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Re-situating *Capital* Vol. 1 beyond Althusser's epistemological break: Towards second generation neo-Marxism

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Abstract

Though opening up important debates about the relationship between the different texts that make up Marx's life time works, Althusser's 'epistemological break' thesis has also been divisive for Marxism and ultimately constraining for Marxist social science. Rather than separating Marx's writing into different stages on the path from ideology to science, as Althusser does, this paper argues that they are the broadly complementary steps of a unified research project. Discontinuity across the corpus of Marx's writing refers more obviously to his developing *account* of capitalism. This two-pronged general argument is specifically detailed by comparing the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol 1*.

This paper reflects a second generation neo-Marxism that aims to reinvigorate Marxist social science, help unify contesting schools of Marxism, and in so doing

contribute to the possibility of progressive political change. The way forward, it is contended, is not by seeking a clean break with Marx, as the post-Marxists do, but rather by seeking a clearer break with the residue of orthodoxy that has constrained first generation Althusser-led neo-Marxism.

Introduction

Althusser's Marxist writing, especially his concept of overdetermination, spearheaded innovative neo-Marxist accounts of capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s in fields such as class theory, state theory, and political economy.¹ However, Althusser's intervention is both unfinished and internally contradictory. His Marxism not only uncomfortably combines naïve scientism and sophisticated French post-structural cynicism; it also represents an uneasy tension between innovation and orthodoxy. While Althusser purposefully advanced Marxism's movement beyond *Communist Manifesto* based orthodoxy, his work still retains its key elements. This orthodox residue, now impeding Marxism's further development, is centrally linked with Althusser's epistemological break argument.² Althusser evaluates and divides up the corpus of Marx's writing according to the external yardstick of orthodox science. As such, the early texts are dismissed as ideological and therefore false, and the mature texts alone are lauded as representing the achievement of Marx's new true science. This fundamentally mistaken approach has generated destructive and divisive effects for both Marx and Marxism. In addition, Althusser's break argument has circuitously reinforced Marxist orthodoxy by both removing the 'subject' and by failing to notice the discontinuity between Marx's youthful account of capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto* and his mature *Capital Vol. 1* account.

The re-reading strategy adopted here follows Althusser's cynical view that there is no innocent reading of Marx and contrarily that non-reading is not innocent either.³ Althusser's own reading is driven by projects to undercut the humanist Marxists who identified with the early texts and to keep side with the orthodoxy of the French Communist Party while at the same time offer elements of an innovative approach that moves beyond orthodoxy.⁴ This paper's re-reading strategy, though running directly counter to the substance of Althusser's epistemological break argument, is also cynical in that it purposefully seeks a re-unification of Marxism by demonstrating the interconnections between Marx's youthful and mature works. Marx's texts are shown to be not fractured and self-contained phases on the path to the summit of science, but rather the elements of an internally coherent and

consistently pursued research project which at the same time involves a critical break in its account of capitalism. This paper thus not only positions itself beyond first generation Althusser-led neo-Marxism but also against the post-Marxist strategic view that reading Marx's work is now time wasted.⁵ In fact, the basic point of this paper is to demonstrate why re-reading Marx in this integral way should be a priority for the Left both intellectually and politically.

The enduring and consistent epistemological foundations of Marx's overall research project are affirmed and conjoined with a much more critical open-ended reading of Marx's unfinished and changing account of capitalism. Combining this more unified view of Marx's episteme with an open-minded view of capitalism's nature and logic into the future, opens up new agendas and projects for both Marxist social science and for practically transforming the world. In sum, this paper offers a way beyond Marxism's impasses and divisions towards an open-ended, non-doctrinaire, self-critical, innovative, and unified episteme that can be broadly embraced and deployed not just to interpret but moreover to change the world. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part briefly overviews Althusser's well-known 'epistemological break' argument that carves Marx's work into self-contained fragments that are then classified into an externally defined hierarchy which advances from falsity towards truth. The second part presents the argument that, though analysis of the textual traces of Marx's thinking demonstrates on-going refinement, critique and innovation, a fundamental epistemological unity connects the young and mature works. Discontinuity, it is contended, more significantly refers to Marx' changing account of capitalism. This section specifically investigates this general argument by examining the relationship between the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol. 1*. The third part of the paper proposes unification of Marx and Marxism around a second generation neo-Marxism which more clearly breaks with orthodox Marxism's residual influence in Althusserian-led first generation neo-Marxism.

Althusser's 'Epistemological Break' thesis: point of departure

According to Althusser, Marx's mature work represents a new paradigmatic science that has finally expunged the ideological residue attributed to Hegel's influence. More precisely, Althusser divides Marx's work into stages on the path from ideology to a new science.⁶ The early work (1840-1844), centrally including the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the *Holy Family*, is deemed to be fatally infected with

Hegel's episteme, and thus pre-Marxist and ideological. Written in 1845, the 'Works of the Break' that first introduce the beginning of Marx's new problematic refer to the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and *The German Ideology*. They are also included in the 'Transitional Works' (1845-1857), along with the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, which though representing emerging elements of Marx's original new episteme have not fully cast off the ideological residue that is equated with Hegel's influence, or fully crystallised Marx's new scientific episteme. Only Marx's mature works (1857-1883), beginning with the *Grundrisse* and including the volumes of *Capital*, are seen to break fully with Hegel's ideological influence to constitute a fully-formed stand-alone scientific episteme that quintessentially defines Marx's Marxism. *Capital Vol. 1*, of particular interest here, most clearly represents Marx's new science that according to Althusser is grounded in the view that 'History is a process without a Subject or a Goal'.⁷ In short, rather than considering epistemological continuity between Marx's early and later works, Althusser divides them up such that only the mature works are deemed to fully represent Marx's new science.

Mainstream science, which has powerfully uncovered non-conscious structural logics of matter, has tended to dismiss the view that purposeful human subjectivity is both integral to our knowledge of, and has material force in, this universe. Only included in the science storehouse are knowledge projects deemed compatible with this materialist paradigm. Relatedly, knowledge projects which have not undergone the official empirical tests of scientific measurement are deployed to police its boundaries. Broadly in line with the materialist thrust of mainstream science, Althusser treats Marx's mature work as scientifically valid, and the early work which is focused on the conscious human subject as non-scientific, that is, ideological and thus false. Like mainstream science establishment gatekeepers, Althusser does not seek to evaluate knowledge projects on their own terms, but rather in terms of external pre-existing scientific criteria.

However, contrary to even basic criteria of scientific method, Althusser comes up short because he does not clearly define, methodically pursue, or empirically demonstrate his argument. More basically, he does not follow the spirit of Popper's falsifiability hypothesis which would have implied also looking for evidence of the contrary thesis of epistemological continuity. Nonetheless, Althusser does loosely apply the external lens of mainstream science to Marx's evolving episteme. That is, the early discussions of human nature, subjectivity, purpose, consciousness and an

associated deployment of Hegel's concepts are all judged to fail the external test of science and are deemed ideological and false.

Alternatively, *Capital Vol. 1*, which identifies capital's structural logic independently of self-conscious subjectivity and political and ideological struggle, is equated with a true objective scientific Marxism. However, surely this leads to a problem in that 'overdetermination', Althusser's most potent contribution to the Marxist toolbox, which treats politics, ideologies, and corresponding forms of consciousness as having an independent 'causal efficacy' that alters economic structural logic, appears as not being a part of Marx's mature science?⁸ Indeed, *Capital Vol 1* neutralizes investigation of political and ideological causality by assuming that politics and ideology reflects economic structural logic. However, this is a methodological strategy which does not dismiss political and ideological causality per se, but simply enables Marx to put aside the less predictable effects of political and ideological intervention so he can concentrate on capitalism's core structural logic. That is, while trying to establish the causal centrality and methodological priority of the category of 'production' in the *Grundrisse's* Introduction, Marx nonetheless reminds the reader that this does not mean that other elements do not have causality, when he states: "Mutual interaction takes place between the different moments. This is the case with every organic whole."⁹ Focusing on the direction of causality that springs from a core generative structure does not imply Marx's denial of causal efficacy going in the other direction. For Marx, the economic base and political and ideological superstructure are the basic internal components, inextricably imbricated, of a mode of production. Marx's mature project to lay bare the epochal logic of capital without directly considering political and ideological effects is only a methodological stage in the movement from the abstract to the concrete, and is thus an incomplete account of the logic of the capitalist mode of production.

More subtly, Althusser can remain simultaneously true to his concept of overdetermination and his view that Marx's mature work is science that identifies a subject-less process because his conception of political and ideological causality is without subjective design or purposeful will, i.e. is without praxis. Especially in the works of Althusser's rebel followers in the French Regulation School, and in Poulantzas' work on classes and the state, this theme of unintentional political and ideological overdetermination is brilliantly developed. That is, contingent political and ideological causality is identified as integral to the mid-range logic of capitalism **but** it is constructed as being without self-conscious design or subjective will, including

their own. In short, the intentional, conscious subject is not part of their analysis of political and ideological causality.

Putting Marx Back Together Again by Re-casting the Break

Althusser places a mainstream external scientific filter on to Marx's texts to reveal an epistemological movement that begins with an immature Hegelian infected ideological phase, to be dismissed, and a final mature phase to be embraced as a new true stand-alone science. While he raises the important question of the relationship between the young and mature writings, Althusser does not seriously engage with Marx's writing to really explore his thesis of epistemological discontinuity, or even pose, let alone investigate, the counter-thesis. In contrast, this paper, grounded in an integral reading of Marx's major texts, identifies a complex but organically inter-connective relation between the young and mature works, especially in terms of core themes, concepts, method, and research agenda that overall define Marx's episteme. Discontinuities identified are more to do with discrepancies in account between the youthful work, which lays down a grand project, and the mature work which deeply investigates only one of its major theses. Contra Althusser, this paper splits Marx's post-doctoral writing into *two* clear phases distinguished by Marx's age and geo-political location.¹⁰ The youthful work refers to what Marx wrote while he was young and living in the politically explosive continental environment and is bookended by the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 and the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of 1852. It includes the *Poverty of Philosophy*, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Communist Manifesto*. Taken as a whole, the youthful work outlines elements and rough sketches of a breathtakingly broad and interconnected research project. Fragments of a long history of humanity dotted across nearly all these young works sit alongside Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that offers such a brilliant account of France's mid-century historically contingent political conjuncture. Grand theories of human nature and alienation, social class being and consciousness, are also discussed in both broad historical context and within the specific historical forms of industrial capitalism. Methodological initiatives also abound, not just in the discovery of praxis, but also in the methods that can be inferred from texts including the *Communist Manifesto*, the *German Ideology*, and the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Though not comprehensively, a growing box of intellectual tools is deployed brilliantly in the *Communist Manifesto*,

where Marx and Engels outline the nature and logic of capitalism into the future that is calculated to generate objective and subjective class effects that will lead to capitalism's socialist transformation.

Marx's mature work, written while in British exile from 1852, and centrally including the *Grundrisse* and the volumes of *Capital*, is fundamentally consistent with the multi-dimensional knowledge project outlined on the continent. Most obviously, Marx repeatedly returns to touch on continental themes in his mature works, including alienation, praxis, human nature, and subjectivity. Further, though more narrowly focused on one particular line of inquiry that was most clearly introduced in the *Communist Manifesto*, to lay bare the nature and logic of capitalism, the mature and youthful works are basically consistent methodologically as well as being conceptually complementary. However, to pursue a double critique of Althusser, the obvious second-order epistemological discontinuity un-noticed by Althusser is between the young and mature accounts of the class effects of the structural logic of capitalism.

The totality of research outputs across Marx's entire post-doctoral life time are cast here as the broadly complementary components of an original, multi-pronged, and consistently pursued research agenda. However, Marx's research project is found to be substantially unfinished, not just because inevitably time ran out, but also because some key claims of the youthful work are contradicted by the mature analysis. In ways that have far-reaching implications for contemporary Marxist social science and political struggle, this two-pronged theme is tentatively explored with special reference to the youthful work, especially the *Communist Manifesto*, and the mature work, especially *Capital Vol. 1*.

Fragments of a General Argument

Although adapting and incorporating selected aspects of Hegel's conceptual framework, Marx's research moves in an original direction from as early as 1844. At the same time, while the materialist break with Hegel's conceptual framework is already present in the early texts, the mature texts remain clearly indebted to core Hegelian conceptual distinctions, such as between in-itself and for-itself, and between essence and appearance. That the legacy of Hegel lives on selectively in Marx's mature writings is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in Althusser's brilliant comparison of Marx's and Hegel's conception of the dialectic.¹¹ In this essay, Althusser conveys that, though radicalised, materialised, de-centered and socially

specified, Hegel's conception of the dialectic as a dynamic interactive causality is still present in Marx's conception.

Although key themes of the young work centrally including human nature, alienation, praxis, subjectivity, consciousness are not centre-stage in the mature texts, they remain integral components of Marx's episteme. Young Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* outlines a view of human nature's trans-historical core and the ways that the capitalist form of society in particular frustrates its positive fulfilment. This early work thus draws attention to the tension under capitalism, and in class societies generally, between social form and core human needs. As brilliant as the manuscripts are, however, they are only the sketch of a very large project which Marx did not develop systematically in his later work. Nonetheless, Marx repeatedly touches on the alienation theme in his mature writing. Most explicitly, he does so in *Capital Vol. 1* via his account of 'commodity fetishism', his observations of the dehumanising effects of the capitalist labour process, and his analysis of the capital wage labour exploitation relation that removes control and ownership over the conditions, process and results of production from the direct producers. In addition, Marx's brief discussions in *Capital Vol. 1* and in the *Grundrisse* of a future socialist alternative which will meet human needs also speak to their negation under capitalist social relations. Finally, the 'worst human architect' passage in *Capital Vol. 1* builds directly on the theme of human nature, and indeed also resonates strongly with the youthful theme of praxis.

A deep epistemological continuity between the young and mature works, both methodologically and thematically, can also be pieced together. In particular, the method and substantive project of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* are basically consistent with the mature work, especially the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which begins with a social critique of the individualistic view of human nature. In the 'Introduction', Marx identifies production, which while only concretely existing in changing socio-historical practice, is assigned to the natural trans-historical abstract core of all human societies. Similarly, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx identifies a trans-historical abstract core to human nature, focusing on humanity's social and creative needs as producers, but which only exists concretely in interaction with historically varying social contexts. For Marx, a common trans-historical set of human needs and powers, including our special intellectual capacity to transform nature to meet our material needs in production, define the practical limits and possibilities of all historical epochs of human civilisation. At the same time, in practical concrete reality, defined by varying socio-

historical contexts, these needs and capacities are variously confirmed or denied. In other words, the historically concrete forms of all human societies, which are universally grounded in the social organisation of production and consumption, selectively affect which specific human needs and natural potentialities are recognised and developed, and which are compromised or negated. This approach connecting young and mature works provides the methodological groundwork for a multi-dimensional approach to the study of dynamic socio-historical practice that integrally includes a conception of trans-historical human needs.

Bearing on the young account of human nature is Marx's concept of *praxis*. He introduced 'praxis' in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach 1845, which I paraphrase as 'the point of knowledge is to change the world.'¹² He revisited this concept in the opening paragraph of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where he states that: "People make history but not under circumstances they themselves have chosen..."¹³ Then, in his discussion of human nature in *Capital Vol. 1*. Marx further argues that, different from other species on planet earth, humanity creatively designs and then intentionally enacts its designs.¹⁴ This purposeful intentionality pertains whether we are building a house or building society. Further, for humans, unlike the spiders or bees who are stuck in a perfect but unchanging congruence, there is always slippage between original intentional design and outcome. Thus, our original creativity is articulated with an expanding logic of knowledge and innovation as we improve on previous efforts. Linking these fragments together, we can say that for Marx, praxis is about making history by consciously and deliberately acting on our knowledge of the practical limits and possibilities of existing circumstances to transform them. Further, by piecing together young and mature texts on alienation, human nature and praxis into an integral composite, one can say Marx thought that all viable human societies are grounded in modes of production essentially defined by the way we meet basic material needs, and that more or less express, and/or estrange us from, our sociable, creatively productive, and practically purposeful intelligent nature.

Marx's praxis-focused conception of human nature also resonates with 'ideology' defined as relative knowledge rather than, as in Althusser's perspective, as false ideas. In the praxis view, knowledge of the world is situated relative to the human gaze which in particularly varying social forms expresses our peculiarly creative and practically purposeful nature. More fully, this nature which sets the trans-historical parameters of possible human thoughts and actions, is further defined partially and in potential contestation as a result of historically different forms

of society, and within them by different class positions. Ideology, in this sense as centrally grounded in the naturally-based yet socially-overdetermined human subject, is not false. Rather, such purposeful human subjectivity is integral to the way we understand our world, the ways we creatively act to (re)make it, and thus to the process of the world itself.

In *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx does not explicitly identify a praxis purpose for the mature work, and indeed brackets out politics and ideology by assuming their integral correspondence with the logic of capitalism's unfolding economic structure. Nonetheless, praxis is arguably integral to the mature work. Marx calculated that political strategy and action aimed at transforming the prevailing mode of production first of all requires coming to terms with the constraints and possibilities laid down by the prevailing epoch's non-subjective logic of economic reproduction. In other words, mature Marx's intellectual priority was to uncover the epochal structural logic of the prevailing (capitalist) mode of production, which ironically initially required abstracting out the unpredictable real world effects of conscious political and ideological intervention.

While Marx's underlying problematic is thus found to be fundamentally consistent, there is discontinuity in his account, especially between the optimistic prognostic thesis of the *Communist Manifesto* and the much more pessimistic findings of *Capital Vol. 1*. The mature works remain true to the *Communist Manifesto's* logic of causal analysis that is grounded in structure but integrally concerns circumstances, ideology and consciousness. The key difference is that the mature work overwhelmingly focuses on the economic structural logic component of the *Communist Manifesto's* grand prognosis. Nonetheless, *Capital Vol. 1's* step-by-step uncovering of capital's laws of motion repeatedly leads Marx into analysis of the changing nature of class circumstances, including the conditions of subjectivity. To this extent, *Capital Vol 1*, and including the other mature works, can be compared with the *Communist Manifesto* argument. While there are important points of continuity, there are also strikingly significant discontinuities which dramatically undermine the overall validity of the *Communist Manifesto* prognosis.

Case Study: *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol. 1*.

Marx's mature work focuses on capitalism's epochal logic that can be observed regardless of political struggles and conscious designs. However, rather than a fully-fledged social science in-itself, the mature work is more faithfully understood in the

context of Marx's overall project which was originally sketched out in his young writing. More fully, I am proposing that the mature focus is integrally grounded in, fundamentally consistent with, and follows on strategically and methodologically from Marx's youthful thinking.

This argument is demonstrated to be the case when the mature work, especially *Capital Vol. 1*, is viewed in relation to youthful themes and concepts which consolidated in the *Communist Manifesto's* prognosis. The latter provides the outline of a multi-layered grand thesis which grounds the mature work's deep and careful investigation of one of these layers. In a purposefully ideological and methodologically pioneering way, the *Communist Manifesto* focuses on the relationship between capitalism's objective logic into the future that is predicted to generate specific objective and subjective class effects. This overview thesis grounds *Capital Vol. 1's* narrower but much deeper investigation of capitalism's objective logic. Though there are many points of continuity, there are also critical breaks, in these accounts. Here, the *Communist Manifesto's* account of capital's logic driving changing class circumstances and associated mental dispositions, and which is intertwined with a praxis approach, is deployed as the reference point of comparison with the account presented in *Capital Vol. 1* and other mature texts.

Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* offers a powerful methodology, the components of which were already being developed in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Poverty of Philosophy* and the *German Ideology*. In the *Poverty of Philosophy*, this methodology has an explicitly Hegelian grounding in the in-itself/ for-itself relationship, while in the *German Ideology* is given the modern sociological sense that actual forms of consciousness are products of class divided social circumstances. Additionally, and again drawing inspiration from Hegel's distinctions between 'in' and 'for-itself' and between 'essence' and 'appearance', the structure of causality posited in the *Communist Manifesto* identifies and distinguishes the deep structural logic of capitalism from the circumstantial effects generated by this structure. Consolidating many themes and concepts present in Marx's (and Engel's) writing before 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* sketches a prognosis for capitalism based on an identification of capitalism's essential structural logic that is calculated to generate circumstantial class effects and a corresponding patterns of collective subjectivity.¹⁵ This is a grand outline that posits a logic of development predicted to result eventually in the 'immense majority' becoming the class-for-itself socialist proletariat which will propel capitalism towards socialism.

In the mature texts, Marx's primary concern is to uncover this deep structure from which can be inferred the dynamic temporal logic of capitalism's 'extended reproduction'. That is, Marx's focus is to capture the structural process at the core of capitalism's long term epochal tendencies. While arguably presupposing conscious humans that have intelligence, will, purpose, and design, and relatedly political and ideological class struggle, as necessary and permanent conditions, the core logic of the essential social structure of capitalism is treated as a process that unfolds independently of our conscious human will, design and, relatedly, political struggles. Destabilising Hegel's materially ungrounded concepts of 'essence' and 'in-itself', but still sharing their generic understanding as fundamental generative structures out of which come dynamic processes, Marx seeks out the essential social structure from which springs the dynamic logic of capital.

From this identification, formally derived from the commodity form itself in the opening chapters of *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx calculates the logic of capitalism's extended social reproduction over time. For Marx, the project of *Capital* is trans-historically underpinned by the concept of the mode of production, understood basically as the social organisation of production to meet human needs, which continues to have at its essential core an exploitation relation between the direct producers and the owners/ controllers of this production process. That is, following Marx's method as outlined in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, the 'trans-historical abstraction' is treated as the generative core of all social forms to date, while it is also recognised that it exists actually or 'concretely' only in different specific historical forms.

For Marx, uncovering the essential social relational core and related dynamic of the *capitalist* mode of production is to identify as an 'historical-epochal abstraction' its invariant core and the logic arising from this core which is calculated to produce dynamic effects through time. Marx is thus centrally focused on the dynamic forces driving capitalism's extended reproduction which are seen to be grounded in production relations between the private owners of capitalist firms who employ producers in an exploitative wage relation and who compete with each other in the market place to sell the products of the producers' labour in order to realise profits. Much of *Capital Vol. 1* drills down on the dynamic logic of capitalist exploitation and competition in terms of the esoteric logic of value. The dynamic effects of this esoteric logic are identified as including centrally a pattern of accumulation found to be deeply unstable.

Marx also considers other integral effects of this dynamic process, especially including themes that align closely with the argument of the *Communist Manifesto* in

predicting a global capitalist class, and the global spread of the capitalist labour process. First, both accounts identify a logic to capital that leads towards its 'concentration and centralisation' on a global scale, and the elimination of smaller scale capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. The global dominance of the capitalist mode of production is expressed in the growing power and wealth of its 'structural bearer' (the capitalist class). Second, the competition between capitals implies increasing rates of labour's relative exploitation and elimination of other production modes that are linked with labour's increasing commodification. 'Wage labour spreads absolutely'¹⁶ and with the associated deepening and spread of the industrial factory system of production leads to a situation where "every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines is equalised and reduced to an identical level."¹⁷ Moreover, third, the *Communist Manifesto* and the volumes of *Capital* concur regarding the contradictory and unstable nature of the capitalist mode of production's accumulation dynamic, which implies not only deepening economic crises but also the simultaneous emergence of the conditions of socialism. The latter work confirms, in these respects at least, structural tendencies that point towards class polarisation as well as both negative and positive features of the mature capitalist mode of production pushing towards the socialist outcome as originally proposed in the *Communist Manifesto*.

However, the most compelling message of the *Communist Manifesto*, that the logic of capital will generate a socialist class-for itself, that comprises the 'immense majority', is strikingly contradicted by a multiplicity of contrary arguments introduced in the mature works. First, in contrast to the *Communist Manifesto* which predicts that the industrial working class will become the 'immense majority', Marx argues in Chapter 25 of *Capital Vol. 1* that the "*absolute general law of capital accumulation*" is for an increasingly pauperized "relative surplus population" to "grow more rapidly than the productive population."¹⁸ Marx does argue in some famously polemical passages in this chapter of how the fate of employed production workers in the 'Active Army' interconnects with those in the 'Relative Surplus Population' who are on the margins of, or outside, capitalism's productive core.¹⁹ Regardless of the organic interconnection, it remains the case that this positing of an inverse numerical relation between a shrinking Active Army and a growing Relative Surplus Population completely destroys the *Communist Manifesto* thesis that the life circumstances of the immense majority will be simply equalised.

Not only does Marx identify this fault line dividing the 'labouring population', he also identifies structural and intersectional patterns of segmentation and stratification

that divide the Relative Surplus Population. Though not making the point explicit, his account of the 'Active Army' can also be linked with internal divisions, and changing numerical proportionality, between knowledge workers and production workers. In sum, rather than forming a single well-formed class-in-itself of, the mature account identifies deep heterogeneity of life circumstances across the 'labouring population.'²⁰

The second theme of the class-for-itself prognosis of the *Communist Manifesto* concerns the assumption not only of a deepening *similarity* of life circumstances of the immense majority but also a deepening of the circumstantial conditions of its *solidarity*. While the youthful works do identify processes of what Ulrich Beck calls 'individualisation', especially around alienation and linked with competition that divides the labouring population, Marx's emphasis in the *Communist Manifesto* and in the *Poverty of Philosophy* are on how these divisive forces will be negated in consciousness and/or as an effect of capitalism's development. However, the mature Marx's discussion of 'commodity fetishism' combined with his account of the Relative Surplus Population radically problematizes the assumption of the labouring population's solidarity. According to *Capital Vol. 1*, Chapter 25, the long term employment effect of labour's increasing productivity under capitalist relations is an increasing oversupply of labour. This implies that amongst the world's labouring population, and in direct contrast to the *Communist Manifesto* prognosis, there will be deepening competition, employment segmentation, and inequality of wealth distribution.

The third theme concerns the circumstantial conditions of knowledge. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue that its everyday experience furnishes the proletariat with the means to independently achieve knowledge. Capitalist exploitation is 'naked' and 'direct'²¹ and intervening classes between labour and capital that could divert and conceal opposition to capital are eliminated by capital's logic. The mature work contradicts both class polarisation and transparency arguments. Marx's own writing itself demonstrates that getting to the essential exploitative dynamic of the capitalist mode of production is an extremely arduous intellectual task. More specifically, the mature Marx realises that the everyday experience of capitalism's 'exoteric' surface form actually contradicts and conceals its deeper hidden exploitative 'esoteric' core. Relatedly, Marx's view of the proletariat's psychological response to the alienating conditions of the capitalist labour process shifts decisively. In the *Poverty of Philosophy* Marx argues that alienation is 'self-abolishing.'²² Contrastingly, in *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx offers a much more pessimistic observation: "Through excessive exhaustion of their powers, brought about by

lengthy, drawn-out monotonous occupations, workers are seduced into habits of intemperance, and made unfit for thinking or reflection (Marx, 1973, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 714).

The mature Marx's choice of focus for uncovering capitalism's path into the future was driven by a methodologically sound, and strategically practical rationale. *Capital Vol. 1* predicted key elements and effects of capitalism's temporal logic of dynamic reproduction that 150 years later are strikingly confirmed. However, Marx could not offer within his single life time a prognosis for capitalism that incorporated political and ideological subjectivity from a praxis perspective. That is, it is another step again to predictively identify the future substance, and outcomes, of the dynamic political and ideological struggle arising from structure, but contingently and creatively interacting in a mutually determining dialectical relation with that structure to overdetermine it. Nonetheless, the mature evaluation of the class effects of the structural logic of capitalism directly destroys the validity of the *Communist Manifesto's* prognosis. The grand themes and predictions of the *Communist Manifesto*, and other youthful works, are rendered utterly problematic. In sum, the *Communist Manifesto's* sense of a final historical resolution to the class-based problems of 'hitherto existing society', so central to the deep emotional appeal of Marxism to the present, is rendered awkwardly unresolved. An ageing Marx is confronted by serious discontinuities between his mature and youthful analyses, but lacks the time and probably energy to radically 'revise and resubmit' his account in a way that can re-specify a practical path beyond capitalism.

Praxis again

Though neither the *Communist Manifesto* nor *Capital Vol. 1* focus on politics and ideology as causality, both can be argued to have been motivated by Marx's original conception of praxis: to use knowledge to change the world. However, considering praxis in the context of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol 1* raises issues about the problematic nature of the praxis approach, and relatedly, raises questions about how to evaluate texts, especially in terms of what is and what is not, emphasised, made explicit, or left out entirely.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels' were genuinely engaged in the social scientific project to uncover the actual path that capitalism would follow into the future. However, they were also passionately interested in that path leading to a particular historical resolution. They emphasised, perhaps one could say even

looked for, factors which would lend weight, and avoided or underplayed those which would challenge, the *Communist Manifesto's* bottom-line prognosis. That is, capital would create its own 'grave diggers' in the shape of the 'immense majority' transformed into a fully-fledged 'class-for-itself' that would directly transform capitalism into socialism.

On the one hand, much is made of the tendency of the capitalist labour process to ultimately equalise the fundamental life conditions of the immense majority. On the other hand, although the divisive effect of competition on the labouring population is noted, and I would argue very well understood by Marx, it is underplayed. Similarly, non-class divisions of family and nation are too easily explained away by the equalisation of circumstances, and implicitly by capitalism's globalisation. Even more glaring is that a central argument of *The German Ideology*, also written jointly with Engels only a couple of years earlier, regarding the proletariat's ideological subordination to the ruling capitalist class that controls the means of intellectual production and represents its class interests as the general interest, is not mentioned at all.

The *Communist Manifesto* passes the baton of responsibility for changing the world directly to the proletariat, but nonetheless Marx and Engels briefly note an active role for Communists: "to point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independent of nationality."²³ But who are the Communists if not Marx and Engels themselves?! Problematically, does this not therefore mean that Marx and Engels should directly bring out this unity in the *Communist Manifesto* itself by selectively highlighting capitalism's logic in ways that emphasise the forces of unity and understate the forces of division? And, if this is the case, will this fudging of the scientific mission then not mean a corresponding inaccuracy in political strategy?

Bourdieu exploits exactly this tension in praxis between: (1) understanding and (2) changing the world, to cast doubt on the integrity of Marx's social science by claiming that the *Communist Manifesto* is not about objectivity actually but rather about 'naming' and 'making' the proletariat as a 'real social fiction.'²⁴ Gramsci, who famously named Marxism the 'philosophy of praxis', addresses this tension by distinguishing between 'pessimism of the intellect', which I understand to mean that the initial task is to understand the world exactly as it is, and 'optimism of the will', meaning that such knowledge underpins the counter-hegemonic project and strategy to change the world. Following Gramsci's lead, it can be added that maintaining the distinction between knowledge and purpose cleanly, clearly, and

transparently is actually the best path for social science. However, because understanding and changing the world are so deeply interconnected, as is demonstrated by the examples of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol. 1*, keeping the distinction straight is not a simple matter.

Even if hidden from the reader by not being transparently stated, or even hidden from the writer him/her-self, texts have method, and there is purpose in the method. In Marx's case, though he actually wrote only a few words on praxis and method, these were nonetheless integral to all his thinking and writing. First, for example, the *Communist Manifesto* is based on a method that posits causality between structure, circumstances, ideology and consciousness. Similarly, though implicit in the *Communist Manifesto* analysis, Marx and Engels do not explicitly state that classes refer to groups of people who share a similar life-situation. Although the methodology is not explicitly revealed, it can be traced back from the narrative.

Second, while Marx wrote about praxis only briefly, it is easy to think that though not made transparent, this sensibility was driving everything he wrote. That is, though not explicitly stated by Marx, it would seem very likely that his purpose in working long hours in the library of the British Museum to uncover the hidden logic of capitalism was not just to understand the world, but ultimately was motivated by his view that this knowledge could be deployed to facilitate progressive social transformation.

While the immediate purpose of *Capital Vol.1* is to lay bare the laws of capital that operate independently of our consciousness and will, ironically from the perspective of praxis, the purpose of such knowledge is to facilitate its progressive transformation. However, once the *Communist Manifesto* narrative of transformation is found to be lacking, then *Capital Vol 1*, offers only a first step towards a full praxis. In other words, understanding the epochal logic of the current mode of production is only a first step towards a praxis that can subordinate this logic to our self-conscious will by progressively transforming it through creative redesign and strategic political action.

Putting Marx Back Together Again: Implications for Marxism

In 1998, Bob Jessop spoke to me about the need to look again at the writings of Poulantzas and Aglietta. He was reflecting on his more general concern that there has been too much forgetting as we move forward. Following this line of thinking, can we discern similarly in the writing of succeeding generations of Marxist and now

post-Marxist thinkers not just significant innovation of, but also loss of deeper connections with, the master's episteme? Moreover, the path of innovation with loss has also partly occurred because Marxism, like all social science, is integrally connected with ideological battles. But Marxism especially has been, and continues to be, directly embroiled in dynamic social and political movements. Thus, influential transmitters of Marx's thought have often been selective in their reading of his texts because of the positions they have taken relative to not just the intellectual but also the political and ideological struggles prevailing in their time.

This ever-changing relation has tended to go hand-in-hand both with the fracturing of Marxism and also, especially in the case of Althusser, with the rupturing of Marx's episteme. As a deliberate counter-move this paper has sought out the intellectual continuity and holistic integrity, identifying only second order breaks, of Marx's thinking. Like Althusser, I am responding strategically to the current intellectual and political environment. That is, though seeking a critically honest reading of Marx for Marx, I am very aware that this project is not innocent!

This paper pushes directly against Althusser's strategy of discrediting some of Marx's texts in order that he could disconnect them from, and thus more narrowly specify, what constitutes Marx's episteme, and thus also Marxism itself. Althusser dismissed the pre-*German Ideology* writing entirely; discredited any words that remain in the mature writing which resonate with this early writing; and disregarded any silent connections that could be derived between Marx's young and mature texts. In effect, Althusser's reading strategy reduced what is deemed to *really* constitute the discourse of Marx's Marxism. In addition, Althusser's lack of attention to the break in account, crystallised especially between the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol. 1*, also had the effect of reducing the innovative scope of Marx's research project. This paper's contrary mission to unify Marx's texts, and thus Marxism, led me to focus on the extent to which Marx's texts from 1844 can be realistically interpreted as integrally interconnecting elements of an evolving but fundamentally holistic episteme. In turn, this focus has led me to a reading strategy that runs directly counter to Althusser's approach.

First, I have been reading Marx's different texts as the unified expression of a single mind. In other words, I have been pursuing an archaeological approach that treats Marx's written work as the 'dead labour' or artefacts and traces of a much larger yet singularly conscious mind. That is, I am searching for the interconnections across his texts in order to reveal the greater organic totality of Marx's mode of thinking. This is a method for bringing Marx's intellectual consciousness, understood

as a once-living mode of thinking, back to (virtual) life. As such, I am responding to the many students who have said to me, 'I wish Marx could be brought back to life so that we could ask him what he thinks about capitalism today'.

Second, rather than seeking a clean break between the so-called immature ideological Hegelian works and the mature scientific Marxist works, connections between themes in the mature work that resonate with the earlier discourse have been sought out. More specifically, this paper has demonstrated how the *Communist Manifesto*, as a grand thesis with multiple dimensions, and *Capital*, as a project that focuses on one of them, are integrally connected. Thus, the episteme grows because each text is not treated as stand-alone, but rather as the interconnecting elements of a single discursive formation.

Third, searching for the deeper epistemological connections, rather than the breaks, across the different phases and texts that comprise Marx's writing and thinking has led me also to connectively read the silences. In particular, specific connections between the youthful continental writing and the mature London writing have been sought and inferred, even if Marx did not always make these connections explicitly in his text, or perhaps even self-consciously in his mind.

Fourth, this paper's identification of significant differences *in account* between young and mature texts, especially between the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Vol. 1*, contrary to Althusser's silence on this topic, expands the scope of contemporary Marxist research agendas. Against these narrowing effects, it is still important to note that Althusser's concept of overdetermination, though grounded in Marx's writing, especially in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* and by inference in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, does also constitute an important innovation and provides an example to inspire future potential innovations that can continue to develop Marxism beyond what Marx himself could do within his single life time. Rather than narrowing Marx's episteme by discounting the words that do not fit Althusser's intellectually exogenous gaze and his politically exogenous struggle, the *endogenous* reading strategy adopted here grows the intellectual and political scope of Marx's episteme and thus also Marxism. In addition, identifying the disjuncture of account between the youthful and mature works is central to opening up second-generation neo-Marxist research agendas.

Integrally, this paper seeks to mend the fractures caused by Althusser's epistemological break argument by seeking a holistic Marxism grounded in the re-casting of Marx's thought as comprising a conceptual and methodological integrity. Marx's youthful and mature writings have been integrated into a single organic mode

of thinking that also points beyond the living Marx towards a project of continuing innovation into the future. The first suture for Marxism is that the themes of the young Marx, which define humanist Marxism but are eliminated from Althusser's Marxism, are demonstrated to be integrally consistent with the mature work. The integration argument not only counters Althusser's epistemological break, it also counters the contrary humanist vision of a Marxism that is overly focused on the youthful writing.

A second set of unifying re-alignments implied by the integrationist argument of this paper refers to rethinking the relationships between Althusser's Marxism, on the one hand, and orthodox-Marxism, neo-Marxism, and post-Marxism, on the other. By dismissing the humanists' subject and retaining a strong sense 'in the final instance' (1969b: 113) of the structural logic of capital, Althusser retained an anchor in orthodox Marxism. However, at the same time, his concept of overdetermination opened up enough space for innovative development in the analysis of contemporary capitalism which is associated with first generation neo-Marxism.

However, many Marxists remain opposed to or at least suspicious of the innovations of Althusser's Marxism and continue to identify with core aspects of an essentialist *Communist Manifesto*.²⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, post-[Althusserian] Marxism has retained only the innovations. Led by Laclau, they have continued on the path laid down by Althusser's reducing of Marx's science by also eliminating, beyond alienation and praxis, both the necessary materialist logic of capital and resulting objective class positions. All that remains of Marx's episteme for the post-Marxists is overdetermination, which grounds a theory of political contingency but now emptied of both objective economic structure and self-conscious subject. This paper's holistic reading of Marx's writing points towards a Marxism that embraces the innovations of overdetermination and contingency, yet retains both objective structure and subjective agent. Innovations of first generation neo-Marxism and post-Marxism are thus re-incorporated back into a broad generic Marxism. In sum, instead of following the post-Marxist route that has thrown out Marx's episteme and replaced it with only an innovation that is based on its foundations, this paper pushes towards a more inclusive second generation neo-Marxism.

Conclusion

By embracing innovation and self-critique, Althusserian-led first generation neo-Marxist writing helped maintain Marxism as a lively and growing research agenda.

However, this important project has also been compromised by vestiges in Althusser's work of an orthodox reading of Marx and an orthodox view of science. Furthermore, against the divisive effects of Althusser's epistemological break, this paper has argued for the reunification of Marxism around an inclusive second generation neo-Marxist agenda that interconnects the mature and youthful work as integral elements of Marx's way of thinking, and in particular casts the mature account of capitalism as a self-critique of the youthful works. In particular, Marx's mature writing has rendered untenable the *Communist Manifesto* prognosis, which is central to the orthodox Marxist narrative. Marx's research can thus now be seen as not only self-critically innovative, but also as unavoidably unfinished. When combined with an integrated view of Marx's episteme, this spirit of critical and on-going innovation beyond the residue of orthodox Marxism lays the Marxist research agenda wide open.

In sum, this holistic reading of Marx's episteme points beyond the residue of orthodox Marxism in first generation neo-Marxist thinking and towards a path that can re-incorporate the important insights and innovations of both humanist Marxism and post-Marxism. At the same time, it seeks to retain the best sense of neo-Marxism, here understood as an openly self-critical approach driving dynamically innovative research and political agendas grounded in Marx's episteme. In my own work, the re-incorporation of praxis and *Capital Vol. 1's* critique of the class theory of the *Communist Manifesto* have been central to going beyond Althusser-driven first generation neo-Marxist class theory. The role of knowledge in directly making the world is re-opened because key elements of the *Communist Manifesto* prognosis are rendered false not just by Marx's revised account in *Capital*/Vol. 1, but also by other developments beyond the unfinished discourse of the historically living Marx. In particular, the crisis logic of contemporary neoliberal-led global capitalism implies the need for, but there does not presently exist, a clear counter-hegemonic project that can push beyond capitalism practically.

¹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by B. Brewster, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, translated by B. Brewster (London: NLB, 1970). Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, (London: New Left, 1976). Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, translation Editor Timothy O'Hagan, (London: Verso, 1975). Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, (London: Verso, 1979).

² Althusser 1969a, 1969c, 1969e, also 1970a, and 1976.

³ Althusser 1970a, pp.14-15.

⁴ Althusser, 1969e.

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- ⁵ See Stuart Sim. *Post Marxism: An Intellectual History*, Introduction, 2000. For example, "Post-Marxists ... studiously avoid being dragged into the internal debates about what Marx really said or really meant, that classical Marxists have such an insatiable appetite for' (3).
- ⁶ See Althusser, 1969, Introduction, especially pp.34-35.
- ⁷ Althusser 1976, 99; see also Althusser and Balibar, 1970.
- ⁸ Althusser 1969b.
- ⁹ Karl Marx, "General Introduction" *Grundrisse*, translated with a Foreword by Martin Nicolaus, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973a), p.100.
- ¹⁰ I leave aside the early work before 1844. However, even in texts written before this date, Marx was already beginning to raise questions and themes that link with his 1844 work and beyond.
- ¹¹ Althusser, 1969d.
- ¹² The actual text is 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point is to change it', Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", 1975, p.422.
- ¹³ Marx, "The Eighteenth of Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" 1973, p.146.
- ¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*/Vol. 1. 1976, p.284.
- ¹⁵ The question of the specific, but clearly critical, role of Engels in the development of this and another signature text of Marx's Marxism (*The German Ideology*) is not dealt with here.
- ¹⁶ Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value: Part II*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969a, p.399.
- ¹⁷ Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, 1976, p.545.
- ¹⁸ Marx, 1976, 798. Also, see D. Neilson and T. Stubbs, "Relative Surplus Population and Uneven Development in the Neoliberal Era: Theory and Empirical Application," *Capital and Class* 35(3), (2011), p.437.
- ¹⁹ Marx, 1976, Chapter 25. On just one page (p.799), Marx writes how capitalism's coercive logic of increasing productivity degrades the worker "to the level of an appendage of a machine, ... transforms his life-time into working time, and drags his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital... the relative surplus population rivets the worker to capital."
- ²⁰ See David Neilson, "In-Itself for-Itself: Towards Second Generation Neo-Marxist Class Theory," *Capital and Class*. Forthcoming, 2017. Also, see Neilson and Stubbs, 2011.
- ²¹ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 1969, p.51.
- ²² Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, 1975a, p.36.
- ²³ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 1969, pp.61-62.
- ²⁴ Bourdieu, P. What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review* XXXII, 1987. Also, see Neilson, "In-Itself for-itself", 2017.
- ²⁵ For a contemporary version of Marxist orthodoxy, but with innovation, see Barker C. et al. *Marxism and Social Movements*. E-book: 2013. "Althusserianism contributed nothing to Marxism as a theory of emancipation", 11. And, the "wager" of Marxism "is that the working class is capable of transforming itself through collective action and organisation to the point where it can break capitalism apart and lay the foundations of a new cooperative world community", p.12.

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