

# Towards Social Change: Social Transformation in a Time of Social Disruption

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**Rumo à mudança social: Transformação social em um tempo de ruptura social** discute o aprofundamento da atual crise capitalista em bases práticas/teóricas; sua superação não é simplesmente uma questão teórica, mas concreta. Enquanto o capitalismo dos EUA se torna mais agressivo, sua apreensão teórica foi historicamente suprimida e substituída por discursos mais unificadores. Surge um novo paradigma: a esquerda e a direita políticas se fundiram. Os programas políticos das últimas décadas foram pegos de surpresa e não podem oferecer respostas concretas e satisfatórias a demandas sociais reais. No entanto, a reorganização da esquerda por dentro poderia abrir a possibilidade de uma verdadeira transformação social.

**Palavras-chave:** WSDEs, ontologia, capitalismo, socialismo, crise

This paper discusses the deepening of the current capitalist crisis in practical/theoretical groundings; its overcoming is not simply a theoretical but a concrete question. While the US-capitalism becomes more aggressive, its theoretical apprehension has been historically suppressed and substituted by more unifying discourses. A new paradigm arises: political left and right have merged. The political programs of the last decades were caught off guarded and cannot offer concrete, satisfying answers to real, social demands. However, the reorganization of the Left from within could open the possibility for real social transformation.

**Keywords:** WSDEs, ontology, capitalism, socialism, crisis

## Introduction

One could say ‘*a time of social disruption*’ are empty words since every transformation is simultaneously a disruption. However, the emphasis given in the subtitle reveals not merely the ontological character of change, but the urgency of the current change humanity is going through—both actively but also passively. In this paper I intend to contrast three layers of transformation: first, the hitherto social disruptions of modern capitalism; second, the ideology—which has no negative connotation, but is the social subjective apprehension of reality, or social nexus (HERMETO, 2019, p. 64; LUKÁCS, 1984b, p. 17)—of the theoretical apparatus that legitimized and still validates capitalist relations; and finally, both a methodological as well as a practical answer to solve the problems addressed.

As capitalist relations become more all-encompassing throughout the world—having even a religious mystic (COX, 1999)—, it becomes more difficult to grasp the totality of such relations, both historically as well as in the present. The form of a paper presents, therefore, an immense methodological barrier for such endeavour. Notwithstanding the complexity and

length of trying to fully understand and address capitalist relations appears an impossible task even in a more thorough book form—even though the latter seems more appropriate than the former. Hence, the question of method becomes utterly important in order to overcome, or rather attenuate those immanent difficulties.

Not only, but my method is also based in immanent critique—and I am going to synthesize this in the third section of this paper—the understanding and differentiation between being and appearance are essential to resolve the methodological problem mentioned by going to the core of given problems. Here, I intend so synthesize part of my long and complex research about political economy and the ontology of social being in a more concrete form of a paper, in order to aid the discussions, foster consciousness about our reality, to enhance the overcoming of urgent problems that humanity and nature (as a whole) face.

### **Social disruption**

When watching the news, one finds great disruptions at local, regional, national and international levels. By glimpsing different media outlets, even the mainstream media—namely while big capitalist corporations are the ones that promote capitalist ideology, at the same time they also unveil, even if unintentionally, its contradictions—, one wonders where society is heading.

In the recent past, first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a major shift of political-economic power from Europe—especially from Great Britain—towards North America—with a vast predominance of the United States; now contemporary societies are experiencing once again a significant shift, but a new one. However, for western societies, it is a more dramatic shift as China gains more relevance in the world economy and consequently in the cultural determinations. This transformation represents an important loss of European cultural hegemony, which has worldwide been continuously significant since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (VILAR, 1984); in the past, the US-American hegemony represented rather a shift in space, the European-ideological core was essentially not changed.

The United States of America are the wealthiest country in the world and, even though in decline, still possesses global geopolitical hegemony; they have the biggest and most expensive military of the planet (both state and private) and are a role model of the global culture; for their prominent status, I am going to showcase them below as a concrete example for what I refer as social disruption.

In reference to Germany, Renate Dillmann and Arian Schiffer-Nasserie argue that civil rights of individual freedom, equality of law and private property ‘are not unfulfilled promises of a better world and no contradiction to poverty and exploitation’ (DILLMANN and SCHIFFER-NASSERIE, 2018, p. 31). The authors do not understand poverty as a condition of having little or

insufficient money—such as the notion of extreme poverty, namely to live with less than 1.90 dollars a day ('POVERTY', 2019)—, goods and similar deprivations. Rather poor are those, who are 'excluded from the means of production' (DILLMANN and SCHIFFER-NASSERIE, 2018, p. 274). But could such a notion apply to the wealthiest nation of the world?

As most of the contemporary social critics, such as those from Thomas Piketty (Piketty, 2015), Peter Philipps also emphasizes inequality as a social problem. He unveils the brutal inequality, which dominates the US-American contemporary society. There, strong deprivation goes hand in hand with immense abundance. According to him, '[t]he billionaires are similar to colonial plantation owners' (PHILLIPS, 2018, p. 21). Recurring to Leslie Sklair (2001), Philipps accentuates that the increase of wealth and power of the elites has formed the so-called TCC (Transnational Capitalist Class). His analysis also is based on the important paper *The network of global corporate control* from Stefania Vitali, James B. Glattfelder and Stefano Battiston, which reveals 'that transnational corporations form a giant bow-tie structure and that a large portion of control flows to a small tightly-knit core of financial institutions' (VITALI, GLATTFELDER and BATTISTON, 2011, p. 1). Politically this is translated in the global organisations such as 'World Bank, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, the G20, World Economic Forum, Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg Group, Bank for International Settlements, and other transnational associations' (PHILLIPS, 2018, pp. 25-26). Connecting to William I. Robinson (2004), Philipps brings to light '[t]he Global Power Elite of the TCC', which 'make efforts to correct and protect their interest through global organisations' (PHILLIPS, 2018, p. 25), namely the ones mentioned above. This social-political interests of the TCC uncover what can be called a 'superclass' (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 27)<sup>1</sup>. These interests come not without immense social costs: capital speculation, privatization and war (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 30). 'The perpetual war on terrorism is good for business and TCC capital investment' (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 33). Where the killing of thousands, or even millions, have become a mean for the enrichment of a few. Such state of affairs would be unthinkable to liberals such as Kant, whose moral philosophy pointed towards a perpetual peace (KANT, 1917) The Giants manage trillions of dollars; in 2017, seventeen asset management firms managed 41.1 trillion dollars in capital (PHILLIPS, 2018, p. 37). 'Western governments and international policy bodies tend to work in the interests of these financial Giants to protect the free flow of capital investment and insure debt collection everywhere in the world' (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 35).

The close relationship between private enterprise, government and banking establishes what Lenin called financial capital as the expression of monopolistic relations of production or as the imperialistic relations as the highest stage of capitalism. Profit does not come from the production of commodities anymore, but rather from 'finance machination' (*Finanzmachenschaften*) (LENIN, 1971, p. 211). What Marx saw as a tendency in 1867 and Lenin as a concrete reality in

1916 (LENIN, 1971; MARX, 1962b), namely the monopolistic practices and the ‘fictitious capital’ (*fiktives Kapital*) (MARX, 1964)<sup>2</sup>, after the economic 2008 crash, became evident even for true believers of capitalist society (CLARK and TREATOR, 24/10/2008).

Achim Szepanski fosters the understanding of these opaque financial capitalistic relations. The state, according to him, is in by no means a non-partisan formation (SZEPANSKI, 2018a, p. 17). The transformation of capitalist relations, the concentration, as a fluid process, requires the implementation of neoliberal strategies at the state level, this means ‘that governments and their administrations must largely meet the requirements of capital’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 60). Fictional capital, explains Szepanski, is not an abstract or imaginative form of capital separated from the real conditions of production, but ‘it operationalizes the financing of capital’s productive relations for future multiplication in a specific way’ (*Idem*, 2018b, p. 85). This means, the power obtained through fictitious capital is translated into concrete power in the manipulation and appropriation of the real economy by the financial leveraging. This leverage occurs in a two-step process. First, it detaches from the real economy and inflates itself. Second, with its expansion of assets, it comes back to the real economy and takes over of most profitable sectors. The fictitious capital has an immanent parasitic character, it needs a host to survive.

Peter Kuznick and Oliver Stone throw light into the pre-Trump relations. As Obama took office, he ‘confided to one of his closest aides: ‘I’m inheriting a world that could blow up any minute in a half dozen ways...’ (STONE and KUZNICK, 2013, p. 549). According to the authors, Obama took a bad situation and ‘made it worse’ (*Idem*). Betraying his electoral promises, ‘Obama turned to Wall Street funders with deep pockets, like Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase, Skadden Arps, and Morgan Stanley’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 551). In 2010, there were, according to the Census Bureau, 46.2 million US-Americans ‘below the poverty line, which was the highest number since it began publishing those figures fifty-two years earlier’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 556). That is why Paul Krugman attacked and ironized that Obama had a ‘philosophy that says the poor must accept big cuts in Medicaid and food stamps; the middle class must accept big cuts in Medicare (actually a dismantling of the whole program); and corporations and the rich must accept big cuts in the taxes they have to pay. Shared sacrifice’ (KRUGMAN, 10/04/2011). Yet, Obama gave a further step towards the protection of the wealthy and powerful by protecting their secrets and misdeeds. He ‘has tenaciously pursued whistle-blowers and ‘leakers’’ (STONE and KUZNICK, 2013, p. 563). On the other hand, the security complex expanded not only its budget but its action boundaries. The extension of the Patriot Act ‘severely eroded’ the ‘Fourth Amendment guarantee of privacy’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 565).

Therefore, it was no surprise when Trump increased the military budget to over 700 billion dollars (BLUMENTHAL, 2019), instead it was merely a continuation of the steady record-breaking in military spending from the (ironically) Nobel Peace winner former US-president

Barack Obama. In his proposal for the federal budget 2015, the increase in ‘defence’ to 623 billion dollars (FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, 2014, pp. 170, Table S-5. Proposed Budget by Category) was justified as:

1. Expand military presence in Europa, especially in Central and Eastern Europe; 2. Increase bilateral and multilateral exercises and training with allies and partners; 3. Improve infrastructure to allow for greater responsiveness; 4. Enhance prepositioning of U.S. equipment in Europe; 5. Intensify effort to build partner capacity for newer NATO members and other partners (BANDEIRA, 2016, pp. 93-94).

This problem of political continuity (entangling republicans and democrats) is well grasped by Domenico Losurdo, which genially regards the western democracies, especially the US-American one, as ‘one-party system with a competitive character’ (LOSURDO, 2017, p. 69). This political continuity expresses capitalist political-economic relations, which deviated from the social democracy from the aftermath of the Second World War. With the hegemony of monopole, capital left even its former liberal ideals towards the neoliberal claim of the free enterprise (FOUCAULT, 2004).

A remarkable example can be found in the most dynamic and modern part of the USA, namely the San Francisco Bay Area. Geographer Richard A. Walker unveils not only a historical-geographical development but also the current situation of the vicinity.

An important reason to pay attention to this area, ‘[L]ike London in the eighteenth century, Paris in the nineteenth and Detroit in the early twentieth, it is a city that captures the imagination of an era and embodies the spirit of the times’ (WALKER, 2018, p. 2). With the so-called [*western*] *Capitalism 4.0* (SCHWAB, 2016), it goes without saying that the San Francisco area has become a key element to understand such transformations (WALKER, 2018, p. 2). Yet, despite the wealth and digital transformation, the ‘list of failures is not short’: there are chronicle problems ‘such as wildly gyrating growth, shamefully unaffordable housing, ghastly homelessness, a plethora of low-wage work, and severe air pollution’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 2). The contrast with the ‘ideology of the Tech Titans’ is remarkable, since it ‘is the latest incarnation of a long-standing American faith in virtue of technology and modernization’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 320). Furthermore, though the counterculture there presented seems ‘appealing’, ‘the hard reality is that the Bay Area has always been a hotbed of capitalist enterprise’ (*Idem, ibid.*, pp. 364, 372). This morality/customs (*Sittlichkeit*) expressed itself politically, in the 2016 presidential election, by massively voting (80% – 90%) against Donald Trump (*Idem, ibid.*, 2018, p. 379). However, ‘most were cool toward Hillary Clinton and decidedly uninterested in Bernie Sanders’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 387). And Walker asserts: ‘To sum up this foray through electoral politics, the Bay Area certainly registers as a bastion of mainstream Liberalism’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 382).

As the US-American economy has for decades been moving away from industrialization—except for few sectors, such as military and weapons (HEDGES, 2018, p. 3)—, the importance of white-collar labour gained tremendous weight over those of blue-collar. Simultaneously, while the dangers of manual labour have been restrained by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha), the hazard of white-collar labour has been neglected, namely stress at work. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer, referring to a poll, ‘almost one-quarter of all adults [*have been*] reporting extreme levels of stress’ (PFEFFER, 2018, p. 1); another poll reveals that ‘61 percent said that workplace stress had made them physically sick’ (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 1) Disregarding the magnitude of numbers, it is obvious that—as the intellectual labour increases its role in the aggregate relations of social production (HERMETO, 2016) —a shift occurs from the pressure and hazards occurring and incurring in manual to intellectual labour since capitalist relations of productions is based on exploitation. Hence estrangement of the self, of its own labour, of the product of labour and society (*Idem*, 2019; LUKÁCS, 1986; MARX, 1962b, 1968).

The disturbance in the capitalist social relations is evident and cannot be neglected. Meanwhile, the US-American empire engages, as already the title of Moniz Bandeira’s brilliant book uncovers (BANDEIRA, 2014), a Second Cold War, in order to protect through geopolitical strategy its decaying hegemony. The Brazilian political scientist also reinforces Hegel’s notion that statesmen and people should learn from history, yet, they never do (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 188; HEGEL, 1986b, p. 17)<sup>3</sup>. This time history repeats itself as a farce, as Marx accurately put it (MARX and ENGELS, 1960, p. 115). Blumenthal’s assessment on the current geopolitical affairs of the US-Empire exposes a rogue state dominated by paradoxically conflicting and converging interest of the deep state, the military, the two corporate parties, the corporate media and the monopolies of both wall street financial oligarchy as well as the tech company barons. Insofar, the US national security— of those private interests—instigated the rise of terrorism; the US-American State being [*the most dangerous*] terrorists themselves (BLUMENTHAL, 2019). The reason for the escalation in conflicts is their decline, which is being catalysed by the clash with China not solely at a trade, but also at the levels of the industrial production, the military and the currency by the substitution of the dollar as dominant world currency (see the 24th chapter in BANDEIRA, 2016).

Not only Losurdo criticized the absence of a real Left, but almost ten years earlier Roberto Mangabeira Unger had already pointed out that the Left was lost (UNGER, 2009). In the new preface for the edition of 2009, which appears after the 2008 crisis, Mangabeira’s critique on the impotence of the Left is fierce.

A Left that has already surrendered accepts the market economy in its present form and globalization on its current course as unavoidable and even as beneficial. It wants to humanize them. To this end, it deploys

compensatory redistribution through tax-and-transfer policies. It has no program, other than the program of its conservative adversaries, with a humanizing discount (*Idem, ibid.*, pp. viii-ix).

And I add: the *compensatory redistribution* of the self-proclaimed Left not only is not a new program, but it represented an important foundation of the *neoliberal conception* from Milton Friedman with his negative tax in order to alleviate poverty (FRIEDMAN, 2002, pp. 191-192), but not to eradicate it since the basis for it lays on the ownership of the means of production, which is the most essential pillar of capitalist relations of production.

Mangabeira underlines: 'If the Left has a proposal, the crisis will be its moment. If the Left fails to develop a program, the crisis will confirm its intellectual as well as its political failure' (UNGER, 2009, pp. xiv-xv). Therefore, when Trump came into office, when the British urged for Brexit, when conservatives and right-wing-extremists gain social relevance across the board, the self-proclaimed Left could not understand what was happening and happened since for years they do not understand what they became, what they fight and not fight for. They represent merely the other side of the same coin they were supposed to fight.

It has been symptomatic the failure of the Left to address concrete problems. One could search for more theoreticians to prove this argument, but the fundamentally proof is the reality (BELLO, 25/08/2019, 26/08/2019; POLYCHRONIOU, 03/07/2019; 'THE FAR RIGHT', 2019). Even if now, third quarter of 2019, there are some Left-wing parties left with some relevance, the majority of political parties dominating the current world politics are not Left, furthermore, those who are, they end up falling into the critique portrayed by Mangabeira Unger 10 years ago.

A great insight into the class struggles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is apprehended in its bare form when one acknowledges the unveiled totalitarian character of contemporary capitalist social relations, namely what Shoshana Zuboff calls the surveillance capitalism. By pointing out that: 'Surveillance capitalists claim the freedom to order knowledge, and then they leverage that knowledge advantage in order to protect and expand their freedom' (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 498), she reveals the true (capitalist) egoist character of the digital revolution, which abstractly claims general wellbeing—as capital usually does—, but in reality is merely a concealed claim for private interest and profit.

The disruption in the United States is capture in the outstanding piece of Chris Hedges *America: The Farewell Tour*. Besides his perplexing journalistic close encounters with US-Americans revealing the deepest guts of a decaying culture; the book exposes the political, economic and psychological tendency, namely historical movement/shift, behind those singular events (HEDGES, 2018). An everlasting war economy; a capitalist society that is best described as corporate socialism (capitalism for the small companies and people; socialism for the big corporations and the wealthy top 1%); the spectacle that detaches reality and discourse; and a

totalitarian corporate state: these and more are the symptoms of a decaying society, which perpetuates a 'collective psychosis' (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 54). The despair has grown to unprecedented levels, 'around 44,193 Americans commit suicide every year and another 1.1 million Americans attempt suicide annually' (*Idem, ibid.*, pp. 88-89).

### **The so-called theoretical apprehension—or: the death of Left and Right politics**

The political death of Right and Left politics does not mean that the class struggle has disappeared, instead, it means the *fundamental distinction*, which one could account to differentiate between both, has. In reality, the conflicts and contradictions of the capitalist relations have never ceased to exist but merely changed their phenomenological form, according to historical moments, which means both the objective differences in reality, but also the compromise that arise through political concessions and struggles.

21<sup>st</sup> century Left and Right seemed to lack ideologies, why is that? Because the *core* ideology of both has merged. *This does not mean that there is no ideology, but there are no multiples [leading] ideologies. This does not presuppose either a homogeneity of discourse, in fact, one of its cores is the plurality.* On the following paragraphs, I will try to make this thesis conspicuous.

The development of capitalist relations of production has been apprehended in various forms and as it changes some of its essential and other of its phenomenological characteristics, so does the perception changes. Still in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Hobbes' philosophy perceived the contradictions of the arising form of society (MALMESBURY, 1651). In a time of war and revolution, the competition of dynasties, of arising capitalists against feudalist masters, of master and serfs (and slaves), of capitalists and proletarians, of capitalist against capitalist, of men and women, of black and white etc., these competitions were striking and translated as: 'a War of all men, against all men' (*Idem*, 1987, p. 49); furthermore, the competitive and contradictory character of trade was recognized as the cause of disruptions (LUKÁCS, 1984a, p. 570), since it represented 'not a common benefit to the whole body (...), but the particular gain of every adventurer' (MALMESBURY, 1651, p. 143).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, David Hume's and Adam Smith's focus on morals signaled the preoccupation of notions of values, not in the modern sense of pricing, but as social principles, which would grant the society cohesion (HUME, n.d.; SMITH, 2006). For Smith, the state and trade competition meant a means not to socialize private vices (SMITH, 2012). He postulates the ethics behind the political economy:



Political economy, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects; first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or, more properly, to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and, secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 417).

However, both liberal philosophers recognized that through and due to disruptions new social conditions would apply and hence the remedy to each concrete situation. The notion of all-encompassing economic and political formulas, as neoclassical and neoliberalism often advocate, was foreign to them as it was for other important names like Marquis de Condorcet. David Hume writes in his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*: ‘The rage and violence of public war; what is it but a suspension of justice among the warring parties, who perceive, that this virtue is now no longer of any *Use or Advantage* to them’ (HUME, n.d., p. 11)? Adam Smith is clear: ‘In a despotic government slaves may be better treated than in a free government, where every law is made by their masters, who will never pass any thing prejudicial to themselves’ (SMITH, 1982, p. 452).

The revolutionary character of the capitalist form of production enabled anything but constant social-economic laws that could grant any society with wonders of civilization and prosperity. In reality, the disruptions constantly increased as the development of capitalist dynamics made the world smaller, where the social relations intensified in speed and quantity, where competition became the essential drive for social organisation in constant contradiction with social cooperation and the social character of production, hence, social friction increased as the social needs were multiplied (HOBBSAWM, 1989, 1995, 1996b, 1996a). What Hume and Smith feared, namely the crumbling of morals—due to, for instance, war and private despotism (arbitrary free government), became central characteristics of the modern capitalist societies.

Hegel’s theories are, in my opinion, the most perfect *expression* of capitalist relations—by no means does this mean Hegel is the one who best understood these relations. His *method* brilliantly encompasses the apprehension of historical development and processuality, it is on the one hand *revolutionary*, as capitalist relations of production are; the *dialectic of matter* extracts by a double negation a positive synthesis, this means, the real contradictions are resolved in mind/abstractly, hence, it is on the other hand *reactionary*, as capitalist relations of production also are. So, two moments are present: *die Aufhebung* and *das Aufbewahren*: the sublation and the preserving (HEGEL, 1986a, 1986c, 2013, 2014).

From this point forward, philosophy, as the translation of reality, gained a highly political double reality. Out of objective idealism arose modern forms of materialism, on the one hand, and new forms of idealism, on the other.

Feuerbach gives a small, but fundamental contribution towards the correct ontological apprehension of the social-being (HERMETO, 2019; LUKÁCS, 1984a). He understood the subject-object-inversion coined and contained in Hegel's method, which could only uphold a transcendental reality (FEUERBACH, 2013, 2016). Marx, understanding the importance of Feuerbach's discovery, declared to Feuerbach his love (MARX and ENGELS, 1963, p. 425), even though years later he criticized the abstract 'anthropomorfization' of social relations without regards to real social relations (politics and economics). For this break with Hegel's idealism constitutes the essence of the whole problematic of social, political and economic power, since capitalist relations became the predominant form of production of life. There could be either a mystical and mythic form of emancipation or a real, concrete one; the latter: which had to be strived for, fought for, aiming for common interests, or the former: one private, idealized, mere an automatic development of reality itself as a form of destiny (HERMETO, 2019).

Since the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fight against the concrete form of class struggle has been fiercely engaged. Its main dominium of socialism translated as social democracy has been divided and from within destroyed; criticizing the farce of this process, Lenin said: 'For to-morrow we have Marxism on credit, Marxism as a promise, Marxism deferred. For to-day we have a petty-bourgeois opportunist theory—and not only a theory—of softening contradictions' (LENIN, *apud* BUKHARIN, 1917, p. 13).

The fight against Marxism and socialism gained impulse with the romantic and consequently irrationalism (LUKÁCS, 1973). However, the ultimate impulse occurs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was much more encompassing (*Idem*, 1974a). Part of the Marxism, sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, economy, irrationalism, fascism, existentialism, social democracy, critical theory, post-modernity, neoliberalism etc.; all sought to destroy the orthodox-Marxism, which was committed with the overcoming of capitalist social relations. In one word: the destruction of private property of production, of the capitalist market and the bourgeois state could not be admitted (HERMETO, 2020).

After the brutal tentative to save capitalism from imperialist destruction by launching fascism, which would render capital a new form of social control, failed; the seeds of neoliberalism (upholding ordo-liberalism) was revealed within the Keynesianism of the bourgeoisie social-democracy of the post-war (FOUCAULT, 2004). As the social-democracy, which was not committed to supersede capitalist mode of production, accelerated its own failure (CASTRO, 1979), neoliberal ideology could be deployed without restraints (HARVEY, 2005; KOTZ, 2017). While reclaiming his editor position at the *New Left Review*, Perry Anderson says in his article: '[w]hatever limitations persist to its practice, neo-liberalism as a set of principles rules undivided

across the globe: the most successful in world history' (ANDERSON, 2000, p. 13). Though this process receives more and more acknowledgement, one has yet to understand the other side of the 'economic-neoliberalism', namely, what I call: 'social neoliberalism' or the 'neoliberal Left.'

With the marginal revolution, the neoclassic economy shifted the social problem by the use of rhetoric, which shifted from concrete problem of value (which does not mean price, but the social relations that determined how society produces social life), of capital, of exploitation to marginal utility, general equilibrium, Pareto-optimum etc. (BACKHAUS and STEPHEN, 2006; CHINCHILUUN, PARDALOS, MIGDALAS and PITSOULIS, 2008; HAGEMANN, NISHIZAWA and IKEDA, 2010; JEVONS, 2013; MENGER, 2004; PARETO, 1971; WALRAS, 1954). For this reason was so easy for Piero Sraffa to overcome this problem and reintroduce the problem of value—in Ricardian terms (SRAFFA, 1960)—, or how Samir Amin puts it: 'The subjective theory of value has been shown to rest on a tautology—it does not even meet the criteria of formal logic' (AMIN, 1977, p. 117). Yet the neoliberal school has fostered further an unsubstantial, aristocratic rhetoric: democracy, free-market, individual history, institutions, rule of law, free society etc. (EUCKEN, 1959; FRIEDMAN, 2002; HAYEK, 2005; MISES, 1927; ROBINSON and ACEMOGLU, 2012). As if a concept held a truth in itself, what is known at least since 1953 as being utterly false (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967).

Such sophism is no monopoly of the economic neoliberalism but has been widely disseminated through the Left becoming, hence, the neoliberal Left, whose rhetoric asserts the same values of democracy, free-market, individual history, institutions, rule of law, free society etc. (even though in praxis it asserts its opposite). Such ahistorical individualism, or the subjectivism of *The World as Will and Representation* is not something new, but it was coined by Schopenhauer (SCHOPENHAUER, 1977) and fostered by the romantic and irrationalism, which strive for a mythological return of the past as reality (HERMETO, n.d.; LOSURDO, 1995, 2012a, 2012b)

As already mentioned, the first major division of the Left occurred on the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where social democracy took two separate ways: revolutionaries vs reformists (LENIN, 1959, pp. 361-362). What seems little understood is the process after the Second World War, where western ideology closed itself from the soviet influence, in order to secure capitalist ideology. First published in 1999, *The Cultural Cold War* from Frances Stonor Saunders reveals much more than it intended (SAUNDERS, 2013). 'Wearing glasses' of the post-2008 crisis one must underline the incapacities of the Left to 1) perceive an existent reality beyond its immediacy and to 2) recognize the struggles that take place beyond its privileged sphere.

These incapacities have a core, a germ in the post Second World War. While the Soviet Union was criticized for censorship and dogmatism, western societies celebrated and self-proclaimed their freedom of speech, heterogenic thinking and democratic institutions. Saunders' book reveals just the opposite. A well-conceived western ideology built to block Soviet influence and any

advances against capitalist societies. ‘Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of Western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of ‘the American way’ (SAUNDERS, 2013, p. 1). In this sense, Anderson’s statement hits home when asserting that ‘[v]irtually the entire horizon of reference in which the generation of the sixties grew up has been wiped away—the landmarks of reformist and revolutionary socialism in equal measure’ (ANDERSON, 2000, p. 13).

States, individuals from the elite and the espionage agencies were involved creating and delimitating a very specific culture by fostering symposiums, colloquiums, conferences, congress (such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom) etc. The people who took part in this process were only those that fit the permitted narrative. The market institutions vastly deployed to enable censorship and propagate plural but consonant discourses. ‘During the height of the Cold War, the U.S. government committed vast resources to a secret program of cultural propaganda in Western Europe. A central feature of this program was to advance the claim that it did not exist’ (SAUNDERS, 2013, p. 1). Or as Sun Tzu puts it: ‘Therefore the skilful leader subdues the enemy’s troops without any fighting’ (TZU, 2007, p. 118).

Left as a divided Social Democracy was once again being divided, the novelty consisted in: 1) it was an internal division created and fostered by external forces; 2) it represented more than just the earlier chiefly double division, i.e., it became a multiple dilaceration. Any space of dialogue or any private (individually or group-wise) concern became a totality in itself ripped apart from social boundaries—just as the economic egoism promoted by first the liberal, then irrational and further neoliberal ideologies did. While the Right organized itself and fought with all their resources the battles of class struggles; the Left detaching itself from reality proclaimed an end to it. Losurdo criticizes Habermas’ reassurance that the Welfare State brought a pacification within this struggle: ‘Unlike in Arendt, the class struggle was not ruinous; it had quite simply become obsolete and superfluous’ (LOSURDO, 2016, p. 273).

The brilliancy of the film *The Square*, from Ruben Östlund, reveals the (post-)modern absurdity of representing social problems as merely independent private matters (ÖSTLUND, 2017). The cult of self-celebration ignores the immanent immediate obliterating reality, while it perceives the world as the representation of hers or his will. The objective world disappears and becomes, instead, a subjective appearance. Consequently, the cause or the essence of different phenomena cannot be grasped. Particular problems gain supposedly social relevance as if the emancipation of any particular group could be achieved without the emancipation of humankind as a whole (MARX, 1992). Inequality, immigration, environment etc. are discussed as if they were specific problems, i.e., even the most social structural problems become part of identity struggles. The Left’s preoccupations, as the Right’s, have become disputes of transcendental moral values,

as if they were in themselves the bearer of a higher truth. For this myth, the Left relinquishes the political struggle and the apprehension of reality. Yet, what has become for both Left and Right indisputable is the basis of social production and reproduction: *the private property of production*. The ontological, essential difference between them has, hence, disappeared.

As capital (the capitalist class) has managed to dissolve the reformists into a neoliberal Left, it has created a new contradiction (namely a major problem for itself). The reformists emerged out of the cleavage within the revolutionary socialists, they represented a dialectic of 1) a struggle for the limitation of the boundaries of capital with 2) simultaneous acceptance of its dogmas. Their transformation into an amorphous part of neoliberal ideology has opened the opportunity for an unrestrained capitalist praxis—since the 1980s and more profoundly in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. ‘Liberalism, which [Rosa] Luxemburg called by its more appropriate name—‘opportunism’—is an integral part of capitalism’ (HEDGES, 2018, p. 188).

Transforming the reformist Left—the antagonistic legitimizer of capital—into a part of itself meant a continuous suicidal (self-)struggle among capitalist classes. Agricultural, banking, renter, productive, corporative, mediatic, belligerent etc. capital though having the common interest of accumulation of capital in-itself also antagonize each other in the so-called ‘free’ process of accumulation for-itself—a process that Marx already emphasized while analysing France in the 1850s (MARX and ENGELS, 1960). With the trend suppression of productive capital in western economies (more significantly in the US), the expansion of one capitalist sector often means the competition for funds with another—the parasitic consumption of governmental funds becomes more accentuated. In the United States, while the stock market is growing (PONCZEK and RINALDI, 23/07/2019) and the military attaining a bigger part of the federal budget (AMADEO, 2019; CAMP, 14/05/2018; KOTLIKOFF and SKIDMORE, 08/12/2017), the real economy is being plundered (NEAL GABLER, 2016), the opioid crisis is out of control (‘ENDING AMERICA’S OPIOID CRISIS’, 2019; HEDGES, 2018, p. 70)<sup>4</sup>, the U.S. yield has inverted, hence, signaling an imminent economic crisis (FURNESS, 15/08/2019), the national conflicts between alt-right and Antifa resembles a civil war with fascists praxis covering both Left’s and Right’s spectrums even if they are based on different moral groundings (HEDGES, 2018, p. 197).

And the reaction of the Left reveals its ‘will to ignore’ the reality, its ‘refusal to be [and to become, *author of this paper*] free’ (SARTRE, 1992, p. 52). Sophia Burns and Aviva Chomsky call attention to these phenomena of Left’s politics as 1) apolitical and 2) individually reactionary. Burns says: ‘While the social justice speaker and the reckless Antifa went about it in different ways, ultimately both made the same mistake: they treated leftism as a method of individual catharsis, not collective power. Catharsis politics is one of the central self-limiting features of the current Left’ (BURNS, 09/08/2017). While A. Chomsky asserts:

Over the years I have come to see more and more of what Adolph Reed calls ‘posing as politics.’ Rather than organizing for change, individuals seek to enact a statement about their own righteousness. They may boycott certain products, refuse to eat certain foods, or they may show up to marches or rallies whose only purpose is to demonstrate the moral superiority of the participants. White people may loudly claim that they recognize their privilege or declare themselves allies of people of color or other marginalized groups. People may declare their communities ‘no place for hate.’ Or they may show up at counter-marches to ‘stand up’ to white nationalists or neo-Nazis. All of these types of ‘activism’ emphasize self-improvement or self-expression rather than seeking concrete change in society or policy. They are deeply, and deliberately, apolitical in the sense that they do not seek to address issues of power, resources, decisionmaking [*sic*], or how to bring about change (CHOMSKY, 21/08/2017).

Though Lenin had already laid out most of these problems, especially calling against revolutionary violence for the sake of violence (LENIN, 1959, p. 7), the Left relapses into the problems it once faced, though they are now aggravated by the fact that no relevant sector of the contemporary Left share Lenin’s concerns. That the Left has become so feeble, so limited to grasp reality, is the greatest achievement of capital. For instance, the United States produces destruction and instability internally and externally, yet they are still largely celebrated. When not explicitly, then tacitly—for instance, when did European Union ever sanction the United States for rendering illegal wars (their crusades) or for unilaterally pulling out of major global agreements? Of course, the propaganda machine has played a crucial role in determining the social psychology (BERNAYS, 1928; BON, 2001; HARMAN and CHOMSKY, 1994), but the ideological victory at the political realm has been the truly decisive factor (BENSAÏD, 2008; DEBORD, 1992a; LUKÁCS, 1973, 1974a, 1974b). The victorious self-proclamation of the capital by declaring *a perpetual present* denies the processual ontology of the social-being and, hence, under the auspices of capital an ethic based on non-estranged (*auf nicht-entfremdeten*) social-relations towards nature and human-being becomes utterly impossible (HERMETO, 2019). ‘By renouncing the systemic critique of capital, the philosophical jargon of postmodernity contributes, however, to naturalizing and depoliticizing the economic field’ (BENSAÏD, 2008, p. 92).

### **Towards social change**

Social change, as any change in nature, occurs inevitably. Its immanency, however, can have two forms for humanity. The first is a qualitative approximation of the social-being as a purely natural being; existence being merely an aggregate of fortuitous iterations. The second could be translated as an active relation of reciprocity, where the social-being alters its reality by actively changing it within given conditions, which it must then adhere passively but within new qualitative boundaries and possibilities (HERMETO, 2019).

The irrational and idealistic world views create a mythology where subjectivity upholds higher ontological priority than objectivity. For this, the notions of essence and phenomenon appear upside-down. Hermeto puts it: *das Versteifungs-Relativierungs-Problem* (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 45) or *die totale Relativierung-Verabsolutierung der menschlichen Teleologie* (*Idem, ibid.*, p. 56). This means, subjectivity becomes stiff, absolute, all-encompassing, it creates its own reality and, by doing so, all non-cultural activities are relativized as a product of subjectivity or teleology.

This does not mean to advocate for a hierarchy of objectivity over subjectivity, but rather an ontological priority. Essence is, in this sense, not a metaphysical category, but rather a concrete relation. Different objective qualities and praxis determine the essence of a thing or a relation. As the qualitative determination changes, then a different essence is originated. Its appearance can assume many phenomenological forms. However, the subjective apprehension does not determine an essence, nor it has a higher ontological priority. Lukács' example comes to the point:

The cars on the street can epistemologically very easily be explained as mere sensory impressions, ideas, etc. Nevertheless, when I'm run over by a car, it does not create a clash between my idea of the car and my conception of myself, but my being as a living person is endangered by a car being there (LUKÁCS, 1984b, p. 11).

Here is the irony, those, who claim an absolute type of the second form of change in nature, paradoxically, eventually falls into advocating for the first form. Let me elucidate. The active role of shaping reality is realized by human labour, where the teleological setting anticipates and creates a transformative action and gives content to it, other than simply reproducing a genetic prescript feature (MARX, 1962b, p. 88). However, if conceived from an absolute standard, teleology detaches itself from any concrete reality and becomes the actualization of the idea (HEGEL, 2014). Historically the religion played a fundamental role to grasp a cruder notion of teleology by understanding the act of creation and its centrality in social relations. And there lies the problem, the transcendental act of, or purely an all-encompassing teleology, becomes for human relations an act in-itself—dispensing its bearer, for-itself, subject becomes object, object becomes subject. Hence, human relations must adhere passively to it. Teleology ceases, therefore, to be part of causal relations and acquire a higher hierarchy (or at least an ontological priority) over (causal) reality. Reality conforms with and becomes a product of a destiny (LUKÁCS, 1986, p. 17). One could say, this is a more sophisticated form of the first character of social change; but bottom line it means that all active changes are actually part of a higher plan/sphere, ergo, completely causal from our (human) perspective.

This is by no means a rudimentary mistake done by simplistic minds. On the contrary, complex and sophisticate minds, e.g. of Aristoteles or Hegel, have committed it. Lukács calls attention to this

problem, but first in his *Ontology*, his earlier writings contained a similar mistake as he was deeply influenced by Hegel, Weber among others (HERMETO, 2019). Though one could argue that in his case it was worst since he considered himself an orthodox Marxist. Because of this mistake, he wrongly assumed that the problem to overcome capitalist estranged relations was a problem of false consciousness and created a mystical category of proletarian as the necessary bearer of the revolution (LUKÁCS, 2013). But years later, 1967, in a new preamble Lukács himself acknowledged such mistake in an extreme emphatic self-critique on his most famous work *History and Class Consciousness* (LUKÁCS and VORWORT, 1967 *apud* LUKÁCS, 2013).

Feuerbach paid attention to this reoccurring methodological mistake (not noticing he reproduced it himself (MARX and ENGELS, 1978)): the subject-predicate-inversion (aka subject-object-inversion) is by no means merely a philosophical problem, it reveals an immense impact in the translation of reality and accordingly transformation of social organisation.

Critique should not be understood as an end-in-itself, but rather a tool to better apprehend—and consequently, modify—reality. To overcome problems one can either rely solely on ‘luck’, ‘destiny’, ‘calling’ etc., or can create new possibilities and, by doing so, construct (and invent) paths that did not previously exist, neither in nature nor in hitherto culture. In no way would this mean a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e., by creating the possibility(ies) the social-being does not and can never guarantee what the outcome of any given process will be, as sure as it may seem, since every outcome is the result of causal relations; teleology gives causal relations a new quality by opening and creating possibilities of new relations and arrangements (HERMETO, 2019).

Acknowledging the need for environmental sustainability and at the same time promoting capitalist social relations show how embedded *magical thinking* (HEDGES, 2018, p. 45) is in capitalist relations of productions. If sustainability presupposes the *ability to sustain* long term relation between humankind and nature, then it is impossible to advocate a form of production, which is conceived as—and its main drive/objective/purpose is—the production of surplus-value (and more capital) as an end-in-itself (*Mehrwert als Selbstzweck*) (MARX, 1962a). Capital accumulation for the sake of accumulation of capital creates an indefinite expansion of the mass of capital; it tends and seeks the infinity, whilst the real world is immanently finite. Such paradox is unsolvable regardless the name one gives to capitalist relations: ‘free market economy’, ‘free society’, ‘state capitalism’, ‘green market economy’ etc. The existence of life (organic nature) presuppose reproduction; if any given life kills/destroys its means/basis of reproduction, then it ceases to be organic nature and falls back into inorganic nature. For capitalist relations appears as a cancer: ‘The malignant tumours break through the natural barriers of their own borders, they spread to other tissues and organs—not only in the immediate vicinity but also through the scattering of tumour tissue into other compartments (metastasis)’ (VON JAGOW and STEGER, 2005, p. 447).



The question of how society produces itself must urgently be addressed. The knowledge of the limits, shortcomings, potentials etc. of the current form of production must be critically apprehended if society wants to create the possibilities towards a new form of society. The way and what people consume do not depend in the individual decision of everyday life, this is again magical thinking; consumption has no ontological priority above production, but the opposite; consumption depends rather on what is produced. But the questions of what, for whom, by whom, in which quantity, with which quality, how etc. depends on the decision making of and within the production. How is labour organized and what to be done with the product of labour? The question of property gains a centrality if one desires social change (HERMETO, 2016, 2019). Insofar, the private property of production must be abolished as a condition towards the possibility of a sustainable society in the broad sense of both environment (nature) and social relations (culture).

Concretely Richard Wolff suggests the *Workers' Self-Directed Enterprises* as an alternative to capitalist relations. WSDEs do not mean a perfect world, they rather mean a shift, nonetheless a major *qualitative shift* in social tensions and contradictions, namely in the exploitation within production, within work. Producers and those, who appropriate themselves over the production, cease to be separated antagonistic beings; hence, the source of private appropriation of surplus cease to exist. Instead, a more democratic production arises. Wolff is emphatic: *no democracy can exist if the economy is not an integral part of its institutions*. Though this notion resembles Karl Polanyi's concept of 'embeddedness', namely that economy, throughout human-history, is not an autonomous entity but rather integrated into social, political, religious etc. relations (POLANYI, 2001); Marx's famous concepts of '*Basis*' and '*Überbau*' already express how intertwined at an ontological level the economic is in relation to other social spheres, such as political or juridical (MARX, 1961). In this sense, Michael Löwy poses an decisive questions: 'If political decisions are not to be left to a small elite of rulers, why should not the same principle apply to economic decisions?' (LÖWY, 2015, p. 25). Therefore, one should not focus in the past and fight for regulations—which not only could be reversed but historically they were—but rather in enabling democracy at work (WOLFF, 2012). This is more than a rhetorical trick to advocate for the abolishment of private means of production, but it stresses that a state capitalism (what has so far been called socialism) does not abolish exploitation and reproduces the logic of capital.

## Conclusion

In a time of political, economic, social, geopolitical etc. tensions in global capitalist societies, this article aimed to foster a debate of social transformation by offering a multidisciplinary critique

of political economic relations. The objectives were 1) to unveil the present state of affairs in global capitalist relations; 2) to present a theoretical explanation for the hitherto lack of concrete alternatives to capitalism and for the fall back into a totalitarian phase of capitalist relations as a form to protect the privileges (and contradictory interests) of the ruling classes, namely the plutocrats and aristocrats (owners of means of production, renters and financial oligarchs, professional politicians, [lumpen] workers aristocracy, '[t]he specialists of the power of the spectacle' [Debord, 1992b, p. 188]); and 3) to present a theoretical/methodological alternative to the mainstream Left's discourse, critique and method, on the one hand, and to briefly offer a concrete political-economic alternative, on the other. However, the limitation of the space and, therefore, of the development and deconstruction of ideas here presented were taken in consideration, hence many of the complex arguments and points had to be oversimplified and are vulnerable to critique. Nevertheless, the reason why such exposure is needed is to present the embryo of such ideas and notions and to open in the future the space for a more thorough discussion of social transformation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Phillips' concept is based on David Rothkopf's (ROTHKOPF, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See the 25th chapter for '*fiktives Kapital*'.

<sup>3</sup> Hegels asserts: 'Man verweist Regenten, Staatsmänner, Völker vornehmlich an die Belehrung durch die Erfahrung des Geschichte. Was die Erfahrung aber und die Geschichte lehren, ist dies, daß Völker und Regierungen niemals etwas aus der Geschichte gelernt und nach Lehren, die aus derselben zu ziehen gewesen wären, gehandelt haben'. Or in english: "Regents, statesmen, peoples are referred primarily to the teaching of the experience of history. But what experience and history teach is this, that peoples and governments have never learned anything from history and have acted according to the lessons which could have been learned from it".

<sup>4</sup> On the White House official website one reads: 'the worst drug crisis in U.S. history'. Chris Hedges asserts: 'Opioid overdoses are the leading cause of death in this country [*United States*] for those under the age of fifty.' He continues: 'The United States consumes 80 percent of the global opioids.'

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