



Introduction: The Social Form of Knowledge and the Possibility of Emancipation

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The false choice between unity and fragmentation

The present issue of *Marxism & Sciences* is our first non-thematic issue. Its contributions address different objects and pursue different questions; they have not been assembled around a common topic. This raises a problem that a thematic issue, precisely by virtue of its organizing theme, can leave unexamined. What constitutes the unity of Marxist inquiry when its objects cannot be gathered under a single heading? Is such unity anything more than the fact that the authors work within, or engage critically with, a Marxist intellectual tradition?

One answer would be to treat the issue as a collection of inquiries whose diversity requires no further explanation. On this view, the sciences constitute distinct fields of knowledge, each with its own object, methods, and criteria of validity. A journal such as ours would provide a meeting place for their results. The breadth of its contents would then be its principal achievement. Yet an accumulation of knowledge, however extensive, does not by itself establish the relations among the objects investigated. The coexistence of different inquiries is not the same as their unity.

An apparently opposite answer would seek that unity in a theory or method common to all the contributions. Marxism would supply the general principles, and each science would apply them to its particular material. The unity of inquiry would thus be secured in advance, before the investigation of any determinate object. But this solution merely reverses the first. Where the encyclopedic conception accepts the separation of the sciences as given, the methodological conception attempts to overcome it by imposing upon them an equally given unity. Both proceed

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as though the objects of knowledge were already constituted independently of the activity through which they are investigated. Their difference concerns only whether these objects should subsequently be collected or brought under a common conceptual scheme.

The difficulty is not resolved by choosing between these alternatives. Scientific inquiry does not begin with an inventory of finished objects to which methods are then assigned. In the course of investigation, an object is progressively determined: relations initially treated as external may prove constitutive, familiar distinctions may lose their explanatory force, and what first appeared to be a self-contained thing may emerge as a moment of a wider process. The object with which an inquiry begins is therefore not necessarily the object it comes to know. Nor can its method remain indifferent to this development. The determination of the object and the development of the means by which it is investigated belong to one process.

This does not mean that thought produces the reality it investigates. The world does not owe its existence or its determinations to our concepts. Rather, the activity of knowing must discover and reconstruct relations that are not established by the investigator's will. An inquiry can be mistaken precisely because its object is not whatever the inquiry takes it to be. The inseparability of method and object thus provides no warrant for reducing reality to knowledge. It requires us, on the contrary, to distinguish the real object from its immediate appearance and from the conceptual forms through which we initially apprehend it.

But if the object and method of each inquiry develop together, what remains of the Marxian effort to grasp totality? Does the rejection of a universally applicable method leave us with nothing but a plurality of inquiries, each enclosed within its own determinations? Or must we introduce a third term that guarantees their unity?

The question cannot be answered by naming such a term and allowing it to perform the work of investigation. To invoke totality, dialectics, or even practice as an explanatory principle applicable in advance to every object would be to restore the methodological solution in another vocabulary. Yet the alternative need not be the abandonment of unity. We may instead ask after the common generic root of scientific inquiry itself.

Scientific knowledge is a historically developed form of human social activity. Human beings investigate an objective world through capacities that are neither merely individual nor recreated anew by each in-

investigator. Concepts, instruments, techniques, problems, and discoveries are inherited, transformed, and made available through the activity of others. Even an inquiry carried out in apparent isolation presupposes this accumulated social history. The possibility of knowing an object is inseparable from the practical and social development through which human beings have acquired the means to investigate it.

This common ground does not abolish the specificity of scientific objects. It cannot tell us in advance what a biological process, a mathematical relation, or a historically determinate social form must be. Nor does it imply that all sciences share an identical procedure. It establishes, rather, that their differences develop within a common history of human engagement with the world. Their unity is neither the sum of their results nor the identity of their methods. It is a problem to be investigated through the relations that constitute scientific activity and its objects.

This brings us to a further difficulty. If knowledge production is social activity, why do its branches so often confront one another as independent domains? Why does their differentiation appear to entail the absence of any constitutive relation among them? The question is not whether the sciences ought to be united by a common programme, but how their existing unity takes the form of separation. To address it, we must move from the generic social character of inquiry to the historically specific relations within which knowledge is produced.

The appearance of independent sciences

The differentiation of the sciences is a real achievement of human knowledge. The investigation of living organisms, celestial motion, and historically specific social relations gives rise to distinct problems, concepts, and techniques. Such differences cannot be overcome by declaring that all sciences concern the same world. Their unity must be established without dissolving the specificity of their objects.

Yet the differentiation of scientific activity does not establish the essential independence of its branches. That an inquiry develops concepts and procedures appropriate to its object does not mean that the object exists in isolation from the relations investigated by other sciences. Still less does it mean that the activity of knowing it can be understood apart from the social conditions of its own development. The boundaries within which a discipline operates may be necessary to a particular investigation without being absolute boundaries of the reality investigated.

The apparent independence of the sciences is therefore not simply an error of thought. It has an objective basis in the differentiation of

knowledge-producing activities, their institutions, and the forms through which their results are produced and circulated. To criticize this appearance is not to deny the reality of specialization, or to demand that every investigation immediately encompass the whole. It is to ask why differentiated activities come to confront one another as self-sufficient domains, and why the relations that make their coexistence possible appear external to them.

The question leads beyond the organization of scientific institutions. It directs us toward the historically specific social form of the division of labour through which knowledge production, like other human activities, is constituted as a moment of a social totality.

The capitalist social form of the division of labour

The division of labour is not, in itself, the source of this apparent independence. The differentiation of human activities, the development of specialized capacities, and the increasing complexity of their products are conditions of social development. The question is not why human beings undertake different activities, but through what relations those activities acquire their social character. A division of labour does not exist apart from its social form: the manner in which distinct activities are related is constitutive of what they are and how they develop.

Under capitalism, the social interdependence of productive activities is established through relations that confront their participants as external necessities. Activities carried out separately become moments of a common process of reproduction, but their social connection is not constituted through the conscious determination of a common purpose. The labour of others appears to each producer through the conditions of exchange, competition, and the reproduction of their own activity. What is social in substance thus takes the form of relations among apparently independent producers and their products. Their independence is neither absolute nor merely imagined: it is the historically specific form in which their dependence upon one another is realized (Marx 1992, 165–167).

This is the *asocial sociality* of capitalist relations. The social whole is not assembled by subsequently connecting activities that were independent to begin with. Their apparent independence is itself constituted through the relations that make them parts of that whole.

Knowledge production develops within this same social world. The differentiation of scientific labour has its own histories and responds to real differences among the objects investigated; it cannot be deduced directly from the commodity form. Yet the apparent self-sufficiency of

scientific activities cannot be understood without examining the historically specific relations through which they are sustained and made social. Their separation is not simply the absence of connections. It is a form in which their connections exist—and one that can make those connections appear as powers belonging to disciplines, institutions, or their products themselves.

Fetishism and the objective appearance of separation

The apparent independence of differentiated activities cannot be explained simply by a failure to recognize their interconnections. Under capitalist relations, the social character of activity assumes forms in which the relations constituting it confront individuals as powers independent of their own practice. This is the problem of fetishism. It is not merely that people attribute autonomy to things, institutions, or processes that are in fact connected. Rather, historically determinate social relations acquire an objective form in which their social character is obscured. The appearance is real as an appearance: it arises from the way the relations themselves are constituted (Ibid., 164–165).

A critique of this appearance must therefore do more than restore missing connections between already established objects. To show, for example, that scientific research depends on technology, that technology depends on labour, or that both depend on economic resources is necessary but insufficient. Such an account can leave each sphere intact as an independent entity and treat their unity as the result of their subsequent interaction. The more difficult task is to investigate how the spheres themselves, together with the boundaries that seem to separate them, are historically constituted. This does not render every disciplinary distinction illusory. It makes the claim of *self-sufficiency*, the assumption that a sphere can be adequately understood from within its apparently given boundaries, an object of criticism.

Fatih Müldür's contribution, "Ascending' Theory to Reality: Materialist Dialectic and Revolutionary Practice," addresses a related problem at the level of materialist method. Beginning with Feuerbach's break from earlier materialisms, Müldür argues that Marx's decisive advance lies in grasping human activity not as an object of contemplation but as practical-critical, transformative activity. On this account, theory is neither an autonomous realm of abstractions nor a passive reflection of an independently completed reality: it emerges within social practice and returns to it as a moment of its transformation. Müldür thus presents materialist dialectics as a unity of logical, theoretical, and practical-critical activity, rather than a method externally applied to its object.

The significance of this argument for our present question is that the independence of thought cannot be overcome by merely declaring its dependence on material life. Its relation to that life must be reconstructed through the historically determinate activity in which thinking itself becomes possible and effective. The same demand applies to the sciences: their unity cannot be supplied from outside their objects, but must be investigated through the social relations in which knowledge is produced. That investigation now requires a closer account of how knowledge-producing activity is reproduced within capitalist society.

Knowledge production within the totality of capitalist reproduction

The social conditions of knowledge production become clearer once we distinguish an activity's immediate purpose from the relations through which it is reproduced. Scientific work may be undertaken in a capitalist enterprise, a public university, an independent research institute, or outside any formal institution. Its results may become commodities, enter production as technical innovations, circulate without payment, or remain unused for decades. These differences cannot be disregarded. In particular, the fact that an activity takes place under capitalism does not make it directly productive of surplus value. Yet neither does its distance from immediate commercial exchange place it outside the social totality in which its material means, institutional conditions, and possibilities of continuation are secured.

Capitalist reproduction is not the aggregate outcome of activities pursuing unrelated ends. It is a historically specific process in which the production of wealth is subordinated to the self-expansion of value (Ibid., 167–169). This imperative does not determine every scientific question or discovery in advance; nor does it exhaust the purposes for which knowledge is produced. It nevertheless mediates the conditions under which research can be sustained, the uses to which its results are put, and the forms in which knowledge becomes socially available. Scientific activity can pursue ends irreducible to valorization while depending upon resources and institutions whose reproduction is conditioned by it. Its relative autonomy is thus a real, but socially constituted, relation.

Kamir F. Gemal's review article, "Revisiting Harvey's Anti-Value: A Critical Review of International and Brazilian Literature," brings a further determination of this totality into view. Through a critical reconstruction of David Harvey's concept and its subsequent uses, Gemal ar-

gues that anti-value should not be conceived as an external force confronting value, but as an immanent determination of value itself: the ever-present possibility that value will fail to be realized or will undergo devaluation. The movement of capital is therefore inseparable from the possibility of its interruption. Gemal's examination of the concept also insists on distinguishing anti-value from non-value and other negative categories rather than gathering different processes under an insufficiently determined name.

This intervention matters to our argument because the unity of capitalist reproduction is not a harmonious coordination of its differentiated moments. The relations that make activities parts of a common process also generate tensions and limits within that process. As Gemal's discussion of devaluation indicates, the very conditions through which capital reproduces itself can threaten its continued movement. To grasp a social totality, then, is neither to deny the specificity of its moments nor to assume that their interdependence guarantees their compatibility. It is to investigate the determinate relations through which they are constituted, sustained, and brought into contradiction.

The question that follows is whether these relations can be understood simply as a particular *organization* of otherwise independent activities. If not, we must specify what is meant by their social form.

Social form is not merely organization

If the unity of capitalist reproduction is constituted through relations that also generate its contradictions, it cannot be adequately understood as a problem of organization alone. Organization concerns the arrangement and coordination of activities: how tasks are distributed, decisions made, resources allocated, and results communicated. These are indispensable questions. Yet they do not, by themselves, tell us why activities take the particular social forms they do, or why the relations among them confront their participants as necessities independent of their collective will.

The distinction becomes apparent when we consider the division of labour. A change in the organization of production may alter who performs a task, how workers cooperate, or who exercises authority over the labour process. But the capitalist character of that process cannot be established, or overcome, simply by describing its organizational arrangements. It concerns the form in which labour becomes social, its products acquire value, and the reproduction of human life is mediated by the accumulation of capital. These determinations are not additional features attached to an otherwise complete organization of production.

They constitute the historically specific relations within which that organization exists (*Ibid.*, 470–480).

The same distinction applies to knowledge production. Greater cooperation among disciplines, wider access to research, and more democratic scientific institutions may transform the conditions under which knowledge is produced and shared. None of these developments should be dismissed. But connecting scientific activities more effectively does not, in itself, explain the social relations through which they have come to exist as apparently independent activities. An interdisciplinary programme can bring together the results of different inquiries while leaving their objects, institutional boundaries, and conditions of reproduction unexamined. Coordination may overcome particular obstacles created by separation without yet grasping the form of separation itself.

The distinction is not between activities that are connected and activities that are not. It is between taking their connections as relations among already constituted elements and investigating the social relations through which those elements acquire their determinate character. This is why the unity of the sciences cannot be achieved by an organizational decision. The question is not simply how knowledge-producing activities might cooperate, but how their existing forms of separation and cooperation are themselves constituted.

The unity of inquiry and the material reproduction of life

The unity of the sciences is neither an identity that precedes their differentiation nor a connection subsequently imposed upon independent fields. It must be reconstructed through the determinate relations in which their objects and activities develop. Under capitalism, this unity assumes a contradictory social form: knowledge-producing activities are moments of a common process of reproduction, yet their interdependence confronts them as an external condition. Their apparent independence is not the absence of social relations, but one of the forms those relations take.

The historically specific unity imposed by capitalist reproduction must, however, be distinguished from the common social and practical ground of scientific inquiry. Knowledge does not originate in valorization, even when the conditions of its production and application are mediated by it. This distinction allows us to grasp both the capitalist form of scientific activity and the possibility of its transformation without treating capitalism as the necessary foundation of knowledge itself.

The inquiry must therefore move beyond the forms in which knowledge is produced to the material conditions that make its production possible. Scientific activity presupposes living human beings, their historically developed capacities, and their practical engagement with nature. The reproduction of knowledge cannot be separated from the reproduction of human life. It is to the relations among labour, nature, and social necessity that we now turn.

From knowledge production to the reproduction of life

The preceding discussion concluded by locating the production of knowledge within the reproduction of human life. This is not a move from one self-contained sphere to another. It develops the same argument: scientific activity presupposes living human beings, historically formed capacities, material means, and a practical relation to nature. Economy, society, and nature cannot therefore be treated as independent domains, any more than labour, freedom, and the human relation to nature can be understood separately. Human beings live only by continually producing and reproducing the material conditions of life. They transform natural materials, cooperate with one another, sustain bodies and capacities, and reproduce the social relations through which these activities are organised. What appears as “the economy” is a historically specific organisation of this broader material process.

Labour is central to this process, but only if it is not identified with employment or reduced to the labour that directly produces commodities. At the most general level, labour mediates the interchange between human beings and nature. It is an enduring condition of human existence because food, shelter, care, and the other means of life do not appear in forms ready for human use. Yet this general necessity never exists outside determinate social relations. What is produced, whose needs count, how labour is divided, and who controls its conditions and products are historical questions.

Capitalist relations give particular answers to these questions. The production of use values is subordinated to valorisation; the capacity to labour assumes the form of a commodity; and access to the means of life is mediated by money. Competitive accumulation then confronts individuals and institutions as an objective imperative, directing investment, reorganising labour, shaping technological development, and sacrificing human needs and ecological conditions to the expansion of value. Capitalism thereby presents its own imperatives as necessities of social life. But the need to reproduce life is real, whereas the need to

produce profit is not transhistorical. What appears as the neutral demand of “the economy” is a historically specific command over social labour and natural wealth.

The hidden conditions of capitalist reproduction

The material reproduction of life extends beyond the immediate production process. Living bearers of labour-power must be sustained from day to day and renewed across generations. Food has to be prepared, homes maintained, children raised, illness attended to, and physical and emotional capacities restored. These activities are not supplementary services added after production. They are necessary moments of social reproduction, even though many of them are not organised through the wage relation or directly subordinated to capital. They reproduce not only labour-power but living persons, social capacities, and relations.

The apparent separation of economy from household and of production from reproduction conceals this dependence. Much of reproductive labour is unpaid or poorly paid, performed disproportionately by women, and naturalised as a familial obligation rather than recognised as socially necessary labour. Patriarchal relations make women responsible for sustaining others and permit men to benefit from and exercise power over women’s labour and bodies. Capital, in turn, presupposes the reproduction of labour-power while neither fully organising nor guaranteeing it. When public services are withdrawn, care is commodified, or households are made to absorb the effects of economic and ecological crisis, this burden is intensified rather than eliminated. The reproduction of life cannot be derived from the circuit of capital, although capital continually reshapes its conditions.

Nature is subjected to a parallel abstraction, but the parallel should not efface the difference between living activity and natural processes. Capital treats soil, water, energy, and ecosystems as inputs into production or as assets capable of bearing a price. Their qualitative differences, temporal rhythms, and limits are translated into the terms of cost, return, and substitutability. Yet ecosystems cannot be regenerated according to the temporal demands of accumulation, and destroyed conditions of life cannot necessarily be replaced by another commodity.

Crises of care and ecological crises thus disclose distinct but related limits of capitalist reproduction. Neither reproductive labour nor nature lies simply outside capital: both are reorganised through capitalist relations. Yet neither can be reduced to value production and accumulation. Capital presupposes living and natural processes that it does not create, while its own reproduction can exhaust the people and undermine the

ecological conditions on which it depends. Crisis is not an external disturbance imposed upon an otherwise autonomous economy. It exposes the material dependencies that capitalist forms organise and conceal.

Freedom and the social organisation of necessity

These relations alter the question of freedom. Freedom cannot mean release from every form of dependence, because human beings remain dependent on nature, on one another, and on the labour required to sustain life. Nor can formal rights secure freedom while the majority must sell their labour-power in order to live and while socially necessary activity is governed by accumulation. The relevant question is how dependence and necessary labour are socially organised. Who decides what is necessary? How is indispensable work distributed? Which necessities arise from human and ecological requirements, and which are imposed by capitalist social relations? Emancipation begins by making these distinctions politically contestable.

Joshua Graf's contribution, "Labour, Nature, Freedom and Universalism: Communism between Capitalist Longevity and Radical Break," develops this problem through Marx's critique of bourgeois freedom. Graf rejects the familiar claim that Marx sacrificed individual liberty to equality or collective purpose. Marx's objection was instead directed at an abstract conception of freedom that isolates the individual from the material and social conditions of action. The formally free worker enters the market as the owner of labour-power but must sell that capacity because the means of subsistence and production are controlled by others. Juridical freedom is real, yet its capitalist form is inseparable from a material compulsion that sharply limits what most people can do with it.

Against the image of the naturally independent individual, Graf reconstructs freedom as relational and historically conditioned. Human beings enlarge their capacities through cooperation, accumulated knowledge, and a division of labour; the development of individuality therefore depends on social powers. Communism, in this account, is directed towards the free development of individuals rather than their subordination to an undifferentiated collective. Its material premise is the reduction of necessary labour time and the expansion of disposable time. Yet Graf also resists a simple opposition between labour and freedom. Some labour remains indispensable, while consciously chosen and collectively organised activity may itself become a field for developing human capacities. The task is not to imagine the disappearance of necessity, but to transform our relation to it.

This argument gives political content to Marx's distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. The realm of necessity cannot simply be left behind: human beings must continue to reproduce themselves and regulate their interchange with nature. Its organisation can nevertheless become freer. Necessary labour can be reduced, shared more equally, performed under better conditions, and directed towards democratically determined ends. Such a transformation requires more than a change in ownership. It must challenge inherited divisions between productive and reproductive labour, mental and manual activity, free time and work, as well as the gendered and racialised allocation of exhausting tasks. Disposable time for some cannot constitute communist freedom when it rests on necessities rendered invisible and borne by others.

Ecological limits sharpen rather than cancel this conception of freedom. Graf argues that a communist politics cannot universalise the resource-intensive forms of consumption enjoyed by privileged groups in the capitalist centres. Such a model is neither materially possible nor normatively desirable. At the same time, ecological politics cannot impose an abstract programme of scarcity on regions and populations whose needs remain unmet. Freedom must be reformulated through collective decisions about sufficiency, differentiated needs, and planetary limits. A post-capitalist society would also inherit damaged ecosystems, unequal productive capacities, and the growing labour of mitigation, adaptation, and care. Communism must therefore be understood both as a radical break with accumulation and as a transformation undertaken within conditions produced by capitalism.

Ecological limits and the problem of mediation

Pietro Daniel Omodeo's "The Dialectics of Ecological Civilization and Degrowth" approaches the same field through a critical examination of John Bellamy Foster's recent eco-Marxism. Omodeo recognises the force of Foster's account of the metabolic rift, unequal ecological exchange, and the contradiction between endless accumulation and nature's regenerative capacities. Particularly important is Foster's critique of "natural capital." Pricing ecosystems appears to acknowledge their importance, but it converts their distinct qualities into exchangeable assets and encourages the belief that destroyed processes can always be replaced. Against this financialisation of nature, ecological critique must insist on physical limits, non-substitutability, and the irreversibility of many forms of damage.

Omodeo nevertheless argues that identifying capitalism as the source of ecological destruction does not by itself yield an adequate philosophy of nature or a viable politics of ecological socialism. He questions Foster's attempt to ground ecology in a general dialectics of nature when this risks effacing the specificity of consciousness, praxis, and political conflict. The alienation of labour and the destruction of ecosystems are connected through capitalist relations, but they are not identical processes. Their unity cannot be secured by applying the same philosophical category to human subjects and natural systems; it must be demonstrated through the historically specific relations that organise both the exploitation of labour and the appropriation of nature.

The same demand for mediation informs Omodeo's political criticism. Foster presents planning, Chinese "ecological civilization," and degrowth in the affluent North as elements of an ecosocialist transition. Omodeo accepts the necessity of planning and the inadequacy of growth as a measure of social well-being, but challenges the inference from these premises to the endorsement of a state model. Official declarations cannot establish that planning is democratic, ecologically effective, or rooted in popular mobilisation. Nor does state direction by itself overcome productivism, technocracy, or the subordination of needs to geopolitical competition. Ecological planning must remain subject to ideology critique, including when its claims are made in the name of socialism.

Social necessity and emancipation

Read together, the two contributions show why social necessity is a central problem of emancipation. Graf demonstrates that freedom acquires material content only through the social organisation of labour, time, and need. Omodeo shows that an ecological alternative requires planning, but that planning becomes emancipatory only when its ends, forms of knowledge, and institutions are open to critical and collective determination. Both therefore displace the opposition between freedom and constraint. Capitalism does not leave necessity behind; it subjects material necessity to the impersonal compulsion of accumulation. A communist and ecological politics would have to distinguish unavoidable natural conditions from socially produced compulsions and bring the organisation of necessary activity under democratic control.

This returns us to the question of knowledge with which this section began. Collective decisions about needs, ecological thresholds, technology, and the distribution of labour require scientific inquiry, but science cannot stand outside the relations it helps to organise. Claims about natural limits, technical possibility, and social necessity are produced

within institutions and conflicts that shape what can be known and whose knowledge counts. The discussion that follows therefore turns from the material reproduction of life to science as a social practice. If freedom depends on the conscious regulation of our relations with one another and with nature, the production and organisation of knowledge become part of the practical problem of emancipation itself.

Knowledge as the Production of the Future

What must be remembered at this point is that every form of knowledge production means the production of the future.

When the connection between the knowledge produced and its own conditions of production is not established, the knowledge produced unwittingly reproduces the very conditions under which it was produced. The price of failing to adopt a critical attitude toward these conditions is, in this sense, to reproduce them. The totality and critical character of Marxism, however, precisely because it establishes the connection between the two, constitute the opportunity for changing the existing conditions.

In societies where the capitalist mode of production is dominant, it is evident that capital needs knowledge production even just to reproduce itself. In other words, capital is dependent on the production of knowledge—that is, on those who produce knowledge. Relative surplus value—that is, the production of new knowledge—will necessarily continue for as long as the capitalist mode of production persists.

Yet the capitalist mode of production conceals this dependency on the producers of knowledge and gives the impression that it is itself the sole and real subject. Another meaning of commodity fetishism lies here. As noted earlier, this appearance corresponds to a concrete reality. Production of knowledge, unfortunately, takes place within the conditions and forms that capital provides.

Even within the capitalist mode of production, there are certain facts that, however much capital may try to conceal them, cannot be eliminated. First, whatever its kind and whatever purpose it is produced for, knowledge is the objectification of existing conditions, that is, their negation. In other words, knowledge carries within itself, by virtue of its very form, the determination of the conditions that are its source, and therefore the possibility of a critique directed at them. Precisely for this reason, knowledge has the power to encompass the contradictions of the very system out of which it arose. In this way, the capitalist mode of production itself creates the possibility of intervention against itself.

At this stage, knowledge is not yet critical; it is merely a determination pertaining to existing conditions. Yet it is pregnant with other forms of knowledge. The distance that the human being takes from the world through every kind of knowledge—and through action as a form of knowing—is its fundamental determination, and this distance can direct the spontaneously negative, critical attitude toward a constructive, positive step. This may be called the second stage of the knowledge in question: the negation of the negation.

This second, critical form of knowledge carries two meanings at once. And these meanings coincide with one another exactly. First, it is critical in the sense of discovering the causes, sources, and conditions of the knowledge in question; and second, in the sense of locating, on the plane of thought, the contradictions within that knowledge. These two seemingly separate paths are, in fact, two different forms of the same path.

The Marxist critical method comes into play precisely at this point. It weaves together these two seemingly separate paths even as it points to their unity.

In its first form, by making the connection between the knowledge produced and the conditions of its production itself into material for knowledge, it incorporates the process of knowledge's production into knowledge itself. In other words, it does not focus solely on the solution that the produced knowledge offers; it also includes in its answer why the problem in question arose and why it came to be treated as a problem.

In its second form, the contradictions within the knowledge produced are brought to light and unfolded on the plane of thought. It is inevitable that the findings that emerge in the course of this analysis will find their correlate on the plane of material conditions as well.

In both forms—the first on the plane of material conditions, the second on the plane of thought—the negation of the knowledge produced takes place. In the first, the material sources of the contradictions that knowledge harbors on the plane of thought are laid bare; in the second, the contradictions on the plane of thought are analyzed through to the end, and it becomes clear that they are an expression of contradictions in practice.

In both cases, the plane of thought and the material conditions are brought together, and in this way a new field of practice is produced. This is itself an indication that thinking is practice. These new fields of practice, in turn, show how the problem of knowledge is bound up with

the problem of emancipation. Grasping the material sources of the contradictions in thought provides the possibility of eliminating them in practice.

In this way, on the one hand, it is shown that knowledge is historical; on the other, it becomes possible to make history otherwise. It thus becomes apparent that what is realized through the mediation of the production of knowledge is, in every case, the future itself. There is knowledge that has closed its eyes to the contradictions of capital and thereby produces the future of capital. And there is knowledge that, produced from a critical, holistic outlook that also investigates the conditions of capital's own production and reproduction, produces our future. In this context, it becomes clear that we must now speak not of the political use of knowledge, but of knowledge—and the production of knowledge—as politics itself.

This question of knowledge production as politics also provides the ground for the exchange between Joost Kircz and Sascha Freyberg on Bogdanov's 1918 theses on proletarian science. Kircz's critique raises the difficulties involved in attributing a class character to scientific knowledge itself, whereas Freyberg asks whether Bogdanov's intervention can nevertheless be reconstructed as a critique of the social organization, control, and accessibility of knowledge production. Their disagreement therefore concerns more than the historical assessment of Bogdanov: it poses the question of where the politics of science resides—in the epistemic content of knowledge, in the social relations through which knowledge is produced, or in the relation between the two. Since the exchange is introduced separately in this issue, we need not rehearse its arguments here. What matters for our present discussion is that the controversy makes explicit the problem with which this movement is concerned: scientific knowledge cannot be separated from the social relations of its production, but neither can its content simply be reduced to those relations.

Contradiction in Knowledge

Isabel Jacobs and Jiří Růžička's article, "Critique of Systemic Reason: Josef Cibulka and Evald Ilyenkov on Cybernetics and Artificial Intelligence," can be said to focus on precisely this point through the Soviet and Eastern European debates on cybernetics.

The article explains, from a critical standpoint, the positions of Ilyenkov and Cibulka within these debates. As the article describes it, cybernetics—or, in the contemporary context, many of the questions reappearing around artificial intelligence—solves the problems it addresses

within pre-established rules and directives, but it cannot take these problems themselves as its own object. In other words, it cannot pass to the stage of negation. Precisely for this reason, on the conception of thinking reconstructed by Jacobs and Růžička, it cannot properly be said to think. It is at this point that the singularity of the human being, as the sole being capable of thought, emerges.

The human being can ask themselves why problems arise in the first place. This stems from the fact that the human being is not merely a brain in a vat but also has a body. For the human being does not think outside of, or in spite of, the body; on the contrary, since thinking is practice, it thinks with the body just as it thinks with the brain. Precisely for this reason, the human being can pass to the stage of negation mentioned above: it can search for the material basis of every question and for the contradictions of every answer.

Unlike cybernetics, the human being can take its own manner of questioning or thinking—that is, its own activity—as an object. The problem, in this context, stems from a misunderstanding of what thinking is. Indeed, Ilyenkov and Cibulka make precisely this problem their own.

The very notion that cybernetics or artificial intelligence thinks demonstrates, today, the power of the capitalist mode of production in general and of commodity fetishism in particular. The attribution of autonomous thinking and creativity to artificial intelligence can, from this perspective, itself be read as a contemporary form of fetishism: socially accumulated human capacities, objectified in technological systems, confront their producers as capacities apparently belonging to the systems themselves. The logic of capital has been adopted, and it has come to be believed that the one who thinks and creates is capital itself. This holds true not only for the period the article addresses but, unfortunately, for the present day as well. The article's contemporary value lies precisely in its exposure of this fact.

The discussion of quality and quantity in the article's second part, where Cibulka's criticisms are presented, points implicitly to this same situation. Just like capital, cybernetics and artificial intelligence evaluate reality purely in terms of quantity, stripping it of all qualities, and they render even qualitative differences functional within this quantitative logic.

The importance of the difference between quality and quantity also shows itself in the political domain. Because artificial intelligence operates by processing determinations within formally constituted systems,

its capacity to represent qualitative differences should not be confused with grasping the genesis of one quality from the internal contradictions of another. An artificial system can reproduce an account of the transition from feudalism to capitalism; what is at stake for Cibulka is whether it can reconstruct that transition as a qualitative transformation arising through historically determinate contradictions. Once this distinction is lost, even the difference between capitalism and socialism risks being represented as a difference among states of a system rather than as a problem of historical transformation.

The question of embodiment raised here receives a further determination in the archival text published in this issue, Kyrill Potapov's translation of Evald Ilyenkov's "Towards the Concept of 'a Human's Body' versus 'the Human Body'." Ilyenkov's apparently peculiar distinction between these two formulations concerns precisely the inadequacy of treating the human body as a naturally given biological entity to which specifically human capacities such as thinking, language, consciousness, purposive activity are subsequently added. What makes a body human cannot be located within its anatomical organization considered in isolation. The human body is formed historically through practical activity, through its relations with other human beings and with a world already transformed by accumulated social practice. Its capacities are therefore neither reducible to biological properties nor detachable from their material embodiment: they are socially developed capacities of a corporeal being. This bears directly on the problem pursued throughout this movement. If thinking is understood as an activity of such a socially formed body, the comparison between human intelligence and artificial intelligence cannot be adequately posed as a comparison between two information-processing systems, one biological and the other technological. What disappears in such an abstraction is precisely the practical and social process through which human capacities become human capacities in the first place. The issue is consequently not whether a machine can reproduce particular operations performed by human beings, nor whether increasing computational complexity will eventually cross some quantitative threshold into "human" thought. It is what kind of activity thinking is, and what relations constitute the being capable of it. Ilyenkov's formulation thus returns us, from another direction, to the problem with which this introduction began: neither an object of knowledge nor the activity through which it becomes knowable can be adequately grasped as an isolated, self-sufficient entity. Their

determinations emerge through relations and mediations that inquiry must reconstruct rather than take as externally given.

Conclusion: The Unity of Critique as a Practical Problem

The question with which we began can now be posed more concretely. If the unity of Marxist inquiry cannot be supplied by a common theme, by an encyclopedic accumulation of distinct knowledges, or by the application of an invariant method to independently constituted objects, where does this unity reside? The preceding movements suggest that the question itself must be reformulated. Unity is not something that inquiry adds to a fragmented reality. The fragmentation with which inquiry begins is already a determinate form of a social world whose apparently autonomous spheres are constituted through relations that connect them. The task is therefore neither to abolish their differences conceptually nor to assemble them externally, but to reconstruct the mediations through which their difference and their unity are produced.

This is why totality cannot function as a methodological guarantee. To invoke the whole before investigating its determinations would merely substitute the word *totality* for the knowledge that remains to be produced. The totality is not given to thought as a finished object standing above its moments; it becomes intelligible through the investigation of the relations by which those moments acquire their determinate forms. Labour cannot be adequately understood without the natural conditions and social relations through which it is performed; freedom cannot be abstracted from necessity and the organization of material reproduction; knowledge cannot be separated from the historically developed capacities, institutions, instruments, and divisions of labour through which it is produced; and thinking cannot be reduced to an operation performed by an isolated mind or reconstructed as information processing detached from socially formed, embodied human activity. What initially appear as different objects of inquiry repeatedly lead beyond themselves, not because a philosophical system commands them to do so, but because their own determinations do.

There is therefore a difference between recognizing that everything is somehow connected and grasping a social totality. The former remains an abstract proposition and can coexist perfectly well with the treatment of its terms as essentially independent. The latter requires the reconstruction of *specific mediations*. Under capitalism, these mediations possess a peculiar character. Human activities become increasingly interdependent while their social connection confronts those who

perform them as an external necessity. The expansion of social cooperation thus accompanies the apparent autonomization of its moments: economy, politics, science, technology, nature, and even human capacities themselves can appear as separate domains related only subsequently to one another. Marxist critique begins neither by accepting these separations nor by denying them. It asks how they are produced, what social relations they express, and under what conditions they might cease to assume their present form.

This also gives a more determinate meaning to the common generic root of inquiry proposed at the beginning. Scientific activity belongs to the historically developed practical relation of human beings to an objective world, but this generic sociality exists only through definite historical forms of cooperation, division, conflict, appropriation, and reproduction. The sciences consequently possess neither an eternal unity waiting to be discovered beneath their differences nor an essential fragmentation that interdisciplinary cooperation might subsequently repair. Their unity is itself historical.

The unity of Marxist inquiry is therefore ultimately a *practical problem*. This does not mean that theoretical distinctions can be dispensed with in favour of political commitment, or that the truth of an inquiry is determined by the purposes it serves. It means that the divisions whose forms thought encounters are themselves bound to historically determinate forms of human activity. Their critique consequently points beyond a rearrangement of knowledge. If the fragmentation of intellectual and material activity belongs to a social form in which collective capacities confront human beings as independent powers, overcoming that fragmentation cannot consist simply in better communication among disciplines, greater coordination among institutions, or the construction of a more comprehensive theoretical system. It concerns the practical transformation of the relations through which human beings produce their material life, their knowledge, and themselves.

Perhaps this is also what a non-thematic issue of *Marxism & Sciences* can make unusually visible. The contributions gathered here do not acquire unity because we have retrospectively assigned them a common subject. Their different objects, dialectics and revolutionary practice, value and anti-value, labour and freedom, ecology and social reproduction, cybernetics and artificial intelligence, the politics of scientific knowledge, and the socially formed human body, should not be made interchangeable. What brings them into relation is precisely the move-

ment through which the investigation of apparently discrete objects encounters the social and material mediations constitutive of them. Their disagreements are no less important than their convergences, because totality is not theoretical unanimity. It is the problem that arises when inquiry refuses to mistake the apparent independence of its objects for their complete determination.

The first non-thematic issue of this journal therefore does not mark a departure from the question announced in its name. It renders that question more explicit. *Marxism & Sciences* has never needed to mean Marxism placed beside the sciences, as though one constituted a worldview and the others supplied independent bodies of knowledge to which it might subsequently be applied. The conjunction is more demanding. It names an inquiry into the relations through which knowledge, nature, labour, technology, and human activity become differentiated moments of one historical world. Their unity cannot be presupposed. It has to be discovered through inquiry, criticized in its historically determinate forms, and, where the relations constituting it confront human beings as alien powers, practically transformed.

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Biographies

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