to meet the environment properly and, consequently, to learn how to coordinate our outgoing nervous impulses with those that are coming in, or, to put it otherwise, to learn how to incorporate the structure of the environment into our ongoing impulses. The effectiveness of these „spontaneously expressed understandings” (if we are to use Bohm’s „translation”³⁷ of the blind character of imagination that Kant previously spoke about) is to be read in the fact that they enable processes of anticipation (through instant recognitions) and thus superior („skilled”) answers (performances) to the challenges of the environment:

Both in the case of perception and in that of building a skill, a person must actively meet his environment in such a way that he coordinates his outgoing nervous impulses with those that are coming in. As a result the structure of his environment is, as it were, gradually incorporated into his outgoing impulses, so that he learns how to meet his environment with the right kind of response. (...) But in a sense the perception of each kind of thing is also a skill, because it requires a person actively meet the environment with the movements that are appropriate for the disclosure of the structure of that environment³⁸.

Conclusions

In today’s philosophy grafted upon concepts and observations derived from quantum physics, the phenomenological tradition still plays an important role and this fact is best mirrored in the idea according to which the world and its constitutive phenomena are *recoverable through (detailed) descriptions*. By means of such descriptions we can actually explore, explain and understand how to further develop the content of any vision. In this context, *to understand* means to decipher through descriptions and to awaken through initiatives the potentialities inherent within the life of our consciousness. Thus, the Husserlian idea according to which one can “*explicate or unfold*” any horizon and the Kantian vision according to which our conceptual and categorial structures establish the nature and the intensity of our interventions in the world gain at Bohm the following pragmatic, accessible and synthetic reformulation:

Question: Would you say then that the world we see is just a description?

Bohm: No. The description means the way we put it in words; literally it means ‘writing it down’. The world we see is far more than those words, but it is recognized through a representation in which those words have had a big effect. The way we talk about things and the way we think about things affects how we see them³⁹.

³⁷ There are no explicit lines that could indicate a direct influence of Kant or of Husserl upon Bohm.

³⁸ David Bohm, *The Special Theory of Relativity*, Benjamin, New York, 1965.

³⁹ David Bohm, *Thought as System*, pp. 109-110.

*Husserl was among the first thinkers to observe the fact that the constitutive power of the transcendental ego (and the related phenomena of constitution of objects) can be acknowledged, integrated and assimilated into one's consciousness (that is, understood) through descriptions. Later on Martin Heidegger called language „the house of Being” and Hans-Georg Gadamer further adapted this Heideggerian vision to the constitution of objects: in his *Truth and Method*⁴⁰ he re-explained how language determines the object (Gegenstand) of understanding itself and how, in the end, there occurs a fusion between the „process” of understanding and its „object” in the sense that no object (Gegenstand) can be separated from the attempt (Vollzug) to understand it. In this light we can perhaps better understand why Husserl labeled the objects as „intentional correlates of modes of consciousness of them”: „I, the transcendental phenomenologist, have objects (single or in universal complexes) as a theme for my universal descriptions: solely as the intentional correlates of modes of consciousness of them⁴¹”.*

In the quantum physics and its philosophical formulations it was David Bohm who revalorized the power of descriptions to create and sustain functional unities (expressed in coherence and cohesion) within the visions and within the theories by means of which we determine and assign meaning and function to immanent and transcendent objectual entities (we will use here the interpretation offered by Gordon G. Globus): „Creative advance as the ‘advance from disjunction to conjunction’ is for Bohm a process of explication, that is, the many implicate disjuncts express an explicate conjunction(...) Bohm is the (...)holonimic thinker⁴²”.

As one can intuit from this last characterization, *the most important supplementary nuance that can be gained as a result of this comparative endeavour* is the observation of the fact that what unites all these three thinkers is a unitary non-separatistic vision and theoretical grounding in what concerns the constitution and functional sustaining of objects within our consciousness. Thus, if Kant spoke of man being able to have a unitary experience of the objective reality (where each and every appearance must be connected to a necessary law through the threefold synthesis of imagination [which determines, associates and relates representations to a unitary, cohesive and coherent consciousness]), and if Husserl interpreted the objectivity of an object (its immediacy and straightforwardness able to transcend anything ambiguous) as reflecting the unity of one's experience (as the object intentional is able generate an axis of stability around which gravitate all the constitutive noeses – thus every objectivity can't be but an intentional unity) –

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Continuum Publishing Group, translated by Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, 2006, London & New York.

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations (An Introduction to Phenomenology)*, translated by Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/Boston/London, Seventh impression 1982 (First published in 1960), printed in the Netherlands, p.37.

⁴² Gordon G. Globus, *The Transparent Becoming of World: a crossing between process philosophy and quantum neurophilosophy*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, p. 61.

David Bohm created similar concepts and grafted them on a similar vision in quantum physics, where he formulated what is known today as „the Bohmian law of overall necessity”⁴³ („For Bohm both past and future are implicate in that all possibilities are interpenetrated in the holomovement at any instant”⁴⁴).

Like Kant who spoke of the *transcendental object X* as a logical necessity meant to provide and to sustain the functional unity of consciousness, David Bohm developed what is known as “*the theory of the implicate order*”. Although he avoided to use this theory explicitly as a logical necessity, in-between the lines he admitted that this is in fact a theory based on the belief that there must be another level of consciousness as well, namely one that allows man to have the necessary inspiration in his vision; one that allows finite beings to know (or intuit) the infinite possibilities, the “unmanifested”, the implicate and thus to rise above the realm of manifest matter (*explicate order*).

We compared and contrasted these three thinkers because we believe that the new branches of scientific research such as the quantum physics should be brought into an argumented contact with the world of the classical phenomenology: important operational notions, methodologies and conceptual nuclei, when transplanted from one soil to another can and actually will reach new efficiency-formulas that could be afterwards projected in a revolutionary way upon the entire cultural spectrum (let us consider for example how could these observations on the nature of objects affect mythology or the study of ancient wooden-idols).

Thus we could conclude with Ion Copoeru’s observation accoring to which nowadays „the phenomenology opens up from a methodological and from a conceptual point of view for an encounter with trends of thought which until now seemed to stand in utter opposition to it”⁴⁵. The result is a revalorization of the lived-world (Lebenswelt).

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⁴³ Gordon G. Globus, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p.62.

⁴⁵ Copoeru, Ion, *Structuri ale Constituirii (Structures of the constituting)*, Ed. Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, pp. 126-127, our translation.

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ARTIFICIAL BODY: BETWEEN „TO BE” AND „TO HAVE”

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ABSTRACT. The body has been widely analyzed in philosophy starting especially with the nineteenth century. The latest theories regarding the body have argued its importance in either constituting our reality, either integrating us in a cultural environment. But what is definitely argued is the *body-subject*, meaning that the body receives a very important part in constituting ourselves as persons.

But there are some recent aspects of reality that can question this view. The latest are the new technological and bio-chemical developments. At what extent can I still be considered my body, if my body appears like a complex system, one in which any part can be substituted, replaced (transplants, prostheses) or improved (liposuction)? What does that imply? *Am I still my body?* Or is the body just something I *have*, and can be easily replaced with something different?

Our view in this article is that the artificial body is not an optional tool, something we can dispose of, and that it still constitutes our identity, but with some different characteristics.

Despite the technological innovations, the body remains *the only form a subject can have and also something that incorporates all the symbolic fields of culture.*

Keywords: *artificial body, transhumanism, homo technologicus, symbolism*

1. Introduction. Concepts

When we talk about the body, we have to take into account the multiple perspectives involved, and the fact that even the concept history is not a complete or a progressive one. So we can hardly speak about what the body really is. The definition of the body itself raises a lot of questions: matter, substance, technique, significant, symbol, fiction, etc. We can ask ourselves with Roland Barthes:

Quel corps? Nous en avons des plusieurs: les corps des anatomistes et des physiologistes, celui qui voit ou dont parle la science (...) mais nous avons aussi un corps de jouissance fait uniquement de relations érotiques, sans aucun rapport avec le premier: c'est un autre découpage, une autre nomination¹.

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¹ Barthes, Roland: *Le plaisir du texte*, 1973, p. 29, apud Brohm, Jean-Marie - *Philosophie du corps : quel corps?* in: *L'Univers philosophique*, Publié sous direction d'André Jacob, PUF, Paris, vol. I, 1989

We approach the problem of the artificial body from two perspectives: phenomenology (that argues the connection between body and self) and sociology (especially Baudrillard's view that argues the re-objectification of the body).

We will analyze the alterations that new technologies have brought into the phenomenological approach on the body. To what extent does the incorporation of technological devices into our bodies require a new understanding of our identity as embodied beings?

A short history of philosophy reminds us of the transition from the Cartesian dualism (I *have* a body, but I don't identify myself with it) to the phenomenological identification (I *am* my body) – because the body is the one through which I am in the world. I perceive and I suffer the world with it: it is my only *here*.

Apart from these two perspectives, there is also another aspect of the body that we have to take into account, for our argument: social and cultural body. We are social beings, and society has always imposed some bodily stereotypes. In any society there is a social imposed desiderate regarding the idea of a beautiful or even perfect body (even if they differ according to different cultures and times). Where is a goal, there are means – most individuals will voluntarily try to achieve that ideally perfect body through all kinds of interventions. All these interventions on the body are based upon the acceptance and integrations within a cultural ambient. They also assume the following *use* of the body according to the degree it has embodied the social requests.

This is not a new perspective. Since old times, people have tried to reach the socially imposed stereotype, whatever this may be: a long neck (as within some African tribes), or a small chest (as in medieval period) or whatever else. Therefore, what changes nowadays? The body has been objectified all the way through history, even if only in the last century there is a significant growth in theories regarding the body as communication tool, or as an instrument for different tasks (Marx, Foucault, Mauss, etc).

Now we have the means to shape our body at an unprecedented scale, an almost unlimited, using the latest discoveries in nano/bio-technology. We get to talk about something we couldn't talk before: the artificial body, and even virtual body, as points where two of our oldest obsessions meet: immortality and perfection.

Artificial Body – is a body that has some parts improved through technological or chemical interventions. But, even if the interventions on/in the body can change its appearance a lot, the artificial body is still touchable; it exists in the physical world.

Artificial bodies have at least three *functions*. First, they *compensate some physical faults* and imperfections (prosthesis for the missing limbs). Then, an artificial body can *express the way the social desiderates/stereotypes have been inoculated* in one's mind/self: from liposuction to the latest skin creams. And, not the least, an artificial body can *provide the person with better self-esteem*.

However, the artificial body also raises some questions. The use of artificial body parts and the degree in which we can remodel our own body, makes us see that “my hand” cannot only be “my hand”, but also a prostheses; in the same logic,

“my legs” can be remodeled by liposuction, “my blood” can be changed, “my skin” can be replaced or artificially colored, and even “my heart” can also be replaced with a different one or even with a device that can perform like it.

What does that mean? It means that some parts of my body can be replaced! And, if “my body” can be replaced, changed, altered as to become a different one, what does that imply for the phenomenological thesis that says “*I am my body?*” *Am I my body?* Or is it just something we *have*, and we can easily replace with something else, that can perform in the same/or maybe different manner? Does the body remain/re-transform itself, again, in an object, like in the dualist perception, or it becomes something different?

2. Short History. Body and Soul, Between Dualism and Identity

There are two big theories regarding the body in the history of philosophy: body-object, in a dualist perspective (instrument, „container” of the soul, prison, etc), and body-subject (body as the expression of the self, in the phenomenological approach)².

The dualism has *ancient* roots; almost all the antique philosophers considered the soul to be immortal, different in nature from the body, which is, obviously, mortal. But the body was really denied by the orphic philosophy, which is then used by Plato (*soma-sēma*)³. The body has been seen as a *cage* or an *instrument* of the soul, being ontologically subordinated to it, inferior. The *reason* or/and the *soul* were the ones that had to rule the body, trying to overcome the instincts, passions and affectivity the *body* represented and sustained.

Descartes went even further, and designed a system based on two substances: *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. *Res cogitans*, the mind, is immaterial, thinking and immortal substance, while the body, *res extensa*, is the mortal, composed substance. The two substances function on some different set of rules, that don't interfere with one another, but there is a hierarchy between them, in the way that *cogito* has to rule and eventually overcome the body.

Therefore, without *cogito* we cannot talk about subjectivity. Meanwhile, *without the body, this thing could be possible*. The *body* is not only *unnecessary*, but it can also be an obstacle for the subjectivity, and this is why it needs constantly supervision and orientation from *cogito*.

Thus rises the *dualism*, which argues (for the next centuries), the fact that we *HAVE* a body, and that we *ARE NOT* our bodies! We *have* a body, that is merely a container of the soul/reason and that has to be subordinate to it. And, most important, this body does not interfere a lot with our identity, soul or conscience.

² There are also other approaches, from different points of view, like cultural body, political body, communicative body, or, as in Lacan's distinction between real, imaginary and symbolic. But for our argument here, we can focus only on these two main subdivisions.

³ Platon, *Phaedo* in *Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Pocket Books, New York, 1957

Starting with the nineteenth century, the perception on the body changed, especially thanks to the work of philosophers like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Merleau-Ponty. Their theories analyze the body not as a simple container of the soul, but as the *only form the soul can take, inseparable from it*. The philosophy also starts to pay more attention to Aristotle's *De Anima*, where he argues explicitly that *the soul cannot be separated from the body, and cannot even be considered, and nor the less analyzed apart from the body*. The soul is from the beginning *embodied*, impossible to be thought of apart from its body.

Edmund Husserl is one of the first that analyzed the body as connected to the conscience, the rationality and the self, pointing out the importance of corporeality in forming the Subject and the relations between Subjects. He also makes the difference between "*Leib*" (my own body, which I perceive from within and that marks my absolute "*here*") and "*Körper*" (the exteriorized body, the other's, mostly perceived as an object). "*My Leib is deeply connected to my soul, as a "psychosomatic unity" which exists in this body, and through which acts in the world and suffers it*". The main purpose of the body resides in the fact that any occurrence or appearance of the world crosses it. Without the body, my world and any phenomenon would disappear. Along with Husserl's theory, the body becomes deeply connected to the subject, inseparably to the soul, medium through which the subject exists as subject and experiences the world as he senses it (through his body!). The human body is the one that makes possible any experience, and, implicitly, knowledge.

However, it was *Merleau-Ponty* that analyzed the body as *body-subject*. He claims that we *are* our bodies, and that our lived experience of this body denies the detachment of subject from object, mind from body, etc.⁵. But his statement: '*I am my body*' does not mean taking the side of a materialist, behaviorist type position:

He does not want to take the "other side" in a continuous dualism, but to stop this dualism, (...). He emphasizes across all his work the fact that the body cannot be viewed solely as an object, or material entity of the world and he suggests that the perceiving mind is an incarnated body. He also uses the term *body-subject* to name this body that can both think and perceive⁶.

As for arguing that he does not try to perpetuate the dualism, he says that:

"L'union de l'âme et du corps n'est pas scellée par un décret arbitraire entre deux termes extérieurs, l'un objet et l'autre sujet. Elle s'accomplit à chaque instant dans le mouvement de l'existence⁷".

⁴ Husserl, Edmund- *Cartesian Meditations*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Boston, London, Seventh Impression, 1982, p. 106

⁵ Merleau Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Editions Gallimard, 1945, p. xii

⁶ Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/merleau/>, Last updated: June 27, 2005 Originally published: October/23/2001, read on March, 2011

⁷ Merleau Ponty, *Phénoménologie ...*, p. 105

Ponty argues that the body is the only way we can *approach* and *be* in the world and, most important, that we cannot get rid of it: “*its absence (and to a certain degree also its variation) is inconceivable*”. The body is simply something we can’t possibly do without. It is not an object we can use *or not*, according to our will.

Phenomenology argues that I AM A BODY, a theory that tries not to oppose the dualism, but to integrate it, with a major shift in the perspective on the body: we ARE our bodies, but we are NOT ONLY our bodies. What we support here is a view where *the body and the soul are both original to humans*, and a subject just can’t exist apart from these. We can’t talk about a disembodied self. *The human body is not only a simple organism, but is the center of experience and representation, center of emotions and thinking, as phenomenology argues.* The body cannot be considered an object among the object of the world, nor just a simple instrument or prison for reason and soul, but *the primary element from which all raises, the place of connection between the inside and the outside, the presence through which the self appears in the world, and also through which everything in the world gets identity and signification.*

3. Threatening the identity. The re-objectification of body

Although in the last two centuries the connection between body and soul has been stressed a lot, in the last decades it has, again, been questioned. And that because of the degree in which we can now interfere in the body, with chemical or even technological means.

The newest developments that have affected the body and the way we understand and analyze it are the ones in the technological, and biochemical fields. As different as may be (in techniques, methods of research, etc.), they are used successfully on the body, mainly in two important cases: *disabilities* (in trying to recuperate the body from a physical disability) and *culture* (trying to „adjust” the body in cases of cultural disabilities, or, in other words, in cases it doesn’t correspond with the socially approved/imposed body ideal).

However, even if we talk about *improving* or just *compensating*, in both cases there is an *intervention over/in the body*, and both of them raise at least two questions regarding the relation between self and body:

a. Are all these interventions transforming our body back into an object? One that expresses better our personality or our understanding of the social desiderates? Are we using our own bodies as objects that express who we want to be?

Looking at it from the perspective of the cultural body, we can easily conclude, as Baudrillard has, that the body becomes (or maybe just returns to being analyzed like) an object or, better said, an instrument that is supposed to express the personal view of one’s subjectivity. Baudrillard talks about the *body-capital*, *body investment* – we adjust and modify it as to reflect the social stereotypes of beauty, as an investment made “*in order to produce a yield*”:

The body is not re-appropriated for the autonomous ends of the subject, but in terms of a *normative* principle of enjoyment and hedonistic profitability, in terms of an enforced instrumentality that is indexed to the code and the norms of a society of production and managed consumption. In other words, one manages one's body; one handles it as one might handle an inheritance; one manipulates it as one of the many *signifiers of social status*⁸.

b. The newest technologies show the body as a complex system formed by small parts, which can easily be replaced. By being able to replace parts of my body with another one, my body appears as a perfectible object, but also as something that can be adjusted, replaced, changed, restructured even up to a point, and all this makes us wonder *what remains left from ME AS MY BODY, if my body can also be changed, improved, adjusted?* How does this affect me? How do transplants and prostheses affect the relation between self and body?

Who says that these new bio-technologies won't go on, by constantly trying to improve our bodies, making people more healthy, super performing, being able to change their affected organs with better ones and to „*upgrade*” the body as you do to a computer?

Aurel David remarque (...) que les barrières biologiques tombent les unes après autres: <les organes notamment se comportent comme des machines: ils sont standardisables et interchangeables avec de véritables machines⁹>.

Technology can also affect not only the body as body-subject, but also the body as body-gender or even body-race. Baudrillard argues, in *The Transparency of Evil*, that there is a tendency towards *ambivalence*, not only in the physical aspect, but also towards *trans-sexuality*,

...which extends well beyond sex, affecting all disciplines as they lose their specificity. (...) Consider Michael Jackson, for example. Michael Jackson is a solitary mutant, a precursor of a hybridization that is perfect because it is universal - the race to end all races. (...) Add to this the fact that Michael has had his face lifted, his hair straightened, his skin lightened - in short, he has been reconstructed with the greatest attention to detail. This is what makes him such an innocent and pure child - the artificial hermaphrodite of the fable, better able even than Christ to reign over the world and reconcile its contradictions; better than a child-god because he is child-prosthesis, an embryo of all those dreamt-of mutations that will deliver us from race and from sex¹⁰.

Furthermore, the new techniques have turned the body into an experimental field for the new medical practices. All the transplants and the artificial organs, prostheses and devices connected to the body have made it comparable to a machine. And we are in the middle of shaping our bodies into *perfect* forms, erasing its traits, making it a perfect object among others:

⁸ Baudrillard, Jean – *The Consumer Society, Myths and Structures*, London, Sage, 1998

⁹ Brohm, Jean-Marie - *Philosophie du corps : quel corps?*, p. 401

¹⁰ Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, Verso, London, New York, 1993, p. 21

We are under the sway of a surgical compulsion that seeks to (...) remodel things synthetically into ideal forms. Cosmetic surgery: a face's chance configuration, its beauty or ugliness, its distinctive traits, its negative traits - all these have to be corrected, so as to produce something more beautiful than beautiful: an ideal face, a surgical face. (...) Even the sex to which we belong - that small portion of destiny still remaining to us, that minimum of fatality and otherness - will be changeable at will. Not to mention cosmetic surgery (...). Everything has to become postsynchronizable according to criteria of optimal convenience and compatibility. (...) Everything has to be sacrificed to the principle that things must have an operational genesis¹¹.

In this way we cannot talk about identification between self and the body, as the body can be changed in so many ways. What remains out of an „I” if any part of my body can be replaced? We are forced to reconsider the traditional categories of self and subjectivity:

Ces réflexions nous obligent à reconsidérer les catégories traditionnelles du Moi, personne et du sujet. *Les notions mêmes de propriété corporelle et d'intégrité de soi tendent à devenir fuyantes si l'on peut tout remplacer du corps.* L'unité du corps elle-même devient une fiction si l'on peut brancher toutes les fonctions sur l'extérieur (...) Enfin, l'ipséité du corps risque, elle aussi, à devenir un mythe si la chair peut être remplacée par des objets matériels. Que signifie dès lors la thèse phénoménologique <je suis mon corps> si mon corps est tout à fait autre”, un ensemble potentiel de choses interchangeable? La relation d'être au corps est transformée en relation de propriété: *j'ai un corps, je ne suis plus corps*¹².

The latest developments in bio-techniques has brought again in the stage the problem of us „having” a body instead of „being” one. Do we return to Descartes and his thesis? We start wondering if he was right by saying that: *„Il este certain que moi, c'est a dire mon âme, par laquelle je suis que je suis, est entièrement et véritablement distincte de mon corps, e qu'elle peut être ou exister sans lui”*¹³.

How can we accept these changes and these new possibilities and still “be” our bodies? Does it become, again, analyzed as something different from our essence, from our soul? Is the artificial body something we HAVE or something we ARE?

4. Towards a solution: Body-Subject as a work-in-progress

We have raised many questions here, but the most important in this approach is the following: *Is my body, in the light of the new discoveries and technological developments, something that is still in deep connection to my SELF, or it became an optional tool?* To answer this, we will first analyze the concept of “prostheses”, and see how it can really affect the body.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 45

¹² Brohm, Jean-Marie - *Philosophie du corps ...*, p. 400 (our emphases)

¹³ Descartes: *Meditations metaphysiques*, p. 119

4.1 *Body extension vs. body incorporation*

Martin Heidegger, in his famous analysis of tool-use, already considers tool-use and techniques as essential in the characterization of what it means to be a human or a *Dasein*. *Humans are defined by culture* - and culture is only made possible by artificial prostheses, by seeing culture prosthetic (for example, not only tools can be seen as prosthetic, but also writing can be easily understood like an external memory). We are not suggesting that prosthesis, or any other “cultural attachments” are mandatory for us as human beings. They are optional, but their existence proves that human beings “*are characterized as embodied beings whose boundaries are not fixed, but are both plastic and vulnerable*”¹⁴.

The prosthesis itself wouldn’t exist if there hadn’t been a body in the first instance, and second, a body-model that provides the basic idea upon which it is built.

And there is also a relativity involved in the external objects that can, or not, become part of somebody’s body-image. This is already present in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he explains that the blind man’s repeated use of the cane results in the cane becoming “incorporated” into the man’s body-image, but also that the cane becomes “a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis”¹⁵.

Merleau Ponty also gives the example of a car, saying that, by constant use, the car is ultimately absorbed in our body schema. It becomes an “*area of sensitivity*” which extends “*the scope and active radius of the touch*”¹⁶ and we can say that, when we drive, we perceive not only our body, but we also have a perception about the car, as it moves through space.

Even if these prostheses are perceived close to us, they still are external objects, even in case of including them in our body schema or into our “area of sensitivity” sometimes. What happens in case of the prosthesis? Are they perceived the same or different, adding the fact that most of them are attached to the body, and even penetrate our skin-boundaries?

Theorists believe that:

An important difference between extension of the body with a tool and replacement of a body-part with something non-corporeal is the possible experience of completion. Ideally, the relation between a human and his or her prosthesis is experienced as a relation of completion. In other words, it is possible to make a whole with the prosthesis that substitutes a missing limb or part of it. *That prostheses can complete a body, i.e. that they can become ‘part of’ the body, is testified by both amputees and people with congenital limb absence*¹⁷.

However, a prosthesis user describes his experience as follows:

¹⁴ Helena De Preester & Manos Tsakiris: *Body-extension versus body-incorporation: Is there a need for a body-model?*, Published online: 27 February 2009, Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009, p. 308

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty – *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, p. 153

¹⁶ Helena De Preester, *Body-extension...* p. 143

¹⁷ Helena De Preester, *Body-extension...*, p. 312 (our emphases)

Fitting a dead thing to your live body is and always will be an imperfect process. The most critical thing is establishing a good fit. Unfortunately your body will change over time, so a good fit today may not feel as good tomorrow, then it will feel great the next day. The body changes in subtle ways that only those that wear artificial limbs can imagine¹⁸.

So it is not as easy as one thinks to “incorporate” something into our living bodies. In the same time, the difference between incorporation and extension, and thus between tools and body-parts, and between tools and prostheses, is most often blurred. It is true that prostheses should be easier to “incorporate” as they replace something that should have been there in the first place, but, as we can see from people already using them, a mix like that is just not as natural and easy to accomplish as it seems. The same thing happens in transplants: the changed organ is not easily accepted by the body, and most of the people who went through a transplant, have to take all their (remaining) lives drugs to prevent a rejection of the new “part”. A technical object, attached to our bodies, perforating our skin, connecting to our neurons, can, of course, perform better than “the original”, but cannot definitely *be felt as* the original. The human body has the natural ability to change, to adapt, to cure itself. A technical object can only be repaired or replaced.

This supports the idea that technological intervention over the body is not as deep as we first thought; and that it does not destroy the integrity of the body. The body presents, even in case of technological interventions, a certain inconsistency, a certain inadequacy to the alien part that tries to substitute the real one.

4.2 *Transhumanism*

All these interventions over/in the body have blurred its limits. There is not even the *skin* limit to save the integrity of the body: *skin* no longer signifies closure! As the limits between races or between man and woman get blurred (as Baudrillard has shown), the same happens to the limits between man and machine:

“Late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines¹⁹”.

The body becomes something that is not identified and not even determined. Does its capacity to incorporate technical or electronic artifacts in its structure change it, or it just simply *reveals* it as what it really is? We think that the body is something that, from the beginning, has the ability to adapt, and that can be adjusted and remodeled in many ways. There is no (more) opposition between man

¹⁸ Murray, C. D. (2004) - *An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the embodiment of artificial limbs*, 26(16), pg. 966, apud Helena De Preester & Manos Tsakiris: *Body-extension...*, p. 309

¹⁹ Haraway, Donna - *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 152

and machine. Technique can enhance and continue something that nature has given, and this should not raise identity problems:

In such an account, incorporation of machines in the human body is not a unique phenomenon but simply extends those mechanistic processes and laws that govern evolving life. *Concerns that such interventions will culminate in a transformed and compromised humanity fundamentally misunderstand human identity*²⁰.

So, we have to accept a sort of continuity between life and technique, between organism and machine. Symbiosis can be done, but this does not mean that there are no consequences. There are - maybe not as powerful as to change the entire human identity, but certainly as strong as to create some differences in the way people act, interact and perceive themselves.

Thus Giuseppe Longo talks about a new concept we can approach: *homo technologicus*:

... a symbiotic creature in which biology and technology intimately interact. [It] is not simply “homo sapiens plus technology”, but rather “homo sapiens transformed by technology”; it is a new evolutionary unit, undergoing a new kind of evolution in a new environment. The novel symbiont is immersed in the natural world, hence obeys its laws, but also lives in an artificial environment, characterized by information, symbols, communication and virtuality²¹.

We also get to talk about *transhumanism*:

Transhumanism has been described by a leading philosophical advocate, Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom, as „the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by using technology to eliminate aging and greatly enhance human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities²²”.

Transhumanism is based on

”the assumption that *human nature is not given or fixed, but malleable and incomplete. According to Bostrom, “human nature (is) a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways”(...)*²³

The important aspect of this view is that it stops looking in the past to justify its existence; transhumanism is not grounded on the *origins*, or on a limited concept of “*natural*”, but on

²⁰ Courtney S Cambell et al.- *The Machine in the Body*, B.A. Lustig et al. (eds.), *Altering Nature*, Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2008, p. 35, (our emphasis)

²¹ Longo Giuseppe – *Body and Technology: Continuity or Discontinuity*, in *Mediating the Human Body: Technology, Communication and Fashion*, Leopoldina Fortunati, James E. Katz and Raimonda Riccini, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, London & New York, 2003, pg 23

²² Hook, Christopher – *Transhumanism and Posthumanism*, 2004, apud Courtney S Cambell et al.- *The Machine in the Body*, pg 42

²³ Bostrom, Nick, *In Defense of Human Dignity*, 2004, www.nickbostrom.com (accessed July 2004), apud Courtney S Cambell et al.- *The Machine in the Body*, pg 42 (our emphasis)

“a forward-looking assessment of our potentiality and destiny (...) The conviction of transhumanist thought is that use of various technologies can unlock fuller human potentiality and extend the self in both space and time²⁴”.

This view shows how the border between nature and technology is being abolished:

At the same time, it may allow us to go beyond ”naturalistic” and ”constructionist” visions of the body, which in themselves are both reductive because the body in its unity is simultaneously a biological and a social phenomenon²⁵.

Therefore, the technical does not substitute the body, it just completes it, or, to be fair, it enhances or *upgrades* parts of it. How does that affect the body-subject? Is there still a body-subject to refer to? Yes, it is. As we have seen, even if, in theory, a perfect cyborg can exist, in reality there is nothing perfect about it. Even if prosthesis can be eventually incorporated in our body-image, and even if the border between body and technology is blurred, there will always be conflicts in the process of *unifying* them. Yes, we can evolve as to a perfect, natural-like use of the incorporated technology, and, of course, that will affect our sense of body, and maybe our thoughts, but this only stresses the fact that we are still body-subjects. Technology certainly affects us as subjects: due to machines, we can extend our area of sensibility, we can change a bit our ways of communicating, we can do some new thing and stop doing others:

In the technology cage we are building around ourselves like a tight suit, some of our skills will be as useless as prehistoric relics, but will nevertheless continue to demand to be put to use or will ache like phantom limbs. Other skills will obviously be enhanced. Technology will operate a sort of selective *filtering* on our person (the complex unit of mind and body)²⁶.

All this affects us as persons. And it is natural to affect our identities, because we just cannot escape being a body-subject, as we cannot escape being mortals. But Giuseppe Longo goes even further and says that, as a consequence to this:

... the body becomes an *object* and loses its remaining personal characteristics, those characteristics that might make us consider it is the sacred guardian of our identity²⁷.

I disagree with the objectification view. Even if an artificial body seems more likely to an object we can remodel according to our own will and even if the skin is no longer the limit, there are other limits that are *taboo* to technicians, as the brain or manifesting emotions. Even if it seems that the Cartesian ideal of

²⁴ Bostrom, Nick *Transhumanist Values, 2004*, apud Courtney S Cambell et al.- *The Machine in the Body*, pg 42

²⁵ DeNardis, P – *Sociologia del limite*, 1999, apud *Mediating the Human Body: Technology, Communication and Fashion*, Leopoldina Fortunati, James E. Katz and Raimonda Riccini, LAS Publishers, London, 2003, p. 216

²⁶ Longo Giuseppe – *Body and Technology: Continuity or Discontinuity*, in *Mediating the Human Body* p. 25

²⁷ *Ibidem*

disembodied consciousness is likely to be realized through technology, this only emphasizes that we are still linked irremediably to our bodies.

Even if my body resembles more to “a work-in-progress”, it doesn’t mean that we can reduce it to an object. The body is still something we just cannot do without, and something that has a lot to do with our identity. First, because it is still the place from where I can see, integrate and communicate in/to the world. And, second, it affects me as a person. Maybe it will make us transcend finitude and evolving into a post-human status. And that has everything to do with me as a person. As perished the body appears to be nowadays, as opened to interventions it is, the body is still something we ARE, the medium through I perceive reality and I participate to it.

4.3 *Ambivalent and symbolic body*

We have shown that even in cases of mixing up a body with a “spare” part, there is no real connection between the two different parts. But even if it would be, there is still something to say about it. Let’s imagine that our bodies could become similar to a machine in which we can replace the broken parts with some new ones, what would that mean?

Jean-Toussaint Desanti, points out, in „*Destin Philosophique*” that we can perceive the body as being: “*symbolico-charnel, unique donnée existentielle*”. Even if some parts of it can be substituted, replaced, affected in a way or another, the body is still significant and incorporates cultural and social inscription. There are all forms of significant inscription on/in the body (social, religious, cultural, even political as Foucault points it out, and not only). So, the body is not just my absolute *here*, but also an expression and also an *archive* of all cultural-symbolical creation. This implies that, apart from being, as we have seen up to now, on one hand, *the only form a subject can have*, and on the other hand, *something that can be objectified, the body is also something that incorporates all the symbolic fields of culture*.

The body enriches as we analyze it deeper. It becomes the surface on which are written all the cultural and social signs that make it a signifier (icons, allegories, myths, rituals, etc.) but in the same time the body is also the point from which, and *through which*, everything else (from symbols to social relations) is interpreted:

Si le corps est le nexus de l’ordre symbolique, s’il est lui-même symbole parmi symboles, cela signifie aussi que l’intertextualité est toujours simultanément “*incorporité*”, la surface d’inscription de tous les textes sociaux ou culturels qui font du corps le porte-signes par excellence (corps iconique, corps allégorique, corps stylisé, corps ritualisé, corps emblématique, corps épigraphique, etc.) Le corps est, en même temps que résonateur au sismographe symbolique sensible à tous les registres culturelles, et aussi le prisme ou l’écran qui s’interpose dans toutes nos relations aux autres, au monde, aux productions supérieures de la pensée, y compris sans doute la philosophie et la religion²⁸.

²⁸ Brohm, Jean-Marie –*op cit.*

So, what can we say about the artificial body? Is it still “*symbolico-charnel*”, as Desanti points it out? Well, even if the “charnel” part became questionable (with all the technological and technical involvements), it still can be supported – and it seems like we won’t be able to give up the flesh any time soon.

As for the “symbolic” part, we argue not only that the artificial body can incorporate and express symbols, but also that it can do it better than “the original”. The chemical intervention and the incorporated prostheses or device, all express a certain stage of evolution, a social desiderate regarding the body and they can all be modeled by art, religion or social stereotypes. Artificial body remains “*le porte-signes par excellence*”, as it is almost entirely a cultural artifact! Homo technologycus, apart from being the result of merging the human body (biology) with technology, is also the ultimate form of symbiosis between culture and science! Even more, a technological or chemical improved body can express sometimes even more and better than a *biological* body can. As nature and culture have always been understood as opposites (even if, as in other oppositions, the limits are often blurred), the “cultural” body can express and incorporate more symbols than the *natural* one. It symbolizes only by presence, almost as the people of ancient tribes symbolized only by panting their faces.

We are still attached to our bodies, it is still the one through which we experience the word, and, as we can see, the one that still incorporates symbolic fields of culture, even if it does it in a particular way.

5. Conclusions. To have, to be - to become!

It is true that my body can be *upgraded*, that our organs can be interchanged, limbs can be substituted by prostheses and the acuteness of our senses can be improved. But that does not return us to a dualist perspective, first because my body is still *my only here*, the way through which I perceive and integrate the/in reality, and second because it integrates symbolic fields:

Loin d'être par conséquent une machine organique supérieure, même si les techniques actuelles ont tendance à la réduire à cet aspect, le corps est le miroir de toutes les instances symboliques (langage, art, mythes, etc.), le lieu d'origine de toute production symbolique et de toute activité culturelle, le signifiant universel parce que multidimensionnel et polymorphe. Si l'on admet, avec Levi-Strauss, que la culture est un ensemble de systèmes symboliques, on peut aussi admet, avec Marcel Mauss, que le corps est au cœur de ce <monde de rapports symboliques> qu'est la société²⁹.

It is not only my body that suffers those objectifications and transformations, but also I am. It doesn't mean that changing the way I look it will automatically change my identity, but that it affects it. There is a specific bond between my body and my conscience.

²⁹ Brohm, Jean-Marie –*op cit.*, our emphases,

I am my body, even if my body tends to be considered an object. But I am not JUST my body, but also my feelings, reason etc. Still, my body is the only way I can exist, is the way I appear in the world, I communicate, I perceive the world, but I am not just this. In this body I also think, accumulate information, live experiences, suffer diseases and get old. But I am not only my body/appearance in the world, as I am not only my reason, my affectivity or feelings. I, as a subject, cannot *but* be an incorporated one, with reason and feelings. We thus return to Aristotle's point of view: *the soul is from the beginning embodied, and impossible to think about apart from its body*.

As Anthony Synnott argues about the body, it is a conflicting and complex term:

The body social is many things: the prime symbol of the self, but also of the society: it is something we have, yet also what we are; it is both subject and object at the same time: it is individual and personal, as unique as a fingerprint or odourplume, yet it is also common to all humanity... the body is both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product: is it personal, and also a state property³⁰.

The new approach on the body, the *homo technologicus* and *transhumanism* have not changed its nature, but revealed its depths! The body is not just something *we have* (and can interfere with) – an object-, and (as we have seen) not even *just* something *we are* – a subject! It is also something *we become!* Or, more exactly, something we wish to become – an artificial body is something desirable, but in the same time something we have to adjust and adapt to!

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