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## FROM MARX TO GRAMSCI - FROM GRAMSCI TO MARX HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS<sup>1</sup>

FOR GIUSEPPE PETRONIO, GRANDSEIGNEUR AND COMRADE

I.

Was Gramsci's term "Philosophy of Praxis" a camouflage, a de-nomination in the sense that it un-named Historical Materialism? Or was speaking of camouflage itself an act of camouflage, designed to protect Gramsci from being condemned as an idealist deviant?<sup>2</sup> It took some effort of "liberating Gramsci" (Baratta) to cut through this cacophony of voices and to understand the legitimacy of his speaking term "Philosophy of Praxis", which condenses precisely into a thesis the Archimedean point of Marxian thinking.<sup>3</sup> The concept itself is derived from those notes of Karl Marx, hidden during his lifetime even from his friend Friedrich Engels, and now known as the "Theses on Feuerbach". It was Antonio Labriola who first spoke of a "Philosophy of Praxis" as the "nucleus of Historical Materialism"<sup>4</sup>:

"In so far, finally, as the Historical Materialism, or the philosophy of praxis, taking account of the integral social and historical human being, puts an end to every form of idealism which regards the empirically existing things as reflex, reproduction, imitation, example, consequence (or what ever one may say) of a presupposed thought [...], in the same moment it is the end of naturalistic materialism [...]. The intellectual revolution,

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning this point see W.F. Haug (1999), "Marxismus und Philosophie", in: *Enzyklopädie Philosophie*, ed by H.J. Sandkühler, Hamburg: Meiner Verlag 1999, vol. 1, p. 794-805.

<sup>3</sup> This controversy is revisited in my article "Gramsci's 'Philosophy of Praxis'" (in: *Socialism and Democracy*, Summer 2000), part of my introduction to volume 6 of the German edition of the Prison Notebooks: Antonio Gramsci (1995), *Philosophie der Praxis, Gefängnishefte 10 und 11*, W. F. Haug (ed.), Hamburg: Argument. See also my "Rethinking Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis from One Century to the Next", in: *Boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 2, Durham (USA), Duke University Press, 1999, 101-117.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Labriola (1934), *Socialism and Philosophy*. Translated by Ernst Untermann. Chicago: Ch.H. Kerr & Co., p. 58.

which has led to regard the processes of human history as absolutely objective ones, is simultaneously accompanied by that other intellectual revolution which succeeded in historicizing physical nature. The latter is no longer, for any thinking human being, a fact which was never in fieri [in the process of becoming]".<sup>5</sup>

While in prison, Gramsci immersed himself in this thought and reflected on it from every possible angle. In doing so, he had to struggle on two fronts: already under Kautsky Marxism had ossified as an "evolutionary doctrine". It was precisely this term which Lenin adopted to describe the dialectical method. Taking the example of Nikolai Bukharin's *Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology*, Gramsci undertook the systematic critique of an ideological formation which was only then emerging, but which was later to be canonized as Marxism-Leninism under Stalin. Gramsci's not always fair polemic against Bukharin indicates that he saw this formation representing a broader tendency. From this Marxism, which saw itself as an exact science of history, the Marxian spirit had disappeared. This ideology inevitably repelled, especially the more intelligent, and posed a political-epistemological as well as a political-ethical obstacle to the unfolding of Marxist theory and practice. In its philosophical essence, it represented a divergence from the project of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and a return to the metaphysical and philosophical materialism which Marx had rejected. Thus far the opponents and dangers which Gramsci's project had to face, came from his own side. On the side of bourgeois theory reigned the powerful neo-idealism of Benedetto Croce; at its side its exalted offshoot, the *Attualismo* of Giovanni Gentile, chief ideologue of Italy's fascism. Both came from Labriola - Croce more, Gentile less - and had taken his still-genuine Marxist inheritance of a philosophy of praxis with them to the right - in much the same way as Martin Heidegger<sup>6</sup> and other philosophical bearers of nazism such as Alfred Baeumler<sup>7</sup> did in Germany.

"The laceration which happened to Hegelianism has reoccurred with the philosophy of praxis.

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Labriola, *Scritti filosofici e politici*, II, Torino: Einaudi 1976, p. 702f. Untermann's translation, which is misleading, has been corrected by us (cf. l.c., p. 60).

<sup>6</sup> For Lucien Goldmann there is "no fundamental difference between Heidegger's theses and the *Theses on Feuerbach*" (Lukács und Heidegger, *nachgelassene Fragmente*, Y.Ishaghpour (ed.) (1975), Darmstadt-Neuwied: Luchterhand, p. 125 ).

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Nolte, from his own rightist perspective, has discussed such Marxist inoculation of fascist philosophy. ("Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus", in: A.Gethmann-Siefert & Otto Pöggeler (ed.s), *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, Frankfurt/M 1988.

That is to say, from dialectical unity there has been a regress to philosophical materialism on the one hand, while on the other hand modern idealist high culture has tried to incorporate that part of the philosophy of praxis which was needed in order for it to find a new elixir." (Selections, p. 396; Notebook 16, 9)<sup>8</sup>

In short, what Gramsci realized was that the vital source of Marxian thinking was forgotten or pushed aside by Marxism itself, while liberal and fascist branches of bourgeois philosophizing rejuvenated and redynamised themselves with it. With the term "Philosophy of Praxis" Gramsci not only expressed exactly what he actually did as a theorist, he also brought back into Marxism what Labriola had grasped as the "nucleus of Historical Materialism". Moreover, through using this term he began to reclaim the field that Croce had occupied with his *Filosofia della pratica* and Gentile with his *Filosofia del atto* as original Marxist territory.<sup>9</sup> While with some recipients of Gramsci the Philosophy of Praxis evaporates into post-Marxism - one has only to think of Ernesto Laclau - for Gramsci himself this line of thinking did not lead away from Marx but, on the contrary, led him to start anew from Marx's own point of departure.

And yet, at least in terminology, Gramsci's move was also a move away from Marx: in Marx and Engels' own terms, a "philosophy" was precisely what their theory had ceased to be. Underlying what seems at first glance to be a merely terminological difference, however, is one of Marx's three great theoretical critiques<sup>10</sup> - that of ideology. Marx, who had introduced this term, casually at first, into the modern language of theory<sup>11</sup> and then elaborated it together with Engels, does not yet, like today's mainstream, take it to mean all conceptual stances or systems of political thought, nor even to mean class-consciousness. Nor does he, like the later Engels,

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<sup>8</sup> Since the great American edition of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks by Joseph A. Buttigieg (Columbia University Press) is still in the beginnings, we mostly quote from: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, selected and translated by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1971; additionally to the page numbers in this edition we give the number of the Notebook and the paragraph, both of which are unfortunately not noted in this edition.

<sup>9</sup> Giovanni Gentile, in his *Filosofia di Marx* of 1899, which was recommended by Lenin (Lenin Werke 21, 77), offers his own translation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. The second part of the book, which contains the translation, is titled *La filosofia della prassi* (see the new edition, Bari 1955, p. 68ff). In the *Theses on Feuerbach* Gentile sees the foundation "di tutto un nuovo sistema speculativo" (p.71).

<sup>10</sup> See W.F. Haug (1999), "Die drei Kritiken. Utopische Überschüsse bei Marx", in: W. Küttler (Ed.), *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert. Ernst Engelbert zum 90. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, Berlin: Trafo Verlag; revised version in: W.F. Haug (2005), *Dreizehn Versuche marxistisches Denken zu erneuern, gefolgt von Sondierungen zu Marx / Lenin / Luxemburg*, Hamburg: Argument, 123-34.

take it to mean false consciousness. Rather, concept and theory of the ideological are inscribed in the categorical center of Historical Materialism in that work that carries the term ideology in its title, the so called German Ideology. For Marx, the connection of the elements "division of labor" and "class-rule", together with the state-based reproduction of these conditions, leads to the institution of specialized normative-and regulative practices, of which the juridical apparatus becomes Marx's paradigmatic example.<sup>12</sup> These practices are located, if you like, within the sphere of the state but outside the administrative and in the last instance repressively functioning state in its narrower sense. Judges, priests, philosophers and similar figures - summarized as "ideological estates"<sup>13</sup> in Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value* - are seen as intervening in society in their respectively specific modes, which are formally independent of this narrowly defined state apparatus. At any rate, philosophy is for Marx one of the ideological forms and it would not have occurred to him to classify his own thinking in this way.

Antonio Labriola, this remarkable figure among the first generation of Italian Marxists, expressed the position of Marx and Engels when he explained: "Our philosophy has once and for all overcome the perspective of ideology as such".<sup>14</sup> Marx's critique of philosophy (in the context of his theory of ideology) is therefore no verdict on reflection - far from it. It is rather a rejection of unreflected thinking in its framework of domination [Herrschaftsdenken]. Self-reflective Marxist theorists, especially philosophers, will never avoid Marx's critique of philosophy but accept it, as it were, as a propaedeutics: it is through this filter that Marxist thought must pass in order not to fall back behind Marx himself.

It is precisely here, in the way that he applies Marx' theory of philosophy, that Gramsci's great innovation lies. He does not simply enter the tradition of all previous philosophy but rather reconstructs philosophy from outside of its philosophical institutions, thereby gaining a

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<sup>11</sup> See Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), I. 1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR, 1982, pp. 53, 218, 332.

<sup>12</sup> See my "Outlines for a Theory of the Ideological", and "Ideological Powers and the Antagonistic Reclamation of Community", in: W.F.Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology & Culture*, New York: International General, 1987, pp. 59-99.

<sup>13</sup> "... that the contradictions in material production make necessary a superstructure of ideological estates, whose activity - whether good or bad - is good, because it is necessary" (Karl Marx (1989), *Theory of Surplus Value*, Collected Works, vol. 31, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 184.) The Collected Works translate "ideologische Stände" (MEW 26.1, p. 259) misleadingly with "ideological strata".

<sup>14</sup> Antonio Labriola (1908), *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*, C.H. Kerr & Co., Chicago, p 106.

vantage point from which he is able to productively approach what he calls the "philosophy of the philosophers". This is, as one can say schematically - and with all the danger attendant upon such abbreviation - philosophy from below. In a very similar way, indeed in almost exactly the same words, Brecht reflects upon what the people mean when they attribute a philosophical attitude to someone. And, like Gramsci, Brecht does not stop there but commits himself to expanding and modifying this popular notion of philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

But why a philosophy of praxis and not just simply Critical Theory - as Max Horkheimer, also writing in the 1930's, entitled his Marxist thought? For Gramsci, the question did not arise in this way. The Second International, whose political stance and theory he had come to know as a young socialist, already used the term "ideology" as self-evidently affirmative. The German Ideology was still confined to the party archive and the tradition of the critical theory of ideology was lost. However, in the context of the Communist International, particularly under the influence of Lenin, who was in turn influenced by Plechanov, what had reemerged was philosophy - albeit, as Gramsci sensed, in its pre-Marxist understanding as first philosophy: metaphysics. In Gramsci's view, rather than being "historical methodology", the Soviet textbook is practicing a metaphysics, "though a naïve one" (Selections, p. 436; Notebook 11, 14). He saw that Historical Materialism had become "the 'sociology' of metaphysical materialism" (ibid, p. 437).

Bukharin would have protested against such a critique, assuring us that he in fact radically criticized metaphysics. But Gramsci demonstrates that the *Popular Manual*, written along Leninist lines, mistakenly identifies metaphysics only with idealism<sup>16</sup> and that Bukharin did not realize that with materialist metaphysics or metaphysical materialism he had come from the frying pan into the fire.

"Separated from the theory of history and politics philosophy cannot be other than metaphysics, whereas the great conquest in the history of modern thought, represented by the philosophy of praxis, is precisely the concrete historicisation of philosophy and its

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<sup>15</sup> I have elaborated this point elsewhere and will not repeat it here. See W.F. Haug (1996), *Philosophieren mit Brecht und Gramsci*, Hamburg: Argument; 2nd, enlarged ed., 2006; English translation forthcoming (Brill).

<sup>16</sup> "Metaphysics means for it [i.e. Plechanov's manual] only a specific philosophical formulation, that of speculative idealism, rather than any systematic formulation that is put forward as an extra-historical truth, as an abstract universal outside of time and space." (Selections, p. 437; Notebook 11, 14).

identification with history" (Selections, p. 436; Notebook 11, 14).

The extra-historical, supposedly eternal truth was the then canonized, so called "dialectical materialism". According to official ideology, its application to history and society would give rise to historical materialism. Yet Gramsci, who in this respect thought exactly in the line of Marx - understood that the presumption of a first, absolute knowledge is absolute anti-historicism. Gramsci replies to this self-renunciation of Marxism<sup>17</sup> with the thesis of absolute historicism:

"it has been forgotten, that in the case of a very common expression [historical materialism] one should put the accent on the first term - 'historical'- and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin. The philosophy of praxis is absolute 'historicism', the absolute secularization and this-sidedness of thought, an absolute humanism of history" (Notebook 11, 27, note 1; Selections, p. 465).

Because of the attacks leveled against it,<sup>18</sup> this thesis has often generated uneasiness, even among those seeking to continue the "line Luxemburg-Gramsci" (Peter Weiss). Its meaning however, is simply that of a purely inner-worldly, in Marx's terms, "this-sided" [diesseitig] thinking (see for instance the second thesis on Feuerbach).

## II.

In 1980 Lucien Sève tried partly to reconcile Gramsci to Engels and especially to Lenin, and partly to criticize him from their position - not, however, without conceding some points to Gramsci. Sève's discussion of Gramsci, which is not without traces of a strategic embracing, at times comes close to a "passive revolution" in theory and is possibly the most solid achievement in this regard on the side of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>19</sup> In retrospect, this piece reads

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<sup>17</sup> See Gramsci's polemics against the "vulgar materialism with its metaphysics of "matter" which is necessarily eternal and absolute" (Selections, p. 407; Notebook 11, 62).

<sup>18</sup> "The hyper-historicising, the super-politicization of Marxism appears to be one of its childhood diseases", in which it fights at the same time against bourgeois infection and its own bureaucratic ossification (Lucien Sève, *Une introduction à la philosophie marxiste*, Paris: Editions Sociales 1980, p. 386). -- For Althusser, Marxism is "en toute rigueur [...] un a-humanisme et un a-historicisme" (*Lire le Capital*, II, Paris: Maspéro 1967, p. 73).

<sup>19</sup> On "passive revolution" or "revolution-restoration", one of Gramsci's key-concepts, see: Notebook 15, 11, 17; also: Selections, l.c., 58ff, 106-20. - Cf. Jan Rehmann, *Modernisierung als passive Revolution*, Hamburg: Argument 1998.

like a final attempt - at least in Europe<sup>20</sup> - to reach a modernization of Marxism-Leninism: its *aggiornamento*. But it is still the notorious 'fundamental question of philosophy' which primarily haunts Sève's Introduction; and what he demands of Gramsci is a direct recognition of the ontological primacy of matter. In this regard, Sève learns enough from Gramsci to understand that answering this question cannot be an extrahistorical act.<sup>21</sup> Gramsci, however, would have hardly been content with this concession, the implications of which, anyway, remain indiscernible. In contrast, Gramsci seems to sense that the "materialist resolution of philosophy's fundamental question" is, in fact, a decision which, *ipso facto*, puts a consciousness or a subject in a decisive position in the double sense. In the end, Sève's "ferme affirmation" of the primacy of matter is, for all its apparent decisiveness and firmness, a subjective act. The non-primary acknowledges the primary; yet the primacy of this act rests with the position of the renouncer because it renounces itself - and it does this but knows not what it does. This is the decisionism of the ontological reflection-theory. The self-declaration of philosophical materialism is thus plagued by the ironic dialectic of its carrying with it an aspect of both subjectivism and idealism.

Gramsci shifts this question to different terrain, where it loses its catechetical, indeed nearly clerical, character. In doing so, he follows Marx who, in the first thesis on Feuerbach, discards and leaves behind the innerworld-externalworld scheme of what he, in thesis 8, calls "contemplative materialism", favouring, despite all critique, even idealism to this stance. He does this because idealism conceives of the subject as active, albeit only cognitively and not materially. The new terrain Marx opens up is that of a practical materialism which sets out to think the materiality of praxis and the praxis-mediatedness of our reality. Bertolt Brecht formulates this principle - in astonishing congeniality with Gramsci, whom he did not even

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<sup>20</sup> Still in 1998 a Chinese author could declare that through Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis --despite the justified critique of mechanistic materialism - "Marx's philosophical thought [would be] distorted into practicism" (Xu Chongwen, "Antonio Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis and Marx's World Outlook on Philosophy", in: *Social Sciences in China*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1998, pp. 126-135, 133). -- That this assessment is controversial can be seen in the following issue of the same journal: "It is now accepted that practice is the most fundamental and important concept in Marxist philosophy, not only in terms of the previously accepted Marxist epistemology, but also in relation to the entirety of Marxist philosophy. [...] Dialectical and historical materialism [...] can thus be regarded als 'practical materialism'." (Wu Yuanliang, 1998: "A Retrospective on and Projected New Horizons in Research on Marxist Philosophy", in: *Social Sciences in China*, Beijing, H. 2, 1998, 7-11, here: 7) -- This is opposed in the same issue by He Zuorong ("My Understanding of Marxist Philosophy", 19-24): "It is not scientific to reduce Marxism to 'practical-isms'." (19)

know by name (nor Gramsci him) - in his philosophical notes which were kept secret in his lifetime and partly, for another thirty years, by his heirs: in the end we can know only what we can change.<sup>22</sup>

When Sève establishes that "the category of reflection is the great Absent in Gramsci's epistemology" (1980, 381), he is quite right; but the absence which he criticizes is theoretically motivated and leads into the very center of Gramsci's conception: More than a reflection of the process of knowing-through-changing a consciousness is "consciousness of existing practice" as already Marx and Engels have argued in the German Ideology (CW 5, p. 45), *bewusst tätiges Sein*, consciously acting being. In their argument, they utilize the fact that in German the term for consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) contains the term for being (*Sein*) [being conscious]. Sève argues that reflection is "inseparably subjective and objective" (381). The example he gives is sensualistic: a perception of color reflects at the same time objective wavelengths and the construction of our visual organ. With this he claims physiological, that is, scientific objectivity. The specifically human which makes this, before everything else, a human perception - according to Marx, the "forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present" - is not grasped from this perspective.<sup>23</sup>

Sève admits that the category praxis contains the unity between human beings and nature as well as the "practicité du savoir et du projet. Elle affaiblit l'autre aspect, celui de l'objectivité de la connaissance, de l'extériorité de la nature". And with Lukács' self-critique of 1967,<sup>24</sup> Sève explains, it is the materialistic concept of nature which radically separates the bourgeois from the socialist world-view (384f) - a position which, as the guarantee of historical materialism's distinctiveness, is more than a little curious, given the widespread existence of such secular

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<sup>21</sup> "Mais ce qui lui fait défaut, est la ferme affirmation du primat de la matière au du rapport historique lui-même." Sève 1980, p. 382.

<sup>22</sup> In Brecht's thought, truth "is not 'there in itself' to be first discovered; rather it develops out of the proof of the alterability of the situation or person, this means not merely out of the alterability which is in itself given, but rather out of that to which truth can - from the perspective of the viewer-as-the-masses - be subjugated. Truth, therefore, is a question of praxis." (Brecht, GA 21, 360, our translation).

<sup>23</sup> The practice of the senses is, according to Marx, not reducible to mere physiological processes but is first of all "appropriation of human reality" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Collected Works, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 302): "seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving - in short, all the organs of his individual being [...] are [...] in their orientation to the object, the appropriation of the object" (Ibid., p. 299).

<sup>24</sup> Georg Lukács (1968), Foreword to the New Edition (1967), *History and Class Consciousness*: MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, ix-xli.

materialism in the bourgeoisie.

For Gramsci, in contrast, nature is exactly not a beyond for the practical-historical reality of human beings. Philosophy of praxis signifies for him a "unified process of reality": a thinking of the "dialectical mediation between human beings and nature". The mediation of this unity, however, can only become real through praxis. Gramsci does not take natural sciences as the paradigm for reliable knowledge; rather, he takes the experimenting scientist to be the paradigmatic actor and the experiment the paradigmatic praxis-form which has work-form and from which experience stems. What at first sight is only a slight shift nevertheless turns out to make a categorical difference: Although using the 'hardest' form of knowledge, Gramsci's figure at the same time avoids the bad metaphysicism which normally accompanies the orientation towards the natural scientific objectivism. Through the figure of the experimenting scientist, reflecting on his experiments theoretically, the active element comes into play as the 'historical' arrangeur and interpreter. Gramsci articulates this starting point in the terms of the epistemological reflection used by Marx in his Critique of Political Economy. Announcing, in the preface to Capital 1, the analysis of the value-form, Marx famously says: "in bourgeois society the commodity-form of the product of labour or the value-form of the commodity is the economic cell-form".<sup>25</sup> And in the first sentence of chapter one, the commodity is conceived of as the "elementary form" of bourgeois wealth. With these two key terms of Marxian reflection on research, cell- and elementary form, Gramsci articulates the status of the experimental practice of research: it is "the elementary historical cell through which man, while putting himself by means of technology into relation with nature, knows it and dominates it"; it is "the first paradigm" of a theoretically reflected mediation between man and nature, which separates "two historical worlds, two epochs" and "initiates the process of dissolution of theology and metaphysics and the process of development of modern thought whose consummation is the philosophy of praxis" (*Selections*, p. 446; Notebook 11, 34; translation slightly corrected).

### III.

Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is not fully carried through as a philosophy. What is

philosophical is first of all the fact that Gramsci postulates the existence of such a philosophy, a philosophy that must be understood as the implicit philosophical dynamic, as theory producing thinking in the strongest sense. Much of Gramsci's work remains a sketch, yet he elaborated crucial points of orientation:

- the development of a philosophical conception from below, grounded in the necessity of individuals working themselves out of a state which, parallel to the term passive revolution, could be called passive socialization [Vergesellschaftung];
- the critique of objectivism through the principle of a "Marxist uncertainty relation", inspired by quantum-physics, or, formulated with less uncertainty: through the principle of the practical implication of the subject in every constituted objectivity;
- a view of the scientific experiment, as the cell form of modern rationality, which culminates in Marxism with its mediation of society and nature;<sup>26</sup>
- the constitution of the term hegemony as a "philosophical fact" (Notebook 10.II, 12);
- the political-ethical dimension of all hegemony;
- the materialistic historization of language.

The question is now how this first complex, the narrowly-defined philosophy of praxis, relates to the specific fields and projects of Gramsci's research. There is, secondly, the complex project of theorizing the vast "continent" of politics, particularly its dimension of civil society with all its forms, stakes, forces and actors, prepared and grounded through the differentiation and pluralization of what Marx addresses in the singular as "the superstructure" [der Überbau]<sup>27</sup> (hegemony, intellectuals, governing/governed, the political-ethical momentum, the popular-national, wars of position and of movement, active and passive revolution, position and history of the subaltern, etc.). This is primarily the place of Gramsci's studies on Machiavelli and on the Italian Risorgimento and his research into the history of the

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx (1995), *Capital*, vol. I Collected Works, vol. 35, International Publishers, New York, p. 19; cf. the transl. by Ben Fowkes, New York: Vintage Books 1977, 90.

<sup>26</sup> See Gramsci's note to notebook 11, 34, in which he criticizes Engels' theory of the Dialectics of Nature "which is meant to prove that the dialectics is a cosmic law" and where Gramsci warns against assuming an "identity of the thought" of Marx and Engels. See also: Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. by V. Gerratana, Torino: Einaudi 1977, vol. 2, 1449.

<sup>27</sup> This "revision" is in fact more a clarification of Marxian thinking, where the plurality, indeed the complementarity of ideological forms is already sketched. Taking into account Marx's analysis of the Commune

intellectuals with its satirical supplement describing "Lorianism".<sup>28</sup> A third field is Gramsci's extensive research into the politics of culture<sup>29</sup> which, closely relating to his political studies, circles largely around questions of a popular-national literature. Fourthly, the quantitatively modest but actually particularly important complex of Gramsci's analysis of Americanism and Fordism has to be mentioned, in which the concept "mode of production" gains life and contemporary relevance through the analysis of the relationship between its then newly powerful 'Fordist' formation and the political and cultural sphere (analyses of the changing mode of production and its consequence for the everyday life, psychology, sexuality, political ideology, religion and literature; economic considerations about the current relevance of Marx's law of the tendential fall of the average profit rate as well about the Fordist answer to this fall on the side of the innovative industrialists; the relationship between finance and industrial capital; the Fordist State interventionism; fascism and bolshevism as diametrical projects of catching up to Fordism in the shadow of the American competition).

These four main fields are located at different levels and differ in their concreteness. In other words, they do not lie next to one another, demarcated like academic disciplines. The first field develops Gramsci's theoretical thinking as such in fluid form in critical debate with Neo-idealism and mechanist Marxism. The second field deals with historical and systematic studies of politics and its cultural foundations. The third deals above all with the role of literature in the formation or prevention of a new culture and mode of life and of what Gramsci calls the "popular-national".<sup>30</sup> The fourth field describes the concrete examination of the second and third theory-level with regard to the case of the Fordist mode of production, whose crisis ridden ascent constituted the structural gravitation center at that time. The first field,

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one could even ask if not Gramsci's main strategic distinction between *società civile* und *società politica* helps to elaborate the not very developed communalistic aspect of Marx's political thought.

<sup>28</sup> See Notebook 28: "under the comprehensive title of 'Lorianism'" Gramsci describes "some deteriorate and bizarre aspects of the mentality of a group of Italian intellectuals and henceforth of the national culture (non-organic character, absence of systematic critical spirit, negligence in the practicing of the scientific activity, [...] not adequately fought and rigorously hit: therefore irresponsibility towards the formation of the national culture".

<sup>29</sup> See W.F.Haug (1989), "Tradurre Gramsci", in: M.L.Righi (Ed.), *Gramsci nel mondo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi gramsciani*, Formia, 25-28 ottobre 1989, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci 1995, 79-84.

<sup>30</sup> As Smith and Hoare before him, in their Selections, Buttigieg puts "national-popular" (see Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. & transl. by Joseph A. Buttigieg, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, vol. II, 1996, p. 124); as I have argued in the introduction to vol. 6 of the German edition of the *Prison Notebooks* (l.c., 1994, pp. 1216ff), the order of double adjectives has to be inverted in translations from Romanic to Germanic languages (and vice versa): "aspetto nazionale-popolare" has to be translated as "popular-national aspect" (cf. Notebook 3,

concerned with the philosophy of praxis in its narrow sense, attempts in abstracto to reintroduce a dialectical approach to Marxist thinking, as it must prove itself in the three concrete fields. If one were to subtract the idea of the philosophy of praxis from what Gramsci has to say in these areas, his findings would collapse; conversely, without these three concrete investigations the philosophy of praxis would become an empty promise.

Is philosophy of praxis therefore yet again a "first philosophy" in the sense in which dialectical Marxism ... la Lenin was meant to be? No, precisely not. Rather, it is akin to a "last philosophy" in the sense which Adorno once associated with the concept of an *ultima philosophia*.<sup>31</sup> It is the rejection of the myth of origin and of the ahistorical, which, for a philosophy of praxis, is a twin-word for the supernatural - although not so easily recognised as such by modern reason (Sève 1980, 82). From the vantage point of such philosophy, our thinking and doing is socially articulated, mediated through praxis and situated in history. History knows no beginning and no end. The philosophy of praxis is therefore in its own terms the self-enlightenment of human reality which arises as a break with all ideology in order to look with sober eyes at the active positions of humans to each other and to nature. In a society characterized by class-domination which predominantly relies on power over minds, philosophy of praxis comes to life in the class-struggle, always in favor of that side which has, to speak with Marx,<sup>32</sup> no interest in "drawing the veil" over reality - an openness, however, which is of course not achieved through inactivity and not through one's class position alone and which, in happier moments, can be found fragmented across all classes, as well as sprinkled throughout the ideologies as their "surplus" (Bloch).<sup>33</sup>

The reinterpretation of historical materialism in the light of Gramsci's outline of a philosophy of praxis wipes out its fatalistic evolutionisms, objectivisms, and the false guarantees of philosophy of history, which have residually afflicted the Marxian thinking and which grew like

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154, title); the popular articulation of the national can mean the left alternative to the national articulation of the popular. At first, the German edition followed the same pattern as the English, but then changed it.

<sup>31</sup> See W.F. Haug (1994), "Karl Marx oder der Beginn der 'ultima philosophia'", in H. Fleischer (Ed.), *Der Marxismus in seinem Zeitalter*, Leipzig, Reclam, pp. 96-112; revised version in: W.F. Haug (2005), *Dreizehn Versuche marxistisches Denken zu erneuern*, gefolgt von *Sondierungen zu Marx / Lenin / Luxemburg*, Hamburg: Argument, 135-52.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, (Collected Works Vol. 37), International Publishers, New York, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> See Jürgen Habermas (1963), *Theorie und Praxis. Sozialphilosophische Studien*, Neuwied-Berlin/W, Luchterhand, p. 204.

mildew on the official Marxisms. In this respect, Lenin's revolutionary voluntarism - the complementary opposite of his philosophical materialism - only constituted an interruption.

To go back to Marx from Gramsci, or rather, to again turn towards Marx, does not mean to turn away from Gramsci. Rather, the point is to re-read Marx with an altered perspective. With the help of criteria made sharper by Gramsci, we try to lay out Marx's theoretical tools in readiness for the analysis of today's world. The "pessimism of reason" helps to overcome the naive beliefs of a philosophy of history,<sup>34</sup> but the "optimism of will" helps to reconnoitre the world with the eyes of "intervening thought" [eingreifenden Denkens] (Brecht).<sup>35</sup> Gramsci helps in distinguishing the dying Marxism from that which remains unexhausted in Marx and in the various Marxist traditions. In Europe and many other parts of the world, more decisively than in earlier crises of Marxism, the post-communist situation is characterized by the withering away of what until now was widely believed to be Marxism. This is a deserved death in so far as in its official forms it was a Marxism with an anti-Marxist - because not historical-materialistic - self understanding, which disregarded the self-application rule. In our situation, where we have to say goodbye to that which is dead in order to free that which continues to live, it is salutary to go, with Gramsci in hand, to Marx whose theory provided no concepts with which to grasp his own role as an intellectual.<sup>36</sup> To begin anew with Marx is, then, not yet another return to an 'original truth', as it happened periodically in the history of Marxism; we go back with criteria stemming from historical experience; these criteria make a difference already in Marx.

Just as Gramsci's steps beyond Marx were not a distancing from Marx (any more than any act of preserving the living ever is), so is the Gramscian re-beginning with Marx out of and in the name of a new epoch of capitalism a necessary task if Gramsci's thought is to remain alive. Just

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<sup>34</sup> The "pessimism of reason", misunderstood by Franck Bardacke as a kind of cowardice in the face of the enemy (postscript to: *Shadows of Tender Furies: The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation*, transl. by Frank Bardacke, Leslie López and the Watsonville, California, Human Rights Committee, introduction by John Ross, New York: Monthly Review Press 1995) demands a sobering reading precisely because it discloses new possibilities of action. This point was already made in 1983 by Stuart Hall, when he sketched a "Marxism without guarantees" (in: Betty Matthews (ed.), *Marx: a hundred years on*, London, Lawrence and Wishart.)

<sup>35</sup> See Karen Ruoff Kramer (1997), "Eingreifendes Denken", in *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, ed. W.F. Haug, vol. 3, Hamburg: Argument, 155-61.

as little as we can rest on the laurels of Marx's critique of Hegel, can we rest on those of Gramsci's critique of Croce. And however great the historical merits of Marx's analysis of the capitalist large-scale use of steam power and "tool machine",<sup>37</sup> the Fordist mode of production which Gramsci analyzed becomes by the day part of a history which consumes its protagonists as Kronos did his children. "Historical" means here: no longer historically actual and relevant. Therefore, Gramscians must today, in a new way, become historical materialists in that they endeavor to analyze the new materialities of the historical. The starting point must once again be a the Critique of the Political Economy, in a non-reductionist reading however, and which must not be left to the economists. Gramsci is wrong when he describes it as "critical economy". It is - in this profound, Kant and Hegel transcending (and preserving-further developing) sense - critique of the economy, even a critique of that "critical economy" which existed in Marx's times (as it does again in ours) in the form of the 'left Ricardians'.<sup>38</sup> It is the comprehensive theory of the forms, dynamisms and tendencies of the capitalist mode of production; that is, it grasps, socio-analytically, the forms in which capitalist economy and its theorizing, through the economists, unfolds.

While the recurring denial that Gramsci dealt with the economy is false,<sup>39</sup> it is nevertheless true that he did so only partially. Particularly if one recognizes that Gramsci's analysis of Fordism realized the historical-materialist concretization of Marxism, one has to grant Lucien Sève's claim that Gramsci disregards the productive forces<sup>40</sup> - to name only one aspect which necessitates a renewed and renewing recourse to Marx. Indeed, what kind of analysis of Fordism is this which does not even address the assembly line and the conveyor belt as its basic equipment, or in which the electric motor and the automobile are not investigated in their consequences? In Notebook 22 Gramsci only mentions the "new methods of production and work". Concerning Taylorism he is only interested in the intensification of labor force

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<sup>36</sup> Gramsci introduced to Marxism the theory (and thus the legitimacy) of the intellectual. Marx only seems to know (negatively assessed) ideologues and (positively assessed) scientists. He lacks a concept for his own form of agency. Gramsci introduces for this the term "organic intellectual".

<sup>37</sup> *Capital*, I, trad. Fowkes, l.c., 494.

<sup>38</sup> Marx called those critics of the economy who operated "on the basis of Ricardian theory" the "Gegensätzer" (contradictors) (see: *Theories of Surplus Value*) MEW 26.3, 234ff., 307.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Fabio Frosini (1999), "Critica dell'economia ed economia critica nei Quaderni del carcere", in: Mario Proto (ed.), *Gramsci e l'Internazionalismo*, Manduria-Roma: Piero Lacaita Editore 1999, pp. 49-63.

<sup>40</sup> Strangely enough, Sève deduces this from the fact that Gramsci would not duly recognize matter - as if it were an economic and not an epistemological category; see *Une introduction ...*, 1980, p. 379.

expenditure, not in the Copernican turn which lets the worker stand still and the products in fieri turn around him. In contrast, one only has to think of the sentence which the fascinated Walter Benjamin picked up from Léon Daudet: L'automobile, c'est la guerre.<sup>41</sup> The assembly line means the never-ending multiplication of the automobile. It is from the assembly line that Fordism's war of masses and matériel is launched. It is also around the assembly line that the Soviet Union rescues and reorganizes itself in the struggle for survival against Nazi Germany's war of conquest and annihilation. Finally, the assembly line demanded Stalin's "patriotic"-political counterrevolution which, at the same time, revolutionized the material forms of production and life in the Soviet Union.

Or, we can compare Gramsci's view with another thought of Brecht<sup>42</sup> and, slightly differing, of Benjamin.<sup>43</sup> Both understood war as one of the "forms of motion" of the economy. Under given relations of production, they argue, a certain wealth of productive forces leads to a crisis, and certain productive forces can only be applied through war. Gramsci, in contrast, extends Clausewitz and sees war "or also every other form of armed struggle" as "the most decisive and effective form" of politics.<sup>44</sup>

Of Karl Marx's three critiques, the critique of ideology, the critique of objectivism in the Theses on Feuerbach, and the critique of the value forms and the double character of labor in Capital, Gramsci elaborated the second like no other. Reconstructing the conception of philosophy from below, he responded to the first one. The third he hardly took into account; it is as if, following his friend Piero Sraffa, he remained a left Ricardian.<sup>45</sup> The current crisis, however, puts a far more radical dialectic on the agenda. It requires transcending, in the steps

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<sup>41</sup> Walter Benjamin (1964), "Theorien des deutschen Faschismus. Zu der Sammelschrift *Krieg und Krieger*, edited by Ernst Jünger", in: *Das Argument*, vol. 6, no. 30/3, p. 129.

<sup>42</sup> As Brecht wrote, „The Weimar Republic collapsed on the contradiction between the erection of a large, rationalised industry - which under the world dominating conditions of capitalism could only be fully used and kept alive through activities of war - and the dismantling of the means of war.” (GA 22, 70; GW 20, 181; our translation).

<sup>43</sup> "Only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technical resources" (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, Schocken Books: New York, 1968: p 241.)

<sup>44</sup> Gramsci, Notebook 26, 5. That this sentence in its general form is at least misleading, is proven by more than one contemporary war. Experience has shown most forms of armed struggle to be an unintended anti-politics. This can be seen for example in the case of the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion*) in Germany; its armed struggle served to legitimize the police state of the nuclear security State, and even internally eroded and consumed its original political character until the struggle became a mere end in itself, struggle for the struggle's sake, a skewed analogy of "producing for production's sake" (Marx, *Capital*, I, l.c., p. 739).

<sup>45</sup> See Gianfranco Pala, *Pierino e il lupo. Per una critica a Sraffa dopo Marx*, Rom: Contraddizione 1998.

of Marx, the limits of a left Ricardianism with its inability to think the structural origins of crisis.

In the possible Renaissance of an integral Marxist theory, Gramsci's philosophy of praxis may come to play a leading part. For this, Gramsci's thought is destined, because it precludes the danger of 'immediatism' - unlike in the case of Marx and even more so of the various Marxisms which have succumbed occasionally to the danger of 'immediatist' politics, with its suggestive idea of unmediated community. 'Immediatism', in this sense, means the tendency to abolish mediating structures (market, parliament, law) and civil society. Nevertheless, Gramsci's contribution will only be able to play this part and remain a historically potent force so long as it does not close in upon itself, but instead - rearticulating itself in the Marxian multiverse, at present more accessible than ever<sup>46</sup>, of the three critiques - approaches the changing world of today.

## POSTSCRIPT

Although distributed in German in advance and presented by Giorgio Baratta in Italian, this contribution remained undiscussed at the conference of which it discussed the main theme. The following speaker unwaveringly took it upon himself, without noticing the differences of one word, "to reintroduce a little materialism into Gramsci" - a materialism of the *senso commune*, however, which has no doubt about the nature of things. Other tools are obviously needed in order to "de-sediment" (Nahum Chandler) the philosophical-materialist sediments. Gramsci's formulation of the *storicismo assoluto*, the absolute historicism, still makes Althusser's orphans anxious. With it, the *Theses on Feuerbach* remain suspicious. Both still contain unexhausted potential.

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<sup>46</sup> What Gramsci, who was largely dependent on the French edition (Costes), could know of Marx was only a fraction of what by now is available in the Marx-Engels-Werke (Collected Works) and the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (the not yet finished complete works are until now unavailable in English). Gramsci's boldest wishes concerning a critical edition have today come true to a large extent.