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Marx and Singularity

From the Early Writings to the Grundrisse

Luca Basso

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From the Early Writings to the *Grundrisse*

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Introduction

The Individual and Singularity

'All that exists deserves to perish'
J.W. Goethe, *Faust*

This book stems from the conviction that central to Marx's itinerary is the question of individual realisation, in a polemic against the old commonplace organicist interpretation of Marx and Marxism driven by the notion that society dominates over the individual. It may seem paradoxical to consider the issue of individuality as central to Marx's works. Obviously, its status and distinctive characteristics need to be made explicit; to assert that Marx moves towards individual valorisation without clarifying how the latter is understood would not be enough. The title of the book, *Marx and Singularity*, mentions a category that appears to be foreign to Marx's vocabulary: Marx does not deal with the notion of singularity and of its differentiation from that of the individual. But using the category of singularity in Marx is productive because it points to an emphasis on individual realisation whilst keeping a distance from the modern notion of individuality. Moving on this trajectory, singularity is an external 'reagent' that allows for the emergence of the key elements of the question.

In its use in contemporary French theory, the notion of singularity does more than refer to a recognition of individuality.[1] First of all, insofar as it

1. On the notion of singularity in contemporary debates, see the following different positions: Badiou 2005; Nancy 1996. On the issue of singularity and Marx, see Badiou 1992, pp. 215–50; Balibar 2000, pp. 77–88, especially pp. 81–2; Tosel 1996, p. 145.

points to the irreducibility of the individual to identity, it entails a powerful appreciation of the realm of difference. This category tries to reactivate the element of subjectivity – or rather, subjectivation – in extreme diversification, without presupposing the existence of a predetermined and statically defined subject. Prioritising the question of individual difference does not lead to a form of atomism. On the contrary, a reference to the realm of relations is a distinctive trait of singularity: relations are primary over individuals, insofar as the latter do not exist prior to the social nexus that constitutes and transforms them. To note this tension, the category of singularity can productively be related to that of 'trans-individuality', which tries to make the opposition between 'individualism' and 'holism' redundant. Central to this question is neither the individual as absolutely independent, nor the community as 'whole', but what lies 'in between' individuals.[2]

Not only does Marx try to move beyond individualism and holism (to use sociological categories), he also brings to light their mutual implication: the individualist premiss of the debate, moving from the recognition of free and equal individuals, and their subsumption under an abstract social power, are two 'sides' of the same coin. As for their mutual implication, its fracture is necessary to create a theoretical device that is not homologous to the object of our polemic. This device is founded on the reciprocal implication of individualism and power; far from negating the realm of relations, it emphasises it in the intercourse and assemblage that lies between civil society and the state. Capitalism is characterised by the presence of a web of relations so wide that it would have been impossible to conceive of it in previous modes of production. Therefore, the 'inter-crossing' of the categories of singularity and 'trans-individuality' does not result in the hypostatisation of relations, because the logic underlying this critique is based on a complex series of relations. If the object of the polemic is founded on the realm of relations, the perspective here outlined can only move in a direction that is asymmetrical to it. The crucial notion of class-struggle, after all, denotes the structural presence of a non-relation, rather than a relation, in bourgeois society.[3] Here, all irenic visions of the social nexus are absent, and relation is revealed as being asymmetrical, 'guilty', marked by a topology of domination and class-logic. Singularity is

2. On the notion of trans-individuality, see Simondon 1992. For an application of the notion to Marxian philosophy on the basis of its politicisation, see Balibar 1996, who interprets Marxian philosophy as 'an ontology of relations': 'Humanity is conceived of as a trans-individual reality'. Central to his investigation is 'what exists between individuals, their multiple interactions', p. 40. The notion of 'trans-individuality' aims to undermine the opposition between individualism and organicism or holism.

3. See Badiou 2005.

understood on the basis of this 'core' of relations, its inner tension and 'broken' formation.

Unlike the 'individuated' individual of modern politics with its predetermined trajectories, singularity is constituted through essentially unstable relations that 'traverse' it. The term 'singularity' denotes an attention towards concrete individuality and the specificity that differentiates it from all other individualities. Singularity is therefore unique, irreducible to an all-encompassing model, and linked to determined conditions and contexts. In addition to its unique character, singularity also entails a reference to contingency and its 'situational' realm, so to speak, that rather than immutable is subject to the dynamism and changeability of events, in a constant movement.[4] The notion of singularity is linked to the realm of practice, and, in particular, to the conjuncture in which it is inscribed, on the basis of a full immanence to the concrete dimension of its given-ness: singularity unfolds 'each time just this once'.[5] From this standpoint, the debate on singularity is constantly traversed by a 'thinking in the conjuncture', starting from a specific situation: the singularity of the present is irreducible to an overall framework capable of incorporating all possible options. Thus, situations do not merely illustrate pre-existing dialectical moments, or the outcomes of a general codification, but constantly re-develop the realm of action.

Here, it is appropriate to dwell on the relation between singularity as defined here in its structural connection with trans-individuality, and the question of the subject and subjectivation. As noted earlier, the notion of the subject is fully compatible with that of the individual, as it follows predefined trajectories: in this sense, the 'individuated individual' presents precise characters and its coordinates can be fixed. By contrast, the term 'singularity', linked to 'trans-individuality', designates individuation rather than the individual, and subjectivation rather than the subject: we are confronted, here, with a process – or, rather, a constant practice – distinctly characterised by signs that cannot be established once and for all and are continually subsumed to the contingency of action. There is no single and inevitably abstract framework, because praxis keeps shifting the coordinates of the political scene. In this sense, the category of singularity allows us to describe not only individual realisation beyond the modern notion of individuality, but also how political action is inscribed, in

4. Without dwelling on the question here, there is an important element of 'evenementality' in the concept of singularity that expresses its full immanence, as present in Gilles Deleuze's work, for instance, in his *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2004a), and the *Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 2004b). A stimulating 'application' of this to Leibniz's monad can be found in Deleuze's *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* (Deleuze 2006).

5. Nancy 1993, p. 67.

its specific determination, in circumscribed circumstances.[6] Therefore, singularity is connected to 'trans-individuality' and, on the basis of a recognition of the centrality of relation, also rooted in a 'thinking in the conjuncture' and the uniqueness of the present.

Here, the debate on singularity influenced by contemporary French theory interweaves with Marx's discourse to highlight how the latter contributes to an appreciation of the individual that also accounts for the element of multiplicity in political frameworks, and for the presence of an irreducible difference against the logic of identity it criticises. It is necessary to dwell on the peculiarity of Marx's device: its underlying materialism presents two distinctive features.[7] The first is the awareness of the primacy of the 'actual truth of the matter' (to use Machiavelli's expression)[8] over theory; the second is the recognition of the autonomy of conceptual development from empirical reality. As far as the first feature is concerned, central to Marx's discourse is the notion that 'the actual truth of the matter' is crucial and cannot be understood as a mere reflection of an inevitably abstract theory. The whole of Marx's discourse is characterised by a constant confrontation with non-philosophy and its eccentric status in relation to any hypostatisation disconnected from the concrete flow of events. On this issue, it is important to underline that the scenario we are confronted with is not fully transparent or directly accessible without the 'fetters' of conceptual generalisations. Moreover, the priority of the 'actual truth of the matter' in its singularity does not point to a merely reflexive theory, that does nothing more than rationally transcribe its constitutive elements, because it has its own independence, however partial. As it will later emerge, the theoretical device cannot be directly derived from

6. On the question of singularity and its connection to the realm of practice, a very important and relevant intervention, full of repercussions on the French debate, is Jean-Paul Sartre's, especially as outlined in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre 1982). See also his 'The Singular Universal' (Sartre 1972), where he outlines the notion of singularity on the basis of an original confluence of Marx and Kierkegaard: within history understood as a fractured scenario rather than a *continuum*, where singularity appears to be irreducible to the present, but existing trans-historically whilst continuously being inserted in determined historical contexts. Thus, Sartre comes to formulate the seemingly oxymoronic 'singular universal', refuting both the structuralist position, and the absolute subjectivism of some Marxist trends. For Sartre, subjects are not impotent, nor do they present Promethean characteristics: subjects act and are acted on, speak and are 'spoken'. In his view, the question of the relation between subjects and practices is crucial. His position is strongly influenced by Marx, as it constantly refers to the always determined character of the individual and ascribes a crucial role to revolutionary practice.

7. See Althusser's 'The Object of *Capital*' in Althusser and Balibar 1970, especially pp. 159–70.

8. See Althusser 1999, p. 127.

the observation of empirical reality, and doing so would lead to generalisations disconnected from political contingencies. The issue of the relationship between theory and practice is extremely complex and cannot be reduced to predetermined solutions. Firstly, Marx does not deduce the latter from the former: there is no immutable theory from whence to derive political practice. On the contrary, the latter keeps shifting the conditions of theory and these can never be fixed once and for all. Thinking in conjuncture and through the singularity of specific cases here re-emerges as a standpoint where politics can never be fully derived from a pre-established theory and is always eccentric to it. Similarly to what Machiavelli refers to as the 'actual truth of the matter', the 'singular' relation between theory and practice cannot be reduced to predetermined solutions, as it wavers between the need for an overall conceptual construction and the recognition of the unpredictability of practice.

The stark innovation of Marx's materialism consists in the idea that actual freedom is always also posed as material transformation. This device is based on the deconstruction of the very status of thought and a constant 'exchange' between analysis and the transformations of the present state of things. Marx and Engels often refer to the Mephistophelian statement that 'all that exists deserves to perish'.[9] This is not only a sort of revolt against the real: reality is praxis, and philosophical consciousness is the symptom of a social condition.[10]

Taking this to its logical conclusions, one might say that the 'actual truth of the matter' is politics: therefore, there needs to be a new form of knowledge, adequate to the radical politicisation that encompasses all branches of existence. This element permeates the question of individuality because, whilst being the object of a general theme, individuality is also always 'inverted' by practice. The present work tries to account for the complex and unstable relation between theory and practice in order to understand how a discussion that is not homologous with the philosophical conceptions at our disposal can be developed through a singular 'kneading' of philosophy and anti-philosophy.

The work seeks to fundamentally valorise the individual realm, unlike the old commonplace interpretation of Marx (a projection of the experience of 'actually-existing socialism') that defends the notion of a domination of society over the individual, and thus of the negation of the latter. Marx's theory is not holistic because its critical referent is also the hypostatisation of society conceived as a 'Whole' at the expense of singular individuals. However, the

9. The reference is to Mephistopheles's words in Part One of Goethe's *Faust*, frequently cited by Marx and Engels, in particular in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: see, Marx 1979, p. 359.

10. See Lefort 1978.

other object of our critique is a liberal reading of Marx that makes Marxism and liberalism compatible. In particular, in the 1980s and 1990s so-called 'analytical Marxism' tried to give rise to a sort of conciliation between Marxism and the liberal social sciences: an important example of this is Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*, where Marx is largely presented as a 'methodological individualist' also on the basis of an analysis of *The German Ideology*.[11] The attempt to make Marx's theory compatible with the theory of methodological individualism diminishes the potential of Marx's radical critique of bourgeois society, which this concept is functional to. Thus, in no way can his framework share the 'liberal' notion of society as founded on a series of individuals-atoms capable of fully autonomous movement. Whilst underlining the difference between Marx's standpoint and methodological individualism, we also note that the goal of the former is individual realisation. 'At stake' is the development of a theory capable of deconstructing both individualism and organicism by focusing on the issue of singularity. Singularity is 'all relation' and posed as 'trans-individuality', which indicates the constant dynamic 'exchange' between the 'individual' and the 'collective'. The relevance of the realm of relations does not entail an 'irenic' and 'pacified' view of it, because each relation is constitutively 'polemical' and marked by fractures and asymmetries.

The outline of this work develops in three thematic directions, each corresponding to a chapter, and is based on the conviction that Marx's theory presents discontinuous features. There is no absolute and unproblematic unity in Marx's thought, from the early to the 'mature' works. This, however, is not to say that there is no common nucleus following a series of significant changes. The starting point of the discussion is explicated in the first chapter and developed in the second: that is, the notion found in *The German Ideology* which inaugurates a new perspective in relation to previous works.[12] But it is not a question of opposing the 'young', 'humanist' and therefore 'ideological' Marx, predating *The German Ideology,* to the 'mature' and fully 'scientific' one; rather, we must highlight the theoretical innovation of *The German Ideology* with respect to anthropological inquiry. This question not only concerns a conceptual development, but also the realm of practice: on this issue, the priority of the 'actual truth of the matter' over theoretical constructs is again a

11. See Elster 1986a. On this debate within analytical Marxism, see also Roemer (ed.) 1986a, which includes important contributions, in particular, Roemer's 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?' (pp. 260–82); See also Tucker 1980; Wood 1981; Lukes 1985; Miller 1984. As distinct from these, Lebowitz 2009, pp. 39–61, is critical of the approach of analytical Marxism.

12. In this respect, Althusser's work, though characterised by a degree of one-sidedness and Manichean oppositions, is relevant, especially in *For Marx*, where he outlines the epistemological break in Marx's *œuvre*: Althusser 2005.

crucial reference-point. *The German Ideology* introduces a novelty that emerges from a constant confrontation with the realm of practice, starting from the changes in political struggles that occurred in those years: theoretical reflection cannot avoid being permeated by it. For instance, of crucial importance are the references to the Silesian revolt of 1844. For Marx, these were not Luddite fights against machines, but actual class-struggles between workers and capitalists.[13] Similarly, Chartism was appreciated firstly by Engels in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and subsequently by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*. Although 1844 was marked by the outbreak of crucial events for Marx's political practice, such as the Silesian weavers' revolt and the French and English working-class organisations, a full recognition of their implications did not immediately arise and required a period of theoretical and political gestation.

The perspective of *The German Ideology* needs to be interpreted in light of these contingencies: instead of the concept of abstract generic or species-being, *Gattungswesen*, underlying Marx's early writings, the perspective that *The German Ideology* pivots on 'real individuals' inserted in specific historical moments and political and social structures that, whilst always conditioning, never fully crush them. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels underline that their starting-point is a reference to individuality, or rather, to 'definite individuals'.[14] This is of particular note because it is the beginning of a questioning and problematisation of the old commonplace interpretation of Marx's theory as one of the domination of society over individuals and their nullification.[15]

It is necessary to point out that the reference to individuality is rooted in an empirical mode of inquiry, in an attempt to adhere to the 'actual truth of the matter' and its singularity, as it is irreducible to overall theoretical frameworks unable to 'tackle' the unfolding of events. Therefore, we are presented with a powerful critique of philosophy that must be understood as radical, without recourse to simplistic solutions. The question of individuality cannot be confronted abstractly and on the basis of 'theoreticism'; it has to be 'played out' in practice, starting from a specific, circumscribed investigation. The centre of gravity returns to the being of individual life, rather than a consciousness that predetermines it. Moreover, a distinctive feature of Marx's

13. See Löwy 2005, especially pp. 109ff.
14. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 35.
15. On the huge importance of the notion of the 'real individual' or 'determined individual' in *The German Ideology*, and their role in the deconstruction of Feuerbach's anthropology, see Basso 2001a, pp. 233–56. In my laureate thesis, Basso 1997–8, I also examined the notion of individuality with reference to *The German Ideology*.

materialism is not so much the notion of the decisive role of the economic structure, but a belief in the importance of 'the production and reproduction of immediate life'.[16] Whilst the analysis of the 'actual truth of the matter' is not abstract and always singular, 'real' individuals are the 'definite individuals' who operate in a specific context and environment, within equally determined and given presuppositions and conditions. Determination comes to take a central role in the debate on the individual, insofar as it defines both him and his historically determined activity. Definite or determinate individuals are not only influenced by the circumstances they operate in, but also by the existence of other individuals: for this reason, the discussion cannot be based on an abstract individual detached from the concrete conditions of his actions and manifestations.

The recognition that 'real individuals' and 'definite individuals' are the starting point of a reflection based on a series of presuppositions that are reviewed in the light of experience, does not point to a pacified reading of Marx's work, because his approach to the question changes throughout time. The first chapter opens and closes with a reference to *The German Ideology* and includes a sort of look backwards to the early texts, where the anthropological realm was of central importance. In the years under analysis, the issue of the ontological and epistemological foundation of individuality and its relation to the element of species-being or *Gattungswesen* played a crucial role in the mediation of the reflections of post-Hegelian philosophy. In *The German Ideology*, Marx expresses the need to mark out his distance from it, especially on the issue of Feuerbach's abstract-anthropological notion. Thus, in this work, the individual is understood as being inserted in a determined productive activity and a specific social and political context, an advancement on the framework that he had previously endorsed, centring on man and his connection to species-being.[17] His distance from the absolute primacy of man, understood as the driving force of historical development in a framework unconstrained by concrete dynamics, could not be more evident: the theoretical realm does not have primacy over the development of historical and political scenarii.

The critique of post-Hegelianism also collides with Marx's own previous formulation: he highlights the limitations of his earlier works that revolved around the notion of *Gattungswesen* (as endorsed from the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* to *The Holy Family*). As distinct from other interpreters, we do not contend that the outline of the notion of species-being entails an overall organicist framework based on a view of communism as the full sub-

16. Engels 1990, pp. 131–2.
17. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 75ff.

sumption of the individual under a hypostatised community, as the perfect re-composition of existing fractures. In the early texts, such as the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question*, this element takes the form of an overcoming of the separation between civil society and the state, materialised in the figures of the *bourgeois* and *citoyen*, which found its apex in the event of the French Revolution. An interpretation of the centrality of *Gattungswesen* as the sign of an accomplished organicism hinders our understanding of Marx's thought: in fact, he shows a sort of lack of differentiation between the concepts of 'individual' and 'collective' and a simplistic refusal of the category of mediation. Marx's discussion oscillates between a 'Promethean' anthropocentrism founded on the notion of an unmediated domination of man over the circumstances in which he operates, and a 'collectivist' organicism that recognises the superiority of the 'common' over the 'individual'.[18] The indeterminacy under question is not coupled with a real practice of struggle: rather than an organicist structure, the discussion still presents an inadequate mode of questioning of given material conditions.

On this issue, it is important to note that, in order to understand the object of investigation, Marx offers us an interpretation of society as negating the multiple relations that occur between individuals, rather than being founded on them. Thus, we are confronted with an apparently paradoxical notion of an asocial society that rests on individual-atoms who are absolutely separated from one another: here, sociality is not deconstructed through the unmasking of the relations of domination that are immanent to it, but rather negated *sic et simpliciter*. This conception was endorsed by the young Marx and influenced by the post-Hegelians: however, *The German Ideology* seeks to develop a critique of Feuerbach's solution to this problem.[19] Faced with the abstract and disembodied materialism of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels propose to fully account for the integrally historical and political character of the debate and its rootedness in a material 'trajectory' based on an immanence to the situations in which it descends: the question of individuality must be interpreted in light of this, starting from the concrete relations of the given scenario. For these reasons, the perspective of *The German Ideology*, though not exempt from internal contradictions, is geared to investigate individuals on the basis of the specific conditions in which they find themselves operating.

In any case, as far as the anthropological conception is concerned, there is no 'gap' between 'individuals as members of a class' and 'individuals as such' in *The German Ideology:* the former form an 'apparent community' and are

18. On the problems associated with the notion of species-being, and the lack of distinction between 'individual' and 'collective' underlying it, see Basso 2001b.

19. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 27.

fully adequate to the scenario of capitalism; the latter give rise to a 'real community' and are out of synch with it. The relationship between the 'apparent' and 'real' community is interpreted on the basis of the ambivalence of the modern condition, as the former is characterised as above, whilst the latter aims at the recognition of 'individuals as such', rather than as subservient to a social structure or 'reduced' to their class-belonging.[20] From this standpoint, as the category of the real community develops, the element of community is led to its logical conclusions and emptied of all its premisses: it no longer indicates the place where individuals are subsumed under a constituted political subject and where they are connected, free and equal; on the contrary, it tends to the overcoming of this logic.[21] In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels attempt to understand individual development in relation – rather than in opposition – to the community, because the development of individuals is only possible through their union. From this standpoint, Marx does not counterpose the appreciation of the individual to the existence of a social and political fabric, because the realisation of 'individuals as such' is only possible in a 'real community' that cannot be reduced to a mere sum of individual-atoms. The objective is the recognition of individuals as such in their singularity and in their eccentricity with respect to any social or communitarian belonging that 'blocks' their freedom of action, starting from the actually present material conditions. Pushing this reasoning to its logical conclusions, and moving beyond *The German Ideology*, it is possible to question not only the 'apparent community', and thus a particular type of community, but the very communitarian structure itself: as a condition of its own existence, the latter inevitably entails the metaphorical and physical marking-out of a territory, and requires the 'sacrifice' of the singular individual. In this sense, full awareness of the 'gap' between common being and community is absent from Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*. The former element, common being, whilst always inserted in specific circumstances, constantly escapes any hypostatisation.

The relevance of the 'common' is linked to the question of relation. Central to Marx's discussion is neither individualism nor organicism, but, rather, a determined and specific 'singular'[22] analysis of what lies 'in between' individuals. Thus singularities are characterised by their inter-relationality and multi-directionality: individual life 'embraces a wide sphere of varied activi-

20. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 88.
21. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 437.
22. See Virno 1986, p. 72, where he appreciates 'singular laws' as 'rules that individuate experience for discontinuous and 'discrete' units', with reference to Marx.

ties and practical relations to the world',[23] thus assuming an expansive character. From this standpoint, in Marx's perspective, 'individuals as such' – or, to use a different terminology, singularities – do not follow pre-established trajectories, but are structured through the realm of relations, though according to shifting coordinates that are not defined once and for all. There is a constant and dynamic 'exchange' between 'individual' and 'collective'. However, the relevance of the crucial role of relations is not sustained by an 'irenic' logic of inter-subjectivity, because the social nexus is constitutively 'polemical' and fractured by lines of separation. On this point, it is important to consider the irreducibility of collective *praxis* to a 'pacified' synthesis: the 'correlative', or other 'side' of singularity is the unstable and mobile reciprocity between 'individual' and 'collective' realised in practices of conflict.

The struggle under question concerns not only singular individuals, but also classes: the reference to the notion of class 'complicates' the issue of the relationship between individual and community and must be 'drawn down' into the field of action. This is important because it demonstrates Marx's rejection of any substantialist notion of the proletariat, both in the ontological sense (as, for instance, founded on 'class-consciousness'),[24] and in the sociological sense (which gives rise to its rigid hypostatisation as a social group, for instance, according to a functionalist logic that diminishes the potential of the element of subjectivity). A class unfolds in the field of practice, and cannot be determined once and for all; its configuration is eminently political. The central role of praxis points to the extreme dynamism of singularities that give rise to moments of subjectivation capable of questioning the 'given state of things'. In this light, Hannah Arendt's criticism of Marx's adherence to modern 'productivism' and the presumed predominance of *poiesis* over *praxis* at the expense of the latter is off the mark, because what is 'at stake', for Marx, is a constant and mobile 'exchange' between *poiesis* and *praxis*.[25] *Praxis* plays a crucial role, but it is not free from constraint by concrete circumstances and the singular, circumscribed, and immanent logic of its conditions of development. Marx does not conceive of the individual on the basis of an abstract human nature, but starting from the practices that materialise in it. His discussion seeks to think about singularity politically, to appreciate it in the specific determinations of the given conjuncture.

This aspect of the question is emphasised in *The German Ideology*, where, in particular, the rootedness of class in the realm of struggle is developed politically through reference to concrete means of working-class unity and

23. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 263.
24. One must here refer back to Lukács 1971.
25. See Arendt 1958.

their corresponding practices of conflict. From this standpoint, no unique and permanently-valid theory about forms of conflict advanced: it is always necessary to carry out a specific investigation of the present situation. As for *The German Ideology*, in addition to the revolt of the Silesian weavers, the English Chartist organisation is also brought to attention on account of its character as a mass working-class movement: the real model, for Marx, is represented by Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, where the connection between Chartism and socialism is clarified. Insofar as they are engaged in a struggle against another class, even when it does not take on an immediately revolutionary form, individuals give rise to a class: in this sense, the emergence of Chartism is paradigmatic. The decisive point is not so much that the class becomes conscious of itself, but that singular individuals in the class turn their cooperation into a politically meaningful movement in the materiality of the specific situation. With Marx, one might even question the centrality of the realm of consciousness (as it is life that determines consciousness, rather than *vice versa*), and underline the 'class-'character of consciousness, rather than the 'conscious' character of class, because consciousness is situated in a perspective that is neither neutral nor immobile. This class-practice, and the immanence of its unfolding, breaks down the distinction between 'social' and 'political'. On the one hand, the 'social' has political value; on the other hand, the political movement referred to is never exempt from a markedly social character, as evident in the following passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy*: 'Do not say that social movement excludes political movement [*politische Bewegung*]. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social [*gesellschaftliche*]'.[26] From this standpoint, the categories of 'political' and 'social' are constantly re-determined in a manner critical with regard to the modern separation between civil society and the state.

In the *Manifesto*, faced with the imminence of the revolutionary crisis of 1848, some of the elements already implicit in *The Poverty of Philosophy* are 'exploded', especially the intrinsically political significance of workers' struggle and its destructive power.[27] The discussion is based on the asymmetry between the bourgeoisie, a particular class that defends particular interests, and the proletariat, a class that is a non-class, a 'partial universality' geared to overcoming class itself. The proletariat is presented as the materialisation of a paradox, pregnant with political developments, presenting a site of struggle with universal value and yet based on a singular standpoint: there is a 'partial universality', situated without 'innocence' and in polemic against the existing

26. Marx 1976a, p. 212.
27. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 493.

state of things.[28] The *Manifesto* advances a crucial discussion of the organisational dimension of the party, posed as the development of workers' associations of the years prior to 1848, which also reflects a series of changes that had occurred at the level of political practice. The party is the basis on which they attempt to maintain the mobility of workers' struggle together with the need for it to 'take shape', through the 'vanguard' of the mass-movement, without destroying the plurality and vitality of its articulations, in a way that is as expansive as possible.[29] In 1844, Marx's interest in the revolt of the Silesian weavers and his contacts with the French workers had not led him to really pose the question of the political organisation of struggles: a period of theoretical and political development was necessary before such a question became central. This need was also part of the idea, expressed in *The German Ideology*, that classes exist in the realm of struggle, in concrete practice, and thus that their role is political.

In any case, one needs to bear in mind that the *Manifesto* is inscribed in the key moment of 1848: for the first time since the French bourgeois revolution of 1789, there seemed to be a chance of proletarian revolution, resulting from the *praxis* of the working class. In this context, Marx and Engels were interested in an expansive political organisation capable of overcoming the restrictive confines of nation-states: in 1848, in the main European countries, there seemed to be an opening for a revolutionary perspective that was apparently unstoppable. The workers' movement moved 'within' and 'outside' the existing scenario and critically traversed its constitutive ambivalence: on the one hand, it was 'inside' contingent situations, which included trade-union and democratic struggles; on the other hand, it tended towards the abolition of the present state of things. Marx's reflection is based on a 'thinking in the conjuncture' – the singularity of the case – and grounded in a careful analysis of the specific situation and transformations in the means and objectives of conflicts: his 1848 writings, in particular *The Class Struggles in France*, are an eloquent testimony to this. Marx understands politics as extremely contingent and eccentric in relation to overall laws: any hypothesis needs to be verified against historical events to confirm and reinforce its validity or, on the contrary, to question its premisses.

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28. See Žižek 2002, p. 298: 'For Marx, of course, the only universal class whose singularity (exclusion from the society of property) guarantees its actual universality is the proletariat.... In Alan Badiou's terms, the proletariat is not another particular class, but a singularity of the social structure, and, as such, a universal class, the non-class among the classes'; Žižek 2008.

29. See Badiou 2005.

The events that followed June 1848 in France, when the insurrection was repressed and Bonaparte initiated his 'reaction', generated a crisis in the very belief in the immediately expansive nature of the revolutionary phenomenon. The defeat of 1848 and the rise of Bonapartism certainly did affect Marx's political perspective. These events questioned the idea of a world-revolution and forced him to re-develop his method of political analysis. As a result, for instance, the state is no longer understood as a sort of 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie', because its margin of autonomy from the mechanisms of bourgeois society is now recognised. His inquiry into Bonapartism and nationalism in general complicates his framework of analysis. In any case, the 'metamorphic' character of politics comes across powerfully, alongside the need to constantly re-determine its coordinates according to the 'real movement' that permeates them.[30] In this view, political economy is traversed by a contradiction because, whilst dressed up as science and referring to a specific object, it actually postulates the eternity of the capitalist mode of production on the basis of an ahistorical 'metaphysics'. Marx's break with classical-political economy is radical: in the 'Afterword' to the second German edition of *Capital*, he writes:

> Insofar as Political Economy remains within that horizon, insofar, i.e., as the capitalist regime is looked upon as the absolutely final form of social production, instead of as a passing historical phase of its evolution, Political Economy can remain a science [*Wissenschaft*] only so long as the class struggle is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomena.[31]

If classical-political economy expressed the bourgeois point of view, Marx's critique of political economy could not but break with it and allow for the emergence of the proletarian standpoint: 'it can only represent the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes – the proletariat'.[32] The 'class-'character of the debate must be complemented with our earlier treatment of the question of the autonomy of thought (and its categories) from 'the actual truth of the matter': critique cannot stand absolutely apart from this conceptual construction. In addition to the recognition of the partial independence of reflection from the concrete unfolding of events, we would underline that, for Marx, the object of knowledge is opaque and not immediately available to the observer, contrary to what classical economists assert when they conflate 'essence' with 'phenomenon'.

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30. On this issue, see Karatani 2005, esp. pp. 142–51.
31. Marx 1996b, p. 14.
32. Marx 1996b, p. 16.

Starting from this theoretical device, the third chapter is dedicated to the *Grundrisse*, the *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, a real, febrile work-in-progress, fully immanent to the crisis of overproduction of 1857, which, in Marx's view, seemed to possess the potential to drive the capitalist mode of production to its own dissolution. For Marx, it was productive to keep the dynamics of the situation open, from a theoretical point of view, and 'charge' these events with subjectivity, in a real 'political gamble'. But beyond the disappointment of his hopes in the economic conjuncture, in the *Grundrisse*, the notion of individuality plays a crucial role, as the intrinsically duplicitous structure of capitalism is recognised as simultaneously an element of liberation and subjection. On the one hand, there is the abolition of all the bonds that had prevented the movement and independence of individuals in previous modes of production;[33] on the other hand, the singular individual is subjected to forms of social domination that 'crush' him and 'serially' subsume him.[34] Thus, in this discussion, the mutual implication of the individualist foundation and the individual's subjection to an abstract and social power materialised in money, is open to solutions that are not predetermined. Here, the emphasis is not only on the two-fold nature of capitalist structure and the ambivalence of its 'objective' characterisation, but also on the idea that subjective insurgencies keep threatening this apparent objectivity and cause it to break down: the idea of individuality as liberation from pre-established bonds is not only an 'endogenous' element of capitalism, but also the inevitably unstable role of class-struggle.

In the *Grundrisse*, this question is presented in the form of the object-less subject of the worker (or *Arbeiter*)[35] who is confronted with the 'real community' of money[36] and its spectral character: whilst apparently paralysing, this situation is, in fact, also full of potential for unknown developments with coordinates that can never be fully predicted. The discussion is based on the tension of the subject of living labour, as the use-value of labour-power, and its ambivalence: on the one hand, living labour is made 'functional' to the valorisation of capital; on the other, it moves in direct opposition to it, following a logic that cannot be re-composed, founded on the 'unfolding contradiction' between capital and labour. Antagonism is not only an effect, but the decisive

33. See Marx 1986c, p. 17: 'In this society of free competition the individual seems to be rid of the natural, etc., ties which in earlier historical epochs made him an appurtenance of a particular, limited aggregation of human beings'.

34. 'The individual no longer exists except as a producer of exchange value. This implies the complete negation of his natural existence; hence he is wholly determined [*bestimmt*] by society'. Marx 1987a, p. 179.

35. Marx 1987a, pp. 212–13. See also Tronti 1966.

36. Marx 1987a, p. 158.

condition of the capitalist mode of production and its specific contradictions: despite some ambiguities in Marx's discourse, in the last instance, these can never be fully resolved at the level of theory, because only a break from the 'present state of things' can explode them. Here, we see the re-emergence of the idea of an asymmetry between the bourgeoisie, a particular class with particular ends, and the working class, the 'partial universality' that tends towards the 'practical' dissolution of class itself. In any case, in the present scenario, freedom and equality are a mixture of reality and mystification: they seemed unthinkable before capitalism, and yet they are revealed to be only apparent, because when moving from the 'superficial' realm of simple commodity-circulation to the 'underworld' of production, they turn into their opposites and display a series of asymmetries and aspects that 'do not hold'.[37] From this standpoint, our treatment of the concept of singularity is closely tied with the 'splitting of society into two', where Marx takes the side of the 'object-less subjectivity' of the worker, the working class and its extreme mobility that is irreducible to any dialectics, and its 'practical' negation of everything that is functional to the system.

Although there are dialectical modulations in the *Grundrisse*, especially given its references to Hegel's *Science of Logic,* merely to focus on this aspect would prevent us from grasping the theoretical and political character of Marx's thought.[38] Similarly, in *The German Ideology*, dialectics are hinged on the ensemble of productive forces and the relations of production, and yet this does not exhaust the significance of the discussion, as its decisive reference to the dimension of class and its immanence to the political situation is irreducible to any pre-established framework and attempts to re-assemble existing asymmetries. To return to the *Grundrisse*, insofar as they recognise the two-fold nature of the individual condition and the relevance of both affirmation and negation of freedom inherent to the capitalist mode of production, they certainly do present a dialectical character. However, the stability of this aspect is seriously questioned not only by reference to political situations that never illustrate preceding dialectical moments and need to be interpreted as events irreducible to any overall framework, but also, and even more so, by the fact that no mediation between these subjects is possible, because the

37. Marx 1987a, pp. 98–9.

38. For the reason mentioned earlier, I do not share the emphasis of contemporary Anglo-Saxon Marxism on dialectics (the 'New Dialectic') and its Hegelian approach: see, in particular, Arthur 2002. On the more specifically economic side, see Albritton and Simoulidis 2003. On the centrality of the dialectic, see, amongst others, Smith 1990; Moseley 1997; Meaney 2002; Ollmann 2003. In contrast, Rosenthal 1998 is very critical of the approach of neo-Hegelian Marxism, especially pp. 157–62. See Micocci 2002.

fracture between the two classes cannot be amended. Marx's standpoint is that of a 'partial universality' of the proletariat, escaping all dialectics, in the last instance, because it is posed as an attempt to constantly 'break' the capitalist mechanism, stop its functioning, and interrupt its dynamics. Marx's notion of communism is not a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, but a rupture that cannot be mediated, and which occurs in the dimension of practice.

Here, it is necessary to focus on the status of subjectivity in the critique of political economy and its relation to politics. The subjects that emerge from the 'theory' of the critique of political economy are ambivalently subjected to social structures, but also able to bear the burden of their own actions. In this respect, one might say that the working subjects of the critique of political economy are also a subjectivity: but only if, by 'subjectivity', we mean the aforementioned subjectivity without an object, confronted with the external and extraneous object of money and its spectral character. In any case, there are both an active and a passive element in this question: to refer to Foucault's problematisation, the production of subjects is understood both as a genitive-object case and a genitive-subject case.[39] Thus, the subject is based on the mutual implication of universality and emptiness: on the one hand, it tries to overcome the limits that prevent its movement and to keep widening its horizons; on the other hand, it is subject to apparently uncontrollable forces. But this mutual implication is unstable not only because of the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, but also – and especially – due to the emergence of conflicts aimed at destroying its functioning. Thus, whilst one can derive the existence of subjects from the critique of political economy, it is not possible to deduce practices of subjectivation *ipso facto*. From this standpoint, 'practical' tensions cannot be fully 'conceptualised', because action follows its own laws and does not offer pre-established coordinates free from constraint by the conjuncture in which it is inserted. For this reason, class cannot be hypostatised, either sociologically or ontologically, as it is an eminently political notion, irreducible to a pre-fixed schema: unsurprisingly, Volume III of *Capital* includes an unfinished chapter on class. The notion of class can neither be defined once and for all, nor 'disembodied' from specific conjunctures and the singularity of the given situation. Subjectivation cannot be immediately deduced from the 'theory' of the critique of political economy; it must be 'played out' in practice. The texts where this element is most appreciated are historical and political; and there, these dynamics are investigated in the concreteness of their unfolding.

39. See, in particular, Foucault 1982.

In this framework, the critique of political economy, whilst emerging from the determined and non-neutral standpoint of the working class, does not immediately point to a politics, because politics are rooted in single events and their contingent character. Therefore, the issue of singularity is founded not only on the attempt to strive towards individual realisation beyond the modern conception of individuality, but also on the idea that each element is inscribed in a conjuncture that one cannot abstract from. This does deny the discourse an overall structure: the tension between the singularity of political action and the generality of the critique of political economy needs to be kept open. Otherwise, there could be no science, because each aspect would be investigated in the specificity of its concrete manifestation and the rejection of all generalisations. The relationship between science and politics, and thus theory and practice, is an open one, and one is not deduced from the other: neither does practice lead to a pre-fixed theory, nor, conversely, can theory be deduced from practice, as if it were impossible to go beyond singular events and come to conclusions that 'exceed' them. If this were not the case, the critique of political economy would be a device of no use.

Unlike Marx's earlier works, the *Grundrisse* do not outline an asocial society: on the contrary, the capitalist system is characterised by the presence of an ample web of relations,[40] something unthinkable in precapitalist formations. For Marx, both society as a developed web of relations, and individuality – in the strong sense of the term – are distinctive features of capitalism and an actual *novum* in relation to the past: in precapitalist-social formations, 'individuals may appear great. But free and full development, either of the individual or of society, is inconceivable here, since such a development stands in contradiction to the original relation'[41] of man with the community. Bourgeois society is the 'absolute mutual dependence of individuals, who are indifferent to one another [*der gegeneinander gleichgültigen Individuen*]',[42] and social relations constitute the other 'side' of individual isolation and its seemingly paralysing character.

Therefore, sociality and isolation mutually implicate one another, because the abrupt development of social relations entails a structure of reciprocal isolation: Marx deconstructs both these notions. As far as the former aspect is concerned, society is the object of a radical critique, and rather than being idealised, it is investigated as being traversed by asymmetries and power-relations that also manifest themselves as class-relations. Isolation, on the

40. Marx 1987a, p. 200.
41. Marx 1987a, p. 411.
42. Marx 1987a, p. 94.

other hand, is understood as an 'optical illusion', the fruit of the Robinsonades based on an abstract-anthropological analysis unconstrained by social relations. However, isolation is also conceived of as 'real': there are constant references to its constitutively two-fold nature. On the one hand, it is 'deadly'; on the other hand, it is tied to the realm of individuation. Isolation presupposes a certain degree of independence: in order to isolate oneself, one must be an individual.[43] As the famous passage in the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* states: 'Man is a *zoon politikon* in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can isolate itself only within society'.[44] This sums up the iconoclastic character of Marx's discussion and the idea that isolation is not only a life-sentence, but also a potential open to unpredictable outcomes. After all, the notion of indifference is closely tied to that of isolation, as its meaning of 'equivalence' or 'equal validity' not only describes a form of atomism, but also presupposes the existence of free and equal individuals and the ambivalence of their conditions on the basis of the aforementioned 'intertwining' of reality and mystification.

Now it is necessary to clarify why the *Grundrisse*, rather than *Capital*, are the object of our investigation. The reason is not a perceived discontinuity between the texts. The trajectory outlined here points to a series of elements that remain valid in the whole of Marx's *œuvre*; though it is noteworthy that the *Grundrisse* are a work in progress and more than a mere preparation to *Capital*, because their function is partly distinct from it. Beyond a chronological criterion, the reason why our analysis of the critique of political economy concentrates on the *Grundrisse* is that the element of individuality is powerfully asserted there, and presented, with its structural ambivalence, in its complex relation to the emergence of subjectivity, one that cannot be defined in linear terms. In continuity with the theoretical remit of the present work, which stops at the *Grundrisse, Capital* will require further attention and a special focus, concerning, for instance, the issue of the 'fully developed individual' and the *conatus* towards the 'kingdom of freedom' based on individual realisation. From the 1860s, and especially in *Capital*, the discourse is increasingly and radically desubstantiated, as the figure of the 'person' as a 'mask' of economic and class-interests emerges. Moreover, in the last few decades of Marxist output, studies in ethnology and anthropology have greatly helped our understanding of the question of individuality, also due to their thorough investigation into precapitalist-social formations and of dynamics internal to countries such as Russia, which were not 'capitalistically' advanced. This

43. See Marx 1986c.
44. Marx 1986c, p. 18.

theoretical and political framework is more complex and developed than that of earlier texts. In any case, for these reasons, positing the thread that runs from *The German Ideology* to the *Grundrisse* at the centre of gravity of our present work makes sense insofar as the question of individuality acquires a central role in these texts: there is a substantial continuity between the discussion of 'individuals as such' of the first text, and that of 'social individuals' of the second. Certainly, despite the significant differences that intervened in the years that separate the writing of the texts, in them we find aspects that are close to the framework of dialectics. In the case of *The German Ideology*, this is the conception that pivots on the nexus (and contradiction) between productive forces and relations of production, and the decisive role of the notion of the division of labour. In the *Grundrisse*, there is *pathos* for the growth of the productive forces that finds its high point in the machine, as if the growing development of the structural contradictions of capital could lead to its dissolution and open up the possibility for an immediately revolutionary alternative. From this standpoint, we are presented, sometimes explicitly, sometimes surreptitiously, with a 'grand narrative' typical of the nineteenth century.

Whilst the presence in the *Grundrisse* of these aspects cannot be denied, it would be misleading to 'systematise' them as a compact and coherent outline of a philosophy of history. In addition to the overall relevance of the mobile and dynamic character of this work – a real 'political gamble' on the conjuncture of 1857 – we would emphasise the 'explosive' character of the subjectivity without object that is the worker, and its eccentricity in relation to any predetermined schema, and, furthermore, the striking effects of living labour as the use-value of the capacity to work that follows its own singular logic starting from the immanence of its concrete determination.

In any case, 'what is at stake' is the attempt to understand singularity, its uniqueness and contingency, as other than modern individuality, though it is only conceivable on the premisses of the latter. As we noted earlier, this perspective does not merely emphasise sociality: in Marx's view, the notion of a complete subservience of the individual to society is actually denied, as evidenced by his constant critique of the means of domination of present society. The 'individual' tension is, however, wholly incompatible with the liberal view of a society based on individual-atoms capable of absolutely autonomous movement. Thus, neither individualism nor organicism are central to Marx's discussion: singularities are constituted through the realm of relations, though in ways that cannot be defined once and for all. This aspect is fundamentally anti-substantialist in character: the reference to the sphere of relations is in the context of the erosion of any absolutisation of a predetermined identity, such that singularity is not 'something that has become', but

rather completely inserted in 'the movement coming into being'.[45] Thus, we are confronted with 'workers who are free *dynamei* whose only property is their labour capacity and the possibility of exchanging it for existing values'.[46] The notion of *dynamis* allows for an interpretation of singularity connected with the conditions in which it operates and eccentric in relation to all pre-constituted belonging: the worker is 'a living subject, [who] exists as capacity, as potentiality'.[47] The potentiality that underlies the *Arbeiter*, simultaneously free and dispossessed, is separated from its acts: labour-power is not owned, but sold as the temporal availability of a subject, the worker, who is deprived of the means of production. This dynamism does not result in an outline of a superior unity that can 'compose' the present contradictions, and cannot lead to any 'constitutionalisation', because between the common being of mobile singularities and any political community that necessarily entails individual 'sacrifice', there is a gap: whilst constantly relating to specific and definite conditions, this 'real movement' can never be fully identified with any of them. Thus, beyond a real ambiguity on this issue, Marx's theorisation of communism cannot be interpreted on the basis of such a tension, or on the notion of the construction of a 'pacified' scenario free from contradictions and conflicts: any attempt to see communism as the achievement of full transparency and complete elimination of all shadows is a *cul de sac*.

In this respect, the relevance of the crucial role of relations is not based on an 'irenic' logic of inter-subjectivity: on the contrary, relations are seen in a constitutive 'polemic' fractured by lines of separation. The other 'side' of singularity is the mobile and unstable reciprocity between 'individual' and 'collective', realised in practices of conflict. In this framework, the element of class plays a decisive role as it unfolds in the field of practice, and can never be determined once and for all, since it always is an eminently political notion. A 'dual' structure emerges, here, materialised in the split of society into two classes, and based on an essential asymmetry where the proletariat is the paradoxical 'partial universality', the 'denomination' of a wrong, the 'side of the non-partisans'.[48] Class as the real 'collective singularity' is characterised by a constitutive mobility, and plays an essential role in the outline of the notion of singularity. This *conatus* towards a 'common being' that is not homologous to that of money poses a deconstructive charge against everything that exists: central to the discussion is the attempt to generate a crisis in

45. Marx 1987a, p. 389.
46. Marx 1987a, p. 425.
47. Marx 1987a, p. 202. See also Vadée 1992.
48. See Rancière 1998.

the 'present state of things', through a movement capable of breaking down the distinction between 'social' and 'political' on coordinates that can never be fully predicted. In this perspective, the individual is conceived of on the basis not of an abstract human nature, but of the practices that materialise in him: 'at stake' in Marx's discourse is thinking politically, in the specific determinations of the given conjuncture, about the valorisation of singularities as they are brought together in a common action.

Chapter One

The Question of Individuality

1.1. Individuals, determination and contingency

The premisses from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premisses from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals [*die wirklichen Individuen*], their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity.[1]

> The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals [*bestimmte Individuen*] who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. . . . social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will. . . . Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, [*die wirklichen, wirkenden Menschen*] as they are conditioned by a definite development of

1. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 31. An important reference is the famous passage in the 'Preface' to the *Critique of Political Economy*, where Marx explains the circumstances of the writing of this work as a break from 'former philosophical conscience'.

> their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.[2]

In these passages from *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels decisively and incisively assert that their starting point is individuality, or, rather, 'individuals'. On this premiss, it is possible to start questioning or at least problematise an old commonplace interpretation of Marxian theory that claims that society is a negation of and overpowering force over the individual. The premiss of the perspective pursued, here, is that Marx's theory shows a distinctive appreciation of individuality, and values it as unique and contingent, as a singularity.

The present inquiry on individuality cannot be thought of as a purely philosophical question: the 'actual truth of the matter' is irreducible to a total and inevitably-abstract conceptual schema incapable of 'capturing' the continuous, dynamic unfolding of events. The nexus of theory and practice must not be understood as a derivation of the latter from the former: no unchanging structure of categories can ever determine activity; on the contrary, activity continually dislocates the field of reasoning. At the same time, theory is not a mere conceptual development of a praxis autonomous from it:[3] therefore, the question of individuality is inserted in a 'singular' relation that is never defined once and for all, but always extremely mobile and dynamic.[4]

The issue cannot be approached in the abstract or from a 'theoreticist' standpoint; it must be 'played' out in practice, starting from a specific inquiry that is not reduced to a total perspective. Giving priority to the actual truth of the matter over theory, we understand being and individual life as preceding consciousness and conceptual constructs: the centre of gravity of our debate is not a consciousness that can predetermine the elements of the question. When Marx and Engels write of individuality in *The German Ideology*, they refer to it in the 'plural': individuals, rather than individual.[5] The object of their investigation is a multiplicity of individuals, whom they describe as 'real', with reference to the important notion of the 'actual truth of the matter'. But, as soon as the analysis of empirical reality becomes 'situated' and circumscribed, 'real' individuals become 'definite individuals' who operate in a singular field and context, and are grounded in a series of particular preconditions. *Bestimmung* is the central concept of this discussion of individuality: it characterises both individuality and its activity as it is carried out and historically determined. The definite indi-

2. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 35.
3. See Althusser and Balibar 1970, especially Part II: 'The Object of Capital'.
4. See Badiou 2005.
5. See Basso 2001a.

viduals are influenced by the presence of other individuals: 'the development of an individual is determined by the development of all the others with whom he is directly or indirectly associated [*Verkehr*]'.[6] The concept of individual is thus closely tied to the determination that arises out of his relation to other individuals: individuals act under 'determinate material limits, presuppositions and conditions that are independent of their will.'

Bestimmung is defined more clearly with reference to production: individuals belong to a productive activity and a historically-determined social and political context. In order to develop the notion of individuality, it is necessary to discuss the realm of production:

> As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[7]

But recognising the importance of production does not lead *sic et simpliciter* to determinism, because neither is production solely linked to the 'physical reproduction of individuals', nor is it reducible to quantitative data. Rather, it is an externalisation of individual life. The two-fold character of the relationship *Individuen-Bedingungen* emerges more clearly in *The German Ideology*, which affirms, on the one hand, that individuals have the opportunity to move beyond the conditions in which they happen to operate; and on the other hand, that it is possible for these conditions to be autonomous from individuals: 'Circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances'.[8] Here, the presence of a definitive influence of individuals on their circumstances is categorically excluded; likewise, the root of any anthropocentrism is denied: even though particular situations do not determine individuals completely, they certainly do influence them in significant ways. *Bestimmung* refers to a productive realm and a number of social and political organisations that relate to it. More generally, individual action appears to be increasingly determined: the individual is presented as being structurally contingent and singular, always situated in a particular position and circumscribed standpoint. In fact, individuals enter into 'determined relations' in 'determined ways': *Bestimmung* thus entails a narrow reference to the conditions, existing presuppositions, and 'specific determinations' of the elements under question. From this standpoint, no totalising schema is applicable to all possible cases, because practice continually dislocates the

6. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 438.
7. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 32.
8. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 54.

field of discourse: we are not confronted with a 'generalising' view, but with a 'singular' logic, one that is immanent to the concrete situations in which it materialises. The above perspective does inform *The German Ideology*, but is not a 'constant' of Marx's trajectory; instead, it is a rupture with his earlier works. In his 1859 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains the circumstances that gave rise to *The German Ideology*, and defines it as a text that breaks with the 'former philosophical conscience': 'We decided to set forth together our conception as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience. The intention was carried out in the form of a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy.'[9]

How does Marx relate to 'post-Hegelian philosophy' on the question of individuality? To answer this question, this chapter will analyse the works prior to *The German Ideology*.

1.2. *Gattungswesen* and politics: from the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* to *The Holy Family*

The starting point of Marx's early writings is the *Gattungswesen*, man as species-being, with qualities, dispositions, and characteristics that belong to the structure of the species. This perspective is based on the recognition of an essence common to all men: one's distance from this essence constitutes an impoverishment of 'humanity', a privation of what is ultimately one's own. In his 1843 *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, whilst coming face to face with Hegel's *Grundlinien* on the question of the state, Marx tries to politically think through the problem of the relationship between men as 'generic essences', on the one hand, and family, civil society and state, on the other: the latter are described as mere objectifications of human essence. Man is the starting point of the derivation of modern particular institutions: 'If, for example, the analysis of the family, civil society and the state etc. leads us to regard these modes of man's social existence as the realisation and objectification of his essence, then the family etc. will appear as qualities inhering in a subject. In that event, man will remain the essence of all these realities, but these realities will also appear as man's *real* universality and, therefore, as common to all men [*Gemeinsame*].'[10]

The universality of man is the actual focus of the debate, because he represents the supreme essence of social modes; these latter are its manifestations at a secondary level.

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9. Marx 1987a, p. 264.
10. Marx 1975c, p. 99.

Feuerbach's identification of the critique of theology with the critique of speculative reason has a strong influence on the *Kritik*: 'just as religion does not make man, but rather man makes religion, so the constitution does not make the people, but the people make the constitution'.[11] This perspective puts the accent on man in the relation of man and society, as is made clear in the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: 'To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself. . . . The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest essence [Wesen] for man*.'[12]

Marx does not fully recognise the complications and difficulties of this statement, as its focus on man is one-sided, and yet resorts to an undifferentiated unity of the two elements in question. *Mensch* is immediately communality or people [*Volk*]: Marx does not conceive of the unity of *Gattung-Volk* dialectically, but, rather, as an indeterminate unity where the universal and the particular are confounded and conjoined and their differences erased.[13] Feuerbach plays a crucial role in this version of Marx's notion of *Gattungwesen*: 'Isolated man by himself has not the essence of *man* in himself either as a moral or a thinking being. The essence of man [*das Wesen des Menschen*] is contained only in the community [*Gemeinschaft*], in the unity of man and man, a unity, however, which depends only on the reality of the difference between I and you.'[14]

The species-being is not atomised because it relies on the 'I-Thou' relation: human essence cannot be understood in isolation, because it is inserted in a *Gemeinschaft* grounded on the unity of the I and the Thou, and their convergence on a common field.

As soon as the question is interpreted politically, the fact that *Wesen* points, on the one hand, to the human essence of each individual and, on the other hand, to the totality of individuals as a species, immediately appears to be highly problematic: the relationship is unbalanced, in the first case, drawn to the singular individual; in the second case, towards the community. In the *Kritik*, Marx tries to solve this difficulty by positing an identity between two terms: because man's common essence is a unity that has been broken, universality and particularity part on trajectories that cannot be rejoined. Under Feuerbach's influence, Marx sees a contradiction between two main aspects of *Wesen*, namely man and community. However, the concept of *Gattungswesen*

11. Marx 1975c, p. 182.
12. Marx 1975c, p. 251.
13. On the structural link between 'real man' and 'real people', see Cian 1980, especially pp. 119–21.
14. Feuerbach 1989, §§ 61, 62, p. 83. On the I-Thou relationship, see §56, as quoted in Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 12.

is crucial to understanding his perspective of the early writings, especially if coupled with the concept of *Gemeinwesen*, another decisive category that refers to both a political community and a being inserted in it.[15] Faced with these questions, Marx tends to uncritically identify individual and community. It would be wrong to interpret this as an inherent organicism in the *Kritik* that advances the idea of a full absorption of the singular into the whole of the community: rather, it would make sense to read it as a conceptual indeterminacy and an all-too immediate refusal of mediation.[16] More than an organicist structure to the discourse, we detect a series of ambiguities and unresolved questions. As will later become clear, Marx increasingly distanced himself from the 'temptation' of organicism and tried to 'water down' the misunderstandings of the *Kritik*.

A framework centred on *Gattungswesen* is, certainly, ridden with problems, but we should point out that Marx attributes an element of sociality to it, moving it well beyond Feuerbach's assumptions:

> The activities and agencies of the state are attached to individuals (the state is only active through individuals), but not to the individual as physical but political; they are attached to the political quality of the individual. Hence it is ridiculous to say, as Hegel does, that 'it is in an external and contingent way that these offices are linked with particular persons'. On the contrary, they are linked with them by a *vinculum substantiale,* by reason of an essential quality of particular persons. These offices are the natural action of this essential quality. Hence the absurdity of Hegel's conceiving the activities and agencies of the state in the abstract and particular individuality in opposition to it. He forgets that particular individuality is a human individual, and that the activities and agencies of the state are human activities. He forgets that the nature of the particular person is not his beard, his blood, his abstract *Physis,* but rather his social quality, and that the activities of the state, etc., are nothing but the modes of existence and operation of the social qualities of men. Thus it is evident that individuals, insofar as they are the bearers of the state's activities and powers, are to be considered according to their social and not their private quality.[17]

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15. See Dumont 1977: 'Man is mainly defined as generic being or species-being (*Gattungswesen,* from *Gattung*, genre or species)…but sometimes man is also defined as social being (*Gemeinwesen*, which means both a community, political in particular, and a "common being", that is, a being who lives in community). In these texts, as in Lorenz von Stein, we find a prefiguration of Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community, and here the state), and *Gesellschaft* (society)'. Dumont's idea that there is a sort of split between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in Marx is not accepted here.

16. See Maihofer 1992, p. 100.

17. Marx 1975c, p. 21.

'The state is active' only through the existence of individuals: the connection between state-offices and particular individuality is not external and contingent; on the contrary, it is real and substantial. Here, Marx resolves this relation through the category of *vinculum substantiale*: this notion (derived from Leibniz and used by him to provide an adequate explanation of the relationship between soul and body in his correspondence with Des Bosses) plays an important role in the interpretation of the relation between the individual and the community freed of its theological substratum.[18] Marx refers to *vinculum substantiale* to describe man's full realisation.[19] In the *Kritik*, the real and concrete subject, given a 'substantial' character, is social man.[20] The problem, here, is that sociality is only asserted as a sort of *petitio principii*: a lack of distinction between the 'individual' and the 'collective', whilst avoiding organicism, still presents the obvious problem of not being 'thought in practice'; it is presupposed as the ground of a theoretical framework.

The affairs of state must be seen through the 'social qualities of man' as the foundation of the family, civil society and the state. Although sociality is investigated in the abstract, the importance of the findings of the *Kritik* cannot be denied, because they would later benefit from greater and deeper insights. The 'human determinedness' of the individual coincides with its 'social essence': what characterises the individual and his 'humanity' is his belonging to society;[21] therefore 'social activity', 'because it is a species activity, represents only the species [*Gattung*]. That is to say, it represents a determination of my own being just as every man is representative of other men.'[22]

Here, there is a clear connection between *Gattungswesen* and *Sozialität*: the former is the ontological foundation of the latter, man's belonging to the

18. In 1841 Marx began 'dismantling' Leibniz's works, noting down passages on individuality, force, and the principle of the identity of indiscernibles: the *Leibniz Notebook* sees individuality, in its physical and metaphysical status, as a crucial aspect of the debate. Marx also examined the correspondence between Leibniz and the Jesuit Des Bosses on the issue of *vinculum substantiale,* to which the quote refers. See Marx 1976c. See also Basso 2005, pp. 17–18. On the relationship between Marx and Leibniz, see Elster 1983 and 1975; Touboul 2004, pp. 83–129. On the treatment of the *Kritik*, Luporini points out that *Sozialität* is only a necessity given a Leibnizian metaphysical foundation [*vinculum substantiale*] '*secundum* Feuerbach', in his Introduction to the Italian edition to Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*.

19. See Gurvitch 1948, especially pp. 22–3; Friedrich 1960, p. 76.

20. On this issue, see Hyppolite 1947 and 1955, where he notes that real society, where the modern separation is overcome, is founded on social man, a true and concrete subject. Hyppolite believes that the full overcoming of contradiction, 'materialised' in the concept of social man, is posed as an actual end of history. We do not share his interpretation.

21. Marx 1975c, p. 321.

22. Marx 1975c, pp. 189–90. See also Žižek 2008.

species. Whilst keeping to his general framework, Marx innovates on some of Feuerbach's insights and renders more explicit some of the premisses that Feuerbach had only made reference to, as to inflect the notion of generic being politically. But it would be mistaken to read this discourse as simply in reference to Feuerbach; such a reading would neglect aspects that reside outside of this framework and would lead to important developments later on. The whole of Marx's trajectory can be interpreted as a true laboratory, where each categorical device undergoes constant transformations. His is more than a simple process of intellectual development: at this point, the eruptions of practice, the beginning of a close confrontation with concrete political situations irreducible to a theoretical total schema, intervene to produce significant changes.

In any case, the reference to *Gattungswesen* is crucial to understanding this debate, and we still find it in the texts that follow the *Kritik*, for instance, *On the Jewish Question* and the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.* In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, its main tenets are finally given full expression. The starting point of the *Manuscripts* is the dialectical relationship of man and society, where human essence [*Gattungswesen*] only applies to social man: 'Just as society [*Gesellschaft*] itself produces man [*Mensch*] as man, so it is produced by him'.[23] From this standpoint, a complication arises in these two elements; insofar as he belongs to the species, man is configured as a 'social being [*das gesellschaftliche Wesen*]', whose manifestations 'are an expression and confirmation of social life': he represents 'a particular individual [*ein besondres Individuum*]', that is, 'a real individual communal being [*das wirkliche individuelle Gemeinwesen*]', and, at the same time, the 'ideal totality, the subjective existence of thought and experience of society for itself'. Here, Marx identifies naturalism with humanism, when 'his natural existence has become his human existence and nature become man for him.'[24] The notion of *Gattungswesen*, found in the *Kritik* and the *Judenfrage*, here

23. Marx 1975c, p. 349. On this issue, see Rojahn 1983; Vogel 1925, pp. 217–18; Clarke 1982, pp. 53–4.

24. Marx 1975c, p. 349. On the question of humanism: Althusser 2005 claims that humanism is an ideological 'residue' of the young Marx and is abandoned with *The German Ideology*, which marks a *coupure épistémologique*. According to Althusser, the philosophical myth of man must be destroyed: this position, despite its schematisations, has the merit of strongly refuting any anthropocentric foundation of Marxism. Badiou 1992 reactivates the critique of humanism, highlighting the radically anti-humanist character of any politics of emancipation. See Tosel 1991; Tull 1990, p. 29; Siemek 2002, pp. 22–5; Karatani 2005, especially pp. 3–5, where he highlights the elements of rupture of *The German Ideology* but adds that Marx's development would see more than one break, but many of them, over time; Campbell 2003, pp. 48–52; Thomson 2004, pp. 7–9. In addition, on different interpretation that appreciate Marx's

recurs with all the problems it entails: on the one hand, man is an ideal totality capable of going beyond the species he belongs to; on the other hand, he is a determined, particular, mortal individual, thus subjected to the species. In this respect, Marx's thought is not freed from the influence of Feuerbach and the ambiguity of his concept of species-being; it is still half-drawn towards the individual, whose centrality is too easily assumed, and half towards the species at the expense of the individual: at this stage, there still is no clear mediation between such opposite views.[25] Marx tries to interpret the relationship between individual and society dialectically: the former cannot be analysed without the latter, and *vice versa*; but they still need to be comprehended in more depth. Then, the object of the inquiry, rather the isolated individual who is a mere abstraction, becomes social man, insofar as he is inserted in given circumstances.

The necessary corollary to this recognition of the centrality of *Gattungswesen* in the *Manuscripts* is a reference to the question of alienation, or estrangement.[26] Marxists have widely debated whether this element is a primary core of the whole of Marx's theory that must be valorised theoretically and politically, or a problematic element of Marx's early writings that he would later supersede. The discussion that follows is closer to this second interpretation: alienation played an important role in the early writings and was fully developed in the *Manuscripts,* but Marx later abandoned or significantly weakened it.[27] In the *Manuscripts*, as he begins his studies of political economy, Marx interprets alienation as part of the contradiction between capital and labour in capitalist bourgeois society, where: 'The alienation [*Entäußerung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external

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humanism in the *Manuscripts*, see Thier 1961; Parsons 1971; Kain 1986; Givsan 1981, pp. 159–160, Sayers 1998.

25. On the notion of *Gattungswesen*: Della Volpe 1963, pp. 55–6; Delfgaauw 1967, p. 77; Plamenatz 1975, p. 68; Fürle 1979, pp. 39–40; Wood 1981; Forbes 1983, pp. 20–35; Moore 1993, p. 13.

26. A terminological (and conceptual) note is needed here: to be precise, *Entfremdung* ought to be translated as 'estrangement', and *Entäußerung* as 'alienation', although alienation is often rendered with *Entfremdung.* In Marx, at times, this distinction holds; at others, the terms are used almost interchangeably.

27. Despite the rigidity and one-sidedness of some of his position, Althusser's reading of the problem of alienation is still relevant; in *For Marx*, he strongly criticises the concept of *Entfremdung* of the early writings, and its Feuerbachian tones. On this, and in agreement with this view, see Wood 1981, p. 16; and Holz 1993, pp. 69–88. For a different position that appreciates the notion of alienation in the whole of Marx's *oeuvre*, see Marcuse 1969; Metzke 1957, pp. 1–25; Pappenheim 1959; Mészáros 1970; Ollmann 1971, p. 131; Magnis 1975, p. 173; and Dussel 1996, pp. 51–61. See also Lefebvre 1980; Barker 1986, p. 56; Arnold 1990, pp. 31–62; Morrison 1995, pp. 91–2; and Sullivan 2002, p. 18.

existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own [*eine selbständige Macht*] confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.'[28]

Thus 'the worker's activity belongs to another; it is a loss of his self.'[29] In this context, the crucial category of 'estranged labour' is rooted in the question of alienation of *Gattungswesen*:

> Estranged labour [*die entfremdete Arbeit*] not only (1) estranges nature from man and (2) estranges man from himself, from his own active function, from his vital activity; because of this it also estranges man from his species (*die Gattung*). It turns his species-life into a means for his individual life. Firstly it estranges species-life and individual life, and secondly it turns the latter, in its abstract form, into the purpose of the former, also in its abstract and estranged form.[30]

In the *Manuscripts*, the humanist position examined earlier that revolves on the axis of species-being is closely linked to the question of estrangement. Private property is nothing but the consequence and the 'material, summarised expression of alienated labour':[31] private property derives from the notion of estrangement, rather than being inserted in a specific analysis of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft.* The exponents of classical-political economy, in particular Adam Smith, the 'Luther of political economy',[32] rightly understood that 'private property is embodied in man [*Mensch*] himself and man himself is recognised as its essence [*Wesen*].'[33] Therefore, private property or, rather, labour, that is to say, 'private property as activity for itself, as subject, as person', plays a crucial role in the definition of man.[34]

The *Manuscripts* do not offer a discussion of the role of species-being: on the contrary, the constitutive elements of capitalist society are deduced from it in an unmediated way. *Gattungswesen* is at the centre of the whole debate: 'Man is a species-being [*Gattungswesen*] not only because he practically and theoretically makes the species [*die Gattung*] – both his own and those of other things – his object, but also – and this is simply another way of saying the

28. Marx 1975g, p. 273.
29. Marx 1975g, p. 274.
30. Marx 1975g, p. 328.
31. Marx 1975g, p. 334.
32. Marx 1975g, p. 342.
33. Ibid.
34. Marx 1975g, p. 341.

same thing – because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a universal and therefore free being.'[35]

Therefore, *Gattungswesen* is not an abstraction, but a 'social being [*das gesellschaftliche Wesen*]' whose manifestations are the 'expression and confirmation of social life'.[36] In bourgeois society, man appears as separate from his generic being: 'In general, the proposition that man is estranged [*entfremdet*] from his species-being [*Gattungswesen*] means that each man is estranged from the others and that all are estranged from man's essence [*das menschlichen Wesen*].'[37]

In this respect, *Gattungswesen* still plays a central and almost foundational role, despite all the difficulties it entails, especially in relation to the lack of differentiation between 'individual' and 'collective', and although it fundamentally changes in the actual structures of bourgeois society.

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx describes communism as the overcoming of the estrangement that arises from the division of labour and as the realisation of *Gattungswesen*, each individual conforming to his own human nature and that of the species he belongs to. Communism coincides with humanism and tends towards the 'reintegration or return of man [*Mensch*] into himself', and thus to the reconstitution of the broken unity.[38] For reasons mentioned earlier, this insistence on identifying communism with humanism creates many problems; it is a sort of political and theoretical *cul de sac*. This interpretation of communism as the recovery of a lost unity (the 'return of man to himself'), a condition free of contradictions and veils, almost an original transparency, is utterly unproductive in the face of the devastation brought about by the process of history. This temptation to prefigure a perfect and 'pacified' scenario is present not only in the *Manuscripts*, but also in the rest of Marx's *œuvre*, until the very last texts. In any case, the conceptual device of the *Manuscripts*, whilst penetrated by this temptation, also contains elements that point beyond it. The ambiguity of the *Manuscripts* is great: humanist *pathos* and its complications appear alongside the 'politicisation' of Feuerbach's *Gattungswesen*. The notion of species-being is progressively eroded as it is viewed from the standpoint of labour: Marx both empties out and uproots its ontological foundation. This operation is present in the *Manuscripts*, and further confirmed and reinforced in the text that follows them: *The Holy Family*.

In *The Holy Family*, the importance of *Gattungswesen* is still recognised, but its distinctive features are divested of their potential: 'Who substituted for the old lumber and for 'infinite self-consciousness' if not, indeed, '*the*

35. Marx 1975g, p. 327.
36. Marx 1975g, p. 350.
37. Marx 1975g, p. 330.
38. Marx 1975g, p. 347.

significance of man [*die Bedeutung des Menschen*]' – as though man had another significance than that of being man! – at any rate '*Man*'? Feuerbach, and only Feuerbach.'[39]

The notion of *Mensch* is still there, but emptied out from within: man no longer means anything other than being what he is. Feuerbach's perspective is praised as the point of reference of the discussion, but is also significantly questioned, and its humanist and organicist foundation becomes less and less relevant. As mentioned earlier, this important reference to Feuerbach's *Gattungswesen* required a lack of differentiation between 'collective' and 'individual', based on an oscillation between organicism (the domination of the species over singular being, with an emphasis on the communitarian dimension) and individual Prometheanism (the domination of singular being over the species, and his ability to immediately and unproblematically confront his circumstances).

As far as the relationship with Feuerbach is concerned, two aspects are worth mentioning: first of all, Feuerbach's influence on Marx lasts up to the writing of *The German Ideology*: therefore, the only texts examined are those published before 1844, in particular, *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy* (1839), *The Essence of Christianity* (1841, 1843), *Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy* (1843), *The Philosophy of the Future* (1843), and *The Essence of Faith according to Luther* (1844). The reason to point this out is that Feuerbach's production would last for much longer after that, nearly thirty years (he died in 1872), and the later texts are very different from the early ones. In the years that immediately followed 1844, his focus shifted away from 'human nature', or *Gattungswesen,* towards nature as such; in his latest writings, ethics acquired greater value and often 'classical' connotations.[40]

Moreover, even if we confined our attention to the 'first' Feuerbach, Marx's interpretation is all but innocent. Feuerbach does not conceive of the communitarian essence of *Gattungswesen* as a form of 'political' organicism, because

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39. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 93.

40. For an examination of the last of Feuerbach's writings, see the collection of important texts: Feuerbach 1992, in particular, the last two works: *Über Spiritualismus und Materialismus* (1866), and *Zur Moralphilosophie* (1868, posthumous publications), where the principle of happiness is completely rehabilitated and classical ethics revisited, with a 'knowing contrast with Kant, who had tried to expunge all eudemonism from morality' (Andolfi, 'Postface on Feuerbach's Eudemonism' in Feuerbach 1992, pp. 106–7). The problem of the immediate identification of individual and common realms, found in his earlier writings in the notion of *Gattungswesen,* returns here in a new inflection, in the context of ethics classically understood, on the basis of a consonance between virtue and happiness. But, given that Feuerbach's influence is only relevant to the early stages of Marx's work, we will here only analyse his first texts.

his framework, however 'subverted', is theological rather than political. The critique of theology in *The Essence of Christianity*, with its polemics against Christianity and Judaism, is still framed within theology: human essence cannot be defined once and for all, because it is the product of a continuous and infinite objectification.[41] Feuerbach concludes his *Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy* with the claim that the new philosophy he had inaugurated embodied the structure of Christianity whilst refuting it in name:

> The Christian religion has joined man's and God's name into the name of God-man, and thus raised the name of man to an attribute of the supreme being. New philosophy, following the truth, has turned this attribute into a substance, the predicate into a subject – new philosophy is the realisation of the idea and truth of Christianity. But it renounces the name of Christianity precisely because it contains its essence within itself.[42]

Without this 'anti-Christian Christian' substratum, it is impossible to understand the appreciation of *Gemeinschaft* and its connection to 'the truth of love' on which the 'new philosophy' is based:[43] 'only in love, the God who can tell how many hairs are on our heads, becomes truth and reality. The Christian God is only an abstraction, an image of human love.'[44] Therefore, theology is certainly not denied, but, rather, turned into an anthropology that becomes a sort of religion of the 'heart':[45] 'The new philosophy is a complete and consistent resolution of theology in anthropology; theology is resolved not only in reason, as in old philosophy, but also in the heart, or, to put it succinctly, in the total and real essence of man [*im ganzen, wirklichen Wesen des Menschen*].'[46]

Despite his significant role in the German workers' movement (see, for instance, his participation to the congress of Frankfurt in 1848–9), Feuerbach

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41. See Feuerbach 1989.
42. Feuerbach 1843, § 69.
43. Feuerbach 1986, § 90.
44. Feuerbach 1986, § 33; on the notion of love, see p. 36: 'Love, the absolute substantive, God, is thus the foundation, the beginning and the principle of both life and death, of non-being; as a distinction, it is the foundation of existence, insofar as it is united, and unification is the foundation of non-being'.
45. Feuerbach 1986, § 48: 'Philosophy has hitherto regarded the heart as the parapet of theology. But the heart, in man, is an absolutely anti-theological principle… Theology denies the truth of the heart, the truth of religious passion. Religious passion, the heart, says, for instance: God suffers, and theology says: God does not suffer; the heart denies the difference between God and man, whereas theology affirms it, § 33.
46. Feuerbach 1986, § 52–4: 'The new philosophy makes man [*Mensch*] the only universal and supreme object of philosophy, and includes nature as the basis of man – thus anthropology, integrated with physiology, becomes the universal science'.

did not really and properly turn the critique of theology into a critique of bourgeois society.[47] In this respect, politics is arguably not extraneous to Feuerbach's life, and yet it is rather marginal in his most important texts, where it can only be deduced 'by deduction'. Thus, the notion of species-being points to *Gemeinschaft* as a constitutive relation of 'I-Thou': the latter, however, is never 'brought down' to concrete social and political circumstances; it is only appreciated as an anthropological or even religious idea.

Marx maintains the centrality of *Gattungswesen*, but, unlike Feuerbach, he conceives of it within the structures of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, rather than in the abstract community of 'I-Thou', and thus his political understanding deprives it of its characteristic traits. Despite this dislocation, *The Holy Family* fails to radically question Feuerbach's framework and offer a new perspective: in fact, Marx defines his own concept in terms of 'real humanism', in polemics with the 'spiritualism' or 'speculative idealism', which substitutes 'self-consciousness [*das Selbstbewusstsein*]' or the 'spirit [*den Geist*]' for the 'real individual man [*des wirklichen individuellen Menschen*]'.[48] Thus, Marx keeps putting these concepts under the pressure of critical examination, without essentially moving away from them. Marx's framework remains anchored on the species-being, although he becomes more critical of its metaphysical foundation and the search for its intrinsic meaning because man's only meaning is being himself: in this respect, the persistence of the category of *Gattungswesen* and the crumbling of its distinctive traits emerges with the greatest clarity.

1.3. The individual separation between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*

Given that the appreciation of *Gattungswesen* arises from a critique of the separation that characterises modern society, it is now useful to dwell on the peculiarity and coordinates of this *Trennung.* In his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, Marx places at the centre of the debate the separation between state and civil society, something Hegel had rightly understood, albeit 'theoretically': 'Hegel has presupposed the separation [*Trennung*] of civil society and the political state (which is a modern situation), and developed it as a necessary moment of the Idea, as an absolute truth of Reason'.[49]

47. See Cesa 1999, pp. 7–30: 'Feuerbach did not believe that historical development could ever radically change human "nature", that it would be possible to speak of a "new epoch"…The problems of man and the individual were, for him, the eternal problems of life and death, of happiness and pain'. For a similar standpoint, see Schmidt 1973, who excessively accentuates the potential for emancipation of Feuerbach's thought.

48. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 7.

49. Marx 1975c, p. 73. On Marx's interpretation of the modern separation between state and civil society, see Basso 2001b, pp. 60–4.

Marx's reading of the *Grundlinien* is already selective, as he sees these two terms as irremediably and absolutely opposed. His notion of the relationship between civil society and the state is rigidly dualistic: inasmuch as civil society is the realm of the particular, the state is the reign of the universal, where the latter is merely fictitious in character. Marx admits that the identification of the contradiction between state and civil society was grasped intuitively by Hegel,[50] but thinks that he failed to fully understand its implications.[51] Marx's critique aims to underline that, in Hegel, the concept of the state is absolutely prominent, it is the infinite, before which the two other spheres are mere finitudes:

> Thus Hegel presents us with an unresolved antinomy. On the one hand external necessity, on the other immanent end. . . . The family and civil society appear as the ground of nature from which the light of the state is born. . . . They are conceived as conceptual spheres of the state, indeed as the sphere of its finite phase, as its finite phase.[52]

Marx claims that the first two ethical moments of the *Grundlinien* lack autonomy of their own and are completely dependent on the entity of the state, which can dominate them: this is a statolatry, a transcendence of the state, the real subject of which family and civil society are mere predicates. In Marx's reading of the *Grundlinien*, civil society is conceived of entirely through the notion of domination of the particular: as an individualistic structure where an unrelenting and unmediated struggle between atomised individuals takes place. On the contrary, the state is read though the notion of universality, but the latter is purely fictitious because the state masks and mystifies the real game played between the interests of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft.*

Marx's critique contains a Feuerbachian element, as it moves from the conviction that Hegel had caused an inversion of the subject and predicate relation. Rather than positing family and civil society as subjects, Hegel invests the state with a *primum*-role in his investigation, and regards the other elements as mere predicates: 'The fact which serves as a starting-point is not seen as such but as mystical result.'[53]

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50. Marx 1975c, p. 141: 'The deeper truth is that Hegel experiences the separation [*Trennung*] of the state from civil society as a contradiction [*Widerspruch*]'.

51. See Friedrich 1960, p. 66; Henry 1971, pp. 81–143.

52. Marx 1975c, p. 7.

53. Marx 1975c, p. 60. Feuerbach accuses Hegel of inverting the relation between subject and predicate, see his *Preliminary Theses* (1843) where he proposes an actual inversion of Hegel's thought. On Feuerbach's conceptual framework and its influence on Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, see Schuffenhauer 1962; McLellan 1970; Guastini 1974, pp. 150–1; Luporini 1993; Breckman 1999, pp. 90–130; Kittsteiner 2004, pp. 41–2; who compares Marx's *Gattungswesen*, strongly influenced by Feuerbach,

Marx applied Feuerbach's schema to the analysis of the political concepts of the *Grundlinien:* the state corresponds, homologically, to the Idea and abstract thought, whilst family and civil society correspond to empirical reality. At the basis of his political critique of Hegel, we find an epistemological and metaphysical critique: Hegel starts from the ideal, from what is a mere predicate, and deduces from it the 'real' empirical, which Marx regards as the real subject. Hegel is not interested in the 'logic of the thing', in the 'thing of logic', so the Idea becomes the real 'demiurge of reality' capable of determining and conditioning every empirical aspect of it.[54] So, according to Marx, Hegel's system gives rise to a real hypostasis of the rational realm whence the empirical is derived. The contradictory nature of Hegel's reasoning is manifest in that he does not do without concrete reality; quite the opposite: thought needs to keep referring to it. Thus Hegel's logical mysticism becomes inconsequential and deeply contradictory: the highest form of materialism is turned into 'crass materialism' and a full justification of the *status quo*. Marx's critique is carried out in the name of empirical reality as a conceptual *primum*, whose product is the idea, although, at this stage, his critique is not presented as the foundation of materialism, as it is linked to the question of the subject-predicate inversion operated by Feuerbach. On these premisses, Marx misunderstands Hegel's treatment of civil society, where the universal and the particular coexist without full mediation, and the state, which overcomes the abstractions of civil society and the family whilst attempting to embody particular interests. Marx regards the state and civil society as opposing elements, and interprets only one of the two notions that Hegel adopted in the definition of their relation, which is that of 'external necessity', rather than 'immanent end'.

However, beyond the misunderstanding of Hegel's *Grundlinien*, it is important to highlight the outcomes of Marx's reflection on the modern separation between civil society and the state, a *Trennung* that Hegel both understood and mystified. This separation can only refer to the division between the individual belonging to the former and the one that belongs to the latter.

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with Heidegger's *Mit-Sein*; Finelli and Trincia 1983, pp. 241–695; Finelli 2004, pp. 164–230.

54. Marx 1975c, p. 32. Della Volpe's interpretation, in Della Volpe 1978, is questionable. He claims that, in the *Kritik*, we find 'the consciousness of the new method of dialectical materialism as a (Galilean) experimental method that would be applied to the (historical dialectical) investigation of *Capital*' (p. 153): this is supposedly 'a kind of frankly materialist critique' (p. 154). Colletti 1979 claims: 'When Marx criticised Hegel's logic, he not only does logic, he also does sociology' (p. 125), a sociology that becomes 'the struggle for world-change' (p. 127). Both these interpretations project onto the *Kritik* elements of Marx's thought that would only arise later.

> Civil society is separated [*getrennt*] from the state. It follows, therefore, that the citizen of the state [*Staatsbürger*] is separated from the citizen as a member of civil society [*Burger*]. He must therefore divide up his own essence. . . . The separation of civil and political society appears necessarily as the separation of the political citizen [*des politischen Bürgers*], the citizen of the state [*des Staatsbürger*], from civil society and from his own real empirical reality; for as an ideal political entity he is a quite different being, wholly distinct from and opposed to his actual reality.[55]

Thus, the *Trennung* between civil society and the state entails a separation between the individual in the former and the individual in the latter, between the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen.* Marx does not use the French terms: he opts for the German: *Bürger* and *Staatsbürger*, and treats them as synonymous of *bourgeois* and *citoyen*. In order for such a differentiation to be possible, the *Trennung* of state and civil society needed to be developed: the genesis of this notion can be found in the period between the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, in a context where the French Revolution played a crucial role.[56]

The decisive element of the separation is the *bourgeois*, the man of civil society, the private individual who tries to pursue his interests at the expense of other people's. According to Marx, Hegel had recognised the constitutive limits of the *bourgeois*, but, because of his idealism, he had also failed to follow his reasoning to its extreme conclusions, and ended up incorporating the egoism of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* into the state-unit, under the illusion of being able to overcome it. Marx's desire to place the *bourgeois* at the core of political discussion is clear: he recognises that this is a distinctive figure of modern society. He defines the *bourgeois* as 'the real person [*die wirkliche Person*]', 'material', 'individual' and 'social':[57] his 'real' character coincides with his materiality, as he bears interests that are precise and inseparable from his context because of his sociality. According to Marx, the Hegelian state, far from being the 'reality of the ethical idea', is the protection of private property and thus marked by the separateness of the individual.[58]

The other figure of the separation is the *citoyen*, the member of the state who, unlike the *bourgeois,* enjoys a character of universality: he is defined as a

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55. Marx 1975c, p. 144. On the relationship between Marx's and Hegel's notions, see Löwith 1950; Hyppolite 1955; Sanderson 1969, p. 57.

56. See Riedel's comprehensive analysis of the term *Bürger* in Riedel 1994a, pp. 672–725, as well as Koselleck 1979. On the sharp distinction between the modern, where the revolution is thinkable, and the medieval scenario, see Fiaschi 1984.

57. Marx 1975c, p. 83.

58. Marx 1975c, p. 171.

'political person', 'formal', 'universal', 'man', in other words, as an individual in his abstraction from civil society and interests who belongs to a sphere where universality is merely illusory.[59] In the separation of civil society from the state, the guiding concept is that of civil society, as it constitutes the foundation of the state and is founded on the particular interests of the *bourgeois*, such as, primarily, private property.[60] The political state is not independent of these demands, but engineers the illusion of meeting everyone's needs, thus guaranteeing a universality that is not only formal, but also real. The idea that in the state, 'the conscious, true reality of the universal interest is merely formal, in other words, only what is formal constitutes the real, universal interest' cannot be denied.[61] Marx highlights the mystifying and deceptive character of such a notion, and thus generates a crisis in all pacified 'narratives' of the modern state,[62] as its strong dependence on the particular interests of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* become exposed. But the limitation of Marx's reflection in the *Kritik*, lies in the homology established between the relation between civil society and the state and that of the earth and the sky; this is in danger of resulting in an understanding that grants effectiveness to civil society and ascribes a merely illusory character to the state. As his later works would demonstrate, the modern state is anything but unreal, and thus cannot be reduced to a celestial being. In any case, the ambivalence in this text can be productive, and ought to be preserved, rather than dissolved: the political realm is somewhat 'degraded' to pure fiction and abstraction (where the latter is meant as a limited concept, rather than something of social relevance), but, at the same time, it is also led back to its root, that is, what is not immediately political.

The issue of the individual separation of *citoyen* and *bourgeois* results from the 'mundane scission [*die weltliche Spaltung*] between political state and civil society'[63] and Marx deals with it in more depth and furnishes it with a concrete historical determination in his text *On the Jewish Question*, a response to the homonymous text by Bruno Bauer. Civil society, as demonstrated in the analysis of the *Kritik*, is the sphere of egoism, of the Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*, where nobody can be secure and everyone is exposed

59. Marx 1975c, p. 220. See the quote on the outline of the figure of the *bourgeois*, which opposes, as in a mirror, that of the *citoyen.*

60. See Marx 1975c, p. 60: 'The political state cannot exist without the natural basis of the family and the artificial basis of civil society. These are its *sine qua non*; and yet the condition is posited as the conditioned, the determinator as the determined, the producer as the product; the real idea only condescends to become the "finite phase" of the family and civil society in order that by their transcendence it may bring about its own infinity and enjoy it'.

61. Marx 1975c, p. 127.

62. Marx 1975c, p. 128.

63. Marx 1975c, p. 137.

to the domination of 'private whim and caprice'.[64] Individual development and the creation of a network of social relations are interpreted as two mutually contradictory processes, the first of which, far from entailing a social connection, results in the idea of an inevitably conflicting superimposition of atomised individuals with no connection between them and tenaciously attached to their own immediate interests. This is the crucial goal of the man of civil society, the *bourgeois*, for whom 'life in the state is nothing more than an appearance [*Schein*], or a momentary exception to the essential nature of things and to the rule'.[65] Contrasted with the real and material character of civil society, a real *Wesen*, the state is *Schein*, mere appearance, or transitory exception. Therefore:

> Where the political state has attained its full degree of development man leads a double life, not only in his mind, in his consciousness, but in reality. He lives in the political community [*im politischen Gemeinwesen*], where he regards himself as a communal being [*Gemeinwesen*], and in civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*], where he is active as a private individual, regards other men as means, debases himself to a means and becomes a plaything of alien powers.[66]

Marx's position is fully inserted in the context of the polemic against Bauer concerning the emancipation of the Jews: according to Marx, Bauer uncritically presumes the political state without analysing its foundations and understanding the 'sophistry' of the *citoyen*, the *bourgeois*'s 'political lion's skin'.[67]

Marx questions the abstraction of the state, which is 'by its nature the species-life of man in opposition to his material life.'[68] Therefore, *bourgeois* and *citoyen* are, respectively, actual and true man:

> Man as he is a member of civil society is taken to be the real man, man as distinct from the citizen, since he is man in his sensuous, individual and immediate existence, whereas political man is simply abstract, artificial man, man as an allegorical, moral person. Actual man [*der wirkliche Mensch*] is acknowledged only in the form of egoistic individual and true man [*der wahre Mensch*] only in the form of the abstract citizen.[69]

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64. Marx 1975c, p. 221.
65. Marx 1975c, p. 220.
66. Ibid. And immediately after: 'The relationship of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relationship of heaven to earth'. See Sanderson 1969, p. 49.
67. Marx 1975c, p. 221. For a comprehensive reading of Bruno Bauer's political philosophy see Tomba 2002; on the relationship of Marx and Bauer, see, especially Rosen 1977, Waser 1994, Tomba 2004, and Leopold 2007, pp. 100–82.
68. Marx 1975c, p. 220.
69. Marx 1975c, p. 234.

On the one hand, the man of civil society, the actual man, bearer of particular and egoistic interests, is not true, because he is distant from the *Gattungswesen*; on the other hand, the man of state is true thanks to his proximity to generic essence or species-being, but he is abstract and artificial, a merely allegorical person.[70] Needless to say, abstraction is still commonly used with a negative connotation and equated to the realm of religion. Marx's early views in this respect are simplistic and based on the misrecognition of the importance of abstraction in modern bourgeois society, of its real character, as more than a mere 'beyond' of politics.[71] At the same time, the revolutionary process unmasks the illusions of the modern world. First and foremost, the mystification intrinsic to the equivalence of free state and free country is revealed: 'The limitations of political emancipation are immediately apparent from the fact that the state can liberate itself from restriction without man himself being truly free of it, that a state can be a free state without man himself being a free man.'[72] Only a justification of the *status quo* would defend the free state, marked by political emancipation, as the guarantor of the freedom of each man; man can, on the contrary, be a slave even in a free state.

The individual separation between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* is a distinctive feature of modernity, and Marx is interested in understanding the nub of the question of *Trennung* in *On the Jewish Question*: the event of the French Revolution was a turning-point in this process. In the *Kritik*, Marx had already asserted that the French Revolution:

> was the process completed in which the estates were transformed into social classes, i.e. the class distinctions in civil society became merely social differences in private life of no significance in political life. This accomplished the separation [*die Trennung*] of political life and civil society'.[73]

In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx deepens his analysis of the French Revolution and examines some of the fundamental principles of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen', as well as several articles from the 1791 and 1793 constitutions. In a 'guided' reading of the Declaration, Marx sharply differentiates between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen. The rights of man concern the *bourgeois*, that is, man as member of civil society, the egoistic man who is 'separated from other men and from the community

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70. See Gilbert 1981, p. 33; Bongiovanni 1989, p. 97.
71. See Finelli 1987, p. 47: 'The difficulties in Marx arise from the inadequacy of his reflection on the issue of abstraction. The meaning of the latter is fundamentally that of abstraction as arbitrariness, logical and illusory generalisation, rather than an abstraction capable of real and effective consistency.'
72. Marx 1975c, p. 218.
73. Marx 1975c, p. 146.

[*vom Menschen und vom Gemeinwesen getrennten*]'.[74] These rights do no more than note and confirm the existing *Trennung* of bourgeois civil society, where each man is separated from the other and it is impossible to bring a *Gemeinwesen* to life. The freedom of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is indifferent to the needs of *Gemeinwesen*; on the contrary, it hinges on the pursuit of one's own interests, the real, dissimulated, goal of the *bourgeois.* In the Declaration, only one limit is imposed on bourgeois freedom: the respect of every other *bourgeois*'s freedom; anything is permitted so long as it does not harm others. This conception of freedom reflects an atomistic view of civil society:

> The liberty we are here dealing with is that of man as an isolated monad who is withdrawn into himself. . . . But the right of man to freedom is not based on the association of man with man but rather on the separation [*Absonderung*] of man from man. It is the right of this separation, the right of the restricted individual, restricted to himself.[75]

The individual of civil society, an atom unconnected to other atoms, is at the centre: the rights of man, an outcome of revolutionary events, far from unhinging – or, at least, attenuating – this state of affairs, actually fully and totally endorse it. The French Revolution leads the process of destruction of feudal society to its extreme consequence:

> Political emancipation is at the same time the dissolution of the old society on which there rested the power of the sovereign, the political system as estranged from the people [*das dem Volk entfremdete Staatswesen*]. The political revolution is the revolution of civil society. What was the character of the old society? It can be characterised in one word: feudalism. The old civil society had a directly political character.[76]

The events after 1789 significantly shook up the *status quo*, raising the affairs of the state to the level of those of the people and eliminating 'all classes, corporations, arts and privileges'. This process led to the primacy of private individuals in civil society, and, released from the latter, the political realm found refuge in the sphere of the state:

> The perfection of the idealism of the state was at the same time the perfection of the materialism of civil society. The shaking-off of the political yoke was at the same time the shaking-off the bonds which had held in check the egoistic spirit of civil society.[77]

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74. Marx 1975c, p. 230. See Kouvelakis 2005, pp. 707–21.
75. Marx 1975c, p. 229.
76. Marx 1975c, p. 232.
77. Marx 1975c, p. 233.

During the French Revolution, two dynamics simultaneously unfold: on the one hand, civil society is divided up into independent individuals, bearers of particular interests; on the other hand, the political sphere becomes autonomous from civil society, so the 'materialism of civil society' coexists with the 'idealism of the state'. This individual *Spaltung* between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* is ambivalent because it does not undergo a 'total' critique; the point in question is the move away from the unity of political and social life that, however contradictorily, had prevented the full development of the individual and his freedom to move freely.

From this standpoint, Marx's reading does not idealise the ancient order or the middle-ages and their (real or presumed) unity: there is no longing for a harmonious 'whole' or a lost heaven. For instance, he claims that, in ancient Greece, there was no realm between the social and the political, between civil society and the state, and the *polis* was both political and social, superior to individual men: 'Either the *res publica* was the real private concern of the citizen, their real content, while the private person as such was a slave – this was the case among the Greeks, where the political state as such was the only true content of their lives and their aspirations.'[78] Marx bases his remarks on this issue on an analysis of modern society and its distinctive feature, that is, separation: from there, categories such as 'individual', 'society', and 'state', which all belong to the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, are projected onto the past. This separation is only conceivable if the individual [*das Individuum*] exists in the real sense of the term: especially since the French Revolution, the term 'individual' indicates that an epochal change has, in fact, occurred. Marx recognises the mere fact that the Declaration regards each man as the bearer of rights to be an important achievement. He notes a deep ambivalence in the French Revolution: its character is expansive and propulsive, but it simultaneously sanctions a substantial dependence of the *citoyen*, a member of the state, on the *homme*, an egoistic member of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*:

> The political revolution dissolves civil society into its component parts without revolutionising these parts and subjecting them to criticism. It regards civil society, the world of needs, of labour, of private interests and of civil law, as the foundation of its existence, as a presupposition which needs no further grounding, and therefore as its natural basis.[79]

In this sense, the Declaration is an extremely important document, because it fully reflects the emergence and heightening of both a separation in the

78. Marx 1975c, p. 91.
79. Marx 1975c, p. 234.

individual due to the events of the Revolution, and the role of the sphere of civil society, where freedom is merely a function that enables the coexistence of different unhindered whims. But the very arbitrariness that reflects the monadic character of this condition is not questioned at all. Thus, the 'practical application of the rights of man to freedom is the right of man to private property.'[80]

The protection of private property is the necessary consequence of the notion of *Freiheit* outlined earlier. Freedom, as will, finds its natural outlet in the institution of private property, whose mystifying character Marx had already attacked in the *Kritik*: private property is the 'right to enjoy and dispose of one's resources as one wills, without regard for other men and independently of society: the right of self-interest.'[81] Just as the rights of man are critically analysed and inserted in the dynamics of the egoism of civil society, the rights of the citizen are inserted in the political community:

> These rights of man are partly political rights, rights which are only exercised in community [*Gemeinschaft*] with others. What constitutes their content is participation in the community [*Gemeinwesen*], in the political community [*politisches Gemeinwesen*] or state [*Staatswesen*]. They come under the category of political freedom, or civil rights [*Staatsburgerrechte*].[82]

Marx deals with civil rights so briefly because, for him, the relationship between civil society and the state is like that of the earth and the heavens: the state has an illusory character. The use of the term *Gemeinschaft* is important, here: it denotes a relationship of commonality, and *Gemeinwesen*, a form of community that can be further qualified conceptually [*das politische Gemeinwesen*].

Thus arises the problem with the relationship of *homme* and *citoyen*: upon closer examination, the articles of the Declaration reveal that the two terms are interpreted as one, as in a sort of hendiadys: the 'and' interposed between 'rights of man' and 'rights of the citizen' seems to point to an identification of the terms, rather than their separation.[83] This makes it difficult to interpret

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80. Marx 1975c, p. 229.
81. Ibid. See Michel 1983; Arnold 1980, p. 56.
82. Marx 1975c, p. 227.
83. Balibar 1992, who believes the foundation of the French Revolution to be the *citoyen* rather than the *bourgeois*, the private individual, bearer of interests that are outside of sociality: the revolutionary solution consisted in identifying these two concepts in order to reclaim a universal right to politics. See also Miaille 2001, who problematises the notion of a clear separation between these elements. See Hincker 1990; Hunt 1984, p. 73; Petrucciani 1995, p. 38; Furet 1986, which analyses Marx's position towards the French Revolution and interprets it as a revolution of the political that becomes autonomous from civil society; Bongiovanni 1989, pp. 54–6, which

the *citoyen* as an individual who belongs to a realm of mere illusion. In this sense, Marx's analysis of the French Revolution seems to be off the mark, because, having recognised the unbridgeable gap it created between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*, he then downplays the function of the latter: in fact, the question is more complex than it might look at first, because Marx considers the contradictions of the articles under analysis and the way in which they are then resolved in practice. The Declaration merely postulates an identification of the terms as a sort of *petitio principii*, without clearly explaining how it can be achieved: this conceptual indeterminacy makes its application both difficult and questionable. The assumption that the relation between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* needs to be understood as the domination of the former over the latter reveals the bourgeois matrix of the French Revolution: despite the abolition of privileges, the equality of the *citoyen* is still conceived of as a merely juridical question, rather than a radically social one. Babeuf and his followers brought to light the fact that juridical equality could coexist with inequality of possession: Marx was influenced by this kind of criticism.[84]

In the *Judenfrage*, this problem is not yet clearly understood as being related to 'class', although there are elements that point in that direction. On this issue, the translation of the expression *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* opens up a controversy, due to its dual meaning: it can mean, in generic terms, 'civil society', and, in particular, terms, 'bourgeois society'.[85] Marx does not provide an analysis of capitalism in the *Judenfrage*, but the expression *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is already a clear reference to bourgeois society and critically engages with the overlooking of the 'social' realm in the French Revolution. Marx aims to remove the 'veils' that mystify the picture of the present in the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, presented as the guarantor of universal rights whilst being, in fact, the protector of particular interests.[86] The affirmation of the 'illusory' character

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shares Furet's idea because it contributes to questioning the traditional interpretation of the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution; Feher 1990, pp. 45–66, Mazauric 2009, pp. 9–31. For an analysis of the Declaration, see also: Gauchet pp. 73–4; Picavet 1996, pp. 249–71. For an examination of the reception of the French Revolution, see Hobsbawm 1990.

84. See Negri 1999, pp. 255–73. Negri observes that the Declarations of the French Revolution resulted from the action of a constituent subject: despite clearly bourgeois elements, they recognised the social realm as the realm of their operations. On the shift from the idea of political to that of social revolution, see Koselleck 1979, p. 65.

85. Michel 1983, p. 37 highlights the presence of a substantial identification of civil and bourgeois society. Unlike Michel, Bongiovanni 1989, pp. 59–60 claims that the expression *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* must be understood as civil society, rather than bourgeois society. See Buchanan 1981, pp. 269–306.

86. See Balibar 1996.

of the rights of man, and, in particular, the right to freedom, does not prevent Marx from recognising their crucial function in the abolishment of feudal privilege: the critique of the modern *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is not nostalgia for previous social formations. From this standpoint, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the 'motifs' of the French Revolution, cannot be seen as merely unreal, even though in earlier writings Marx often denounced their illusory character *sic et simpliciter*. The circumstances were the fruit of a practice of emancipation from a series of ties and ecclesiastic and aristocratic-hierarchical structures; this practice had opened up new perspectives and was full of potential. At the same time, it was far from neutral: it was necessary to demystify their universality and understand it as a function of the interests of the *bourgeois*, rather than simplistically as a non-existence.[87] Marx's attitude towards the French Revolution is structurally two-fold: on the one hand, he recognises its propulsive role, the overcoming of medieval privileges and the creation of a juridical establishment founded on freedom, equality, property and security.[88] On the other hand, he criticises its 'bourgeois' character, its connection, however dissimulated and hidden, to the interests of the *bourgeois*, the interests of man as a member of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft,* in relation to whom the *citoyen* only occupies a secondary and derivative role.

In any case, moving on in our analysis of *On the Jewish Question*, we should note that the role of the *citoyen* is amply problematised. Marx points to the existing contradiction between the content of the Declaration (in particular in reference to Article 11, cited above), that sanctioned the dependency of the *citoyen* on the *bourgeois*, and the 'revolutionary praxis' that seemed to have inverted the relationship in favour of the member of the state, to the detriment of the egoistical member of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.[89]

> The right to freedom ceases to be a right as soon as it comes into conflict with political life, whereas in theory political life is simply the guarantee of the rights of man, the rights of individual man, and should be abandoned as soon as it contradicts its goal, these rights of man.…Even if we were to assume that the relationship is properly expressed in revolutionary practice,

87. For a different interpretation from the one outlined here, see Bobbio 1978, pp. 593–9, who engages in a polemic against Marx on the question of the rights of man, accusing Marx of denying them altogether; Buchanan 1981 p. 79.

88. On this question, see also later Marx 1986b: 'the gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the 18th century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice'. See also Marx and Engels 1976a.

89. On the contradiction between the constitutional decrees and revolutionary practice, see Bourgeois 1990, esp. pp. 99–129.

> the problem still remains to be solved as to why the relationship is set upon its head in the minds of the political emancipators so that the end appears as the means and the means as the end.[90]

The development of 'revolutionary practice' into the Reign of Terror seems to question the idea of the domination of the *bourgeois* over the *citoyen* held in theory.[91] In Marx's view, the dynamics of the Revolution – in its 'practice', rather than the principles of the Declaration – led to the emergence of a truly despotic domination of the 'heavens' of politics, the realm of the state, over the 'earth' of civil society, the social sphere. On this issue, we refer, again, to the 'actual truth of the matter' and the question it asks: the starting-point must be sought in the realm of practice, and not in a set of abstract principles. In Marx's analysis, this coexists with the identification of a whole historical outlook that interprets the Revolution as 'progress [*Fortschritt*]' on previous epochs, although without a linear understanding of it, and with a recognition of the strong contradictions that arose during the Reign of Terror, when its exponents invested in the impossible task of subjecting the *bourgeois* to the *citoyen*.[92] Of significance is the fact that, in his early writings, Marx regards the French Revolution and Terror as examples of 'political understanding',[93] often returning to Hegel's thoughts on this issue, where, especially in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[94] he refers to absolute freedom and to what prevents internal difference thus resulting in total unmediated negation.[95]

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90. Marx 1975d, p. 231.

91. According to Avineri 1970, Marx judges the Jacobin attempt to subject the private interests of civil society to the public interests of the state as a failure, because 'the dichotomy of state and civil society cannot be overcome though a politicisation of civil society.... The restoration of the Directorate was already implicitly there in the one-sidedness of Jacobin Terror and its necessary defeat', pp. 233–53. Avineri notes an important aspect, but seems to assimilate Marx's reading of Terror to Hegel's, which is questionable. Löwy 1989 rightly ascribes the apparent contradiction between 'theory' and 'revolutionary practice' to an obvious difficulty of interpretation of the Terror: 'If Marx's analysis of the bourgeois character of the revolution is extraordinarily clear and consistent, the same cannot be said of his attempts to interpret Jacobinism and the Terror of 1793. Confronted with the mystery of Jacobinism, Marx hesitates.... The Terror is a moment when the political becomes autonomous and comes to direct conflict with bourgeois society'. See also Nürnberger 1957, pp. 61–76.

92. See Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 88, where they present a polemic against the category of progress used by absolute critique, and judged as 'completely inconsistent and abstract'.

93. See, for instance, Marx 1975f: 'The classical period of political understanding is the French Revolution. Far from identifying the principle of the state as the source of social ills, the heroes of the French Revolution held social ills to be the source of political problems... The principle of politics is the will,' p. 413.

94. Hegel 1979.

95. Hegel 1979; see also Hegel 1991.

In 1845's *The Holy Family*, this question is further developed: the starting-point is a critique of Bruno Bauer and the young Hegelians. To Bauer, who lamented the fact that the ideas of the Revolution failed to innovate on those of earlier historical periods, Marx responds that ideas can only overthrow previous ideas, not reality, because 'ideas cannot carry out anything at all. In order to carry out ideas, men are needed who can exert practical force'.[96] In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels criticise Terror on entirely different grounds than Hegel does: rather than the problem of the unmediated abstraction of the actions of the Jacobins, they question their ability to criticise the key elements of bourgeois society. In *The Holy Family*, they accuse the Jacobins of a lack of rigorous historical and social analysis, of a purely subjectivist and voluntarist approach.[97] The short-sightedness of their outlook is evident in the confusion they make between the distinctive features of modern society, and those of the ancient world:

> Robespierre, Saint-Just and their party fell because they confused the ancient, realistic-democratic commonweal based on real slavery with the modern spiritualistic-democratic representative state, which is based on emancipated slaver, bourgeois society. What a terrible illusion it is to have to recognise and sanction in the rights of man modern bourgeois society, the society of industry, of universal competition, of private interest freely pursuing its aims, of anarchy, of self-estranged and spiritual individuality, and at the same time to want afterwards to annul the manifestations of the life of this society in particular individuals and simultaneously to want to model the political head of that society in the manner of antiquity![98]

In fact, as Marx later remarks in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the exponents of Terror, whilst evoking the *polis* and *res publica* in their speeches, had no intention of rebuilding them:

> Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, St. Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time – that of unchaining and establishing modern bourgeois society – in Roman costumes with Roman phrases.[99]

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96. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 230.
97. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 95. Marx and Engels observe that the abstract character typical of political emancipation is realised through the violent exclusion of the opponents of the state: an example of such emancipation is, precisely, the Reign of Terror, that 'wished to do away with hoarding by guillotining the hoarders'.
98. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 122.
99. Marx 1979, p. 104.

In its highest phase,[100] political enlightenment protected the rights to private property and the interests of the *bourgeois*, who had been declared independent from it; political enlightenment had its 'profane' realisation in the government of the Directorate, the necessary result of the one-sidedness of Jacobin Terror and of its negation of the realm of the particular.[101] If the French Revolution, whose meaning Marx never ceased to question, had led to extreme consequences – the process of separation in the individual and the subordination of his political to his civil side – the Reign of Terror attempted to invert this process to the advantage of an all-powerful totalising political realm: despite the intentions of its exponents, it constituted, to use an expression from *The German Ideology*, an energetic bourgeois liberalism [*Bourgeoisliberalismus*].[102]

A new interpretation would emerge over the years, according to which the Reign of Terror was a turning-point for the organisation of the proletariat into a party. In the *Reden auf der Gedenkfeier in Brussels* of 1848, Marx and Engels go as far as to claim: 'The Jacobin of 1793 has become the communist of our day'.[103] Thus, the interpretation of the Terror as a form of domination of 'political understanding' is clearly put behind: in the historical and political texts, in particular, the radicalism of the Terror is pregnant with consequences for the working-class movement. It should be noted that only in later works do we find a positive evaluation of the Reign of Terror, especially after 1848. Despite his different interpretations of Terror, Marx provides an organic and consistent interpretation of the Revolution. But the Terror creates hesitation and difficulties for him: in many ways, it is an 'unthought' of his theory. In the texts under analysis, especially *The Holy Family*, the analysis of the Terror complicates the picture presented earlier of a relation between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* that cannot be reduced to the opposition of an earthly with a heavenly realm through a political application of Feuerbach's critique of theology.

It is interesting to note that in texts written before or simultaneously to these, Engels interprets not only the Terror, but also the French Revolution as the origin of European democracy, in its ambivalent character: on the one hand, it has an expansive function and opens up scenarii that had been unthinkable before then; on the other hand, it becomes its own opposite when it turns into a dictatorship. Babeuf and Napoleon were the two opposite poles[104] of this debate. For Engels, 'the French Revolution was a social movement [*eine soziale*

100. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 126.
101. Marx and Engels 1975a.
102. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 99.
103. Marx and Engels 1976b, p. 545.
104. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 250.

Bewegung] from beginning to end, and after it a purely political democracy became a complete absurdity [*Unding*]'.[105] We cannot overlook the Engelsian conception of the French Revolution as a *soziale Bewegung*, a fluid, dynamic process that sanctioned the shift from political to social democracy, a sort of condition for the possibility of communism. Marx, too, noted that 'the first manifestation of a truly active communist party is contained in the bourgeois revolution, at the moment when the constitutional monarchy was abolished. The most consistent republicans, in England the Levellers, in France Babeuf, Buonarroti, etc. were the first to proclaim these "social questions".'[106] In the French context, Babeuf and Buonarroti had radically insisted on the *soziale Frage*, on the need to question property-relations.[107] In their discussion of Jacobinism in the section of *The German Ideology* on Stirner, Marx and Engels describe Robespierre and Saint-Just as the real representatives and embodiment of the revolutionary power of the great mass. Stirner failed to understand that the reasons for the guillotine were the real, empirical and extremely profane interests of the great mass, not of the *agioteurs*.[108]

This change in his interpretation of the French Revolution cannot be simply attributed to some sort of intellectual development, but to his 'thinking in practice': the analysis of particular social and political contexts shows that earlier interpretations were inadequate or insufficient. For instance, in his 'Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian"', Marx refers to the outbreak of the Silesian revolt:

> We have shown that in the Silesian uprising, there was no separation of thoughts from social principles. That leaves 'the disastrous isolation of men from the community.' By community is meant here the *political community, the state*. . . . But do not *all* rebellions without exception have their roots in the disastrous isolation of man from the community? Does not every rebellion necessarily presuppose isolation? Would the revolution of 1789 have taken place if French citizens had not felt disastrously isolated from the community? The abolition of this isolation was its very purpose.[109]

Here, the French Revolution is not part of a general theory; the crux of the matter under question is the subjective realm, or the practice of subjectivation, characterised by an expansive temporality and directed at 'abolishing the present state of affairs': like the French Revolution, the Silesian revolt

105. Engels 1975a, p. 5.
106. Marx 1976b, p. 312.
107. Marx 1976b. On the role of Babeuf in Marx's reading of the French Revolution, see Gilbert 1981, pp. 27–9.
108. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 297.
109. Marx 1979, p. 295.

originates in the 'disastrous isolation of man from the community'. In this respect, if the reference to the two-fold nature of the French Revolution (as both progress in relation to previous epochs, and bourgeois rather than proletarian revolution) remains nearly unchanged over the years, the outbreak of practice represented here, for example, by the Silesian revolt, and later by the European revolution of 1848, creates difficulties for this emerging overall reading of history. It is not so much a case of understanding the general role of the revolution in history, but of allowing the destructuring character of the mobilising masses to express itself as a decisive feature for future political struggles, the constitution of a communist party. Marx's relationship to the Terror is extremely complicated: the framework of the debate is purely theoretical, and we find neither exaltation nor total critique. Instead, it is necessary to shift the plane of inquiry and examine how the question of the French Revolution is constantly 're-thought in practice' on the grounds of a flow of unpredictable events; in this sense, the events of France are pregnant with inspiration for a new and expansive political organisation, and *in primis,* for the party-form.

To return to the issue of the relation of the man of civil society and the man of the state, as soon as the modern epoch is examined through its concrete dynamics – instead of an abstract framework – the French Declaration reveals not a contrast, but an interpenetration of the social and the political realm, between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*. After *On the Jewish Question,* Marx's critique of the state's dependence on the interests of the bourgeoisie certainly does make more room for a convincing explanation of the unfolding of events than does a reading of the state as a mere 'beyond' of politics. However, despite all of this, the identification of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is a central focus of Marx's perspective in the early writings: his analysis of the French Revolution only confirms it. Marx needs to conceptualise civil society more thoroughly and interprets it in what are anything but pacified terms, as the sphere reminiscent of Hobbes's *bellum onmium contra omnes,* an unending struggle between conflicting individuals, bearers of incompatible interests.

1.4. A society without relations

To deal with the issue of civil society, we need to return to the *Kritik*, where Marx confines his analysis and critique to the sections of Hegel's *Grundlinien* on the state, neglecting those regarding civil society: Marx's interpretation of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is one-sided; it is the realm of the absolute predominance of particularity and the absence of universality.[110] Private egoism

110. See Marx 1975g, p. 42 'private egoism is revealed to be the secret of the patriotism of the members of civil society'.

is the foundation of modern civil society: 'The civil society of the present is the principle of individualism carried to its logical conclusion. Individual existence is the ultimate goal: activity, work, content etc. are only means.'[111] For Marx, the realm of universality is completely excluded from bourgeois civil society: the conflict between various particulars is in constant danger of erupting and degenerating. The *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is composed of atomised individuals opposed to one another: it is impossible to combine through conflict, because each individual is pursuing his own interests at the expense of everyone else's. 'Within society itself, however, distinctions are variable and fluid and their principle is that of arbitrariness [*Willkür*].'[112] The domination of the private realm totally prevents the formation of a political organisation: 'The principle underlying civil society is neither need, a natural moment, nor politics. It is a fluid division of masses whose various formations are arbitrary and without organisation.'[113] Thus, Marx isolates one of the operating principles of Hegelian civil society, particularity, and makes it absolute, thus characterising the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as markedly asocial.

The system of Hegel's *Grundlinien* places civil society at the second stage of the development of the ethical idea, and regards it as universal and true, however insufficiently so.[114] Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes* certainly does describe an important aspect of modern civil society, the reference to particularity and the pursuit of one's own interests at all costs. However, in Hegel's *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, the search – albeit abstract – for universality coexists with this element. In the *Grundlinien*, the shift to the state does not require a 'leap' from civil society, but a development of the elements already present in it, albeit abstractly. Hegel describes the relationship between family and civil society, on one side, and the state, on the other, through notions such as 'external necessity' of 'immanent end'.[115] Within Hegel's logic in the *Grundlinien*, these two sides are not in mutual contradiction: the state is not reducible to the two previous moments, because these cannot establish a concrete link of universality with particularity; the state preserves the element of the particular that they presented, though it overcomes its abstraction. For Hegel, civil society contains reality only in the state.[116]

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111. Marx 1975g, p. 147.
112. Marx 1975g, p. 146.
113. Ibid.
114. Hegel 1967, p. 123. See Duso 1977, pp. 9–21.
115. Hegel 1967, § 261, p. 161.
116. See Riedel 1980, p. 781. Riedel claims that the state incorporates civil society and thus makes it impossible for concrete freedom to be actualised through the state, because the latter is the 'organisation of particular circles'.

Marx does not interpret civil society as the realm of coexistence, however incomplete, of the principles of particularity and universality, but as the absolute and one-sided domination of particularity that abolishes all references to the universal: in this sense, because of their separation, Marx sees the functions of the state in relation to civil society in terms of 'external necessity', but not as its 'immanent end', to use Hegel's expression. Civil society is characterised by a rampant individualism, the complete negation of any sociability. In fact, although the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* is a commentary of the *Grundlinien*, the conceptual device at work there is neither Hegelian nor materialist. To backdate Marx's materialism to the *Kritik* would be a mistake and neglect the specificity of this work, for the sake of promoting a 'continuist' view of Marx's development. It would ignore, or underestimate, the existence of the several ruptures and changes that it underwent. Rather than reasoning on the basis of an unproblematic unitary framework, we need to identify the 'singular' logic, a constitutive reference to the 'particular difference' present in his thought. The distinctive feature of the *Kritik,* with all its structural limits, is not materialism; this conceptual device is significantly extraneous to the work being investigated, and, in the *Kritik*, we are not confronted with the idea of the priority of social and political reality over theoretical constructs, but with a 'theoreticist' framework within which Hegel's thought, while subjected to discussion, is hypostatised. In any case, to return to the first element underlined in our discussion, it is worth noting that the epistemological framework of the critique of Hegel's articulation of the relationship between civil society and the state is Feuerbachian: Hegel is accused of inverting subject and predicate, regarding as subject (the state) what is a mere predicate, and as predicate what is the real subject, that is, civil society. The *Trennung* of civil society and the state, in Marx, is framed as a political inflection of Feuerbach's separation between empirical reality – for Hegel, the predicate, but in fact, the subject – and the Idea, which is the subject for Hegel, but the predicate in reality. Thus, the empirical realm is transposed onto civil society and the Idea onto the state, on the basis of a homology between critique of theology and critique of politics. But, in order to 'invert' Hegel, it would be necessary to place civil society and its concreteness – not the state and its illusory character – at the centre of the debate.

Marx's position is more than a mere appropriation of Feuerbach's framework, because it questions the centrality, however inverted, of the theological realm and thus politicises the notion of *Gattungswesen*.[117] But, because of the homology between Feuerbach's critique of theology and the critique of poli-

117. See Marx 1975c and 1975d.

tics, the description of the materiality of civil society is still a *petitio principii*: it is investigated in the abstract rather than in its specific determinations. Thus, there emerges a paradoxical image of an asocial civil society, a society without relations: in the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, there is no social connection, only singular individuals, each of whom acts for his own ends, regardless of sociality. The main difficulty with this image is that the structural nexus of social relations is incomprehensible: civil society is interpreted in the terms of atomism. The absence of a specific investigation of empirical reality, beyond its generic invocation, results in the identification of atomism as the distinctive feature of Marx's reflection on society.

At this point, we need to go a step further. Although the separation of civil society from the state and the abstract inflection of the former are extremely problematic and largely derivative of Feuerbach's structure, Marx's theory cannot be reduced to this plane *sic et simpliciter*.[118] A one-sided interpretation of the *Kritik* that only highlights the Feuerbachian subtext would be incorrect; it would ignore the break with Feuerbach and completely project Marx's discourse onto his: while the reflection on Feuerbach is crucial to the *Kritik,* the thought therein cannot be reduced to this alone. Marx develops Feuerbach's critique of theology politically and appreciates the dimension of the common from this perspective. The latter was only operative at the level of theology in Feuerbach; but in Marx, it is thought of in relation to the social realm. However, like civil society, the political is only a *petitio principii* and is not really unfolded in the text.

Despite the abstract nature of its approach, the *Kritik* presents an image of civil society as a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes* between individuals.[119] In *The Holy Family*, the *bourgeois* is 'no longer connected to other men, not even through the semblance [*Schein*] of a general connection.'[120] The realm of civil society is dominated by private and particular interests: a constant battle of all against all, where nothing is safe. Marx and Engels often describe it in these terms; for instance, in the following passage from *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* Engels writes: 'Competition is the completest expression of

118. See Kouvelakis 2003, pp. 360ff.

119. For an interpretation of the state of nature in Hobbes as a mirror of bourgeois society, see Macpherson 1962. Starting from Hobbes's interpretation of the *status naturae,* the author develops the category of 'possessive individualism' with reference to the English commercial society of the 1600s. See Pincus 1998, pp. 705–36. Pincus criticises Macpherson's analysis of the social situation of England in the seventeenth century. Sereni 2007, especially pp. 48–77, focuses on Macpherson's category of possessive individualism on the basis of a comparison between Locke and Marx. For more on the relationship of Hobbes and Marx, see Thomas 1987.

120. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 60.

the battle of all against all which rules in modern civil society.... Each seeks to crowd out all who are in his way, and to put himself in their place.'[121] This condition reaches a frenzy in the context of the great cities:

> The brutal indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit*], the unfeeling isolation [*Isolierung*] of each in his private interest becomes the most repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking, is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads [*die Auflösung der Menschheit*], of which each one has a separate essence, and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme.[122]

Here, the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is the stage of a dramatic conflict between individuals; each spasmodically turned towards his own interest at the cost of harming and even destroying other people. But bourgeois civil society also contains an element of anarchy, though the latter is propulsive when it comes to the medieval logic of privileges and hierarchies. To return to the *Kritik*, this reference to the state of aggravated conflict within bourgeois civil society and to the impossibility of a 'peaceful' composition of the struggle is extremely important.

Although the debate centres on civil society as an ensemble of atomised individuals, and no trace of the concept of class can be detected, a further aspect is worth mentioning, that is, the critique of the structure of the Estates. According to Marx, Hegel tries to neutralise the *Trennung* in every way: 'The mistake he makes is to rest content with the semblance [*Schein*] of a resolution (to the contradiction) which he declares to be the real thing.'[123] Thus Hegel goes no further than the 'semblance' of the problem, does not tackle its essence, and thus diminishes the potentially innovative charge of this modern separation through the neutralisation operated by the *Stände* [Estates]. In the logic of the *Grundlinien*, the Estates play a decisive role because they mediate between private and public; or, rather, they lead the former to flow into the

121. Engels 1975b, p. 111.

122. Engels 1975b, p. 69. See also the rest of the paragraph: 'Hence it comes, too, that the social war [*der soziale Krieg*] the war of each against all, is here openly declared.... Each exploits the other, and the end of it all is that the stronger treads the weaker under foot, and that the powerful few, the capitalists, seize everything for themselves, while to the weak many, the poor, scarcely a bare existence [*das nackte Leben*] remains'.

123. Marx 1975c, p. 141.

latter and overcome the modern *Trennung*: given the relationship between civil society and the state outlined above, where there is an unbridgeable gap between these two realms, the Estates are highly important to the concrete organisation of the state.[124] Marx strongly opposes this mediation, which contradicts the *Trennung* presupposed by Hegel and resolves it in an illusory identity.[125] Therefore, 'the identity Hegel has established between civil society and the state is the identity of two hostile armies in which every soldier has the "opportunity" to "desert" and join the "hostile" army'.[126] Thus, the *Stände*, far from really mediating between civil society and the state, the people and the government, represent 'the state in a society that is not a state',[127] 'the political meaning of the private estate [*Privatstand*], or the non-political estate.'[128]

Marx's critique of the *Stände* is not only directed at the logical stratagems that Hegel employs in order to neutralise and thus negate the very *Trennung* he had assumed; but also to their historical-institutional backwardness as a tool of mediation: 'The constitution based on the Estates [*die ständische Verfassung*], when not a tradition of the Middle Ages, is the attempt, partly within the political sphere itself, to plunge man back into the limitations of his private sphere.'[129] In fact, the function of the institution of the Estates was crucial in the social and political history of Germany from the fourteenth to the end of the eighteenth century (or the early nineteenth century): far from being a relic of the middle-ages, they actually played a vital role in the modern epoch.[130] But, aside from the historical reconstruction of the concept, it is important to note the presence of a structural critique of the *Stände* for their inability to 'capture' the ongoing process, due to their exacerbation of the conflict, or *bellum omnium contra omnes*, within the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft,* bourgeois civil society, internally riven by deep divisions. For Marx, as soon as political orders became social and the differences in civil society acquired a merely social rather than political significance, 'the medieval Estate survived only in the bureaucracy, in which civil and political position are immediately

124. On the role of the Estates, Duso provides a critical reading of the abstraction of modern natural law, and interpret the relation between unity and multiplicity as a dualistic one: 'The state, as a constitution, overcomes the simple opposition between individual and sovereign and does so because the whole is an organism, an articulated totality, whose fundamental elements are the *Stände*': Duso 1998, p. 358.

125. See Marx 1975c, p. 137: 'He thus hopes to heal the split between "civil and political life" and to establish their identity'.

126. Marx 1975c, p. 112.

127. Marx 1975c, p. 391.

128. Marx 1975c, p. 142.

129. Marx 1975c, p. 147. See Rametta 1999, pp. 363–72, especially p. 364.

130. See Walther 1990, pp. 155–284; Hintze 1962.

identical. In contrast to this, civil society exists as the class of private citizens.'[131] From this perspective, given the clear shift that had occurred, resorting to mediations that do not really mediate would be meaningless.

Indeed, Marx questions the notion that the *Stände* are *sic et simpliciter* a medieval inheritance. 'The Estates are the lie, legally sanctioned in constitutional states, that the state is the interest of the people or that the people is the interest of the state.'[132] The problem is that Marx establishes a true and proper equivalence between modern reality and Hegel's theoretical exposition in the *Grundlinien*; therefore, the critique of Hegel's notion of the *Stände* immediately becomes a critique of the political and social structure of the Estates:

> In the modern state, as in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the conscious, true reality of the universal interest is merely formal, in other words, only what is formal constitutes the real, universal interest. Hegel should not be blamed for describing the essence of the modern state as it is, but for identifying what is with the essence of the state. That the rational is real is contradicted [*Widerspruch*] by the irrational reality which at every point shows itself to be the opposite of what it asserts, and to assert the opposite of what it is.[133]

All the problems of the representative state come together in the Estates. The state tries to neutralise and hide them, without being an actual mediation of them: the modern world tries to dissimulate the deep contradictions that it produces and thus generates a mere semblance of overcoming them, behind the mask of an identity. It is obvious, here, that, for Marx, the *Grundlinien* offer an accurate picture of the modern condition: Hegel's text is criticised but also uncritically taken to be true.[134] Of interest here is the notion of a 'gap' between social and political reality and thought, something that would later characterise Marx's variant of materialism. Marx's attitude to Hegel is two-fold: on the one hand, he accuses him of trying to use a backward socio-political structure [the *Stände*] to overcome modern contradictions; on the other hand, he concedes that this fictitious resolution of conflicts is typical of the modern period, of which Hegel's thought provides the most accurate reflection. More generally, Marx criticises Hegel's abstraction whilst recognising its importance in the modern landscape. It would be mistaken to completely do without the question and accept one solution and reject the other, because they are both operative in the *Kritik*, at times in contradiction, at

131. Marx 1975c, p. 146.
132. Marx 1975c, p. 118.
133. Marx 1975c, p. 127.
134. On the homology of the modern state and the Hegelian system, see Lefebvre 1958, pp. 299–324, especially pp. 300–1.

other times according to their own inner logic. The clear limitation of Marx's position lies in the second aspect: his uncritical identification of the modern situation with Hegel's text. Nonetheless, the critique of the *Stände* is crucial and full of consequences: although the notion of class is not yet outlined, his deconstruction of the logic of the Estates allows for a premonition of it. These polemics assail all attempts to hide or 'cushion' the significance of the modern separation: its overcoming cannot consist of reconciliations between elements that cannot be mediated. The aim of the debate is to find a way – on the basis of a strong critical stance towards the present state of things – that is not posed as an illusory synthesis of civil society and the state, but rather is capable of destructuring both.

Marx concludes with an outline of democracy as a political form able to overcome this *Trennung* through active and passive universal suffrage, where the 'universal' and the 'particular' are immediately united. This political project aims at widening participation ever further: the importance of universal suffrage in those years cannot be understated. Electoral reform was an attempt, within the political state, to remove from power both civil society and the state itself. Marx finds in democracy a way to question the constitutive aspects of the modern political condition; the democratic perspective is not simply a glorification of civil society versus the state, but an attempt to overcome both: 'In modern times, the French have understood this to mean that the political state disappears [*untergehe*].'[135] The structure under question has an expansive movement at its base that aims to dismantle the distinction between social and political, and thus redevelop their relationship on new premisses. However, if, in the *Kritik*, Marx conceives of democracy as a political form that can generate a crisis in the *Trennung* of civil society and the state, a few months later, in *On the Jewish Question*, the scenario completely changes and democracy becomes the object of a harsh polemic. It is then completely 'internal' to the separation, insofar as it distances man from the *Gattungswesen* and does not overcome its logic, as it very much seemed to have done in

135. Marx 1975c, p. 41. On the analysis of democracy in the *Kritik*, see Basso 2001b, pp. 64–70. See also Rubel 1962, pp. 78–90; Lacharrière 1963, pp. 146–83; Zolo 1974, pp. 73–116; Draper 1974, pp. 102–24; Krancberg 1982, 23–35; Sanchez Vazquez 1983, pp. 19–30; Lange 1986; Abensour 1997; Abensour 1989, pp. 17–114; Gilbert 1991; Texier 1992, pp. 113–51; Texier 1998; Garo 2000, pp. 33–44; Daremas 2009; Kouvelakis 2000, pp. 89–101. Kouvelakis rightly notes the expansive notion of democracy as the 'result of a process of permanent re-foundation of social life' (pp. 96–7), based on a double movement of 'socialisation of politics and politicisation of the social' (p. 100); Kouvelakis 2003, pp. 376–89; Nimtz 2003. Nimtz focuses on the relation between the concept of democracy and the development of the United States: since Marx's early writings, the United States are seen as the nation where the process of democratisation and its contradictions is the most developed.

the *Kritik*.[136] Marx's development is characterised by not only one break, but many breaks and dislocations from previous positions: it is not merely a process of intellectual development, because the constant 'revision' of his theory adheres to the concrete political struggles as they keep shifting the plane of action. As previously mentioned, this 'thinking in practice' is not taken to its full extent in the *Kritik*, because the debate is sustained by an abstract framework, a sort of political inflection of Feuerbach's species-being. Here, democracy comes to 'name' the *conatus* towards the full realisation of 'individual humanity' beyond the structure of the estrangement of the modern world. In this context, the democratic perspective of the *Kritik* moves in an antithetical direction to the individualism of civil society, characterised by a juxtaposition of completely separate atoms and the negation of any possibility of relation between them.

If the view presented in the *Kritik* and *On the Jewish Question* risks positing a split between this civil society without relations and the realm of the state, over time the question of their relationship is subjected to further problematisations and opened to new developments. Already in *The Holy Family*, Marx had pointed out that 'the situation of the modern public system' is not only the foundation, but also the guarantor, of civil society.[137] Therefore, the role of the state cannot be reduced to a sort of passive and deformed reflection of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*: Marx begins to question the immediate application of Feuerbach's model to the political realm. The state cannot be regarded simply as a 'heaven' of politics, because it has an important role as a guarantor of the social sphere. Rather than outlining a causal relationship between these two realms, Marx concludes that they mutually influence one another. Therefore, the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen* cannot be derived from one another; but this does not mean that the difficulties and ambiguities of Marx's argument ought to be ignored. A focus on the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and the individuals that move within it does not lead to diminishing or neglecting the relevance of the role of the state; on the contrary, it means refusing the idea that the latter is independent from the former.

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136. See Marx 1975c, p. 225: 'Political democracy [*die politische Demokratie*] is Christian inasmuch as it regards man [*der Mensch*] – not just one man but all men – as a sovereign and supreme being; but man in his uncultivated, unsocial aspect, man in his contingent existence, man just as he is, man as he has been corrupted, lost to himself, sold, and exposed to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements by the entire organisation of our society, in a word, man who is not yet a true species being [*Gattungswesen*]. The sovereignty of man – but of man as an alien being distinct from actual man – is the fantasy, the dream, the postulate of Christianity, whereas in democracy it is a present and material reality, a secular maxim'.

137. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 117.

In any case, the centre of the debate is bourgeois civil society as a realm riven by extreme internal tensions, a *bellum omnium contra omnes* amongst atomised individuals. In the *Kritik*, the problem was interpreted on the basis of an atomistic conception; in *The Holy Family*, it is much more complicated:

> Speaking exactly and in the prosaic sense, the members of civil society are not *atoms*. The *specific property* of the atom is that it has no properties and is therefore not connected [*Beziehung*] with beings outside it by any relationship determined by its own *natural necessity*.... The egoistic individual in civil society may in his non-sensuous imagination and lifeless abstraction inflate himself into an *atom*.... But since the need of one individual has no self-evident meaning for another egoistic individual capable of satisfying that need, and therefore no direct connection with its satisfaction, each individual has to create this connection; it thus becomes the intermediary between the need of another and the objects of this need. Therefore, it is *natural necessity*, the *essential human properties* however estranged [*entfremdet*] they may seem to be, and *interest* that hold the members of civil society together; *civil*, not *political* life is their *real* tie. It is therefore not the *state* that holds the *atoms* of civil society together, but the fact that they are *atoms* only in *imagination* [*Vorstellung*] in the *heaven* of their fancy, but in *reality* [*Wirklichkeit*] beings tremendously different from atoms, in other words, not *divine egoists,* but *egoistic human beings*.[138]

Firstly, the individual of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* cannot be immediately described as an atom, because the atom has no relations and is completely self-sufficient, whereas in civil society the individual is in a very different position. Only in the abstract, according to an imagination that does not correspond to reality, can members of civil society appear as 'divine egoists', like the Epicureans of the *intermundia*, given that natural necessity, essential human properties and interests, push them to enter into relations with one another. There is no abstract representation of divine egoists, but a much more concrete description of egoistic men who enter social relations in order to satisfy their needs.

This analysis has the merit of bringing to light the fact that, in order to realise his interests, the individual is not independent and needs social connections: Marx begins to distance himself from the framework of the *Kritik*, where the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* was interpreted through the lens of absolute atomism, dominated by individuals completely separate from one another. The perspective of *The Holy Family* is still primarily anthropocentric, albeit

138. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 121.

with several notable openings;[139] one of the three factors that prevent the individual from maintaining a condition of 'divine indifference' is the 'human properties, however estranged [*entfremdet*]': the use of this expression indicates that Feuerbach's notion of *Gattungswesen,* the origin of the problem of *Entfremdung,* has not been overcome. Beyond anthropocentrism, these elements point to a connection between individuals: 'Only political superstition still imagines today that civil life must be held together by the state, whereas in reality, on the contrary, the state is held together by civil life.'[140] The state-realm is not a mere illusion, as some passages of the *Kritik* and the *Judenfrage* had suggested, analogous to the phenomenon of religion; it has its own reality. It is not autonomous from the dynamics of civil society, but is also irreducible to a mere juxtaposition of separated individualities.

In *The Holy Family*, Marx questions the concept of individualist atomism and claims that it is impossible for man to exist regardless of his social context: 'natural necessity', 'essential human properties', and 'interest' prevent the individual from being self-sufficient, the framework of the *Kritik* comes under question, but the focus is still on civil society:

> It was shown that the *recognition of the rights of man* by the *modern state* has no other meaning than the *recognition of slavery* by the *state of antiquity* had. In other words, just as the ancient state had slavery as its *natural basis*, the *modern state* has as its *natural basis* civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] and the *man* of civil society, i.e., the independent man linked with other men only by the ties of private interest and *unconscious* natural necessity, the *slave* of labour for gain and of his own as well as other men's *selfish* need.[141]

Here, Marx compares the ancient and modern epochs: whilst the former openly required the institution of slavery, so much as to consider it its natural basis, the latter, apparently founded on its definitive rejection, in fact also posits the slave at its own foundations, even though it is never recognised as such from a juridical standpoint. Modern slavery has the semblance of 'the greatest of freedoms' because it grants the individual an absolute autonomy from 'generic ties' and, thus, the opportunity to express his potential in full:[142] however, this autonomy is shown to be purely illusory and empty when the individual is, in fact, 'chained' to his labour. Beyond Marx's refusal to

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139. For a different view, see Pashukanis 1932. Pashukanis claims that, in *The Holy Family*, Marx understands the relation of state and civil society in materialist terms; Löwy 1970. In fact, whilst introducing many new and fertile elements, *The Holy Family* fails to 'defuse' the anthropocentrism of the early writings.
140. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 114.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.

conceive of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as a mere aggregation of atoms, there is another relevant innovation: *bellum omium contra omnes* does not concern individuals alone, but also opposing classes. This is not only an intellectual advancement; it is also inscribed in the concrete political struggles of those years, on the basis of the 'thinking in practice' we have frequently referred to in this chapter. In particular, the revolt of the Silesian textile-workers and the formation of French and English workers' organisations played an important role. The separation is not only found in each individual, between his social essence [*bourgeois*] and his political one [*citoyen*], but also in the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, between individuals and classes in conflict with one another.

In *The Holy Family*, we still find a primarily anthropocentric position, centred on the element of *Gattungswesen* and, therefore, on the critique of human *Entfremdung*; but we also see other elements that create difficulties or, at least, question this humanistic framework. In this respect, the function of the concept of the proletariat is very important. The theoretical framework of *The Holy Family* rests on the idea that the propertied class and the proletariat represent two irreconcilable elements:

> The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognizes estrangement as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence.…Within this antithesis the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it.[143]

The focus of this passage is the question of the alienation of the proletariat and its distance from its own essence. The resolution of such an *Entfremdung* is only possible if this class eliminates its opposite (private property): 'the proletariat disappears as well as the opposite which determines it, private property'.[144] Despite its anthropocentrism, Marx's reasoning displays a clear reference to the class-logic of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft.*

It must be noted that the notion of class is not first mentioned in *The Holy Family.* In Marx's refusal to attenuate the bitterness of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* in the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, there was already an attempt to conceive of modern society without recourse to the mediation of

143. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 36.
144. Ibid.

the Estates. The latter served to hide the conflict in the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*; according to Marx, in this situation no mediation is possible, and thus the *ständische Vermittlung* is inevitably destined to 'erupt'. In the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, we find a further theoretical turning-point. In this text, written immediately after *On the Jewish Question*, Marx theorised the notion of the proletariat as opposed to that of the bourgeoisie. Whilst the latter is a sum of all the ills of society and an enemy to be fought at all costs, the proletariat is not only the subjugated class, but also 'a class with radical chains' that, as the 'dissolution of all the Estates', carries in itself the positive possibility of German emancipation: the proletariat is turned to the destruction of bourgeois society and, therefore, also of its own existence as a particular class.[145] Thus, the concept of proletariat emerges as asymmetrical in relation to the bourgeoisie: whilst the latter is the bearer of particular interest, the proletariat, a determined class, tends towards a goal that, far from being particular, has a universal value and consists in the dissolution of class-society as such, and thus of itself as class.[146] Therefore, a universality – the proletarian one – emerges and originates from a 'partiality', one that tends to the dissolution of its own position as such. In the *Manuscripts*, this class-based dynamic is further developed through a reference to elements of political economy: the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat becomes the contradiction between capital and labour.[147] *The Holy Family* is influenced by this theoretical development: the clash within the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* no longer involves individuals alone, but classes, too.[148] Therefore, the picture of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* portrayed in *The Holy Family* is dramatically divided by a struggle of all against all: bourgeois civil society is characterised, here, by a structural *Trennung*, with devastating consequences for every individual.

Although this separation moves on various levels that are not immediately homogeneous amongst themselves, we ought to note that the problem of the distance of man from his species-being is very important in Marx's early writings, taking on a fundamental role. Here, he crucially insists on the importance of *Gattungswesen* as a 'recomposition' of what seems irrevocably divided: a

145. Marx 1975e, p. 186. On the proletariat as 'paradoxical protagonist', see Kouvelakis 2003.

146. See Žižek 2002.

147. Many places in the *Manuscripts* that could be mentioned: in the first manuscript, there is a reference to the wage as 'determined by the fierce struggle between capitalist and worker', (Marx 1975e, p. 282). Society is divided into the two classes of 'the propertied and the propertyless' (p. 309); in the third manuscript, the opposition between property and propertyless is understood as one between capital and labour.

148. Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 199.

unity able to overcome these divisions must be achieved. The notion of species-being risks being posed as an immediate identity – with no political or theoretical foundation – between the 'individual' and the 'collective', towards a 'recomposition' of individuality. In the *Judenfrage*, this conceptual tension is evident in the reference to the notion of human emancipation:

> Only when the real individual man resumes the abstract citizen [*den abstrakten Staatsburger*] into himself and as an individual man has become a species being [*Gattungswesen*] in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognised and organised his *forces propres* as forces so that social force is no longer separated [*trennt*] him in the form of political force, only then will human emancipation be completed.[149]

Human emancipation is founded on the union between the *bourgeois*, real man, and the *citoyen*, the actual man who is not real because he is abstract. Just as the *Trennung* entails an essential asymmetry between these realms, so the overcoming of this separation and the consequent unity present the idea of a superiority of the first over the second: only 'real man' incorporates the actual man, who is abstract, but not *vice versa*. The perspective, from a critical point of view, is focused on the question of human estrangement, whereas the *pars construens* of the reasoning consists in the identification of the *Gattungswesen* as what is capable of overcoming *Entfremdung*, a new unity between man and his species-being.

When making the distinction between human and political emancipation, Marx exemplifies the latter with the following reference to Rousseau's *Social Contract*:

> Whoever dares undertaking the organisation of a people must feel himself capable of changing, so to speak, human nature, of transforming each individual, who in himself is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of a greater whole from which he somehow receives his life and his being, of substituting a partial and moral existence for physical and independent existence. He must take man's own powers [*ses forces propres*] away from him and substitute for them alien ones which he can only use with the assistance of others.[150]

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149. Marx 1975d, p. 234. See Robelin 1989, p. 156; Tosel 1995, pp. 35–45, especially p. 37.

150. Marx 1975d, p. 234.

Rousseau's aim, here, is to 'create' the *citoyen*, an individual endowed with a 'partial and moral existence'. Each of these adjectives has great significance: the first is linked to the fact that, unlike the 'individual in himself' or a 'complete whole', the *citoyen* is partial because he is deprived of his *forces propres* and given other, extraneous ones in exchange; the second adjective, 'moral', indicates the abstraction of the man of state, his not being a real person. For Marx, Rousseau's thought represents the apex of the abstraction of the political state, the clearest expression of a merely political emancipation with all its intrinsic limitations. Although Rousseau is consistently criticised, Marx never manages to really free himself from the problem of the recomposition of what, in this context, is separated. However, beyond Rousseau's influence on the *Judenfrage*,[151] the notion of *Gattungswesen* remains problematic because it combines the individual and the collective and superimposes them on one another without mediation. This indeterminacy certainly does contain the dangers of organicism, but cannot be reduced to this aspect *sic et simpliciter*. So, even if the centrality of *Gattungswesen* represents a problematic element in Marx's discourse, it would nonetheless be mistaken to interpret this as its unitary aspect, because Marx subjects it to substantial theoretical examination and changes his interpretation of it over time.

1.5. The need for a change of perspective: *The German Ideology*

Despite the difficulties outlined earlier and the questions that would later arise in his work, the notion of *Gattungswesen* still remains a strong presence in Marx's framework up until *The Holy Family*: in this respect, Feuerbach, however displaced, continues to play a crucial role. But this notion was no longer sufficient to 'politicise' species-being. A few months after writing *The Holy Family*, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx began to distance his view from Feuerbach's and criticises its abstractness and presupposition of an isolated individual, detached from the social context:

151. On the Marx-Rousseau relationship, see Della Volpe 1978, p. 77. Della Volpe claims that Marx does not openly recognise his great debt to Rousseau and completely misunderstands the meaning of *The Social Contract*; Della Volpe 1963. On this issue, we do not share Della Volpe's interpretation, because he projects external categories on Rousseau and describes him as a precursor of communism, whilst also underestimating Marx's critique of him. Colletti follows Della Volpe's suggestion and writes: 'All of Marxist political theory, with the exception of the analysis of the economic basis of the abolition of the state, is already contained in Rousseau's framework'. See Colletti 1969, pp. 52–262.

> Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence [*das menschliche Wesen*]. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual [*dem einzelnen Individuum*]. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations [*das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*].[152]

In addition to an erosion of the most 'metaphysical' elements of *Gattungswesen*, here Feuerbach's thought is questioned and attacked as a whole, for resolving religious into human essence, thus inflecting the latter as 'an abstraction inherent in each single individual': 'The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice [*Praxis*], not subjectively.'[153] Feuerbach's materialism, grounded on *Gattungswesen,* seems incapable of 'capturing' the social dimension and the concrete element of subjectivity. *Gattungswesen* must be interpreted in its effectiveness, as an *Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse,* dropped in the river of history. Species-being concerns the whole of social relations, here; not, as in the *Manuscripts*, simply the 'return of man to himself': the question of human nature is no longer crucial to the debate.

The progressive erosion of Feuerbach's conceptual framework was not sufficient to 'break it up': there needed to be a further rupture with his previous position. The famous reference to all 'former philosophical conscience', an expression used by Marx, years later, to describe the experience of the writing of *The German Ideology,* needs to be understood in the context of this complicated set of questions.[154] *The German Ideology* was a 'critique of post-Hegelian philosophy' and its main exponents (Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner). The critique was not a mere recognition of the internal limitations of post-Hegelian thought, but also meant taking leave from the 'former philosophical conscience' that Marx had endorsed up to that point. From this standpoint, the statement quoted above must be interpreted in all its radicalism without diminishing its power, but also without indulging in facile schematisations. Shifting the focus on the issue is not enough: *Gattungswesen* must be made concrete by dropping it in the midst of the social structure. At the centre of the debate lies a constant confrontation with the realm of practice and a reference to the social and political scenario in all its singularity, an adherence to 'the

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152. Marx 1975c, p. 423. See Bloch 1962; Bloch 1968.

153. Marx 1975c, p. 421. On the *Theses*, see Labica 1987, and, more recently, Macherey 2008.

154. Marx 1987b, p. 519: 'we abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose – self-clarification'.

actual truth of the matter'. Thus, more than a new philosophical understanding, here we find a subversion of the very structure of thought: it undergoes a 'tension' that changes its peculiarities to its extreme consequences, that is to say, its dissolution.[155] The critique of the former philosophical conscience needs to be understood in all the force of the rupture, but, at the same time, avoiding an unsophisticated interpretation starting from the idea of a 'direct' and immediate relationship with the empirical realm. Such a naïve interpretation would not allow us to grasp the extent to which social and political reality, for Marx, are not transparent, but opaque and full of veils.

In *The German Ideology,* the critique of the former philosophical conscience results in a strong change in the inflection of the notion of individuality:

> The individuals, who are no longer subject to the division of labour, have been conceived by the philosophers as an ideal, under the name 'Man' [*der Mensch*], and the whole process we have described was conceived by them as the process of 'man's' development. . . . With this overturning, that abstracts from real conditions, it was possible to turn the whole of history into a process of development of the conscience.[156]

Marx and Engels compare Stirner to Feuerbach for the importance they both ascribe to the concept of man:[157] his history of 'knights, robbers and ghosts' becomes the 'history of man'.[158] In Stirner's perspective, 'Men's representations and ideas, separate from real things, must naturally have at their basis not real individuals [*die wirklichen Individuen*] but the individual in his philosophical representation, separated from his reality, purely thought, "man" as such, the concept of "man".'[159]

Similarly, the exponents of 'actually-existing socialism' in Germany do not take 'real individuals' into account and put 'man' at the centre of their reflection.[160] However, whilst in *The German Ideology* the polemic against post-Hegelian philosophy has many targets, the reference to Feuerbach is undoubtedly crucial. Paradoxically, in the section entitled 'Feuerbach', little reference is made to him, but the most fundamental break from the philosopher is there:

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155. On this, see Balibar 1996: 'One might say that since Marx philosophy has never been the same. The event was irreversible, not comparable to the emergence of a new philosophical standpoint, because it not only forces a change of ideas or method, but also a transformation of the practice of philosophy', p. 10.
156. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 93.
157. Ibid.
158. Ibid.
159. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 257.
160. Ibid.

> Certainly Feuerbach has a great advantage over the 'pure' materialists in that he realises how man too is an 'object of the senses.' But apart from the fact that he only conceives him as an 'object of the senses, not as sensuous activity'…he never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstraction 'man'….As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist.[161]

The criticism in the *Theses* of the abstract and ahistorical character of Feuerbach's materialism is stretched to its logical conclusion. The above quote has even led to the idea, now commonplace, that *The German Ideology* contains the first formulation of the doctrine of historical materialism. As Marx himself recalls in his 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, The German Ideology* was not published for contingent reasons; in any case, however, its purpose was not to offer an organic and systematic exposition of historical materialism, but rather to attempt a self-clarification and deconstruction of previously held ideas. Once this objective had been accomplished, there was no need to publish the text: what mattered was the awareness – contained therein, and full of consequences – of an urgent need to break with former conceptualisations. These remarks on the work-in-progress character of *The German Ideology*[162] do not diminish its importance in Marx's development. On the contrary, this chapter aimed to bring to light the relevance of this particular text, in its significant discontinuity in relation to the post-Hegelian thought, and to Feuerbach in particular, that Marx had previously adhered to. Thus the reflection in *The German Ideology*, whilst trying to dislocate the very structure of thought, shifts the centre of analysis from 'man', as rooted in *Gattungswesen*, to 'real individuals' in their determinacy, their insertion in a specific context, their contingent character: in other words, their singularity.

But this reflection is not interpreted in the sense of a self-referential 'philosophical' outlook, but rather as 'thought in practice', adhering to the concrete struggles of the times and the development of the working-class movement in Europe: with reference, for instance, to the insurrection of the Silesian textile-workers in June 1844, and the English Chartists, to whom they dedicate many

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161. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 64.

162. The researchers at *MEGA* are preparing a new edition of *The German Ideology* that will show, more clearly than before, the fragmentary and 'mobile' character of the work as an incomplete codification of historical materialism. See Various Authors 2004, in two volumes: the first includes Chapter One on Feuerbach and Chapter Two on Bauer, the second features the critical notes.

of the pages of *The German Ideology* in the wake of Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.[163] This connection of individuals to the singular situations in which they operate, seeking to question the existing state of affairs, does not imply the idea that they are totally able to dominate the course of events, but, rather, recognises that it is impossible to abstract from a complex series of limitations and preconditions that do not totally determine individual action, even if they certainly do exercise a strong influence on them. From this standpoint, any form of anthropocentrism needs to be destructured, because it is illusory to think that it is possible to immediately 'address' circumstances and situations.

The necessary corollary to the theoretical shift from 'man' to 'determinate individuals' is a redevelopment of the notion of estrangement, of *Entfremdung*. When describing the condition of the individual facing the abstract and anonymous social power of the capitalist system, Marx speaks of '"alienation" [*Entfremdung*], to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers'.[164] In the *Manuscripts*, the issue of *Entfremdung* is linked to *Gattungswesen*; but, in *The German Ideology*, the text that most criticises this notion and, more broadly, any 'theoreticist' approach to the problems of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (and thus the 'former philosophical conscience'), the centrality of *Entfremdung* and its ontological foundation are challenged. Marx still uses the term, as for instance in the passage cited above, but without the same crucial function he had granted it in previous works: from *The German Ideology* onwards, the term does not disappear, but its use becomes less frequent. To confine our discussion to *The German Ideology*, we need to take into account what he writes about the term *Entfremdung*: 'alienation', to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers. The sarcasm directed at the philosophers is obvious, here; they are accused of reasoning in the abstract, through 'categories', and 'ideas' independently of the concrete unfolding of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft.* The term recurs because of a need, so to speak, to be understood by a philosophical public: it is not the focus of the debate, but, from a 'wholly philosophical' standpoint, it points to what should be examined through a determinate analysis of the real forces in action.

At this point, in order to avoid an excessively schematic representation, two remarks are necessary. First of all, it would be simplistic to conceive of

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163. See Engels 1975b, p. 146: 'Chartism is the compact form of their opposition to the bourgeoisie.... In Chartism, it is the whole working class [*Arbeiterklasse*] which arises against the bourgeoisie, and attacks, first of all, the political power [*die politische Gewalt*], the legislative rampart with which the bourgeoisie has surrounded itself. Chartism has proceeded from the Democratic party which arose between 1780 and 1790 with and in the proletariat [*Proletariat*]'. On this issue, see Löwy 2005, pp. 132–9.

164. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 56.

Marx's thought prior to *The German Ideology* as merely pre-scientific because it is humanist: as we have already pointed out, Marx's early writings can only be partly reduced to the limitations of Feuerbach's framework, because the notion of *Gattungswesen* is descended in the social and political realm and increasingly freed from its constitutive aspects. From this standpoint, an interpretation of the Marx that precedes *The German Ideology* as organicist would be mistaken: his position was fundamentally ambiguous, as it did not differentiate between the 'individual' and the 'collective'. Feuerbach's influence is evident in Marx's early writings, but we cannot reduce them, *sic et simpliciter,* to this aspect, without grasping their deviation from it. The idea of a rigid opposition of two Marxes – one, young and humanist, as against the other, mature and scientific – needs to be problematised (although this does not mean that it has to be refuted).

The need to consider the works previous to *The German Ideology* does not deny the fact that this particular text is extremely innovative and eccentric with respect to the development of elements that were already present *in nuce* in earlier texts: the radicalism of Marx's critique of the 'former philosophical conscience' cannot be comprehended on the ground of an absolute and problem-free continuity, without internal ruptures in his development. But just as it was unproductive to read the early writings as completely bent on a Feuerbachian approach without recognising that some elements were already moving beyond it, it would be equally simplistic and misleading to claim that the problems left unresolved in previous writings find their full solution in *The German Ideology*. First of all, one cannot superimpose on *The German Ideology* the categories that Marx would not discover until later and interpret the work as a critique of political economy as a whole. Such a reading would be inadequate and risk resulting in a unproblematic 'Marxist' framework, characterised by the idea that Marx progressively overcame the limitations of his previous works: in this view, *The German Ideology* would allegedly have overcome the difficulties of the early writings and, at the same time, due to a still approximate knowledge of political economy, have failed to fully develop the critique of bourgeois society. Marx's development is more complex that this reading allows, and is irreducible to a linear reconstruction: the clear 'breaks' need to be recognised without assuming, *a priori*, that what Marx is taking leave from does *ipso facto* disappear irreversibly and once and for all.

Therefore, the shift from species-being to definite individual needs to be understood as a strong innovation on previous works, but without naïve simplifications: for instance, the term *Gattungswesen* is used more rarely but does not completely disappear; it recurs even in the *Grundrisse*. To keep to *The German Ideology*, it is important to point out that many aspects are only enunciated and not fully developed: the very critique of philosophy risks remaining

within the realm of philosophy that was the object of the harsh polemic, rather than overcoming it. Notwithstanding these contradictions, the perspective inaugurated by *The German Ideology* is new in many respects, to which the next chapter is devoted. The premiss of the analysis is the reference to real individuals, examined in their present 'conjuncture' according to a 'thought in practice': the revolt of the Silesian textile-workers and the links with workers' organisations played a crucial role in the change described. This framework is characterised by a 'singular' logic based on a specific determination, and human nature is set aside, or, at least, bracketed away. We are then faced with a destructuring of all abstract-philosophical anthropology: the individual is conceived starting from the practices that materialise in him – not the notion of species-being – because humankind does not precede the concrete forms of politics. As regards human nature, the problem lies elsewhere.

Chapter Two

Beyond the 'Private-Social' Dichotomy

2.1. Social power and chance in *The German Ideology*

The German Ideology introduces changes with respect to previous theoretical constructs and powerfully asserts the intention of investigating the concrete development of civil society in relation to the political events of the time, rather than on the basis of an abstract model. But this critique of the 'former philosophical conscience' does not immediately follow social and economic processes in their (presumed) transparency at the expense of an overall reflection. The empirical realm is not seen as unquestionably evident, and the function of philosophy is not to simply 'transcribe' its constitutive aspects. The object of the polemic is, rather, an interpretation of civil society disconnected from the context and environment in which 'real individuals' act. Such an interpretation is not able to grasp reality and its specific determination, its singularity that cannot be reduced to an abstract model, and the determined problem that it posits.[1] But Marx delineates the 'actual truth of the matter' in view of the constant 'exchange' between the interpretation of the world and its transformation expounded in the famous *Thesis on Feuerbach*. The knowledge and transformation of empirical

1. Althusser 1999, pp. 40–1, emphasises that Machiavelli is interested in the 'actual truth of the matter', of the thing in the singular and the singularity of its 'case'. The 'thing' is also the single cause, task and problem to posit and solve'. See also Raimondi 2004, pp. 7–34.

reality cannot be separated, and this makes the relation between the analysis of the present situation and political practice very close.[2]

The 'former philosophical conscience' had not been able to 'intercept' the empirical realm and its irreducibility to an all-encompassing conceptual scheme and thus also placed real history 'in brackets'. This is not to say that prior to *The German Ideology*, for Marx, real history was negligible (think, for instance, of the relevance of the struggles for universal suffrage to the understanding of democracy in the *Kritik*). Rather, real history was not the fulcrum of his theoretical concept. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels start to confront the realm of practice more closely, and with it, the concrete forms of workers' organisation under definite circumstances: in this context, the problem of the political agency of the proletariat becomes decisive.[3] Chartism is praised because it aims towards the political power of the proletariat, first in Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, then by Marx, and there are many references to it in *The German Ideology*. Marx and Engels begin their political activity in the European workers' movement after writing the *Theses on Feuerbach* and whilst working on *The German Ideology.* The first appearance of the expression 'communist party' is found in *The German Ideology*,[4] so this was the period when they increasingly tried to develop a working-class organisation.

The perspective of *The German Ideology* must be interpreted on the basis of this political practice, as it pivots on 'real individuals', rather than an abstract species-being. These are embedded in a specific historical moment and social and political structure and constantly influenced, yet not fully determined, by them. This premiss implies understanding civil society in a different manner from the past: 'Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces'.[5] First of all, we would emphasise the importance of the notion of civil society to Marx's standpoint: in the work preceding *The German Ideology*, we find significant references to Adam Ferguson's 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, read by Marx in the French translation, as well as to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.* In *The German Ideology*, the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* simultaneously refers to civil society, as a system of needs, and as bourgeois society. In previous works, especially in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question*, it was less clear whether this expression was used to refer to bourgeois as well as civil society, but not so in *The German Ideology*, where it

2. See Lefort 1978, p. 192.
3. See Löwy 2005, pp. 139–43.
4. See Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 453.
5. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 57.

becomes bourgeois civil society. In a passage of this work, Marx interestingly uses the term *Bourgeoisgesellschaft* as a synonym of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*,[6] thus proving that the latter refers to both civil and bourgeois society.

In *The German Ideology*, we find a true and proper genealogy of civil society. Clearly, the latter cannot be found in all previous historical economic and political formations, but only in modern bourgeois society, in the presence of the state-form: 'The word "civil" society emerged in the eighteenth century, when property relationships had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval communal society [*Gemeinwesen*]. Civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie'.[7] Marx would later – for example, in the *Grundrisse* – give life to a *Geschichte der Gesellschaften* (prehistoric community, slave-society, feudal society, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and communist society), and seemingly widen the notion of society to encompass each historical period. But the term 'society' in its strict sense applies only to the modern and bourgeois epoch, because it is determined by the extent to which the organic reciprocity between man and nature has become specifically historical.[8] For a society to form, there must be a very developed stage where individuals enter into universal reciprocal contact and social relations become autonomous, to the extent of being second nature: in the next chapter, we will examine further the fact that in the *Grundrisse*, Marx adopts terms such as 'tribe' and 'community' as 'natural' aspects of precapitalist-social formations. Therefore, the notion of society understood as such is not a historical constant, but something that determines the context of capitalism. We are presented with a 'singular' analysis of bourgeois civil society and its character of *novum* and specific difference from precapitalist structures, rather than a general inquiry into human history.

To return to the passage in *The German Ideology* previously quoted, we would underline that civil society is interpreted on the basis of two elements: the 'material intercourse of individuals' and the level of 'development of productive forces'. As regards the former element, the 'material' character of the social nexus is not simply the generic identification of the existence of private interests, as in the *Critique*, but a close investigation into the specific structures of bourgeois society. In the latter case, the extent of the relation, far from being denied, gives the inquiry its distinctive character: 'the development of an individual is determined by the development of all the others with whom

6. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 183.
7. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 57.
8. See Krahl 1972, pp. 51–2.

he is directly or indirectly associated [*Verkehr*]'.[9] The focus is not simply on individuals, but their concrete intercourse. Interestingly, in *The German Ideology*, the term *Verkehr* [intercourse] is often used, but will disappear in later writings. The term also means 'traffic' and indicates first and foremost commerce understood in a broad sense: here, it is used as a synonym of *Verhältnis* [the relationship] within production. Marx's 1846 letter to P.V. Annenkov is interesting in this regard: 'If he is not to be deprived of the results obtained or to forfeit the fruits of civilisation, man is compelled to change all his traditional social forms as soon as the mode of commerce ceases to correspond to the productive forces acquired. Here I use the word *commerce* in its widest sense – as we would say *Verkehr* in German.'[10]

Although *Verkehr* can be translated as 'traffic', this would not capture the generality of the concept. The reference to commerce demonstrates its complexity and how it refers both to the productive and the communicative element of the relation; 'what is at stake' in Marx's discussion is how to keep both aspects together, showing how the social nexus takes form, rather than reducing it to the strictly economic realm.

In order to understand Marx's discussion of civil society, it is also important to recall the notion of productive forces, the 'material intercourse of individuals', which refers to the realm of production as it is connected to the individual realm: 'As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce.... [Production] in turn presupposes the intercourse [*Verkehr*] of individuals with one another'.[11] Individuals are at the origin of production, which plays a crucial role in the conceptual construction of *The German Ideology*.[12]

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9. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 438. See also the preceding paragraph: 'Individuals have always and in all circumstances "proceeded from themselves", but since they were not unique in the sense of not needing any connections with one another, and since their needs, consequently their nature, and the method of satisfying their needs, connected them with one another (relations between the sexes, exchange, division of labour), they had to enter into relations with one another.... They entered into intercourse with one another as what they were, they proceeded "from themselves", as they were, irrespective of their "outlook on life".'

10. Marx and Engels 1962, p. 97. In the 'Annotations' to the German edition of *The German Ideology*, the editors note: 'The term *Verkehr* has a broad meaning in *The German Ideology*. It refers to the material and spiritual relation between each individual, social groups, and whole countries. In this book, Marx and Engels remark that the material relation, and especially the relation between men in the process of production, is the foundation of all other relations. The concept of "relations of production" they develop finds expression in the terms *Verkehrsform, Verkehrsweise* and *Verkehrsverhaltnisse* in *The German Ideology*' (p. 548).

11. Marx and Engels 1975b, pp. 42–3.

12. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 46. See Fischbach 2005 for an interpretation that underlines the centrality of production in Marx without presenting an apology for productivism.

Production is not natural; it is social and linked to the cooperation and union of individuals, a social fabric.[13] Recognising the importance of the notion of production does not necessarily lead to the endorsement of a deterministic view, because production is not only linked to the 'physical reproduction of individuals': it cannot be reduced to a quantitative datum, because it represents an expression of their life. Clearly, the notion of intercourse is not absolute and ahistorical, but specifically determined by its connection to the mode of production. Production presupposes a reference to these 'traffics': the invocation of 'determinate individuals' flows into an analysis of their modes of relation.

The debate presented, here, ascribes a decisive role to the productive forces that arise from the praxis of individuals.[14] But the shift from a view centred on 'man' to one based on 'determinate individuals' also entails the rejection of the idea of the latter's absolute domination of existing conditions and circumstances, such that the reference to the productive forces must be seen in the context of the historically-conditioned premisses in which they are inserted.[15] Civil society cannot be interpreted merely in light of the domination of the 'private', as an asocial society, but as the form of relations determined by productive forces situated in a particular environment that they can never completely transcend. Determinate relations correspond to different productive forces: the relations are relations of production, the way men produce in a specific social context, and the social relations influenced by them.[16] So the analysis of the nexus of productive forces and relations of production becomes crucial to our understanding of bourgeois civil society.[17] Civil society does not emerge *sic et simpliciter* from an ensemble of separate and wholly self-sufficient individual-atoms, but is influenced by the development of the productive forces.

This view is also 'sustained' by the notion of the division of labour[18] – a real 'red thread' in *The German Ideology* – and the separation it introduced between town and country.[19] Under capitalism, labour is the real means of domination of individuals that can determine their relation in terms of its material, instruments and products.[20] In the *Manuscripts*, the analysis of the division of labour

13. See Tosel 1991, pp. 130–1.
14. See Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 44.
15. See Marx and Engels 1963, p. 452.
16. On the productive relations/form of relations nexus, see Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 129. See also Cohen 1979, pp. 31, 43; and Cohen 1986a.
17. See Marx and Engels 1975b, pp. 55–6, 59.
18. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 91.
19. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 68.
20. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 43: 'The division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another [*die Verhältnisse der Individuen zueinander*] with reference to the material, instrument and product of labour'.

was coloured by the anthropocentric structure and great limitations we have already discussed.[21] On the contrary, in *The German Ideology* Marx presents a historical inquiry of this concept in order to highlight the specific differentiation between the medieval and modern period. Whilst, in the middle-ages, the element under discussion was not developed at all, and the worker had to show his skills over a whole work-cycle, with the spread of commerce closer links between towns were developed such as to create a separation between production and exchange, and a division of production within the town. This process resulted in manufacture, establishing a new relation between worker and capitalist, 'the money relation [*das Geldverhältnis*]'.[22]

The German Ideology casts light on the stunning innovation that the capitalist mode of production brings about in relation to the feudal economic system founded on corporations. The division of labour, on the basis of a constitutive ambivalence, opens up the possibility of real individual development. In this process, the individual is subjected to the social context in which he operates and apparently paralysed by it: 'Even that which constitutes the advantage of an individual as such over other individuals, is in our day at the same time a product of society…the individual as such, regarded by himself, is subordinated to division of labour, which makes him one-sided, cripples and determines him'.[23] From the political and theoretical standpoint, it is useful to maintain this ambivalence that suggests that capitalism is a real *novum* with respect to previous social formations and is distinguished by this character of structural duplicity. Our view rejects all apologist positions and the 'catastrophist' and apocalyptic interpretations of these phenomena that risk seeing capitalism as 'eternal' and failing to 'grasp' the potential, at the level of subjectivity, of the situation subject to critique. However, the division of labour is also the essential 'root' of the individual separation, or *Trennung*, that was discussed earlier.[24] The constitution of individuality and its subjection to society are the result of a long history of development of large industry, universalisation of competition, creation of the modern world-market, transformation of every capital into industrial capital, as well as the outcome of a stimulus to

21. See Marx 1975g, p. 369: 'The division of labour is the economic expression of the social nature of labour within estrangement. Or rather, since labour is only an expression of human activity within alienation, an expression of life as alienation of life, the division of labour is nothing more than the estranged, alienated positing of human activity as a real species-activity or as activity of man as a species-being [*der Menschen als Gattungswesen*].

22. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 78.

23. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 437.

24. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 43.

develop the productive forces, for whom private property was only a fetter.[25] Thus, a contradiction emerges between, on the one hand, the forces of production in society and their impressive growth, and, on the other hand, the form of relations and the whole of the relations of production (and the social relations that derive from them), which remain static and inadequate to such a process of innovation.[26]

A rather problematic aspect of this discourse is that it ascribes centrality to the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, giving rise to the 'collisions in history'. It is not primarily a matter of valorising the dynamism of the productive forces as against the static character of the relations of production, for instance pitching the entrepreneur against the financial speculator, as Keynes later would. Behind the idea that the greatest development of the productive forces would inevitably lead to a revolution of the *status quo* lies a philosophy of history based on the relation and potential contradiction between them. The analysis of the division of labour, so central to this work, is still influenced by the 'grand narrative' typical of the nineteenth century:

> History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.[27]

But, as will later become clear, many elements in *The German Ideology* also problematise this approach.

In the conceptual structure outlined so far, characterised by the relations of production/form of intercourse nexus, money comes to play a decisive role as the 'representative of the value of all things, people, and social relations':[28] 'In modern bourgeois society, all relations are subordinated in practice to the one abstract monetary-commercial relation'.[29] One ought to separate the question of money from the series of moralistic considerations and its characterisation as something 'sordid'[30] very much prevelant in previous works, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *The Holy Family* in particular. This is not a

25. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 78.
26. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 84.
27. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 59.
28. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 110. See also Givsan 1980, pp. 133, 175.
29. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 109.
30. On this issue, see the third Manuscript on 'The Power of Money', where Marx refers to parts of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* where money is described as 'visible

matter of whether one deplores its use and relevance, but of understanding the role it plays in *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, and how it relates to the isolation of individuals and their subjugation to an objective power. There is no 'political romanticism' in Marx's outlook in *The German Ideology*, nor any temptation to 'block' the course of events and its destructive character in order to re-enact an original community-realm. Thus there is no nostalgia for previous social structures and their hierarchical organisation, compared to which the capitalist *tabula rasa* represents progress.[31] The 'progressive' value of the exploitation introduced by money consists of the transparency with which it reveals reality [*Wirklichkeit*] and eliminates the masks that hide it. In Marx, the notion of progress is ambivalent. On the one hand, progress is the overcoming of patriarchal, hierarchical, and ecclesiastical elements that impede the full development of the individual. On the other hand, it is the subsumption of individuality under an abstract and objective mechanism. Capital 'sustains' this contradiction, even if in an unstable manner. These two aspects are inextricably complicated by capitalism: in order to break this nexus, the whole capitalist mode of production must be overcome. Marx's unmasking of this is only possible by the unmasking-process already accomplished by the capitalist system: later, in the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels would return to this idea when asserting that 'for exploitation [*Ausbeutung*], veiled by religious and political illusions, [the bourgeoisie] has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.... The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation'.[32]

But Marx is always ambivalent when referring everything back to 'a mere money relation', because of the reciprocal influence of individuality and chance, a distinctive feature of capitalism and its brutality, as well as its unmasking of a series of 'idyllic' illusions that impeded a clear vision of the given situation. Money subjects the individual to a position of fortuity or chance [*Zufälligkeit*] that prevents his realisation and valorisation 'as an individual' rather than a mere cog in the engine of the productive machine: 'With money every form of intercourse, and intercourse itself, is considered fortuitous for the individuals'.[33] Fortuity is crucial to understand the dynamics of the division of labour and the structure of money: 'The transformation of the individual relationship into its opposite, a merely material relationship, the

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God', 'supreme good', 'alienated ability of mankind', and 'truly creative power'. Marx 1975g, p. 377.

31. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 109.
32. Marx and Engels 1976a.
33. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 91.

distinction of individuality and chance by the individuals themselves, as we have already shown, is an historical process and at different stages of development assumes different, ever sharper and more universal forms.'[34]

This is not a historical constant, but a specific analysis of the capitalist mode of production in which individuality and chance are transformed into one another. In this context, the productive forces emerge as an entity superior and extraneous to single individuals, whilst the latter are degraded to the status of instruments in the actualisation of their objectives:

> Thus, on the one hand, we have a totality of productive forces, which have, as it were, taken on a material form.…On the other hand, standing over against these productive forces, we have the majority of the individuals from whom these forces have been wrested away, and who, robbed thus of all real life-content, have become abstract individuals, but who are, however, only by this fact put into a position to enter into relation with one another *as individuals*.[35]

Each individual is in a condition of separation [*Trennung*] in relation to the productive forces, because of his inability to control or direct them. Moreover, this is how workers are separated from one another, as they are fragmented and thus potentially in conflict: not only a member of a different class, but even one of your own, could be an enemy to be fought at all costs.

The mutual indifference among individuals is based on the existence of a wide net of relations and social nexus, such that sociality and isolation are both sides of the same coin: 'Human beings, by no means wanting to form a society, have, nevertheless, only achieved the development of society, because they have always wanted to develop only as isolated individuals and therefore achieved their own development only in and through society'.[36] Given and despite the fact that individuals are in a situation of mutual indifference, they can fully develop in civil society: the premiss of the latter is the very possibility of the development of individuals. The apparent paradox is precisely that, insofar as they are isolated and indifferent to one another, and thus deprived of the real content of their lives, individuals are social and enter into relations of exchange. Marx here tries to conceive of the individual and society as asymmetrical to a framework of categories, on the basis of an 'other' sociality that is not homologous to the sociality under critique.

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34. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 117.
35. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 92.
36. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 215.

The extraneousness of the productive forces to individuals as such results in the formation of a power with an objective character, able to dominate the life of each individual:

> The social power [*die soziale Macht*], i.e., the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power [*vereinte Macht*], but as an alien force [*eine fremde Gewalt*] existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus cannot control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the action of man, nay even being the prime governor of these. [37]

Social power, identified with the growing productive forces, multiplied in size and intensity, is external to the majority of individuals. In fact, it is not a means of cohesion, but an alien force whose origin and end are unknown, incontrollable and unpredictable. From this standpoint, individuals are faced with a cogent obligation that is also the outcome of a social process: sociality and abstract power do not contradict one another; on the contrary, they entail one another. There is a structural link between the notions of *Gewalt, Macht* and *Herrschaft*: in the citations above, they refer to the existence of an 'objective [*sachlich*]' social power (determined by the dynamics of the relations of production. This objectivity is the distinctive feature of sociality as found in capitalism, where the relations between individuals are subsumed by an anonymous power able to overarch and 'crush' singular individuals (without ever succeeding in totally destroying spaces of subjectivity), whilst setting them in relation to one another.

Given that capital immanently tends to take on a global character, maximal expansion and the elimination of existing barriers, the *soziale Macht* of the capitalist mode of production becomes *Weltmarkt* and thus puts enormous pressure on national borders.[38] On this point, one cannot help but recall the famous description of this process presented in the *Manifesto*: 'The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over

37. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 54. As Guastini suggests, *Gewalt* in Marx indicates 'political power in its institutional articulations', whilst here, whilst retaining its character of obligation, *Macht* presents a social connotation as the outcome of a *Vereinigung*. See Guastini 1974, p. 287. On the centrality of the issue of social domination, though with reference to the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, see Postone 1993, p. 162: 'The structures of abstract domination constituted by determinate forms of social practice give rise to a social process that lies beyond human control'.

38. Marx and Engels 1975b, pp. 55ff.

the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.'[39] The overcoming of narrow national limits is a form of domination of the productive forces over individuals, and its character is more pressing and uncontrollable than ever before. It would be reactionary to interpret this situation as a catastrophe and to express nostalgia for national borders that are easier for the individual to 'grasp'. The globalisation of capital presents the same structural ambivalence that we discussed earlier: on the one hand, it maintains the individual in a position of subjugation to an objective power and of isolation; on the other, it creates the conditions for his realisation and the full development of his capacities, insofar as it places him, in practice, in relation to the production of the whole world.[40]

2.2. The ambivalence of the community

In order to 'name' this subsumption of individuals to an abstract and objective power, Marx and Engels develop the notion of 'apparent community': 'The apparent community [*die scheinbare Gemeinschaft*], in which individuals have up till now combined, always took on an independent existence in relation to them, and was at the same time, since it was the combination of one class over against another, not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well.'[41] This *scheinbare Gemeinschaft* marks a step forwards from precapitalist social-formations, since it leads to an extraordinary development of the productive forces; the realisation of the individual and his capacities and needs is only possible on its basis. In the middle-ages, when serfs and the poorest of society tried to flee their unbearable situation, they sought to free themselves from their fetters as individuals, not as a class. Therefore,

39. Marx and Engels 1976a, pp. 487–8.
40. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 57.
41. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 83. The apparent community is also illusory: see p. 53, where they refer to 'an illusory communal life [*illusorische Gemeinschaftlichkeit*], always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family and tribal conglomeration – such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests – and especially, as we shall enlarge upon later, on the classes, already determined by the division of labour, which in every such mass of men separate out, and of which one dominates all the others'.

they did not upset the social structure, made as it was not of classes, but of orders within a political and social hierarchy.[42]

The apparent community rooted in the division of labour is simultaneously the affirmation and the negation of the individual:

> The division between the personal [*des persönlichen Individuums*] and the class individual, the accidental nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears only with the emergence of the class, which is itself a product of the bourgeoisie.…It follows from all we have been saying up till now that the communal relationship into which the individuals of a class entered, and which was determined by their common interests over against a third party, was always a community to which these individuals belonged only as average individuals [*als Durchschnittsindividuen*], only insofar as they lived within the conditions of existence of their class – a relationship in which they participated not as individuals but as members of a class [*Klassenmitglieder*].[43]

This separation between the personal individual and contingent or average individual can only occur within bourgeois society. The personal individual is one with abilities, attitudes and needs, and his realisation is made impossible by the persistence of the present social structure. The contingent or average individual is an individual insofar as he belongs to a class and is completely subjugated to it; his singularity is thus negated. For proletarians, in particular, this subjugation is in danger of turning into the tragic impossibility, within this society, of moving from one class to another and thus ameliorating one's condition.[44]

Thus the community takes on an illusory character, because it requires the existence of structures of subjugation able to 'block' individual action. The *Gemeinschaft* is apparent because it does not lead to a real commonality and is marked by the domination of a class over another. It is founded on the individual not as an individual, but as belonging to a class: 'In the previous substitutes for the community, in the State, etc. personal freedom has existed

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42. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 84: 'Certainly the refugee serfs treated their previous servitude as something accidental to their personality [*etwas ihrer Persönlichkeit Zufälliges*]. But here they only were doing what every class that is freeing itself from a fetter does; and they did not free themselves as a class but separately [*vereinzelt*]. Moreover, they did not rise above the system of estates'.

43. Marx and Engels 1975b, pp. 85–7.

44. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 85: 'For the proletarians, on the other hand, the condition of their existence, labour, and with it all the conditions of existence governing modern society, have become something accidental, something over which they, as separate individuals, have no control, and over which no social organisation can give them control.'

only for the individuals who developed within the relationships of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class'.[45] In the context examined so far, the individualistic premiss and the subsumption of singular individuals to social power are two sides of the same coin:

> Here, therefore, the will of the whole community [*Gesamtheit*] is enforced against the will of the separate individual. Since each of the egoists in agreement with themselves may turn out to be not in agreement with the other egoists and thus become involved in this contradiction, the collective will must also find some means of expression in relation to the separate individuals.[46]

Thus the freedom characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is also 'apparent', since individuals are, in fact, subjugated to an objective power that directs their movement and tries to prevent them from becoming subjects.[47] In several passages, this apparent characteristic of freedom is emphasised in terms of the fact that individuality is converted into mere fortuity:

> Combination [*Vereinigung*] up till now (by no means an arbitrary one, such as is expounded for example in the *Contrat social*, but a necessary one) was an agreement upon these conditions, within which the individuals were free to enjoy the freaks of fortune (compare, e.g., the formation of the North American State and the South American republics). This right to the undisturbed enjoyment, within certain conditions, of fortuity and chance has up till now been called personal freedom.[48]

Let us note, here, that it would be wrong to ascribe to the term 'apparent' – used to describe the community – the meaning of 'unreal' or 'fictitious'; at the same time, we are not presented with a fetish of freedom, but with true and proper freedom. Marx maintains the ambiguity that characterises bourgeois civil society, where the freedom that individualism is premissed on is inseparable from subjugation to an objective power. Marx keeps the apologists of the *status quo* at great length, since they try to conceal its power-structure. His position is also far from that of socialist theorists who propose a differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' (with clear reference to Proudhon). Accepting and appreciating capitalist freedom whilst fighting this objective power is not what it is called for. Under the capitalist mode of production, these two aspects entail one another, representing two sides of the same coin.

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45. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 83.
46. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 400.
47. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 83.
48. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 85.

From this standpoint, only by creating a clear rupture with present conditions can one arrive at a notion of community (and freedom) that is not homologous to that under criticism. To avoid misleading theoretical and political implications, we ought to underline that an immediate interpretation of freedom as non-freedom would prevent us from understanding modern subjectivity and its ambivalence; an ambivalence that needs to be kept open and productive. The necessary point of departure for our analysis is subjective freedom, which is a field of forces in constant tension – rather than a 'resolved' issue – and an opening of possibilities whose outcomes can never be predicted or fully determined. Therefore, it is necessary, on the one hand, to understand subjectivity as liberation from preconstituted hierarchical systems, and, on the other hand, to distance this notion from the 'liberal' appreciation of individuality that is inevitably underpinned by a kind of 'theodicy' of capitalism. The openness of this ambivalence interprets apparent freedom as a mixture of mystification and reality, a mystification with its own reality, and allows for a rejection of both perspectives; albeit in an unstable and never totally complete manner, capitalism still 'keeps these two aspects together'. The problem is not merely theoretical and must, in the last instance, be resolved in praxis, as the *Theses on Feuerbach* suggest. In order to explode this contradiction, one cannot simply resort to a reference internal to rational argumentation: it is necessary to introduce an element of 'disturbance' external to the theory, and thus endowed with a practical significance. Although there are several aspects in Marx's argument that do not immediately combine together, the fracture between the ones here debated cannot be resolved at the level of rational argumentation, because the task of political practice is precisely to pose a challenge to it. Contrary to a well-known commonplace, we are not confronted with a deduction of practice from an unchanging theory, but a very complex relationship between the two. For Marx, political action continually shifts the conditions of theory, which are never determined once and for all. However, at the same time, in light of what we have discussed so far, theory cannot be seen as a mere 'transcription' of political practice.

To return to the questions of our study, the radicalism of Marx's demolition of the 'myths' of bourgeois civil society 'from within' and on the basis of an immanent critique cannot be underestimated. First, the interpenetration of fortuity and individuality in this apparent community, rooted in the subjugation of individuals to an abstract and objective power, is harshly criticised. Second, the character of modern freedom is described as apparent, but not fictitious: the semblance of community does not make community any less real. The community is configured as a structure of discipline that 'squashes' the singular individual and prevents him from becoming subject, whilst at

the same time presupposing his subjectivity. Marx's whole perspective is based on his stance towards individual realisation and the valorisation of the abilities and capacities of all. The determinate individual plays a decisive role because of the universality of relations that is only made possible under the capitalist mode of production. To reclaim the centrality of the individual does not mean to buy into the illusion that he has absolute control over the mode of production. It means conceiving of him as inextricably linked to the concrete conditions of his actualisation. In *The German Ideology*, the notion of 'apparent community' is deconstructed, and with it, any organicist understanding of the relation between the individual and the political body. Marx's critique hinges on the recognition of a mutual implication of individualism and organicism in the capitalist social structure. The 'apparent community [*scheinbare Gemeinschaft*]' is founded on the individual; and yet, contradictorily – whilst sustaining this contradiction in a never definitive or stable manner – also causes his 'serial' subsumption under a mechanism of production that prevents his full mobility and denies his singularity. Individualism and organicism are two sides of the same coin, and, as we have tried to argue, Marx's communism is not a form of organicism: quite the contrary, it is asymmetrical to it, insofar as organicism entails the subjugation of individuals to an abstract and social power.

> Community [*Gemeinschaft*] is criticised because it is apparent, and this means that the only connection between individuals is the lack of a real relation. But another aspect of the critique is society (*Gesellschaft,* understood as both civil and bourgeois society: the 'system of needs', to use a Hegelian expression) or the whole of relations of domination between individuals: 'Even that which constitutes the advantage of an individual as such over other individuals, is in our day at the same time a product of society [*Gesellschaft*]. . . . Further, the individual as such, regarded by himself, is subordinated to division of labour, which makes him one-sided, cripples and determines him.'[49]

Marx's distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* (terms which, until the end of the eighteenth century, were essentially synonymous), though not pointing to a sharp bifurcation, deconstructs the notions of society and community.[50] The polemic against an understanding centred on a society of

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49. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 437.

50. On the notions of society and community, see Riedel 1994b. Riedel argues that *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* were synonyms for centuries. In the seventeenth century, they lost their connotation of finalism and substance, and began being referred to contractualism, though they were still synonymous. Between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the context of the separation of civil society from the state, these notions start going in different directions. On this, see

which the individual is but a product points to the fact that Marx does not wish to substitute a hypostatised 'social' for the fiction of the 'political' (fiction understood as mere unreality). On the contrary, this social power over singular individuals intrinsic to the capitalist dynamic is the true object of his polemic. Thus, contrary to Max Stirner's opinion, Marx's perspective does not place an emphasis on society: 'Saint Max believes that the communists are only waiting for "society" to "give" them something…Saint Max believes that the communists want to "make sacrifices" for "society", when they want at most to sacrifice existing society'.[51]

Here, the hypothesis that the individual must be sacrificed to the 'spectre' of society is questioned. The notion that the individual is fully absorbed in society is the opposite of Marx's view. For these reasons, it is inadequate to propose to concentrate certain functions in civil society: 'The communist revolution will be guided not by the *social institutions* [*gesellschaftlichen*] of inventive socially-gifted [*sozialer*] persons'.[52] The attempt to overcome a system founded on the division of labour is destined to fail if its aim is based on the societal structure; the latter is one of the two poles on which the 'political' and its emphasis on connection is concentrated, the other pole being the state. The realm of intercourse materialised into a community that extends between civil society and the state is in crisis. An affirmation of the 'social' *versus* the state is insufficient if we aim to question the 'present state of things', because it hides the fact that the latter is based on the autonomy of the 'social' from the 'political' of the state-form. This situation was unthinkable, for instance, in the simultaneously social and political structure of the Estates. The eighteenth century and the period after the French Revolution is characterised by the growing importance of the 'social', although with different conjugations in different countries. For instance, in Germany, this occurred later than in France, cradle of the political revolution, and in England, cradle of the 'economic', industrial revolution, as Marx and Engels frequently remark. From this standpoint, a counterposition of the 'social' and the 'political' does not help us move beyond the framework under criticism, which hinges on the 'social'. If anything, we need to insist on the ambivalences of the 'social' and its unresolved tensions and divisions. Even though the outcome of the division of labour opens the possibility for developing the individual as much as

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the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Leipzig 1887. On Tönnies's approach to the relation, see Ricciardi 1997.

51. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 213. Marx's view, as found in the proposed solution, is substantially different from Vogel's. Vogel believed that, under communism, 'society is the whole, and the singular as such is nothing or mere number', see Vogel 1925, p. 298.

52. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 381.

subsuming him under an objective power, the process is never fully accomplished and perfected, and is essentially unstable.

In *The German Ideology*, this sharp critique of all social and communitarian interpretations results in a polemic against doctrines of abnegation and sense of duty, such as that of Buchez, the Catholic, who believed that '*society* always has the *right* to take from us what our own duty bids us sacrifice to it.... Each one of us must sacrifice himself, always and everywhere. He who out of egoism refuses to fulfil his duty of self-sacrifice must be *compelled* to do it'.[53] This position links a preaching moralism, based on the spirit of sacrifice, to an apologia for labour:

> Man exists on earth only to fulfil a *calling*, a duty [*une fonction, un devoir*].... Man is a worker [*ouvrier*],... he must accomplish the work [*œuvre*] which morality imposes on his activity ... *we are created in order to labour [faits pour travailler*], to labour *always*, and that the only thing we can demand is what is *necessary for life* [*la suffisante vie*].... Everything that is beyond this boundary is *absurd* and *dangerous*.[54]

The theological assumption of this view of man's function in the world is surreptitiously linked to a justification of the present system of production and the relations of domination typical of civil society. Marx underlines that Buchez's reasoning results in the sketching of a '*communauté* which was created long ago and of which you too are members'.[55] In order to legitimise the obedience of the worker, a metaphysical foundation is called into cause, consisting of a human nature that is entirely dedicated to production: 'We are created in order to labour'. Anything excluded from this reasoning is 'absurd' because it questions this naturalist conception, and dangerous because it aims to subvert the *status quo*. From this standpoint, the reference to human nature is functional to a sort of social 'theodicy' and the justification of the existing state of things.

The unmasking of the fiction of community is closely intertwined with the critique of hierarchies of values that befit the *status quo*, albeit under the guise of a societal moment. The polemic is thus directed against expressions such as 'spirit of sacrifice', 'social duty', 'duty of society', 'labour, man's mission' 'to produce what is indispensable to life'.[56] Marx's criticism, though directed against Buchez, is also extended to all attempts at building a sort of societal

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53. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 227. See also: 'Self-sacrifice is the only means of fulfilling one's duty.... Thus Buchez cries out to all: sacrifice yourselves, sacrifice yourselves!'.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.

morality where a normative structure serves to make the existing relations of production immutable and cogent. This 'socialist' view ends up legitimating a social system founded on labour as the 'source of all wealth and all culture', to quote from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.[57] It also fails to appreciate the indissoluble link between labour and the material dynamics of civil society.

It is necessary to make a clean break with these notions of the 'social', labour and the inadequate categories of egoism and abnegation which need to be overcome:

> The communists do not oppose egoism to selflessness or selflessness to egoism, nor do they express this contradiction theoretically . . . they rather demonstrate its material source, with which it disappears of itself. The communists do not preach *morality* at all. . . . They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists, etc.; on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selflessness, is in definite circumstances [*unter bestimmten Verhältnisse*] a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals. Hence, the communists by no means want . . . to do away with the 'private individual' for the sake of the 'general', selfless man. . . . They know that this contradiction is only a *seeming* one . . . so that this contradiction is in practice constantly destroyed and reproduced.[58]

This opposition of egoism to selflessness needs to be overcome and 'is destroyed in practice': a critique of bourgeois society based on this opposition in no way questions the principles of the *status quo*, and leaves them untouched. In particular, Marx criticises preaching and moralistic socialists who hold a *Weltanschauung* of altruism. Marx defines egoism as 'a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals', which indicates that the idea of a private realm subordinated to a social one is entirely foreign to him.

To avoid the aspect we have just emphasised being made an absolute and turned into a mistaken interpretation of Marx as a philosopher of 'egoism' and champion of private interests, it is useful to pause, here, and note the following. No matter how different from Marxian vulgate, this image does not help our understanding of Marx's theoretical and political deconstruction of capitalism in the least. In our present discussion, the object of criticism is the hypostatisation of the 'social' at the expense of singular individuals typical of 'organicist' interpretations of Marxism. But another target of our polemic is the liberal reading of Marx based on the idea that Marxism and liberalism

57. Marx and Engels 1989b, p. 81. See Arndt 2010, pp. 141–64.

58. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 104. See also Sève 2004, pp. 63–7. For a perspective different from ours but based on the appreciation of individuality, see also Sève 1969.

are compatible, where the latter is open to social-'progressive' demands and a Keynesian regulation of the state. For instance, Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* largely presents Marx as a 'methodological individualist', though influenced by some elements of holism.[59] As we have noted earlier, Elster's challenge is a stimulus to renew the debate on Marx at a distance from the old formulae and engage with the contemporary social sciences. However, his approach is very problematic because it does not grasp the intrinsically 'political' character of Marx's discussion. In fact, it underestimates class-subjectivity, and in some cases, its functionalist and systemic interpretation of social conflict 'conceals' it.

To go back to the passage quoted above, it is important to note that Marx's perspective aims to emphasise the deep mystification inherent to the opposition of egoism and selflessness, as this antithesis is constantly overcome and eliminated. The actions of individuals must be embedded in the structures that they embody and give rise to a 'material ethics', based on their concrete conditions but at the same time constantly critical of them: this position does not entail a 'value-based' substratum, because 'communists do not preach morality'.[60] There is a clear distance between this and the Marx of *On the Jewish Question*, who criticised the egoism of bourgeois society: communists do not build a moral system or normative hierarchies. The rejection of the notion that Marx's method has a moral foundation does not lead to an adherence to a determinist interpretation of his theory. Morality, as part of the superstructure, must not be reduced to a mechanical product of economic activity. Morality has its own reality and exercises its own function in bourgeois society. Under question is the assumption that it is a realm separate from the political and the social, and thus functioning as a normative criterion.[61] In fact, behind the solemn defence of the universal principles common to all men is a

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59. Elster 1985, p. 5 believes that Marx's philosophy is substantially moulded on methodological individualism, that is, the notion that 'all social phenomena – their structures and their change – are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals', but also that it includes elements of holism, that is, forms of methodological collectivism, that disprove the individualist structure mentioned here.

60. For a perspective on a material ethic, see Badiou 2000, pp. 32–3. On this issue, there has been a wide-ranging debate, especially in the Anglo-Saxon context, on whether Marx's critique of capitalism is purely descriptive or also prescriptive. A position shared by many scholars is that Marx's critique of capitalism displays a moral character. In disagreeing with this, we do not interpret these notions as purely descriptive, but believe that the method under question, based on an application of 'Hume's law', misunderstands Marx's thought. See, on this, Wood 1984, and Miller 1984, who underline the absolute absence of a moral critique of capitalism. For different conclusions, see Geras 1985, Lukes 1985, Cohen 1986b, and Reiman 1991.

61. On this, see Gramsci 1975: 'The concepts of equity and justice are purely formal…but we can say that: 1. In conflict, any moral judgement is absurd be on facts

prosaic reference to the material dynamics of bourgeois society and its disciplinary structures. If egoism and selflessness are inadequate means for interpreting the current processes, notions that derive from them such as 'private man' and 'social man' are equally unsatisfactory. Marx's perspective cannot result in a hypostatisation of the 'social' or civil society at the expense of the individuals that make them up; nor can it entail the exaltation of private man and his abstract asociality, full self-sufficiency, and demands for rights *versus* the state. For these reasons, the notion of a 'liberal' Marx is questionable, or at least incompatible with liberalism, insofar as the liberal attempt to defend the individual against the state is consistent with the separation of civil society and the state that Marx critiques.

Whilst emphasising that the position discussed here is clearly different from liberal individualism, we are convinced that individual realisation is the fulcrum of Marx's argument. We have already shown how Marx's theory is foreign to all organicist logics and ideas of subsumption of individuals to a community understood as a Whole. In fact, the apparent community is criticised precisely because it is established on the foundations of the submission of individuals to an abstract social power. This observation marks a step forwards in *The German Ideology* as compared to previous works. These, though not presenting an organicist view proper, still proffered a too-immediate identification of the individual with the community. The difficulty of this debate is rooted in the notion of *Gattungswesen*. In *The German Ideology,* though with internal contradictions, there is a shift from *Gattungswesen* to *bestimmte Individuen* and to individuals who are contingent, determined, and constitutively related to a particular social and political framework. This shift reshuffles the terms of the debate because singular individuals can no longer be regarded as being in absolute control over their circumstances and situation, and yet they cannot be 'incorporated' in a *Gattung* either.

From this standpoint, in order to underline Marx's distance from organicism, it is useful to highlight his difference from Rousseau's position. In his early writings, because of the problematic nature of the notion of *Gattungswesen*, Marx's relation to Rousseau was ambiguous, though he always criticised him. For instance, as we have noted, *On the Jewish Question* ends with an attempt to give rise to a kind of individual 'recomposition' and a full identification between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*. A simplistic reading would interpret this as an idea of building a 'new man'; but this interpretation would be the outcome of a too-immediate 'short-circuit' between the historical events of

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that the conflict is about to change; 2. The only possible judgment is "political", of the conformity of the means to the end'.

twentieth-century 'actually-existing socialism' and Marx's theory. In fact, there are ambiguities and aspects that are still unresolved. In *The German Ideology*, Marx abandons the project of building a 'totally social' man, free of private 'stains', completely deleterious and worth eliminating at all costs: the very dualism between 'private' and 'social' is put aside, but not because of a subsumption of the former under the latter.

An unbridgeable gap separates Marx's conceptual structure from Rousseau's full subsumption of the individual under the community.[62] As in Hobbes and other contractualists, in Rousseau individualism and absolutism are complicated and not irreconcilable opposites, but two sides of the same coin. To fulfil the rights of individuals, or procure their safety when it is constantly threatened by the *status naturae*, a political obligation must arise from a pact that is absolute and agreed on by all.[63] Rousseau's perspective is characterised by a clear opposition between the man that emerges from the contract, who is completely 'social' and has forgotten his inevitably selfish personal interests, and the private man, who is denied, after the social pact, even the possibility to exist, because of his lack of love for the community and his attachment to money. The 'new man' of the *Contrat* is entirely at one with the general will: only through the latter can real freedom and real equality be achieved, and he must hand all his rights over to it and love it even if it is to his own detriment, even sacrifice his life to it, if necessary.[64] The antithesis between social and private man becomes the opposition between selflessness and egoism, conceived of as a social ill that must be eradicated at all costs.

Marx's reflection on this issue is entirely at odds with Rousseau's counterposition of selflessness and egoism. This counterposition is deconstructed and its foundation eliminated: in Marx, there is neither an anthropology of abnegation nor one of selfishness. But a further step is required: the development of a theory that allows for the *Aufhebung* of egoism and selflessness is not sufficient; they would be maintained and overcome in their abstraction and one-sidedness. This is not a self-referential theoretical construct: to refer

62. Rousseau 1968; see also Biral 1993.

63. On the individualism/absolutism nexus, see Schnur 1963 and Giuseppe Duso's comment in Duso (ed.) 1993, p. 13: 'Individual freedom and absolute sovereignty – and the coerced activity of the political body – are not conflictual poles but elements of the same theoretical construct'.

64. There are several passages in the *Social Contract*, but see in particular Book II, Chapter Ten on 'The People': Rousseau 1968, p. 93. See also Fiaschi, 1984, p. 139: 'It is a positive state-order that affirms with exclusive determination its own dominion as an autonomous law maker. But now this positivity must achieve its own total self-affirmation in the complete identification of all ordered subjects'; see also Fiaschi 2008, pp. 33ff, who dwells on the question of the individualist foundation of this logic of legitimation.

to the *Theses on Feuerbach*, theoretical contradictions must be resolved through practice. Therefore, the opposition is continuously created and destroyed in practice, rather than on the basis of an abstract principle decoupled from the empirical realm of its concreteness. As we have already noted, in Marx there is no opposition between practice and philosophy that results in an 'anti-philosophy' founded on an immediate and unquestioned evidence of practice. Rather, it is necessary to stay as close as possible to the 'torsion' that is impressed on theory by practice through the constant change of political forms and situations.[65] One could even say that reality is politics, if the latter is understood as a constant shift from the analysis of the situation, from the specificity and 'unique' singularity of its instances, to the transformation of the 'present state of things'.[66] Given that philosophical conscience is the symptom of a social condition, there needs to be a form of knowledge that is adequate to the process of politicisation traversing every aspect of existence. Therefore, the inadequacy of the opposition between egoism and selflessness does not result *sic et simpliciter* in the search for a theory capable of overcoming it. Practice keeps shifting the level of debate, and the latter can never be 'fixed' in an anthropology of egoism or selflessness. Looking at the practical dimension of this question highlights one of the distinctive traits of Marx's materialism: the idea that no real freedom is not also posed as an effective change of the *status quo*, and *vice versa*. The constitutive reference to practice and the significant abandonment of the notion of *Gattungswesen* allow Marx to 'suspend' the question of human nature, bracket it away, or leave it behind. The focus is not human nature, but a specific and 'singular' investigation of contingent individuals and their participation in action. Equally, the question of choosing between an anthropology of egoism and one of selflessness is abandoned. These two notions and the corresponding figures of private and social man fully belong to the capitalist framework: the apparent community is based precisely on the reciprocal implication of private and social man, of individualist presupposition and subsumption under an objective power, a relation that is never fully resolved. From this standpoint, overcoming the antithesis under question also entails moving beyond the bourgeois system that extends over civil society and the state. It entails a questioning of its constitutive elements and moving in a direction different to and in discontinuity with the fortuitous domination of individuality and individual subsumption, both distinctive features of the apparent community.

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65. For an analytical investigation of the complex relationship of *The German Ideology* to philosophy, see Vinci 2011; Brudney 1998, pp. 264–359; and Lebowitz 2003².

66. See Lefort 1978, p. 192.

The German Ideology does not provide a 'one-dimensional' image of modernity based on a 'reactive' outlook. The 'apparent community' is characterised by a structural ambivalence typical of Marx's analysis of the modern epoch, in particular of the French Revolution as the event in the wake of which the aforementioned *Trennung* reaches its apotheosis. The capitalist *Gemeinschaft* aims to move beyond hierarchical and ecclesiastical arrangements, and this is a necessary condition for the very existence and development of individuality. At the same time, it also entails its subsumption under a social power that overarches and almost destroys it. The tendency of the apparent community is to destroy the individual realm, but it can never completely destroy the capacities, faculties, and potentialities of individuals.

Marx explains this ambiguity in various ways, not always convincingly. For instance, a 'classical' interpretation in the history of Marxism ascribes a central role to the question of the connection and contradiction between forces and relations of production as the situation that opens up the possibility of a revolutionary rupture.[67] In the dynamics under analysis, there is a strong structural element of contradiction [*Widerspruch*]: the productive forces deny their own nature, which is the possibility of creating new life-conditions for the individual, and become their opposite, that is, destructive forces (money and machines). In this perspective, the opposition [*Gegensatz*] between the two classes that society is divided into becomes paroxysmal to the extent that the proletarian class, whilst comprising the majority of society, is forced to bear all the burden of society in order to escape from a situation of constant danger: 'Thus things have now come to such a pass that the individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity [*Selbstbetätigung*], but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence'.[68] In a Hobbesian sense, the primacy of this search for concrete and existential security over the will to individual self-affirmation sanctions the end of struggle. But the most convincing approach to this question is not primarily the recognition of a historical dialectics hinged on the relationship between productive forces and productive relations. As a matter of fact, *The German Ideology* presents a historical framework based on the structure and development of the division of labour. From this standpoint, such an approach presents certain problems. When taking into account the fundamental contradiction between productive forces and productive relations, one runs the danger of determinism, or understanding communism as the inevitable outcome of historical development.

67. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 439.
68. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 92.

The German Ideology, despite these limitations, also offers the opportunity to confront this issue in a different and more productive manner, both theoretically and politically. The co-existence of different aspects that cannot be immediately combined should not surprise the reader, given the fragmentary and unfinished character of the work. But, more generally, the whole of Marx's development is not reducible to an unambiguous characterisation or 'system', and even less so to a doctrine. It is traversed by a multiplicity of perspectives and political projects. This should not be seen as a form of 'eclectism', but as evidence of a constant attempt to reflect starting from the singularity of the situation in which Marx operates, on the basis of particular conditions that are immanent to it.[69] To open new fields beyond those of the contradiction between forces and relations of production, this ambivalence of the seeming community must be leveraged because one the one hand it signals the subjugation of individuals to an objective power and class-domination, on the other hand, it is the very condition of possibility for individuality.

2.3. Singularity and practice: the realisation of 'individuals as such'

For Marx, the character of the categories of civil society is structurally two-fold; because of this, his critique is immanent and does not point to an absolute otherness. The apparent community is not mere fiction, but neither does it comprise all actual reality: while it keeps trying to exclude every *conatus* of emancipation, it never fully succeeds. In fact, the very existence of an 'apparent community' presupposes the possibility of a 'real community': the relationship between 'apparent' and 'real' cannot be interpreted as one between 'false' and 'true', or mystification and effectuality. Under the *scheinbare Gemeinschaft* there lies a *scheinbare Freiheit*; individuals are subsumed under an objective social power materialised in money. However, this is far from saying that there is no freedom and that individuality is merely fictitious. The ambivalence and two-fold character of the individual condition needs to be taken into account: on the one hand, the full development of human capacities and abilities, hitherto unthinkable, is now possible; on the other hand, individuality turns into chance. However, it is important to reiterate that individuality is subject to forces that are autonomous from it, but never completely cancelled-out by them: capital can never fully cancel out

69. On this issue, Terrell Carver's analysis in *Postmodern Marx,* despite its merit of offering a non-conventional image of Marx's development based on the identification of 'multiple Marxes', risks falling into the 'eclecticism' criticised above. See Carver 1998, p. 234.

individual and collective energies. This is not a 'deadly' and 'funereal' history of devastations *sic et simpliciter*, but a constitutively ambivalent social structure open to different developments that cannot be fully predicted. Marx's theory cannot be reduced to a 'catastrophic' and 'tragic' idea of historical development, or to an exuberant valorisation of subjectivity and its ability to overcome its own circumstances immediately.

In contrast to the apparent community and its character, the community of revolutionary proletarians aims to recognise individuals as such, not as subjects to a social structure: 'It is just this combination [*die Vereinigung*] of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development and movement [*der freien Entwicklung und Bewegung*] of individuals under their control'.[70] From this standpoint, the notion of community is pushed to its extreme consequences and freed of all its distinctive traits: it is no longer the place where individuals are subsumed to a constituted political subject whilst seemingly united in their freedom and equality; on the contrary, it is the overcoming of such logic. The singular individual must be conceived of in a manner adequate to the determined circumstances, but not as a cog in the engine of a mechanism that seemingly moves *motu proprio.* In order to 'replace the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals with the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances', his potential needs to be fully developed.[71] The fulcrum of the argument is individual realisation: no hypostatisation of the community or its absorption of the individual, but an attempt to politically conceive of the end of individual subjugation to objective and seemingly uncontrollable social forces.

Marx tries to valorise the individual in relation rather than counterposition to the community, because the development of individuals is only possible through their *Vereinigung*, their union, and obviously given the existing forces of production:

> Only within the community [*in der Gemeinschaft*] has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community.... In the real community [*in der wirklichen Gemeinschaft*] the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.[72]

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70. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 80.
71. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 438. On the asymmetry between the 'apparent community' and the 'real community', and between 'individuals as members of a class' and 'individuals as such', see Basso 2001. See also Di Marco 2005, pp. 97–100, whose direction is close to ours.
72. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 78.

Personal freedom and individual realisation are inseparable from the presence of a community based on the association of individuals. The complexity of Marx's analysis is clear: on the one hand, he defends the full unfolding of individual potential; on the other, he criticises the individual 'seriality' mentioned above. The purpose of the argument is to conceive of the valorisation of individuals beyond the context of their subsumption under the alien power [*fremde Macht*] of the apparent community. In the latter situation, their connection is marked by a lack of any intercourse other an abstract form of domination, materialised in money. In counterposition to the existing paradigm of community, the fictitious idea of freedom and the negation of real relations between individuals, a new model of community emerges, one free from organicist connotations. Later, in the 1850s and 1860s, Marx would abandon the notion of *Gemeinschaft* that was so crucial in *The German Ideology*. Aside from some limitations of the text, this can be explained as a questioning not only of the 'apparent community', but of community itself. A community is inevitably bound to the physical and metaphorical confines of a territory and entails some form of individual subsumption. *The German Ideology* does not display full awareness of the non-coincidence between commonality and community or of the disciplinary framework inherent to any *Gemeinschaft*.

Despite these difficulties, *The German Ideology* does point to the overcoming of oppositions between the individual realm and the existence of a social and political fabric, because the realisation of 'individuals as such' is only possible in a 'real community', an 'association' that is not a mere sum of individual-atoms:

> Only at this stage does self-activity [*die Selbstbetätigung*] coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitations. The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the previously limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such.[73]

The shift from labour, a burden on man's existence, to the opportunity of a self-activity related closely to the material 'direction' of its context signals that the real community has affected a displacement. The real community [*wirkliche Gemeinschaft*] under question is also communist society [*kommunistische Gesellschaft*], the emancipation from the subjugation inherent to the 'system of needs'. This is symmetrical to the analysis of the apparent community, that

73. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 88.

is also *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, bourgeois civil society, as a system of needs': 'Within communist society, the only society in which the genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase, this development is determined precisely by the connection of individuals'.[74] Communist society, simultaneously also a real community, can only be conceived on the basis of civil society, the whole of the material intercourses between individuals. Like bourgeois society and the apparent community, these two notions become compatible, but their presuppositions are eliminated: whilst the community, founded on singular individuality, is the negation of organicism in the modern form of its subsumption under an anonymous power, society no longer constitutes the whole of power-relations but, on the contrary, becomes its overcoming. 'Individuals as such' must be appreciated in their singularity and, starting from actually-existing material conditions, they should not be made to belong to a predetermined society or community that 'impedes' their ability to act.[75] The first distinctive feature of the real community is its reference to 'individuals as such [*Individuen als Individuen*]', as opposed to 'individuals as members of a class [*Individuen als Klassenmitglieder*]' with their fixed belonging to an apparent community. 'Individuals as such' are not understood as being absolutely free from any determination or conditioning. This would entail the earlier anthropocentric interpretation that we criticised for its tendency to reduce all processes to a mere effect of human action. The focus on 'individuals as such' in *The German Ideology* does not refer to a dialectical mediation between man and present society, as had been the case, for instance, in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Here, Marx aims to deconstruct these two notions, because they are unable to grasp the 'actual truth of the matter' in its fluid and dynamic character. At the centre of this argument there is no absolutisation, whether individualist or organicist; but rather, a determined, specific and 'singular' analysis of what lies 'between' individuals. Whilst, in earlier texts, society had been described as being composed of individual-atoms, in *The German Ideology*, it is not primarily composed of individuals, but of material relations between them. From this perspective, 'individuals as such' are characterised by inter-relationality

74. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 439.

75. This largely sums up the position of Tosel 1995, which highlights the centrality of the question of the reciprocal implication of individual and community. See also Tosel 1996, p.13, where he valorises the 'being in common' as a substantial common realm and not only a formal-procedural one. For different perspectives, see Plamenatz 1975; Elster 1986b, who believes that Marx's attempt to conceive of communism as a synthesis of individual and community 'was inspired by Leibniz's philosophy, who similarly claimed that each monad differs from all others, and that each reflects all others from its point of view'; Screpanti 2007; Thomson 2004, p. 215; and Leschke 2005.

and multi-directionality: individual life expansively 'embraces a wide circle of varied activities [*Tätigkeiten*] and practical relations [*Beziehungen*] to the world'.[76] In order for the relational dimension to emerge from singularity, it is useful to use the notion of 'transindividual', adopted in the contemporary French debate, to indicate the constant 'exchange' between the 'individual' and the 'collective', based on mobile coordinates that are never defined once and for all.

Here, the relation between apparent and real community and, in particular, between the elements that underlie them, namely 'individuals as members of a class' and 'individuals as such', needs further examination. At times, Marx describes future communist society in some detail. Faced with the devastation brought about by historical developments, Marx runs the risk of providing an idyllic picture in the colours of a perfectly self-transparent association. Though this is a real dead-end for the argument, both theoretically and politically, criticising it does not need to lead to a realist, as opposed to a utopian, standpoint. Marx referred to the opposition between realism and utopianism whilst engaged in harsh polemics against the latter (although he sometimes adopted means of argument that were somewhat utopian, in the strict and limiting sense of the term). Marx interprets utopianism as the construction of a purely imaginary society *sic et simpliciter*, rather than a perspective with some potential to criticise the existing state of affairs. The opposition between utopianism and realism needs questioning. Marx's descriptions of communist society are limited because they resemble a pacified state of affairs purged of all conflicts, the result of the unfolding of the decisive contradiction between forces and relations of production, which is able to give rise to a historical 'collision'. In this framework, the 'real community' is the outcome of a process understood deterministically on the basis of a philosophy of history hinged on the division of labour, and on the nexus between productive forces and relations of production in particular.

Although this way of looking at the problem is present in the whole of Marx's trajectory, and not at all foreign to the framework of the categories of *The German Ideology* as a whole, it is not the only possible way of developing the argument. For instance, beyond the anti-utopianism, we can interpret Marx's famous statement, his refusal to provide detailed descriptions of the coming society and 'write recipes for the cookbooks of the future', productively. If the 'real community' of *The German Ideology* is not understood as the result of a teleological historical process, but as the outcome of a projec-

76. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 263. See Balibar 1996. Balibar insists on the relevance of individuality in 'the infinite development of his singularity, which would also make it necessary to be in common', Balibar 2000, p. 82.

tion aimed at conceiving of a society free from contradictions, it cannot be a merely ideal construction. Far from 'having to' be actualised, this community is 'real' insofar as it develops the energies that operate in the dynamics under investigation. There is an attempt, here, to understand freedom as a cooperation of 'trans-individualities' in unity, something extremely mobile, and thus never definitively achieved.[77] Moving beyond the limits of *The German Ideology* we interpret the relationship between 'apparent' and 'real' community (and 'individuals as members of a class' and 'individuals as such') as an open process that cannot be reduced to pre-established schema and with coordinates that can never fully predetermined.

For this reason, both theoretically and politically the most productive definition of communism is not a specific and detailed description of the future society, with idyllic traits and based on the removal or devaluation of existing contradictions. Rather, it is something that brings to light the structural character of the 'real movement':

> Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement [*die wirkliche Bewegung*] which abolishes [*aufhebt*] the present state of things.[78]

Communism is not the inevitable outcome and final goal of a historical process, but the 'flow' inscribed in the 'folds' of the present that develops its energies. To highlight its constitutive constitutive character, one of 'movement', is to cast light on its dynamism and irreducibility to a determined framework and situation, although it is constantly confronted with contingent political situations. The effort lies in keeping together the provisional character of this element and the need for it to exercise an effective influence on the contexts in which it is inserted. In any case, for Marx, the movement of communism is 'real'. It is inscribed in the materiality of existing historical situations and mobile coordinates that are not determined once and for all, do not coincide with a specified political form, and are in open 'tension' with it. There is a two-fold 'demarcation' of the notion of communism: on the one hand, communism is rooted in the singularity of the situation; on the other hand, it is

77. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 92. On the 'social' character of freedom, for different perspectives see Texier 1990, pp. 45–66. Tosel 1996 appreciates Marx's attempt to conceive of the freedom of each individual through their connection, beyond the logic of identity of 'possessive individualism'. Negri 1999, pp. 252ff. insists on the relation between individual and collective, or rather between singularity and cooperation. Vadée 1998 highlights the fact that Marx's theory is a philosophy of freedom understood dynamically, as a real possibility.

78. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 49.

eccentric to any attempt to legitimate a determined structure or any attempt at 'constitutionalisation'. Whilst connected, these two aspects can also be different and pregnant with new political developments. As for the definition of communism as the real movement that abolishes 'the present state of things', a further clarification needs to be made. The critical element deployed here is very different from Hegelian *Aufhebung.* It is not an abstract overcoming of contradictions and their one-sidedness, but a neat rupture with the 'existing' state of affairs. This excludes the possibility of recomposing it at a higher level and entails a process of deconstruction of the modern political scene that lies between civil society and the state.

This insistence on rupture leads to a further observation. Marx's argument offers a strong 'potential' for conflict, which is why we need to further qualify our earlier discussion of the centrality of the question of relations. On the one hand, as we have explained, the relation between 'apparent' and 'real' community is not the same as the one between 'false' and 'real', because the latter develops energies that exist contradictorily and inadequately in the former. On the other hand, the real community cannot be reduced to the notion of an unfolding of premisses contained in the apparent community and to a rupture with the latter. There is a discontinuity between 'individuals as such' and 'individuals as members of a class'. Therefore, the apparent community – that is, bourgeois society, founded on the relation and the material intercourse of individuals – is more than a sum of individual-atoms. The social nexus is decisive but also reveals a deep mystification: as individuality turns into chance, most relations turn into a lack of intercourse between 'individuals as such', beyond that determined by their common subsumption to money. In this context, the shift from apparent to real community can only be actualised in a fracture where the very field of discourse is deconstructed: the mutual implication of connection and fragmentation proper to the apparent community must be exploded. Since it is not enough to 'overthrow' the existing state of things whilst preserving its essential logic, one must break away from all symmetries with it. Rather than simply counterpose a 'real' connection to the 'false' one of bourgeois society founded on the isolation of individuals from one another, it is necessary to generate a crisis in the actual structure of the relations that extend between civil society and the state.[79] To 'swerve' the

79. Badiou appreciates Marx's understanding of the elements of fracture in the 'social' (especially those brought about by workers' movements). Being eccentric to all predetermined contexts, these are also the possibility of an 'other' politics: 'This radical hypothesis of truth reduces all previous politics to fiction in order to grasp the symptom that characterises the social without pointing it to the fiction of the political; it needs a proletarian political capacity to posit itself as an exception to the approach based on the social and the communitarian'. Badiou 1985, p. 31.

conception here criticised demands a 'rupture' in the mutual implication of an individual's freedom and his subjugation to social power, and thus questions the emphasis on relations, fixed in communities of individuals who are substantially unrelated because they are subsumed to the domination of the fictitious community represented by money. From this standpoint, there is no search for a 'real' connection *versus* the 'false' one of the capitalist mode of production: the very structure of the social nexus is deconstructed.

From the framework outlined thus far, it is clear that not only relations, but also non-relations are political and capable of questioning the determined *status quo*. The relevance of 'trans-individuality' does not entail an irenic logic of inter-subjectivity[80] because its social character is constitutively 'polemical', guilty, and established on a specific position. Rather than relying on the notion of the primacy of conflict, this is a particular and 'singular' analysis of the practices of conflict of 'individuals as such' within civil society. To use a mathematical metaphor, Marx is not so interested in the 'integral' but in the 'differential'. This is what produces an effect of acceleration, like Epicurus's *clinamen*,[81] and allows one to swerve from the predicted path, giving rise to splits and tears in bourgeois civil society and thus the possibility of its dissolution.[82] Given that the fracture does not only involve individuals but also, and perhaps especially, classes, it is now necessary to investigate the meaning of the decisive role of class and how it changes the terms of the question.

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80. On the question of inter-subjectivity, the argument moves in a direction that is incompatible with Habermas's communicative ethics, which results in the identification of a 'public sphere' characterised by structures of integration and sharing where inter-subjectivity holds different aspects together without assimilating them to one another. This finds its greatest realisation in complex democratic societies founded on the idea of the rule of law. Marx's perspective does not seem reconcilable with this approach, because it is based on a practice of 'disjunction' rather than a search for integration. Moreover, as we earlier emphasises, the 'real movement that abolishes the present state of things' cannot be 'constitutionalised' and thus excludes any juridical codification, whereas Habermas's theory is eminently juridical in character. As for inter-subjectivity, in addition to previous works, also see Habermas 2008.

81. See Marx: 'Atoms are purely self-sufficient bodies.... They move not in straight, but in oblique lines. The motion of falling is the motion of non-self-sufficiency. Lucretius therefore is correct when he maintains that the declination breaks the *fati foedera*, and, since he applies this immediately to consciousness, it can be said of the atom that the declination is that something in its breast that can fight back and resist'. Marx 1975a, p. 49.

82. See Balibar 1996, p. 107.

2.4. Common class-action

Let us go back to our earlier remarks on the notion of the proletariat, its embeddedness in practice, and its two-fold character as, on the one hand, a particular class, and on the other, as the overcoming of its class-status. The concept is so mobile that it is impossible to hypostatise it and uncritically apply it to all historical contexts. The importance of the conflict that materialises in it shows that, for Marx, the elements of fracture in the 'social' realm are eccentric and cannot be completely fixed in relation. Existing inequalities and injustices cannot be recomposed at a higher level: a 'swerve' must take place to grasp the extremely political character of conflict and non-connection.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels offers what is in many ways a more advanced perspective than Marx did at that time, and his influence on Marx's articulation of the class-question cannot be underestimated.[83] The analysis of the structure of competition in *The German Ideology* has resonances with Engels's text.[84] Competition isolates the individuals who form classes: the bourgeoisie, but especially the proletariat. Far from being neutral, competition is linked to the relations of production in civil society and the relation of bourgeois domination over the proletarian class. Marx's analysis highlights the two-fold character of the capitalist mode of production: in this context, association [*Vereinigung*] and isolation [*Isolation*] are two sides of the individual condition. Thus, on the one hand, we have the isolation of proletarians amongst themselves, who are in constant danger of fighting amongst themselves, in a Hobbesian scenario where nothing is safe; on the other hand, it is possible to unite forces against a common enemy who holds power [*Herrschaft*]. In *The German Ideology*, the process is described historically.[85] The division of labour is the 'red thread' of an argument that develops a 'grand historical narrative' typical of the nineteenth century.

However, the text includes elements that are eccentric to that framework. First of all, by way of comparison with previous social formations, the analysis powerfully demonstrates the destructive character of capital and its ability to 'uproot' a series of pre-constituted structures of belonging that held society together prior to its emergence. One could even go as far as to say that the

83. Engels 1975b, p. 443. See also p. 427: 'every one sees in his neighbour an enemy to be got out of the way, or, at best, a tool to be used for his own advantage. And this war grows from year to year, as the criminal tables show, more violent, passionate, irreconcilable. The enemies are dividing gradually into two great camps – the bourgeoisie on the one hand, the workers on the other. This war of each against all, of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, need cause us no surprise, for it is only the logical sequel of the principle involved in free competition.'

84. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 82.

85. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 81.

individual and society, in the strongest sense of the terms, were unthinkable before the advent of the capitalist mode of production. Despite the danger of providing an excessively linear view of historical development, Marx grasps a force of rupture in capitalism. Secondly, the text highlights the constitutively ambivalent character of competition. Competition makes the individual subservient to an overarching social power that tries to destroy him; but it also opens up potentials that were unthinkable before capitalism, because the very idea of individual realisation was inconceivable. Moreover, and with clear references to *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* the text shows that large industry leads to the formation of large industrial centres and rapid communication between them. This enables workers to come to closer contact with one another and thus win over the fragmentation that, in those circumstances, they had appeared to be inevitably destined to. But, moving beyond the limits of *The German Ideology,* the 'instability' of the process must be taken into account: its outcome cannot be taken for granted, and can never be fully predicted. Though Marx sometimes identifies a sort of 'necessity' in the historical process, the provisional and open character of the situation must be underlined, because its coordinates are not predetermined.

It is now necessary to investigate the configuration of the relation between class and its individual members in the capitalist mode of production. At first sight, individuals do not seem autonomous from their class, being in a condition of subsumption to it.[86] Apparently, class enjoys unchallenged domination over its members, because as soon as it is formed, it becomes autonomous from them and subjugates them: 'In the bourgeois class, as in every other, it is only personal conditions that are developed into common and universal conditions under which the separate members of the class possess and live'.[87] Marx tries to develop a different perspective on the apparent community through the notion of class, and by different we mean relocating the essence of the question and its conceptual core, rather than some absolute otherness. 'This subsuming of individuals under definite classes cannot be abolished [*aufgehoben*] until a class has evolved which has no longer any particular class interest to assert against a ruling class'.[88] The rupture with the present state of things does not entail its overturning, which would keep its essential logic intact: if the subsumption of individuals to an abstract social power is linked to the existence of a structure of domination embodied in a particular class, its overcoming cannot be *sic et simpliciter* the symmetrical inversion of the relations of subjugation to the advantage of the (previously) oppressed class.

86. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 75.
87. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 359.
88. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 77.

Here, it becomes necessary to examine the status of the proletariat so that its asymmetrical character in relation to the bourgeoisie can emerge.

The proletarian, as described in *The German Ideology*, is interpreted in two different ways. In a first interpretation, the proletariat is fully inserted in the topology of bourgeois society, with its class-divisions and their absolute autonomy from the individuals that make them up. From this perspective, it appears to be homogeneous to the apparent community, based on the domination [*Herrschaft*] of each individual: individuals are seen as 'members of a class', rather than 'individuals as such', in a pre-fixed and immobile belonging. Marx and Engels's writings from these years often treat the class-struggle as if it were an actual war between two hostile armies. This interpretation runs the risk of finding a symmetrical relation between the proletariat and the bourgeois class.[89] In many respects, such a view of class is inadequate and presents a complication: the presence of this symmetry is complicated by the existence of a relation of domination. The action of the class that is ruled over is not at the same plane as the action of the ruling class. The investigation of class-structure is closely linked to the analysis of the dynamics of the productive forces: 'The conditions under which definite productive forces can be applied are the conditions of the rule [*Herrschaft*] of a definite class of society, whose social power [*Macht*], deriving from its property [*Besitz*], has its practical-idealistic expression in each case in the form of the State.'[90] Capitalist exploitation consists in the rule [*Herrschaft*] of one class whose presuppositions correspond to those of the productive forces, a class that can, therefore, exercise an actual social power over the class it dominates.

Though a connection between relations of production and structure of domination does exist, the latter cannot be reduced to the economic realm, as the effect of a cause, from which the intellectual realm derives. 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force [*die herrschende Macht*] of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force'.[91] There is a correspondence and inter-relation between the material and the spiritual realm, based on ideas. Marx rules out the possibility of conceiving of notions detached from the social context and unconnected to the material realm. He tries to link all outcomes to the historical and political conditions of their realisation. The distinction between structure – namely the ensemble of the material relations of production – and ideological superstructure – that is, morality, the law, and politics – should not be under-

89. On the question of whether there is symmetry between social classes in Marx, also in relation to Balibar's reading, see Basso 2009, pp. 215–36.
90. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 52.
91. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 58.

stood rigidly, nor should the role or importance of the superstructure be underestimated. Ideology is not, then, devalued or merely derived from the structure; on the contrary, Marx here demonstrates its function and lack of abstract self-sufficiency.[92]

For the ruling class, it is essential to exercise 'ideological' domination: 'For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones.'[93] However that may be, if a class wants to represent its own interests in the form of universality, it needs the strength [*Gewalt*] to do so and seize political power.[94] From this perspective, the relationship between classes within the capitalist mode of production is driven by a relation of domination of one class over the other. Rule, as we have seen, is not solely related to the economic realm.

But alongside this interpretation of the proletariat – that it is in substantial homology with the bourgeois class, albeit on the basis of a sort of asymmetry that it derives from being 'ruled over' – another interpretation can be found in *The German Ideology*. According to this second interpretation, the proletariat does not stand in continuity with this set of categories. This is evidenced in the discussion of the 'real community', which is not symmetrical to the 'apparent community', insofar as it is founded on the realisation of 'individuals as such', rather than 'as members of a class'. Like many Marxian categories, the notions of individual, class and community possess an intrinsically two-fold character, and whilst the 'name' remains the same (individual, class, community), there is a decisive discontinuity between the two aspects. On the one hand, they are not fully inhomogeneous to the structure in question; on the other hand, they do have the power to create ruptures in the *status quo*. These notions are extremely dynamic and irreducible to any pre-fixed and static structure; they are mobile and susceptible to various developments, and not wholly predictable. Thus the status of the proletariat itself is also ambivalent: on the one hand, like the bourgeoisie, it appears to represent a particular class; on the other hand, it is out of synch with the class-based scenario of the apparent community. In this perspective, the proletariat combines a mass of individuals who tend towards overcoming the class-structure of society and, by doing so, also their very status as members of a class. As we have already

92. Balibar 1996, pp. 55–7.
93. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 60.
94. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 40.

explained, the proletariat is a 'partial universality', not homogeneous to the bourgeoisie, which tends towards the realisation of particular interests. After all, this question acquires a precise meaning when one sees communism as a real movement inscribed in the materiality of struggles and their tendency towards the *Aufhebung* of the present, rather than an inevitable outcome. This 'real movement' does not emerge *ex nihilo*; it is rooted in the workers' experiences of the period for instance, the Silesian textile-workers' revolt of 1844, the 'League of the Just', and Chartism. At the same time, Marx's communism is critical of some elements of European workers' associations, especially the exaggerated role of the artisans, who detracted from the potential of the proletarian dimension of the struggle. The goal is to come to a political articulation of the working class: in this context, the 'communist party' is designated as the organisation adequate to pursuing the objectives of the workers' movement.[95]

The notion of class must 'drop to' the level of practice, because 'the separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle [*Kampf*] against another class'.[96] What unites (and divides) individuals in bourgeois society is not some basic common good or a constituted and regulated juridical order, but an element of structural conflict: classes only exist within this conflict and thus are only determined in class-struggle. This perspective entails the rejection of substantialist understandings of the proletariat, whether ontological or sociological, based on a rigid hypostatisation of it as a social group and its uncritical application across different eras. Class is explicated in the realm of practice and cannot be determined once and for all; it is an eminently political notion that demands a radical transformation in political practice.[97] This recognition of the central role of praxis reveals the extreme mobility of class and its constant tendency towards the realisation of 'individuals as such'. This expression indicates that each individual is in a position of absolute equality, where the latter is neither immediately economic nor juridical, but what has the potential to unhinge the pre-fixed belonging and any representation that blocks its dynamics.[98] From this standpoint, the relationship between 'real community', based on the valorisation of singularities, and class, irreducible to any hypostasis, is constantly brought to bear on contingent situations. Singular individuals constitute a class only insofar as they have to wage a common struggle against another class: as soon

95. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 458. See Löwy 2005, pp. 194–5.
96. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 77.
97. See Balibar 1974, pp. 184–5; and Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, pp. 203–40.
98. It is useful here to refer to Badiou's essay of 1992, where he highlights the importance of the notion of equality interpreted not economically but as a name for radical emancipation, based on singularities that cannot be reduced to a predetermined schema.

as there is common action, there is unity. After all, when Marx differentiates between his view of the revolution and Stirner's notion of revolt, he emphasises precisely this constitutive reference to *praxis*.[99] In order to understand the revolution as a political act, we need to look at Marx's 1844 'Critical Marginal Notes on the King of Prussia and Social Reform', where this is grasped in all its deconstructing power with reference to the Silesian revolt.[100] This act is clearly different from the generic and chance act of an individual in the apparent community. Though inscribed in the dynamics of the productive forces based on the conditions of domination of 'a definite class',[101] the overcoming of this logic is materialised in the existence of the proletariat, a class that turns the cooperation between individuals into a politically meaningful movement starting from the recognition of a common condition.

From this standpoint, conflict is not an 'original' element, conceived in full accordance with the conditions in which it is actualised: singular individuals form a real community when they give rise to moments of subjectivation that can question the present state of things. But, insofar as there is no 'metaphysical' assumption of conflict and we are confronted with a circumscribed analysis of each situation as it immanently unfolds, it is impossible to treat the notion of class aside from the concrete struggles where it is constantly redetermined. It is thus necessary to analyse the way that Marx continually reflected on class following *The German Ideology*, up until a key moment for the working-class movement: that is, 1848. The class-action nexus is crucial because class cannot be hypostatised sociologically or economically. It is 'what is at stake' politically, and class-practices must be examined as they are concretely produced, irreducible to a pre-fixed and rigid schema: without this 'incursion' into workers' struggles, such perspective would be entirely undetermined. Therefore, for Marx, the relevance of the historicity (understood in the sense of a constitutive reference to individuals and classes within the circumscribed circumstances in which they operate) of the argument is never detached from the political action of intervention in the concrete situation. Marx's historical writings must be interpreted on the basis of their political stances.

2.5. Towards 1848: thinking in the conjuncture

The closing pages of *The Poverty of Philosophy* on the contradictions in bourgeois society are particularly useful for tackling this question.[102] Marx's view

99. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 439.
100. Marx1975f, pp. 189–206.
101. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 52.
102. Marx 1976a, p. 108.

of capitalism is structurally two-fold: capitalism is simultaneously the source of wealth and misery, of the extraordinary growth of the forces of production and the creation of destructive powers. Under capitalism, these two characters cannot be separated, because they are not merely 'juxtaposed', allowing us to separate a 'negative' from a 'positive' factor, such as misery from wealth and subservience from freedom. These elements are in conflict with one another, in connection with the class-dynamics of society.[103]

This society is composed of classes as well as individuals, and cannot be seen as a sum total of citizen-atoms:

> What, then, is this Prometheus resuscitated by M. Proudhon? It is society [*Gesellschaft*], social relations [*gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse*] based on class antagonism. These relations are not relations between individual and individual, but between worker and capitalist, between farmer and landlord, etc. Wipe out these relations and you annihilate all society.[104]

Though antagonism permeates society, bourgeois ideologues paint a completely idealised and harmonic picture of the present situation: 'So long as one is bourgeois one cannot do other than see in this relation of antagonism a relation of harmony and eternal justice, which permits no one to get value at the expense of another'.[105] It does not make sense, in this context, to separate the 'good' from the 'bad' as Proudhon does.[106] As Marx argues in his 1846 letter to Annenkov, modern industry and slavery are not antithetical; on the contrary, they presuppose one another: 'Direct slavery is the pivot of bourgeois industry as well as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton, without cotton you cannot have modern industry'.[107] When questioning Proudhon, Marx not only argues that the 'good' and the 'bad' side of capitalism mutually imply one another, but also that the 'bad' side is responsible for moving events forwards. Then Marx engages in a harsh polemic against the 'philanthropists', whom he accuses of wanting to maintain the bourgeois system and trying in vain to eliminate its negative sides. 'The philanthropists thus wish to conserve the categories which express bourgeois relations, without having the antagonism [*Widerspruch*] which is inseparable from these relations. They fancy they are seriously combating the bourgeois system, and they are more bourgeois than the others'.[108]

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103. Marx 1976a, p. 170.
104. Marx 1976a, p. 159.
105. Marx 1976a, p. 144.
106. Marx 1976a, p. 168.
107. Marx 1976a, p. 167.
108. Marx 1976a, p. 177.

This rejection of all forms of reconciliation and of an immediate elimination of the 'bad' aspects in the name of the 'good ones' does not lead to an apocalyptic vision: Marx's critique is always immanent to the concrete situations in which it develops, relating to contingent events and the openings they allow for, and trying to question the *status quo*. Therefore, the emphasis on antagonism is not nihilistic, because Marx presents its intrinsically two-fold character: as politically destructive as well as productive.[109] In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, workers' combination plays an important role in the elimination of internal competition between workers and the stimulation of a general uprising against capital. The English Chartists' organisation is particularly relevant in this respect, as Marx defines it as a true and proper 'political party'.[110] In this context, there is no antithesis between reform and revolution: Marx's position is neither reformist,[111] obviously, nor is it driven by an absolute aversion towards all reforms. Reform and revolution should not be seen as opposites or incompatible *a priori*. What needs to be investigated is the potential of the material circumstances of each situation to subvert the present state of things in its rootedness in the practice of struggle. As long as they engage in a struggle against another class, whether immediately revolutionary or not, individuals form a class: Chartism is paradigmatic in this respect. In *The German Ideology*, there are various references to Chartism and citations from Eugène Buret's 1843 work *De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France* and Thomas Carlyle's 1840 book *Chartism*. But the main point of reference for Marx is Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, where a clear connection is made between Chartism and socialism. On the question of reform and revolution, the following passage is revealing:

> The first draft of the constitution…still contained the *droit au travail*, the right to work, the first clumsy formula wherein the revolutionary demands of the proletariat are summarized.…The right to work is, in the bourgeois sense, an absurdity, a miserable, pious wish. But behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class, and therefore the abolition of wage labor, of capital, and of their mutual relations. Behind the '*right to work*' stood the June insurrection.[112]

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109. On Marx's notion of politics, see Artous 1999; Mezzadra and Ricciardi 2002, pp. 11–43.

110. Marx 1976a, p. 210.

111. A recent example of 'reformist' interpretations of Marx is Carandini 2005: this perspective does not seem tenable, because it neutralises the destructuring character of the critique of bourgeois political economy.

112. Marx 1978, p. 77.

Marx's view is directly opposed to the emphasis on labour: rather than freedom of work, it is a question of freedom from work, because work is fully inserted in the relations of domination that characterise the capitalist mode of production. From this standpoint, social democracy is harshly criticised, because instead of overcoming the present scenario, on the contrary, it reinforces the *status quo* and provides it more stability: 'The peculiar character of social-democracy is epitomized in the fact that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as a means, not of doing away with two extremes, capital and wage labour, but of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony.'[113]

Marx is not interested in a mere amelioration of the conditions of wage-labour, but in doing without it altogether, as the pages of his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* reveal:

> The bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing *supernatural creative power* to labour; since precisely from the fact that labour depends on nature it follows that the man who possesses no other property than his labour power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can only work with their permission, hence live only with their permission.[114]

The 'right to work' slogan, discussed in *The Class Struggles in France*, is problematic because labour is not the 'source of all wealth and all culture', but the exploitation of one class by another. Marx does not accept this formula theoretically, but does use it 'against itself' politically: rather than mediation or compromise, what is politically at stake is the fact that 'behind the "*right to work*" stood the June insurrection'. This right is the result of a common class-action, the June struggles, and of the workers' singularities 'taking the floor' politically.[115] This right is not conceded, but obtained by force, and the result of a common practice of 'individuals as such' who form the working class in the attempt to 'break' capitalist seriality.

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx strongly defends the political nature of this question. 'The interests which it [the working class] defends are the interests of its class. But the struggle between class and class is a political struggle'.[116] At first sight, this seems to point to the question of a shift from 'class *in* itself',

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113. Marx 1979, p. 130.
114. Marx 1989b, p. 81.
115. See Rancière 1998. On the notion of 'taking the floor' with reference to 1968, see Certeau 1994.
116. Marx 1976a, p. 493.

the presence of people in similar living-conditions, to 'class *for* itself', namely their organised political movement. The latter entails 'class-consciousness', to use what has become the 'classical' terminology.[117] But we should problematise this perspective. Aside from the fact that Marx never uses the term 'class-consciousness', the shift from 'class *in* itself' to 'class *for* itself' cannot be convincingly 'systematised'. Though, at times, Marx uses this terminology, explaining his thought on its basis would be unproductive. The expression 'class in itself' is inadequate because it presupposes an ontological and sociological foundation of class and fails to grasp its high mobility and irreducibility to predetermined schema. This dynamism does not result in a lack of differentiation: class is not *sic et simpliciter* the whole of the 'defeated' and excluded. Rather, though it cannot be generalised and turned into a historical invariant, it has its own determination. In fact, the three volumes of *Capital* offer a theory of value, not a systematic theory of classes, though classes constantly feature in the treatment of economic categories: the chapter on classes at the end of the third book of *Capital* was never finished.

Thus class is extremely 'mobile' and intrinsically political, irreducible to any systematic hypostasis, be it 'ontological' (based on the question of 'class-consciousness')[118] or sociological (seen in a functionalist logic that diminishes the potential of the element of subjectivity).[119] The decisive element of the question is not whether class acquires self-consciousness, but whether singular individuals of a class turn their cooperation into a politically meaningful movement in the determinacy of their material circumstances. With Marx, we would question the centrality of the realm of consciousness (it is life that determines consciousness, not *vice versa*) and rather than pointing to the 'conscious' character of class, we would instead point to the 'class-'character of consciousness, given that the position of the latter is neither neutral nor

117. See Lukács 1971, especially pp. 59–106.

118. See Marx 1976a, p. 211: 'Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have pointed out only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.' Marx contemplates a scenario where class has not reached a level of organisation in his letter to Friedrich Bolte of 23 November 1871. See Wood 1981, pp. 90–6, who refers to Hobsbawm's notion that 'classes are simply special cases of the social relations of production' whilst warning against a deterministic reading of the concept. See Hobsbawm 1965.

119. A recent example of this kind of functionalist and systemic explanation of social structure is Iorio 2003, pp. 201–31, who reduces the potential of class-subjectivity, which he understands in its full immanence in relation to the situations in which it operates.

equidistant. This class-practice, through the immanence of its determination, breaks up the distinction between 'social' and 'political', because the former has a political character whilst the political movement referred to earlier is never exempt from being described as markedly social: 'Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social'.[120] The categories of 'political' and 'social' are constantly redeveloped and articulated towards a critique of the modern separation of civil society from the state.

In the *Manifesto*, written when the revolutionary crisis of 1848 was imminent, some of the aspects present in *The Poverty of Philosophy* are 'exploded', especially its emphasis on the eminently political character of workers' struggles.[121] The bourgeoisie, having destroyed the power of other classes, is now forced to keep the proletariat alive because it is the condition of its own existence.[122] The asymmetry discussed earlier here becomes evident, namely that between the bourgeoisie, a particular class that defends particular and private interests, and the proletariat, the non-class class, the 'partial universality' that tends towards overcoming the very framework of class. In this scenario, the distinctive feature of Marx's reasoning is its ability to live up to the general needs of the working-class movement:

> The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.[123]

The central point of the *Manifesto* is the organisational dimension of the party, a development of previous workers' associations, but also a reflection of a series of significant changes that occurred between 1846 and 1848 at the level of political practice. On this issue, we must mention the 'Committee of Correspondence' founded in Brussels in February 1846, Marx and Engels's first political organisation, and the 'League of Communists' founded in 1847.[124]

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120. Marx 1976a, p. 212.
121. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 463.
122. 'Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat'. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 485.
123. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 497.
124. See Löwy 2005, pp. 119–48.

Beyond their limitations, such as the decisive role played by a proletarianised artisan-class rather than the industrial proletariat as such, these organisations were an authentic 'laboratory' for the outline of the party-structure, with its ability to maintain the mobility of workers' struggles and the need for a 'form' that does not destroy its plurality and vitality.[125] Prior to 1846, Marx and Engels had not really confronted the need for a political organisation of struggle: calling for political organisation would have been politically ineffective in the absence of a structure that was able to sustain them. Although *The German Ideology* plays an important role in this respect, further steps beyond the purely theoretical level were now necessary in order to think 'in practice' and in the singularity of the contingent circumstances. In 1844, Marx's interest for the Silesian revolt and his contacts with the French workers' associations had still not led him to really pose the question of the formation of a political organisation. In the *Manifesto*, we find a convergence of all these elements: the party is not a particular party amongst other workers' parties, but something constituted by their most radical factions and their mobility. Thus the problem of organisation is inserted in the idea that classes exist in the realm of struggle, concrete historical praxis, and thus play a properly political role, as suggested in *The German Ideology*.

At this point, it is necessary to investigate how these observations relate to the belief that individual realisation is, in Marx's view, the goal to be achieved. Earlier, we showed how individuality is not annulled to the advantage of class, and, on the contrary, how the serial nature of capitalism and its reduction of the individual to being a mere means of production is criticised. In the *Manifesto*, the 'social' is not pitted against the 'private': Marx and Engels deconstruct this antithesis and direct their polemic against not, for instance, the private property that the peasant derives from his labour, but bourgeois private property as the result of a definite and determined relation of domination that brutally excludes a large section of the population:

> In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is independent and has no individuality.... You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths.[126]

125. On the development of the theory of the party, see Nimtz 2000, pp. 29–56. More specifically, on the role of the Brussels organisation, see Matuba 2006, pp. 165–79.

126. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 497.

Bourgeois society, founded on the individual and his privacy, paradoxically results in the subsumption of the individual under a mechanism of production that moves of its own accord. Given that this social structure 'strangles' the individual and makes him more and more subservient to objective and hostile forces, the critique of its conceptual framework is based on a search for the individual's realisation. Its goal is 'an association, in which the free development of each [*freie Entwicklung eines jeden*] is the condition for the free development of all'.[127] The idea (and practice) behind this is the valorisation of singularity, in a perspective different from the capitalist one that turns individuality into fortuity and subjects it to an anonymous, social power. One must 'think in practice' how the individuals of the working class can find a 'common' space of action able to 'abolish the present state of things', to use an expression from *The German Ideology*. The 'real movement' is asymmetrical to the civil society-state nexus and destructures the realm of the 'social'.[128] Its practice is not marked by the domination of the 'social' over the 'individual', because the 'free development of each' is the presupposition of the 'free development of all'.

Here, it is necessary to resist the temptation of elevating the *Manifesto* to a system and drawing it away from the conditions of its elaboration. One might object that the text offers no thorough analysis of bourgeois society and is a political manifesto that cannot be examined according to the same criteria of judgement as other works like *Capital*, for instance. Such an objection, however, would assume a dichotomy between 'theoretical' and 'systematic' texts of scientific value, and 'political' ones that lack overall meaning. Such an interpretation completely ignores Marx's effort at analysis starting from the present 'conjuncture', grounding itself in a careful analysis of specific circumstances in constant interaction with the shifts and sudden transformations of political struggle. There is not a single level to the debate, but a multiplicity of points of entry that cannot be recomposed together. This plurality should not be interpreted on the basis of a dichotomy between 'theoretical' and 'political' writings.

Therefore, the *Manifesto* is close to the definite and 'singular' moment of its publication: for the first time since the 'bourgeois revolution' of 1789 (despite the ambiguities of this expression), 1848 seemed to have opened the possibility for a proletarian revolution that resulted from the action of the working class.[129] In this context, Marx and Engels were looking at a revolution that

127. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 506.
128. See Karatani 2005, p. 226 and Claudin 1980.
129. On Marx's relation to 1848, see Hunt 2010; Nimtz 2000, pp. 57–81; Moggach and Leduc Browne (eds.) 2000, pp. 21–42; Kitching 1988, pp. 124ff; Steinert and Treiber 1975.

could transcend national borders and take on a true Europe-wide character: in 1848 in the main European countries there seemed to be the real prospect of a revolutionary movement of unstoppable force. The workers' movement moves 'within' and 'outside' the existing framework: thus, on the one hand, it seems to be 'inside' the contingent situations and democratic trade-unionist struggles,[130] and, on the other hand, it tends towards the abolition of the present state of things: 'The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement'.[131] Marx's position was based on the notion that there could be a Europe-wide insurrection, and that Germany was to play a decisive role in it.[132] I will later dwell on this issue and the 'revision', after 1848, of earlier political objectives: here, it is important to underline that Marx's position was very much in the 'conjuncture' of the 1848 European revolution.

The element of class emerges in definite conflicts, so it is important to look into the historical and political writings that examine class and the concrete dynamics of its development. These writings (amongst them, *The Class Struggles in France from 1848 to 1850*) are not secondary to so-called 'theoretical' works. Here, Marx interprets politics as full contingency and as being eccentric to totalising historical laws of development: all hypotheses must be validated by historical events and their presuppositions revised or confirmed accordingly. In particular, in *The Class Struggles in France between 1848 and 1850*, Marx offers a thorough examination of the Paris events of 1848 leading up to the formation of the bourgeois republic, and highlights the central role of class-struggle. It is illusory, he claims, to believe that the radical clash can be neutrally conciliated.

> The phrase which corresponded to this imaginary abolition of class relations [*Aufhebung der Klassenverhältnisse*] was *fraternité*, universal fraternisation and brotherhood. This pleasant dissociation from class antagonisms, this sentimental reconciliation of contradictory class interests, this visionary elevation above the class struggle, this *fraternité* was the real catchword of the February Revolution.…The Paris proletariat revelled in this magnanimous intoxication of fraternity.[133]

130. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 519.
131. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 497.
132. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 519.
133. Marx 1978, p. 58.

The earlier passage adopted the formula 'right to work' politically as the outcome of class-practice, and highlighted the 'internal', though problematic, character of this perspective. However, this passage points to the character of 'fracture' in such perspective and the emphasis on *fraternité* characteristic of some sections of the workers' movement. For Marx, such an emphasis in fact symbolises a neutralisation of class-differences and an attempt to stand above them. On the contrary, it is necessary to 'enter' the gap created between classes, starting with the recognition that they are not connected.

These two aspects, the critique of *fraternité* and the question of the 'right to work', are not necessarily contradictory: one must keep close to particular situations and avoid all apolitical kinds of absolute otherness in order to set in crisis, to overthrow, the present state of things. After all, *fraternité* found its real expression in the civil war between two classes:

> This brotherhood lasted only as long as there was a fraternity of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. . . . The February revolution was the nice revolution, the revolution of universal sympathies, because the contradictions [*Gegensätze*] which erupted in it against the monarchy were still undeveloped and peacefully dormant, because the social struggle [*der soziale Kampf*] which formed their background had only achieved a nebulous existence, an existence in phrases, in words. The June revolution is the ugly revolution, the nasty revolution, because the phrases have given place to the real thing, because the republic has bared the head of the monster by knocking off the crown which shielded and concealed it.[134]

In this case, rather than abstract theorisations, the concrete development of events unmasks the 'prosaic' function of fraternity in the relations of domination. In *The Class Struggles in France between 1848 and 1850* the June defeat is not interpreted as a 'catastrophe' and the definitive closure of all revolutionary possibilities. Marx defends its open potential, provided that a European plan of action is drawn out and the merely national perspective, which is politically unproductive, is abandoned:

> Finally, with the victories of the Holy Alliance, Europe has taken on a form in which every fresh proletarian upheaval in France directly involves a world war [*Weltkrieg*]. The new French revolution is forced to leave its national soil forthwith and conquer the European terrain, on which alone the social revolution of the nineteenth century can be accomplished. And we exclaim: The revolution is dead! – Long live the revolution![135]

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134. Marx 1978, p. 69, from an article published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on 29 June 1848.
135. Marx 1978, p. 70.

This is a similar perspective to that expressed in the *Manifesto*, namely, that workers' struggles are European: underlying it is a belief in the unlimited expansiveness of the revolution and its opposition to the 'Holy Alliance' of capital.

The events that followed 1848, the repression of the uprisings and the emergence of Bonaparte's reaction, seriously questioned the enthusiasm of 1848 and the very idea of a worldwide revolution. The belief in the immediate spread of the revolutionary phenomenon no longer held: in the analyses that follow, Marx no longer interprets it as the moment of the 'final crisis' of bourgeois society. In fact, in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, 1848 is described as a 'caricature' of 1789. Whilst 1789 led to the elimination, though ambivalent and contradictory, of the feudal structure, 1848 did not succeed in going a step further: the destruction of the capitalist system at the hands of the proletariat: 'From 1848 to 1851 only the ghost of the old revolution walked about'.[136] Marx's perspective did not go unchanged by the revolutionary defeat of 1848 and the rise of Bonapartism. These events not only revealed the problematic character of the idea of a world-revolution, but forced a rearticulation of the entire political analysis of that moment. The state, for instance, is no longer a 'committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie', and now enjoys a margin of independence from the mechanisms of bourgeois society. The 'metamorphic' character of politics and its constant changing starting from the 'real movement' that permeates it becomes more evident.[137] The critical analysis of the state changes from what it had been in the *Manifesto* not merely because of a process of intellectual development or maturity, but as a result of a close confrontation with contingent political events and a shifting of the terrain of their actualisation. Rather than some abstract-theoretical construct, it is history and politics that intervene to change Marx's perspective.

In the different 'Prefaces' to the *Manifesto* written over the years, Marx and Engels also mention the limitations of this text, in that it was not conceived as a hypostasis, or as a rigid and unchanging intervention, but as something 'at stake', in need of constant development in line with changes in political struggle and the international conjuncture. For instance, in the 'Preface to the German Edition of 1872', Marx and Engels state that 'in view of the gigantic strides of "modern industry" since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working class, in view of the practical

136. Marx 1979, p. 105. On the strongly innovative character of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* on the relation between politics and the imagination, see Cowling and Martin (eds.) 2002, especially Carver's chapter, pp. 113–28, and Jessop's, pp. 179–94. On the same issue, see also Assoun 1978, pp. 203–18. On the changes that occurred in Marx's theory after 1848, see Liesegang 2004, pp. 234–5.

137. On this issue, see Karatani 2005, pp. 142–51.

experience gained . . . first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune . . . this programme has in some details been antiquated'.[138] It was not necessary to introduce changes in a text that was meant as something to be conjugated politically in different scenarii rather than as an absolute statement. The analysis of circumstances and their particularities changes the development of political discourse, often drastically, as does the identification of the most adequate political practice. In Marx, there is a 'singular' logic at play, constantly 'measuring' itself against contingent events and the immanence of their presence, in critical tension with them.

Thinking in the 'conjuncture' and in a constant 'revision' of one's political direction does not entail a reduction of revolutionary potential, quite the opposite: it reveals a rupture with any social-democratic emphasis on labour, because the communist perspective can only be realised through a liberation of the very structure of work, which is the outcome of a topology of domination. Alongside the category of labour, Marx also deconstructs that of 'fairness' in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Bourgeois society is 'fair' insofar as it is adequate and functional to the capitalist mode of production and its ruling ideology. Marx derides an article of the programme of Lassalle's workers' party centred on the idea of 'fair distribution': 'What is "a fair distribution"? Do not the bourgeois assert that the present-day distribution is "fair"? And is it not, in fact, the only "fair" distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production?'[139] Marx's actual view of equality, as compared to the traditional image of him as a 'philosopher of equality', is even more surprising. When referring to the demand for 'equal rights' advanced by Lassalle, though he sees it as a step forwards from feudal privileges, Marx asserts:

> This equal right is an unequal right for unequal labor. . . . It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right. Right, by its very nature, can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only – for instance, in the present case, are regarded only as workers and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored.[140]

From this standpoint, inequality is a distinctive feature of civil society that conceals a powerful mystification: the fact that an equal measure is applied

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138. Marx and Engels 1988, p. 175.
139. Marx 1989b, p. 84.
140. Marx 1989b, pp. 86–7. On Marx's critique of inequality, see Miller 1984; and Wood 1986, pp. 283–303.

to subjects who are not equal at all. By criticising this model, Marx aims to appreciate singularities in their utmost differentiation and irreducibility to a single schema that is strictly defined and inevitably subjected to 'geometries' of power and their asymmetries.

Consequently, Marx's critique of morality implies the idea according to which individuals who belong to the dominated class do not fight in the name of an abstract and ahistorical ideal, but for a definite political end. Here, we need to add a further observation if we want to avoid a misunderstanding of this question. Although these arguments are not based on 'values' or a sort of morality of intentions, and require an examination of the concrete political situation as it unfolds, this does not mean that there is an opposition between realism and utopianism to the advantage of the former.[141] Similarly to what was discussed on the question of the 'right to work', the debate must be kept open in its ambivalence: on the one hand, justice, freedom and equality appear to be adequate to the capitalist framework; on the other hand, because of the two-fold character of their structure, they can be conjugated within a Marxian framework on the basis of their 'transvaluation'. Thus, the critique of such notions must be understood not only in its radical character, but also on the basis of its immanent involvement in the context under consideration; not for its postulation of a sort of 'beyond' in relation to it. In particular, the relevance of the mystification that underlies bourgeois representations of equality, and Marx's outline of an unequal right (asymmetrical to the 'equal right' that assumes an identical measure for different subjects) do not entail a 'total' critique of equality. The latter is a 'field' of forces, and not a static and unchanging one: from this standpoint, there must be a rupture with the 'petty'-bourgeois framework that whilst keeping the question of equality open, also rearticulates it as a constant practice of emancipation.[142]

As emerges from the 1879 'Letter to Bebel and others', this political perspective cannot be heightened to abstraction because it must be inscribed in the praxis of the working class itself: 'The emancipation [*Befreiung*] of the working class must be the act [*Werk*] of the workers themselves'.[143] The act that can be common to the class, to refer back to the passage cited earlier from *The German Ideology*, responds to a singular logic that is circumscribed, unique and immanent to the situations in which it unfolds. In this sense, there is a

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141. On the notion of utopia, see Maler 1994, pp. 164–5. Maler argues that Marx's critique is an attempt to move from the enunciation of abstract principles to the expression of the emancipation of the real; see also Fuller 2000 and Bensaïd 2002.

142. Marx 1989b, p. 92: 'With the abolition of class distinctions all social and political inequality arising from them would disappear of itself.'

143. Marx 1989b, p. 517.

'thinking through conjunctures' sustained by mobile coordinates that can never be prefigured and are always 'exposed' to the unpredictability of events. Political change must be enacted starting from the relations between existing powers and actually-existing institutions, but in critical tension with them. The 'turning point' of 1848 was full of consequences and incisively determined the emergence of this aspect and its constitutive ambivalence: on the one hand, it seemed to open up the possibility of an immediately expansive revolution; on the other hand, it resulted in the reactionary involution of Louis Bonaparte and the capitalist restructuring that weakened the operational room for manoeuvre of the working class. Therefore, the defeat of 1848 forced Marx to reconsider his previous direction: political practice would partly be redetermined according to the changes that occurred, and the objectives would be redeveloped starting from this new conjuncture.

Chapter Three

Social Nexus and Indifference

3.1. The genesis of individuality and capitalism in the *Grundrisse*: the breakthrough of the critique of political economy

As a result of the realisation of the defeat of revolutionary insurgency, after 1848 Marx was forced to gauge his past political and theoretical achievements. He had thought that the insurgency would unite the European proletariat in a common action geared to breaking up the entire social structure of his time. This defeat led him not only to question his previous perception that the revolution was spreading, but also to change the standpoint of his investigation of the state from that presented in the *Manifesto*, where it was defined as the 'committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie'. As his analysis of Bonapartism revealed, the state can appear to function in the interests of the bourgeoisie, but does not coincide with them, because its role is partly autonomous. However, something more than a reworking of the problem of political agency and of the mode of inquiry of the state-form emerged. This is something that we might call 'the critique of political economy'. It would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of this expression in our efforts to understand Marx's discourse: *Capital* is presented as a critique, not a science. The term 'critique', here, not only points to the limit of a paradigm, but also truly undermines all classical-political economy's claim to scientificity, beyond any particular aspect of

the problem.[1] Marx not only turns classical-political economy on its head, but creates a theoretical device that cannot be reconciled with it: its deconstruction is a radical one. In the 'Afterword' to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx clearly states that: 'In so far as Political Economy remains within that horizon, in so far, i.e., as the capitalist *régime* is looked upon as the absolutely final form of social production, instead of as a passing historical phase of its evolution, political economy can remain a science [*Wissenschaft*] only so long as the class struggle [*Klassenkampf*] is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomena.'[2]

In this sense, class-struggle explodes not only classical political economy, but political economy *tout court*: no homology with it is possible. It is not a case of 'extending' or widening this science beyond its bourgeois territory, but of giving birth to a new science that can question the constitutive aspects of classical political economy. To outline this new science, a purely theoretical framework is insufficient. As his reference to the realm of class-struggles shows, Marx presents a constant 'exchange' between his development of concepts and the 'eruption' of practice. The difficulty stems from this need to entertain a constant exchange between 'theory' and 'practice' and the belief in the autonomy, though only partial, of the former.

Whilst classical-political economy expresses the bourgeois standpoint, Marx's critique of political economy is discontinuous in relation to it and expresses the standpoint of the proletariat: 'so far as such criticism represents a class, it can only represent the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow [*Umwälzung*] of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition [*Abschaffung*] of all classes – the proletariat'.[3] Marx unmasks the supposed neutrality of classical-political economy and shows the function of the topologies of domination of bourgeois society: its scientific status is shaken up, to say the least. However, this is not to say that the scientificity of classical economics is merely fictitious; one must bear in mind that Marx's thought is configured as an immanent critique that cannot be reduced to the outline of a 'true' as opposed to a 'false' classical-political economy. The latter must be understood as a weaving-together of mystification and reality. Had political economy been false *sic et simpliciter*, the overall project of its critique would

1. See Althusser 1970, on 'The Object of Capital', p. 160: 'Critiquing political economy means positing a new problem and a new object: questioning the object of political economy itself.... Marx's critique of political economy cannot question its object without questioning political economy itself.... The critique of political economy operated by Marx is thus radical: it questions not only the object of political economy, but political economy itself as an object'. See also Renault 1995, pp. 91–134.
2. Marx 1996b, p. 14.
3. Marx 1996b, p. 16.

have been meaningless. Marx's effort does not result in a total elimination and unveiling of illusions, or an absolute opposition to a caricatured classical-political economy. Therefore, it is important to underline that Marx's reasoning is a political and non-neutral science[4] that does not simplistically deny all scientific value to the structure of the categories of political economy. This raises the question of how political economy can be reconciled with science and what value science acquires in the discussion that follows from it. What is clear is that the critique of political economy is increasingly posed as the characteristic theoretical and political device of Marx's discourse from 1848 onwards. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the way in which this constitutive reference to the critique of political economy affects the outline of a notion of singularity in Marx's thought and how it 'traces' it, in two senses: first, as it denotes a tendency towards individual self-realisation; second, as it inscribes itself in a specific, determined and irreducible conjuncture.

After 1848, Marx increasingly felt the need to produce an organic critique of political economy. Although in the earlier writings, from the *Manuscripts* to *The German Ideology*, he had already presented some aspects of this critique, its overall framework was still unsatisfactory, based on a generic and approximate knowledge of political economy. It became necessary to develop a complete critique of classical-political economy, and, to this end, Marx wrote a series of texts that were not intended for publication, culminating in the *Grundrisse*, or *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, which is the object of this chapter. In order to grasp its significant characteristics, it must be noted that the *Grundrisse* is a real work-in-progress and one adequate to the conjuncture of 1857, the year of the first world-crisis of overproduction and the potential of revolution that this carried with it. This is evident in a letter of Marx to Engels, where he writes: 'The American crisis – its outbreak in New York was forecast by us in the November 1850 *Revue* – is beautiful'.[5] 'Though my own financial distress may be dire indeed, never, since 1849, have I felt so cosy as during this outbreak'.[6] Thus, the deepening of the economic crisis encouraged Marx to gather together and write down the economic studies of his past fifteen years. The 1857 crisis did not arise out of the revolutionary situation that he so impatiently awaited: Marx would later remark that a distinctive feature of crises of overproduction is their periodicity, as they are based on the renewal of fixed capital. Therefore, for Marx, no crisis is permanent: the economic crisis only brings about the extreme consequences of the contradictions of the

4. On the political character of Marx's critique of political economy, see Krätke 2003, pp. 211–61, especially p. 251.
5. Marx 1983, p. 191.
6. Marx 1983, p. 199.

capitalist system, and, at the same time, speeds up the development of the productive forces.[7]

The *Grundrisse* is a febrile work, full of contrasting tensions and elements that cannot be immediately assembled because practice moved at such speed that theory could no longer 'fix' its constitutive characteristics and had to stick as close to its dynamics as possible. Therefore, the text is mobile and open and cannot be forcibly pressed into a unitary framework, or 'used' against *Capital*. At the same time, because of these limitations, the *Grundrisse* should not be contrasted to *Capital*, or seen *sic et simpliciter* as a 'preparatory' work for it, since there are significant differences between the two which should not be reduced to the presumed 'immature' character of the former with respect to the latter. To draw a graphic view of the works, we might say that, whilst *Capital* moves on a more-or-less uniform line, the *Grundrisse* zigzags forwards, offering extremely contentious positions and points at which the analysis has a striking acuteness, probably never achieved since.[8] Both interpretations, either of an immediate and unproblematic unity and a linear development from one text to the next in Marx's thought, or of the opposition between them, fail to account for the great dynamism of the *Grundrisse*. The *Grundrisse* seems exemplary of a work in progress: as our analysis will demonstrate, its dynamism needs to be seen not only in a philological sense, internal to its structure, but also in relation to its historical and political meaning.

The *Grundrisse* is extremely relevant to the in-depth analysis of the central issue of our present work, namely the question of individuality. First of all, in the *Grundrisse*, the critique of political economy does not proffer a general outline of the history of mankind, and, in particular, of the forms of production that have evolved throughout the centuries. The starting-point of the debate is the capitalist mode of production and its underlying mechanisms. We are not presented with an overall theory of social formations, but rather a singular analysis of the capitalist-social formation and its becoming dominant as a mode of production under circumscribed and contradictory circumstances. Central to this reflection is the investigation of the specific determinations of the capitalist system; it is starting from this that other social forms are inter-

7. On the importance of the notion of crisis and its theoretical and political productivity through a parallel drawn between the *Grundrisse* and Melville's *Moby Dick,* see Casarino 2002.

8. In his 'Introduction' to *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Eric Hobsbawm 1965 aptly described it as a 'a sort of private intellectual shorthand, which is sometimes impenetrable', p. 10. Amongst the numerous studies on this work, and with different interpretations, see Rosdolsky 1977; Tuchscheerer 1968; Vygodsky 1977; Negri 1989 and Dussel 1985.

preted, as clarified in the 1857 'Introduction' [*Einleitung*], a text that can be linked to the *Grundrisse*.[9]

> The example of labour strikingly demonstrates that even the most abstract categories, despite their being valid … for all epochs, are, in the determinateness of their abstraction, just as much a product of historical conditions and retain their full validity only for and within these conditions. Bourgeois society is the most developed and many-faceted historical organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, an understanding of its structure, therefore, provide, at the same time, an insight into the structure and the relations of production of all previous forms of society. … The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape. … In all forms in which landed property rules supreme, the nature relationship still predominates; in the forms in which capital rules supreme, the social, historically evolved element predominates.[10]

So long as bourgeois society stands as the historically most differentiated organisation of production, the categories that express its relationships are still the most adequate for investigating the nature of previous, less complex societies. This perspective does not entail a negation of historical differences: on the contrary, it posits the *differentia specifica* of capitalism with respect to previous social formations at the centre of the question. The constitutive elements of the capitalist system cannot be applied, *sic et simpliciter*, to previous modes of production: 'if it is true that the categories of bourgeois economy are valid for all other forms of society, this has to be taken *cum grano salis*, for they may contain them in a developed, stunted, caricatured, etc., form, always with substantial differences'.[11] In any case, the starting point

9. On the *Einleitung*, see Marx 1987b, p. 261: 'A general introduction, which I had drafted, is omitted, since on further consideration it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated'. On the relationship between the 1857 Introduction and the *Grundrisse*, we would say that the 'Introduction' can be inserted in the *corpus* of the *Grundrisse* in many respects, because it provides the coordinates of the method of the critique of political economy. However, in other respects, it cannot be interpreted as a linear and unproblematic addition to the *Grundrisse*, or as its theoretical foundation, because the latter is extremely dynamic and cannot be reduced to a predetermined categorical schema. In this sense, the only method is theoretical and political: no methodology can be preliminary to the concrete unfolding of events on the historical field. The 'Introduction' was initially meant to be published, unlike the *Grundrisse*, which were 'private'. Amongst the numerous interpretations of the 'Introduction', see Althusser 2005, pp. 150–6; Krahl 1972; Rovatti 1973; Schmidt 1971: pp. 42–67. See also, more recent works such as: Gilbert 1981, Wilson 1991, pp. iii–9; and Janoska (ed.) 1994.

10. Marx 1986c, pp. 41–4.

11. Marx 1986c, p. 42.

of Marx's reflection, here, is the analysis of the present capitalist structure and its specificity: 'It would therefore be inexpedient and wrong to present the economic categories successively in the order in which they played the determining role in history. Their order of succession is determined rather by their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society'.[12] Thus, the core-aspect of the discussion is a circumscribed investigation of the structure of capitalism: in the *Grundrisse*, there is not one single plane of the development of events, because its perspective is centred by reference to the capitalist mode of production.

Rather than an overall analysis of the history of humanity and the productive forces that evolved throughout the centuries, the central focus is on an inquiry into the capitalist system and its singularity and specific difference in relation to previous modes of production; its assertion as an absolute *novum*. Exploring this question from the standpoint of the central node of our work, namely the relationship between man and political community, this point is particularly incisive. Capital operates a 'permanent revolution' and destroys the hierarchical set-up that characterised previous modes of production, thus giving life to complete 'denaturalisation' and full socialisation:

> Thus it is only capital which creates bourgeois society and the universal appropriation of nature and of the social nexus itself by the members of society. Hence the great civilising influence of capital; hence its production of a stage of society compared to which all previous stages seem merely local developments of humanity and idolatry of nature. . . . It is this same tendency which makes capital drive beyond national boundaries and prejudices and, equally, beyond nature worship, as well as beyond the traditional satisfaction of existing needs and the reproduction of old ways of life confined within long-established and complacently accepted limits. Capital is destructive towards, and constantly revolutionises, all this, tearing down all barriers which impede the development of the productive forces.[13]

Capital subverts everything that seems to be solid, but its role is also a civilising one, because it builds the foundations for a real domination of nature and a social development that does not stand any comparisons with past

12. Marx 1986c, p. 44.

13. Marx 1986a, pp. 336–7. On the innovation brought about by the capitalist mode of production, see Krahl 1971, pp. 155–6: 'The capitalist-social formation is dynamic in so far as, unlike feudal society, it constantly revolutionises its own social relations and the technological relations of reproduction; it developed relations of production and forms of social relation that constantly revolutionise society and lead it to ruin' (my translation). On the discontinuous relation of the capitalist mode of production to others, see also Lefort 1978, pp. 33–52.

ones. Rather than a continuity of historical development, Marx registers it as a radical discontinuity, a 'new beginning' and a transformation of humanity. It is a 'permanent revolution' capable of eliminating, by force, all the 'barriers and national prejudices', aspects that only slow down the 'development of the productive forces' and keep 'needs within narrow limits'.

Thus capital continues to expand until it incorporates the whole world, giving rise to the world-market [*Weltmarkt*], which provides the necessary elements for interpreting contemporary capitalist globalisation: 'The tendency to create the world market is inherent directly in the concept of capital itself'.[14] In this movement, capital is revolutionary because it aims to keep overcoming the limits it posits:

> But since capital represents the general form of wealth – money – it has a boundless and measureless urge to exceed its own limits. Every boundary [*Grenze*] is and must be a barrier [*Schranke*] for it. Otherwise it would cease to be capital, money reproducing itself. If a particular boundary were not to be a barrier for it, but one to which it could confine itself without difficulty, capital would itself have declined from exchange value to use value, from the general form of wealth to a particular substance of it.[15]

Capital has a rapturous force because it tries to overcome boundaries [*Grenzen*], which it regards as barriers [*Schranken*]. But the notion of capital's revolutions is very problematic in Marx, as it is synonymous with innovation and modernisation, with its propulsive and spectral side, rather than with revolution as such. From this standpoint, an emphasis on the 'permanent revolution' effected by capital can give rise to a series of misunderstandings, because it does not point to any potential for emancipation. We are presented with the destruction of previous hierarchical structures, but without any alternative course of development being outlined. As previously stressed, this position is in danger of taking on a Promethean form in the *Grundrisse*.

The insistence on the revolutionary and progressive character of capital must be criticised when it comes to the condition of the individual, as the enduring presence of elements of servility at both the juridical and the economic level are maintained under capitalism. The overcoming of previous

14. Marx 1986a, p. 335. See also Marx 1986a, p. 160: 'In the world market, production is posited as a totality and all its moments also, but in which simultaneously all contradictions are set in motion. Hence the world market is likewise both the presupposition of the totality and its bearer.'

15. Marx 1986a, p. 260. On the relationship between *Grenze* and *Schranke*, see Hegel's treatment of the question in Hegel 1969, p. 132: 'Something's own limit [*Grenze*] thus posited by it as a negative which is at the same time essential, is not merely limit as such, but limitation [*Schranke*]'. On these comments, see also Calabi 1975, pp. 55–69.

social arrangements was never complete, as demonstrated in other texts by Marx and in particular by *Capital*.[16] The notion of revolution, when ascribed to capitalism, is problematic, to say the least, and Marx's emphasis on the great empowerment of individuality that accompanies its maximum-exploitation, as these contradictory elements make a breakdown of the capitalist structure possible, is in danger of relying on a linear and progressive view of history. But the main problem with Marx's discussion is that it equates wage-labour and free labour. The use of the category of free labour points to the overcoming of economic and juridical serfdom and suffers from an element of the 'grand narrative' typical of the nineteenth century. In fact, servile forms of labour and forced labour never disappeared in capitalism: therefore, the notion of free labour needs to be questioned. It would be useful to refer to aspects of the analysis of capitalist subsumption of non-capitalist forms presented by post-colonial studies,[17] and necessary to reactivate Rosa Luxemburg's ideas in *The Accumulation of Capital*, where she states that capitalism arises and develops historically within a non-capitalist environment.[18] The time of capital is in a relation of dependency on other historical times that do not belong to it. From this perspective, the counterposition of history to prehistory, and of man to ape, no longer holds if read in the sense of a 'grand narrative' charting the elimination of all aspects of so-called 'prehistory'. The relationship between history and prehistory is continually opened up again in capitalist dynamics. The assertion that servile forms of labour never disappeared under capitalism does not lead to a denial of the novelty of capitalism in relation to previous forms of production and of the structural separation it introduces.

In any case, this structure of domination destroys and eradicates anything in its path, changes the means and relations of production and social relations, and comes to occupy a position of perennial instability, as is made clear in the *Manifesto.*

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[19]

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16. See Moulier-Boutang 1998; Mezzadra 2004, pp. 261–72, esp. pp. 265–6.
17. Amongst the numerous studies on this issues, see particularly Chakrabarty 2000.
18. Luxemburg 2003.
19. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 487. See also Berman 1982, who posits at the foundation of his interpretation of modernity the sentence found in the *Manifesto* to the effect that under capitalism, all that is solid melts into air.

The capitalist world is profaned and disenchanted because it eliminates all that is lasting and the values that had seemed to be absorbed and internalised: the old relations of production and institutions, such as the Estates, fall with the ideas and principles that sustained them. The distinctive trait of the capitalist system is that it strips away all familiar, patriarchal and idyllic veils. Marx's unmasking procedure is only possible because of the erupting innovation introduced by the mode of production where the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, has:

> drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.…[It has] stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.[20]

'Fervour', 'chivalrous enthusiasm', and 'philistine sentimentalism' all belong to the old world that capitalism destroys: confronted with this, it is impossible to remain anchored to old frameworks and moral interpretative categories. It is necessary to underline that this representation of capitalism, whilst grasping some of its essential features, emphasises, beyond historical reality, the complete overcoming of social, political and religious structures that were previously foundational. Aiming to give prominence to the revolutionary character of capitalism, Marx's accentuation of capital's destruction of previous formations becomes paroxysmal. In fact, the servile characteristics of labour, both juridical and economic, did not completely disappear in capitalism, even in 'advanced' countries: these were, rather, 'made to function' and subjected to the needs of the dominant mode of production.

To return to *The German Ideology*, 'communists do not preach morals' and do not stand for reversion to previous situations. This suggests that the capitalist *tabula rasa* needs to be assumed as a point of departure, with its ambivalence and eccentricity in relation to predetermined solutions. Stopping at a one-sided image of capitalist modernity would be unproductive unless at the same time the potentialities it activates are also recognised. This is a 'field of forces' full of opposing tensions that cannot be seamlessly recomposed. One must enter this field in order to let the elements that 'do not hold' emerge from the context: in this scenario, a purely reactive approach is meaningless. Here, we return to the mode of immanent critique often referred to in our work, and its ability to 'insinuate' itself in constituted knowledge in order

20. Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 487.

to question it. The categories of 'egoism' and 'self-sacrifice' are inadequate because in praxis their apparent contradiction is 'luckily' overcome (to quote the *Manifesto*). Capital destroys previous values and presents the possibility of creating new ones, in an entirely new outlook based on a sort of 'transvaluation of values'.[21] Although it seems the place of non-value, or of the neutrality of value (if we ascribe the usual meaning to the term 'value'), the market is in fact ruled by it, as 'exchange-value'. Capital is nothing but its accumulation and multiplication, and the domination of money as general equivalent.[22]

The references to 'icy water' and 'bare life'[23] indicate that the individuals of the oppressed class are stripped of all auras and reduced to wage-labourers. There is a formation of a new concept, unknown in the past, namely individuality. It would have been meaningless to speak of individuality before the capitalist mode of production, since social structures rested on men who were inextricably linked to the political community they belonged to. Only with capitalism could one refer to individuality, its autonomy, the independence from the obstacles to its movement and the full unfolding of its potentials. This process was all but 'peaceful' or free of internal contradictions, because it was traversed by conflicts and elements that could not easily be held together. In order to understand the problem, it is necessary to insist on the fact that this perspective emphasises the separating character of the capitalist mode of production. Throughout Marx's discourse, we find the issue of separation and scission expressed through terms such as *Trennung, Spaltung, Scheidung*, and this plays a decisive role. Therefore, to grasp the significance of his reflection on precapitalist-social formations, it is necessary to dwell on the question of separation as a distinctive feature of capitalism. Central to the debate in the *Grundrisse* is the scission within the individual and amongst individuals found in the capitalist system:

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21. This calls for a comparison with Nietzsche's theory. On the relationship between Marx and Nietzsche, see Ricoeur 1970, who unites Marx, Nietzsche and Freud under the category of 'masters of suspicion'. See also Foucault's analysis in Foucault 1990, which sees a link between Marx, Nietzsche and Freud in the lack of innocence of the sign. More recently, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger have been compared for the nihilistic character they ascribe to capitalism, albeit in questionable ways, in Kroker 2004.

22. See Badiou 2000, pp. 26–7.

23. To return to the notion of 'bare life' see Benjamin 1999, who inserts it in the context of a critique of violence that is also the 'expounding of its relation to law and justice' (p. 236): 'The proposition that existence stands higher than a just existence is false and ignominious, if existence is to mean nothing other than mere life' (p. 251). Adorno 1978, p. 15, states that: 'What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own.…Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer'.

> A prerequisite [of capitalism] is the separation [*Trennung*] of free labour from the objective conditions of its realisation – from the means and material of labour. This means above all separation of the worker from the land, which functions as his natural workshop, hence the dissolution both of free small holdings and of communal landed property, based on the Oriental commune.[24]

The typical feature of the capitalist mode of production is this *Trennung*, or the separation of the individual from the elements to which he was previously attached. The capitalist system initiates a process of uprooting and of the denaturalisation of man. This situation is constitutively ambivalent because whilst it opens up new possibilities that can potentially expand, it also gives rise to new modes of domination: the picture is not uniform, but, rather, traversed by opposing tensions and irreducible to prevented solutions. In any case, the difference between capitalism and other modes of appropriation of the labour of others lies in the fact that the coercion of workers is internal, not external to the immediate productive process. Labour-power is incorporated in the process of production. In this context, money has an important function. 'In so far as money itself plays a part in the process, it is only to the extent that it is itself a highly energetic agent of separation [*Scheidungsmittel*], and to that extent contributes to the creation of the plucked, objectiveless, free workers'.[25] Capitalism is again here presented as a powerful force that breaks through and destroys communities of interests, opposing individuals to one another in competition: a real *bellum omnium contra omnes* where sellers and buyers of labour-power confront one another.[26]

Marx does not see the scission [*Spaltung*] introduced by the capitalist mode of production, in particular by the means of separation [*Scheidungsmittel*] constituted by money – although, in *Capital*, there are frequent references to

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24. Marx 1976a, p. 399. See also, p. 421, the same question: 'the relation of labour to capital or to the objective conditions of labour as capital, presupposes an historical process that dissolves the different forms in which the labourer is a proprietor or the proprietor works. This means first and foremost: (1) Dissolution of the relation to the earth – to land or soil – as a natural condition of production to which man relates as his own inorganic being, the workshop of his forces and the domain of his will. All forms in which this property is found presuppose a communal entity.... (2) Dissolution of the relations in which he appears as the proprietor of the instrument.... (3) Included in both is the fact that man possesses the means of consumption prior to production; this necessary to enable him to keep alive as producer....(4) On the other hand, dissolution, also, of the relations under which the workers themselves, the living labour capacities, are still a direct part of the objective conditions of production'. See also p. 88.

25. Marx 1976a, p. 430.

26. Marx 1976a, p. 369. See also pp. 340, 370, and 214.

the capitalist process of separation [*Scheidungsprozess*] – as a catastrophe. He shows no nostalgia for the past: 'In this society of free competition the individual [*der einzelne*] seems to be rid of the natural, etc., ties which in earlier historical epochs made him an appurtenance of a particular, limited aggregation of human beings'.[27] Only as a result of the destruction of personal relations mediated by the presence of a community [*Gemeinwesen*] is it possible to refer to the independence of individuals: so long as man was linked to the community as if by an 'umbilical cord' and inserted in a whole on which he depended, he was not an individual.

Therefore, individuality becomes a point of departure of the capitalist system and an opportunity, though not free from contradictions, to fully develop one's potentials, and thus move beyond existing assumptions. In this sense, Marx asserts that the capitalist mode of production is an true and proper revolution of previous social formations: whilst precapitalist societies were based on an eminently conservative technical foundation and did not aim to change the existing conditions, capitalism relies on a revolutionary basis as it is geared towards the transformation of the present. Here, we must highlight a decisive feature of Marx's theory that will be returned to in the later part of our work: innovation cannot be sought in the 'objective' mechanisms of capitalism, when comparing it with previous modes of production. Workers' subjectivity keeps shifting the plane of political practice, and subjective insurgencies question the presumed solidity of the system and create cracks inside it. From this standpoint, it is of political relevance that the capitalist mode of production is based on class, because it operates on the basis of a clear division of society into two sides that cannot be mediated. To return to the issue of the comparison of capitalism with previous forms of production, we need to stress that the individual dynamism that allows for the overcoming of external boundaries constitutes an absolute *novum* in relation to the organic structure of precapitalist social formations. Here, it is necessary to investigate the way in which Marx analyses these precapitalist communities in order to bring to light capitalism's powerful rupture with them.

3.2. *Gemeinwesen* in precapitalist-social formations

So far, we have underlined that the starting-point of Marx's theory is individuality, the actual 'creation' of the capitalist mode of production. The latter, full of contradictions, marks a clear break from previous social formations. Individuality is a decisive concept in the *Grundrisse* because it explains the

27. Marx 1976a, p. 18.

emergence of specific differences between the forms of production that developed throughout history. Having underlined that the core of the perspective of the debate is a reference to the capitalist mode of production, from which an analysis of precapitalist formations is derived, it is now necessary to examine the distinctive features of these previous formations from the standpoint of the relationship between man and community. In Notebooks IV and V of the *Grundrisse*, entitled 'Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production' (present in his notes on at least fifty historical texts), Marx identifies three precapitalist-social formations.[28]

For Marx, every social formation presents different levels: an economic foundation, a form of social consciousness and a political and juridical superstructure. Although the economic basis is decisive, the other two are not derived from it. Instead, it is possible to speak of a complex structural causality, because the whole [*Ganze*] is extremely developed and the 'concrete' is a synthesis of many determinations.[29] The first precapitalist formation mentioned in the *Grundrisse* is characterised by the presence of a natural community dedicated to pasture and nomadism and founded on the family and the union of families in tribes, in a direct relationship to the earth, which is at the same time 'the great workshop, the arsenal which provides both the means and the materials of labour, as well as the location, the basis of the community. Men relate naively to it as the property of the community, and of the community which produces and reproduces itself in living labour'.[30] Another reference on this is the Asiatic or Oriental model:[31] 'In the Asiatic form (at least in its predominant variant), there is no property, but only occupation by individuals; the commune [*Gemeinde*] is properly speaking the real proprietor – hence property only as communal property in land'.[32] The category of the Asiatic mode of production, highly debated within Marxism, was also taken up in *Capital*. But at the time of writing the 'Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production', Marx's knowledge of so-called primitive societies was not a deep one.

Although it presupposes a community, the second *Gesellschaftsform* – 'the product of a more dynamic historical life'[33] than the previous formation – is founded on the city as a place created by farmers: 'The individual is placed in such conditions of gaining his life as to make not the acquiring of wealth

28. On precapitalist-social formations, see Rosdolsky 1977, Hobsbawm 1965, Hindess and Hirst 1977, Carandini 1979, Sofri 1969, Janoska 1994, pp. 215–337, Sereni 2000, pp. 103–10; and Sereni 2007, pp. 127–62.
29. See Marx 1986c, p. 37ff.
30. Marx 1986a, p. 400.
31. See Sofri 1969.
32. Marx 1986a, p. 408.
33. Marx 1986a, p. 402.

his object, but self-sustenance, his own reproduction as a member of the community'.[34] Unlike in the first formation, here 'the property of the community . . . is separate from private property. . . . The property of the individual [*des einzelnen*] is not immediately the property of the community'.[35] There are two types of the second precapitalist formation that operates by means of war: that of classical antiquity (Greek and Roman) and the Germanic one. Slavery is the fundamental feature of the ancient system. The Germanic social formation, anchored on the individual's landed property,[36] differs from the ancient form in this respect: 'In the ancient world, it is the city with its attached territory that forms the economic totality, in the Germanic world, it is the individual home, which itself appears merely as a small dot in the land belonging to it; which is not a concentration of many proprietors, but the family as an independent unit'.[37] The third precapitalist form is feudalism, which sees the emergence of manufacture based on the artisan organised in corporations and on a specialised production of goods: 'Here the relationship of dominion exists as an essential relation of appropriation'.[38] In this third precapitalist formation, serfdom comes to play a decisive role. Engels later presented a much deeper investigation of feudalism, in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

The overall meaning of Marx's discussion is analytical rather than historical, because it does not offer a temporal succession of stages *sic et simpliciter*. Although it could be argued that the first stage corresponds more to the origins of humanity, the second to a further development, and the third to feudalism, it highlights characteristics that somewhat 'lay the ground' for capitalism. As is evident in his analysis of feudalism, Marx does not investigate the specific contradictions of precapitalist structures in depth, but sees them in relation to the capitalist system. Here, we can see a degree of ambiguity: on the one hand, Marx seems to reject a linear and 'progressive' view of time; on the other hand, there are elements in his texts that move in that direction, as if to outline a succession of stages up to the coming of a truly accomplished formation: that is, capitalism. These two views coexist in Marx, and their juxtaposition is

34. Marx 1986a, p. 404.
35. Ibid.
36. On Germanic property, see Marx 1986a, p. 421. The difference between the ancient and Germanic worlds is outlined in the following way, p. 407: 'In the ancient world, it is the city with its attached territory that forms the economic totality, in the Germanic world, it is the individual home, which itself appears merely as a small dot in the land belonging to it; which is not a concentration of many proprietors, but the family as an independent unit.'
37. Marx 1986a, p. 407.
38. Marx 1986a, p. 424.

not always theoretically founded, running the risk of giving rise to a 'grand narrative' of historical development typical of the nineteenth century, a time when dialectical development and economic determinism came together. In Marx's interpretation of precapitalist forms and the 'prehistory' of capital, there is no outline of a unidirectional historical development. One might perhaps argue that the slave-based, feudal and capitalist economies followed one another in this order in Europe, but Marx never writes that feudalism can only give rise to capitalism. In his framework, the capitalist era marks a clear advancement in relation to previous structures where 'the individuals relate not as workers but as proprietors – as members of a community [*Mirglied eines Gemeinwesen*] who also work. The purpose of this labour is . . . the maintenance of the individual proprietor and his family as well as of the community as a whole'.[39] The very autonomy of the worker is a product of history, not something common to all epochs: in precapitalist forms, all men are members of a *Gemeinwesen* in which they are inserted and on which they depend. The subsistence of the individual, in these formations, pivots on his belonging to a whole greater than himself, to a *Gemeinwesen* from which he cannot be independent. Precapitalist structures are characterised by a substantial unity [*Einheit*]: a unity of man and land, the objective conditions of labour and other men.[40] This unity, geared to the conservation of its members and their reproduction as property-owners, is the result of a modest development of the productive forces:

> Originally [man] is a species being, a tribal being, a herd animal – though by no means as a *zoon politikon* in the political sense. . . . All forms . . . in which the community presupposes its subjects in a specific objective unity with the conditions of their production, or in which a specific subjective mode of being presupposes the communities themselves as condition of production, necessarily correspond only to a development of the productive forces which is limited.[41]

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39. Marx 1986a, p. 399.

40. See Marx 1986a, p. 401: 'Since the unity [*die Einheit*] is the real proprietor, and the real precondition of common property, it is quite possible for it to appear as something distinct over and above the many real, particular communities. The individual is then in fact property-less, or property – i.e. the relation of the individual to the natural conditions of labour and reproduction as belonging to him, as the objective body of his subjectivity present in the form of inorganic nature – appears to be mediated for him through a concession from the total unity – a unity realised in the despot as the father of the many communities – to the individual via the particular commune [*der besondren Gemeinde*]'.

41. Marx 1986a, p. 420. See also Marx 1986a, p. 87. See Carandini 1979, p. 283; Vadée 1998, pp. 220–2.

In precapitalist formations, the singular individual [*einzelne*] is only a member of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], with no opportunity to be autonomous from it. So man relates to the objective conditions of labour as his own, and to the earth through the mediation of the community:

> The individual here can never appear so thoroughly isolated as he does as mere free worker. If the objective conditions of his labour are presupposed as belonging to him, he himself is subjectively presupposed as belonging to a community, through which his relationship to the land is mediated. His relation to the objective conditions of labour is mediated by his being as a member of a community.[42]

In these formations, men 'only enter into relations with each other as individuals in a particular determination, as feudal lord and vassal, lord of the manor and serf, etc., or as members of castes, etc., or as members of an estate, etc.'[43] This brings to light the difference of the modern structure from previous ones:

> This (modern situation) is indeed a condition very different from that in which the individual, or the individual extended by a natural or historical process into a family and a tribe (later community), directly reproduces himself from nature, or in which his productive activity and his share in production are dependent on a particular form of labour and of the product, and his relationship to others is determined in this particular way.[44]

The economic goal of precapitalist communities is the production of use-values: 'As the natural member of the community, he participates in the communal property and takes a particular share of it into his own possession.... His property...is mediated by his natural membership of a community'.[45] In this context, the presupposition of circulation is external to production: the latter needs constant stimuli to be kept alive, and it is not easy for it to renew itself as it is not identified with the general reproduction of mankind. In this situation, the circulation of commodities and social antagonism are not immanent to the productive process: social antagonism is not directly embodied in the degraded conditions of work. As previously noted, capitalism is the first mode of production to have class at its foundation, and with it the duality of bourgeoisie and proletariat gives rise to a separation that cannot be resolved within the present framework. On the contrary, previous formations

42. Marx 1986a, p. 409. See also pp. 412–13.
43. Marx 1986a, p. 100.
44. Marx 1986a, p. 94.
45. Marx 1986a, p. 414.

were characterised by a unitary composition rather than a binary structure, mediated by the relationship with the land and with the community. This 'organicism' is inevitably configured in despotic terms because it keeps the individual bound to the community as if by an umbilical cord: hence the recurring metaphor of the 'chain'. Here, we are presented with a structure based on personal relations mediated by nature: 'Relationships of personal dependence (which originally arise quite spontaneously) are the first forms of society, in which human productivity develops only to a limited extent and at isolated points'.[46] In precapitalist formations, the singular individual is nothing but a member of the community and has no autonomy from it. His relationship with nature is mediated by determined social conditions. Although the land is divided amongst individuals, they only own it insofar as they are members of the community.

From the analysis of the 1857 'Introduction' it emerges that the man of these social formations [*Gesellschaftsformen*] is not valorised in his singularity, but only insofar as he belongs to a whole [*Ganze*]:

> The further back we go in history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and belonging to a larger whole. At first, he is still in a quite natural manner part of the family, and of the family expanded into the tribe; later he is part of a community, of one of the different forms of community which arise from the conflict and the merging of tribes.[47]

In the first volume of *Capital*, though there is a thorough analysis of precapitalist-social formations, these are still conceived as backward in relation to the capitalist mode of production:

> In the ancient Asiatic and other ancient modes of production, we find that the conversion of products into commodities, and therefore the conversion of men into producers of commodities, holds a subordinate place.... Those ancient social organisms of production [*gesellschaftlichen Produktionsorganismen*] are, as compared with bourgeois society, extremely simple and transparent. But they are founded either on the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellowmen in a primitive tribal community, or upon direct relations of subjection.[48]

46. Marx 1986a, p. 95.
47. Marx 1986c, p. 18.
48. Marx 1996a, p. 90.

It is pointless to look to these formations with nostalgia, because it is not possible to conceive of the development of the individual within them: 'During earlier stages of development, the single individual seems more fully developed because he has not yet worked out the fullness of his relations and has not yet set them over against himself as independent social powers and relations'.[49] In the 'Introduction', Marx refers to the second precapitalist structure in particular, as represented by ancient civilisation, and characterises it as backward in terms of its productive forces, and as something that does not call for any nostalgia:

> An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish.... The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary, that charm is a consequence of this and is, rather, inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art can never recur.[50]

The unity [*Einheit*] that characterises precapitalist formations is not idealised as 'beautiful' or as a regulative model. This view, however, runs the risk of pointing to a 'progressive' succession of social forms starting from the decisive role of the productive forces: the structural connection between the succession of epochs and the development of the productive forces is rather problematic.

In any case, Marx does not aim to write a general history of mankind, but, rather, to grasp the constitutive aspects of the capitalist system and its 'specific difference' from precapitalist formations. Rather than precapitalist unity [*Einheit*], the distinctive trait of capitalism is the *Trennung*, or separation, which Marx is interested in investigating. The unity that characterises precapitalism is described through metaphors such as 'umbilical cord', and 'chain'. In this context, individual development and class-struggle are inconceivable. One might go as far as to argue that the categories of 'individual', 'society' and 'class' are unthinkable prior to the capitalist mode of production. In order to characterise the precapitalist condition, it is necessary to adopt the notion of man and his unbreakable relationship with the community he belongs to, not the notion of an individual and his independence and liberation from the predetermined bonds that hold it together.

As for the concept of society, the question is more complex because Marx often recurs to a sort of history of society: primitive society, Slavic society, feudal society, bourgeois society and communist society. Nonetheless, the notion

49. Marx 1986a, p. 99; see also p. 412.
50. Marx 1986a, p. 48.

of society as such refers to the scenario of capitalism, because the latter is determined by the fact that the organic exchange between man and nature has become specifically historical.[51] In order for a society to emerge, there must be a very developed stage where individuals enter into a reciprocally universal contact and relations are made autonomous from producers and become a sort of second nature. Marcuse writes: 'The motor and orientation of social efficiency is given by the reproduction and permanent renewal and repetition of its existence'.[52] Characteristic of society is a constitutive dynamism and constant opening to solutions that are not predetermined and not totally conditioned by nature. Thus, society proper only arises with the capitalist mode of production and when commodity-production has become the dominant form. Capitalist production, as production for the sake of production rather than consumption, entails that individuals abstract themselves from particular use-values, needs and interests. The key-element of production is only truly realised in the capitalist form of society, when the means of production are historicised and property-relations are historicised and depersonalised. To designate precapitalist formations Marx uses the terms 'tribe' and 'community' as 'natural' elements. But, despite his occasional use of the term 'society' in reference to precapitalist structures, a real society can only be conceived of starting from the capitalist mode of production. After all, Marx underlines that in precapitalist formations

> considerable developments are possible.... Individuals may appear great. But free and full development, either of the individual [*Individuum*] or of society [*Gesellschaft*], is inconceivable here, since such a development stands in contradiction to the original relation' of man and community.[53]

The inquiry into the notions of individual and society that starts from a comparison between different forms of production highlights two important issues. The first concerns Marx's recognition of the innovation affected by the capitalist system as compared to previous communities: we are confronted with a breakthrough that completely displaces existing coordinates and allows for a discussion of individuals, not men, and society as a complex

51. See Krahl 1971: 'The notion of society in its strict sense only refers to bourgeois society. Unsurprisingly Marx uses the notions of tribe, community etc. For pre-bourgeois organisations of human coexistence: society is a very developed stage where men enter into a reciprocally universal intercourse and the specificity of bourgeois society is that this universal relation... in the abstract unites men, but in concrete separates them from one another.'

52. Marcuse 1969, p. 163.

53. Marx 1986a, p. 411. On these issues, especially the notion of society, see Basso 2008, pp. 58–73.

network of social relations. Whilst this first issue is extremely fertile from the political and theoretical point of view, the development of the argument brings to light a more problematic aspect. Marx emphasises that each epoch interprets the preceding ones one-sidedly. This applies to bourgeois society and feudalism, but also to Christianity and paganism, and is due to the fact that the latest formation is incapable of self-criticism. In the 'Introduction', Marx asserts that 'what is called historical development rests, in general, on the fact that the latest form regards the earlier ones as stages leading towards itself and always conceives them in a one-sided manner, since only rarely, and under quite definite conditions, is it capable of self-criticism'.[54] Despite this, Marx starts from the need to analyse the capitalist epoch himself, and uncritically investigates precapitalist formations on the basis of capitalist presuppositions: having to demonstrate the revolutionary character of the capitalist mode of production and the sudden rupture it introduces, he is forced to postulate a unity that precedes it. From this standpoint, an analysis of precapitalist forms is inadequate when it identifies their unity; this is made necessary after the fact, given the recognition of modern separation as a starting-point of Marx's discourse. This manner of developing the question does not completely disappear in *Capital*. Although, in the chapter on fetishism, for instance, he writes that 'forms of social production that preceded the bourgeois form, are treated by the bourgeoisie in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-Christian religions',[55] Marx still describes them as being somewhat backward. In this respect, he is not far from classical-political economists, as he seems to interpret precapitalist structures in much the same way as Christians treated pre-Christian religions. Therefore, the treatment of precapitalist structures is partly 'vitiated' by this need to achieve an understanding of the distinctive traits of the capitalist mode of production. But Marx was not primarily interested in a detailed analysis of the modes of production that developed throughout history; he was interested in capitalism and its specificity. Therefore, it is necessary to return to precisely this: Marx's discourse is centred on the capitalist mode of production and the modernisation, both propulsive and devastating, that underlies it.

3.3. Society as an ensemble not of individuals, but of relations

Our discussion has brought to light the strong differences between precapitalist and capitalist formations with regard to the question of individuality. In

54. Marx 1986c, p. 42.
55. Marx 1996a, p. 92.

fact, far from bringing different structures of production together as a sort of 'red thread' through human history, individuality is a 'creation' of the capitalist system. The precapitalist scenario is characterised by rootedness, whereas uprootedness and the dissolution of 'organic' bonds is the necessary prerequisite of modern individuality and our ability to even conceive of it. So far, individuality has been regarded as the distinctive feature of capitalism, as if bourgeois society was primarily formed by individuals. To avoid misunderstandings, it is now necessary to question this assumption.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx argues that 'society does not consist of individuals [*Individuen*], but expresses the sum of the relationships [*Beziehungen*] and conditions in which these individuals stand to one another'.[56] Thus society is not founded on individuals, in the first instance, but on their relation: relations have primacy over individuals. Therefore, bourgeois society is based on the realm of relations, on connections and aggregates: far from being irenic, Marx's view describes relations polemically as relations of domination marked by an asymmetry between existing forces. The characterisation of the private and social realms in the *Grundrisse* could not be further from that of earlier works. In the *Critique*, for instance, bourgeois society was differentiated from the private realm of single individuals. These were atoms engaged in a constant struggle against each other. In that framework, sociality was strongly denied and abstractly counterposed to the private realm, which was regarded as selfish. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx goes beyond this approach, its schemes of opposites and easy simplifications: here, he deems it necessary to grasp the mutual implication of social and private spheres and the impossibility of separating them. From this standpoint, and contrary to what he had argued earlier – in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in particular – the distinctive feature of bourgeois society is not atomism. Bourgeois society is not founded on the existence of individual-atoms and unrelated singularities, as argued in *On the Jewish Question*; rather, it develops through a complex network of relations.

Given that society is not a mere sum of individual-atoms, capitalism itself constitutes it to a large extent: 'Bourgeois society is the most developed and many-faceted historical organisation of production'.[57] But Marx also warns against universalising the interpretative frameworks of bourgeois society. Instead, he tries to focus on its 'specific difference' from precapitalist structures: 'If it is true that the categories of bourgeois economy are valid for all other forms of society, this has to be taken *cum grano salis* for they may contain

56. Marx 1986a, p. 195. On the centrality of the question of relations, amongst the many studies, see Lohmann 1986; Gould 1978; Kitching 1988; Kößler 2001.

57. Marx 1986a, p. 42.

them in a developed, stunted, caricatured etc. form, always with substantial differences'.[58] From this standpoint, only the capitalist system is a society in the strict sense of the term: the use of the word 'society' to describe previous modes of production would be improper and imprecise, because no form that preceded capitalism was structured through a network of relations. Therefore, not only the category of the 'individual', but also that of 'society' belongs to the capitalist framework. Prior to capitalism, it was inconceivable to speak of the individual and his independence from bonds that prevented his movement, as well as society as a complex series of connections.

Given that the notions of individual and society were unthinkable before the capitalist mode of production, their relation needs to be investigated. For these reasons, these elements cannot be examined independently of one another. On the contrary, natural-rights theorists (and Rousseau in particular, who pushed this model to its extreme consequences) and classical-political economists share the common notion that one must presuppose the isolated individual as being free from any bonds with his social context:

> Individuals producing in a society – hence the socially determined production by individuals – is of course the point of departure. The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of the eighteenth century. Robinsonades.…No more is Rousseau's social contract, which by means of a contract establishes a relationship and connection between subjects that are by nature independent, based on this kind of naturalism. This is an illusion and nothing but the aesthetic illusion of the small and big Robinsonades. It is, rather, the anticipation of 'bourgeois society' which began to evolve in the sixteenth century and was making giant strides towards maturity in the eighteenth.[59]

Contract-theorists such as Rousseau and classical-political economists, such as Smith and Ricardo developed their investigations starting from the existence of a natural man who was completely isolated and independent, and thus created their Robinsonades. The man [*Mensch*] they call upon can only exist in Defoe's novel, set on a desert-island, not in a complex structure like bourgeois society: speaking of individuals irrespective of their social context is meaningless, because they always and under all circumstances operate within a society.[60] Marx points out that Rousseau, Smith and Ricardo were

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58. Ibid. See also Schmidt 1983, pp. 90–4.
59. Marx 1986a, p. 17.
60. On the notion of Robinsonades see Janoska 1994, p. 30: 'For Marx, this paradoxical formulation characterises a consciousness that forcedly imposes itself on the social

not motivated by nostalgia for the man of nature and a critique of civilisation: this 'aesthetic appearance' is deceitful because it hides a reference to a particular context and its determined lines of domination. From this standpoint, the link between individual and society and the impossibility of conceiving of the one without the other brings to light the non-neutral character of the representation of isolated individuals and points to the 'socially determined production of individuals' and the asymmetries that pertain to it.

In any case, a recognition of the centrality of the question of relations does not entail an irenic logic of inter subjectivity free from lines of fracture:

> As if someone was to say: for society, slaves and citizens do not exist: both are men. They are both men [*Menschen*], if we consider them outside society. To be a slave and to be a citizen are social determinations, relations between human beings A and B. Human being A as such is not a slave; he is a slave in and through society.[61]

To regard individuals in bourgeois society as men requires an abstract reasoning that does not account for their relations. But these relations and their structures of subjection in fact constitute the real subjects. From this standpoint, the debate is focused on the realm of relations and does not entail an uncritical interpretation of society, because the latter is founded on a topology of relations of subjugation, rather than a 'smooth' scenario conceived irenically.

After all, within the capitalist system, the domination of exchange-value, and the equivalence and uniformity it introduces, relies on the notion that the production of each individual is inherently social and cannot be seen irrespective of that of all others. Private interest itself is social, and can only be satisfied within the premisses of bourgeois society. It would not make sense to refer to the private interest of the bourgeoisie without an examination of the structure of bourgeois civil society. Marx's analysis in the *Grundrisse* was also made possible by the overcoming of the anthropocentric views of earlier works, corroborated in *The German Ideology* by a close engagement with the working-class insurgencies of the time. The move from man as *Gattungswesen* to the individual in his determined circumstances and the presuppositions of his context, whether pre-existing or created, changes the perspective. The freedom of the individual and his opportunity to subvert the present state of things through praxis is not denied, but rather inserted in existing relations of production, their limitations and the difficulties they entail, and cannot

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context and is not a mere "fantasy" … Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel has already provided an adequate representation (of this individualism)'; see also Iacono 1982.

61. Marx 1986a, p. 195.

be immediately overcome. Hence the idea of the centrality of the individual becomes highly problematic because society, to which individuality is subordinated, appears to be the real topic of debate.

From this standpoint, the assumption of the key role of society does not entail its uncritical hypostatisation, or an emphasis on the 'social' at the expense of the 'individual'. In fact, Marx is critical of modern society and wishes for it to be overcome because he believes that it immanently requires the substantial separation of individuals from one another and their shared subjugation to an objective, anonymous power materialised in money. Two interconnected separations are at play: one concerns the relation between individuals and social circumstances, the other the relationship of individuals amongst themselves. If we move beyond the sphere of simple commodity-circulation, characterised by absolute equality and the reciprocity of the subjects who operate in it, and descend into the 'underground' of production, the individual element is shown to have been subsumed by the dimension of the social:

> In the totality of existing bourgeois society, this postulation as price and its circulation, etc., appears as the superficial process, below which, in the depths, quite other processes occur in which the apparent equality and freedom of individuals disappear.... It is forgotten that right from the start the premise of exchange value as the objective basis of the whole system of production already implies coercion of the individual,... that the individual no longer exists except as a producer of exchange value. This implies the complete negation of his natural existence; hence he is wholly determined [*bestimmt*] by society.[62]

Thus, there is a real subjection of individuals to the social power embodied by money: 'The individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals who manage it as their common wealth'.[63] Money functions as a mediator and transforms the relation [*Verhältnis*] between persons into a relation [*Verhalten*] between things: from human needs, to the needs materialised in an object that confers social power to its owners.[64] Sociality is connected to the domination of money, and not founded on the existence of an association of individuals: when pointing to its absence in bourgeois society, Marx uses the English term 'association', roughly equivalent to the

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62. Marx 1986a, p. 179.
63. Marx 1986a, p. 96.
64. On the notion of money, see Simmel 1978, who argues that money is a symbol of modernity insofar as the latter is characterised by the existence of such a powerful means of mediation that makes human relations objective. On the relationship between Marx and Simmel, see Poggi 1997, pp. 64–185; and Poggi 1972, pp. 200–1.

German *Assoziation*, to highlight the total lack of individual participation to decision-making processes.

Going back to the categories of *The German Ideology*, the individual is reduced to his 'contingent' dimension, namely his class-belonging and subjugation to an external and hostile mechanism. The 'personal' individual, his abilities and faculties are negated; here, we find the recurring image of a society [*Gesellschaft*] structurally unable to recognise singularity as such without trying to incorporate it in some way. Marx is foreign to any idea of society as foundationalist: it is a 'spectral objectivity' characterised by the denial of the natural existence of the individual and the full development of his abilities and faculties. Marx does not criticise the state in the name of society: he criticises both the state and bourgeois society for their reliance on a topology of domination, asserting the necessity and possibility of overcoming them. If one stops at the 'surface-'level of the simple circulation of commodities, one can see the relation of two individuals A and B as being characterised by equality and reciprocity, hence freedom:

> Although individual A may feel a need for the commodity of individual B, he does not seize it by force [*Gewalt*], or *vice versa*; A and B recognise each other as owners, as persons, whose commodities are permeated by their will. Accordingly, the juridical concept of the person comes in here, as well as that of freedom in so far as it is contained therein.[65]

In the context of the simple circulation of commodities, there emerges the juridical moment of the private (and not social) contract of individuals involved in relations of exchange who recognise one another as owners. It is clear that the cause of the contract is not a desire to enter into relations with another, but reciprocal interest and thus the possibility of achieving one's goals through the other, who functions as a means. Therefore, the mystification inherent to reciprocity [*Wechselseitigkeit*] must be revealed and its limits must be shown, without giving credence to the illusion of its neutral application:

> It is as such a matter of indifference for each of the two subjects of exchange, and is of interest to each of them only in so far as it satisfies his own interest as excluding that of the other, without relation to it.... Both know that the social interest is nothing but the exchange of the selfish interest in its duality, many-sidedness and autonomy. The general interest is nothing but the generality of selfish interests.[66]

65. Marx 1986a, p. 175.
66. Marx 1986a, p. 176.

In the move from the 'surface' of the sphere of circulation to the 'depth' of the sphere of production, the contradictions in this process emerge: in particular, freedom and equality turn into their opposites, a lack of freedom and inequality.[67] It would not make sense, at this stage, to claim, like Proudhon, that the system of exchange and exchange-value are in themselves founded on freedom and equality and subsequently ruined by the development of money: money is not a mere convention, but the necessary outcome of the dynamics of exchange-value.

As soon as one descends to the 'underground' of production, the equality of the operating subjects is merely fictitious:

> What is essential is that the aim of the exchange for him (the labourer) is the satisfaction of his need.... True, he receives money, but only in its determination as coin; i.e. only as a self-transcending and vanishing mediator.... Present-day society makes the paradoxical demand that he for whom the object of exchange is means of subsistence should deny himself, not he for whom it is enrichment.[68]

Ideas of liberty and equality hide the fact that worker and capitalist are opposed to one another in an unequal condition and asymmetrical relation: 'What the worker exchanges for capital is his labour itself (in the exchange, the right of disposing over it); he alienates it [*entäussert*]'.[69] In this situation, the capitalist wants his workers to save and sacrifice themselves, but obviously when it comes to the rest of the workers, he wishes them to be consumers and stimulates them to spend rather than abstain from doing so.[70] Despite the different categorial framework, we still find the idea that universal principles conceal a structure of domination. This does not mean that freedom and equality are an expression of a hidden form of slavery, nor does it deny their existence as more than mere names or covers for their opposite.[71] These notions can only be conceived in the context of the capitalist mode of production: the reduction of men to universal subjects of exchange, without national or individual barriers, operating in a state of equality and freedom, as well as the structural two-fold nature of these concepts, are all

67. For a deconstruction of the notion of freedom, see Lenin 1973, p. 11: 'Freedom is a grand word, but under the banner of freedom for industry the most predatory wars were waged; under the banner of freedom of labour, the working people were robbed'. See also Basso 2008–9, pp. 69–87, especially p. 69.
68. Marx 1986a, p. 214.
69. Marx 1986a, p. 248.
70. See Marx 1986a, p. 208.
71. See Lohmann 1986, p. 57; Maihofer 1992, pp. 107–12; Thomas 1987, pp. 168–75.

an innovation of the modern period. When moving from the sphere of circulation of simple commodities to that of production, the mystifying (but not unreal) character of such a representation of freedom and equality is powerfully revealed.

Thus these symmetries explode because of the materialisation of the 'untenable' reciprocity of capitalist and worker, who cannot be separated from the dynamics inherent to the capital-labour relation:

> Of course, socialists say: we need capital, but not the capitalist. Capital then appears as a pure thing, not as relationship of production, which, reflected in itself, is precisely the capitalist. . . . Capital is therefore quite separable from an individual capitalist, but not from the capitalist who as such confronts the worker. In the same way the individual worker can cease to be the being-for-itself of labour; he can inherit money, steal, etc. But then he ceases to be a worker. As worker he is only labour existing for itself.[72]

An important aspect that frequently recurs in the analysis emerges again here, namely, the identification of the 'dual' character of the capitalist mode of production: society is 'fractured' into two irreconcilable sides that are not homologous.

In any case, the worker is not viewed anthropocentrically, because he is a 'figure' of labour and is inserted in a class from which he is not fully autonomous. It is, therefore, meaningless to think of an individual in isolation from his class and from the web of conditionings that he can never fully transcend:

> A closer investigation of those external relationships and conditions shows, however, that it is impossible for the individuals of a class, etc., to overcome them en masse without abolishing them. A single individual may by chance cope with them; the mass of individuals dominated by them cannot do so, since the very existence of that mass expresses the subordination, and the necessary subordination, of the individuals to it.[73]

Thus, Marx draws a distinction between the Hegelian *Überwindung*, a purely abstract and 'intellectualist' overcoming, and *Aufhebung*, that is, realisation or actualisation. Marx does not understand *Aufhebung* in Hegelian terms as an overcoming of the one-sidedness of the preceding moments that conserves the positivity of their positing. For him, it is, rather, an abrupt rupture with the present and a fracture that cannot be rejoined. From this standpoint, it is

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72. Marx 1986a, pp. 229–30; see also Negri 2005, pp. 1–50; Ricciardi 2000, pp. 39–66, especially pp. 43–4.
73. Marx 1986a, p. 101.

pertinent to recall the definition in *The German Ideology* of communism as a 'real movement which abolishes [*aufhebt*] the present state of things'. This is not a Hegelian actualisation but the destitution of the present condition: 'all that exists deserves to perish', to recall Mephistopheles's motto in Goethe's *Faust*. In this respect, the working class plays a decisive role because it is asymmetrical in relation to the bourgeoisie and tries to move beyond the very framework of class as it posits itself as a non-class class. Underlining the power of class over individuals, however, does not mean to say that individuals are completely subjected and enslaved to it. Class is not understood in terms of substance, but starting from a practice with the capacity to bring together what workers' singularities have in common, as is made clear in a passage from *The German Ideology* that we have already cited: 'the separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle against another class'.[74] Having highlighted that it is 'marked' by class-conflict, we must note that society is not made up of individuals in the first instance, but of relations between them. This starting-point has helped us problematise the notion that the individual is the point of departure of the analysis. The importance of the role of class points to the limitations of a purely 'individualistic' approach to the debate: it is not necessary to accept the dualism of individual and society, even in a dialectical appreciation of these notions. Rather, such a framework needs to be made more 'complex'. But this reflection does not result in an irenic view of inter-relationality, because the realm of relations is problematic and marked by internal fractures, asymmetries and displacements.

3.4. The subject between universality and emptiness

We have seen how in precapitalist-social formations the individual, far from representing a common denominator of different modes of production or a 'red thread' through history, is a distinctive feature of the capitalist system. However, the central reference to society opens up new questions because society, too, is ultimately a true and proper 'creation' of the bourgeoisie and has a decisive role in the analysis. Despite the rhetoric on individuality, the modern epoch actually produces a subsumption of the individual under

74. On the notion of class, see Balibar 1991, pp. 153–204, who argues that a purely 'political' or 'historical' interpretation of class-struggle diminishes the complexity of its character: 'What binds social groups and individuals together is not a higher common good, or a state of law, but a perpetually evolving conflict. For this reason, class struggle and classes, especially in so far as they are "economic", have always been eminently "political" concepts' (p. 169).

social relations. To grasp the particular meaning of this question, we must assume the 'disenchanted' perspective of the modern man, aware of the fact that 'finally' all that was sacred has been profaned, to return to a formula of the *Manifesto*:

> These distinctive social characters are, therefore, by no means due to individual human nature as such, but to the exchange relations of persons who produce their goods in the specific form of commodities. So little does the relation of buyer and seller represent a purely individual relationship that they enter into it only in so far as their individual labour is negated, that is to say, turned into money as non-individual labour. It is therefore as absurd to regard buyer and seller, these bourgeois economic types, as eternal social forms of human individuality, as it is preposterous to weep over them as signifying the abolition of individuality. They are an essential expression of individuality arising at a particular stage of the social process of production.[75]

At stake in this debate is individuality as a constitutive element of the capitalist mode of production that can be approached neither apologetically nor merely reactively.

Firstly, it is necessary to highlight that individuality is subjected to structures of social domination:

> The power that each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth exists in him as the owner of exchange values, of money. He carries his social power, as also his connection with society, in his pocket. . . . The social character of the activity, as also the social form of the product and the share of the individual in production, appear here as something alien to and existing outside [*Fremdes, Sachliches*] the individuals.[76]

Social power is intimately connected to the dynamics of money, an individualised and isolated aspect[77] that, on the one hand, as the universal possibility of exchange, is opposed to the possibility of a particular exchange of commodities,

75. Marx 1987b, p. 331.

76. Marx 1986a, p. 94. See also p. 171: 'What makes the comprehension of money in its fully developed character as money especially difficult – difficulties from which political economy seeks to escape by neglecting one of the aspects of money in favour of another, and when confronted by the one appealing to the other – is that here a social relationship, a specific relationship of individuals to one another, appears as a metal, a stone, a purely corporeal object outside individuals.'

77. See Marx 1986a, p. 89.

and on the other hand is itself a particular commodity and, like other commodities, is subject to the conditions of the system of exchange:

> If it is argued that within free competition individuals, in pursuing their purely private interest, realise the common or rather the general interest [*das gemeinschaftliche oder rather allgemeine Interesse*], this means merely that they press upon each other under the conditions of capitalist production and hence their mutual repulsion itself only reproduces the conditions under which this interaction takes place.[78]

Contrary to the claims of classical-political economists, rather than the general interest and satisfaction of each individual's needs and abilities, the sum of private interests achieves their incorporation into the conditions of the mode of production. In a situation where individuals, as free and equals, are vehicles and means of unlimited exchange, the role of money is primary insofar as it constitutes the actual community of the capitalist system: 'Money is itself the community [*Gemeinwesen*], and cannot tolerate any other community'.[79] Whilst, in the *Grundrisse*, the term 'Gemeinwesen' generally refers to precapitalist-social formations characterised by a direct connection with the land, in the passage quoted above it becomes the 'common being' of the capitalist mode of production, namely money.[80] The latter, when confronting the individual, is accidental:

> Money,…as the individuality of general wealth,…as mere social result, implies no individual relation at all to its owner. Its possession is not the development of any one of the essential aspects of his individuality, but rather possession of something devoid of individuality.…Its relationship to the individual appears therefore as a purely fortuitous one [*zufällige*].[81]

The centrality of the problem of the connection between individuality and fortuity or chance and their turning into one another had already emerged in *The German Ideology*: this question found its full application in the analysis of money, as an element given an abstract character. Here, it is necessary to recognise Marx's innovation of the concept of abstraction: whilst in his earlier works his interpretation of it was essentially 'negative' or reductive, now he fully recognises the importance of abstraction in the modern world.[82]

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78. Marx 1987a, p. 40.
79. Marx 1986a, p. 157 (translation modified).
80. On the notion of *Gemeinwesen* in the late Marx, see Riedel 1994b, pp. 851–2.
81. Marx 1986a, p. 154.
82. See Postone 1993, p. 162: 'The structures of abstract domination constituted by determinate forms of social practice give rise to a social process that lies beyond human control;…According to Marx's analysis, the universal is not a transcendent

This analysis of the *Gemeinwesen* of money, capable of bringing individuals together on the basis of a form of 'unsocial sociality', remains unsurpassed. The paradox of the modern condition is that it unites individuals whilst dividing them in the same gesture. Therefore, for the first time in history, capitalism posits the conditions of possibility for the full development of the individual, in his singularity and with his unique characteristics: this opening, however, is realised through specific practices of subjugation. Within this apparent paradox that must be interpreted, there is a reference to the dual existence of money, an element of both cohesion and separation on the basis of its constitutive ambivalence, as we find in the *Grundrisse*.

In this framework, the development of the productive forces that money and its accumulation in capital allow results in a real structure of domination of capital at the expense of labour:

> All advances [*Fortschritte*] of civilisation, therefore, or in other words all expansion of the social productive forces, or, *if you want*, of the productive forces of labour itself…enlarge only the productive power of capital. Since capital is the antithesis of the worker, they augment only the objective power standing over labour.[83]

Here, we find the recurring issue of the duplicity of progress: on the one hand, its propulsive abilities are appreciated; on the other hand, its contradictions, inherent to the sudden growth of the productive forces, are highlighted. Marx's position on progress can neither be reduced to an uncritical exaltation that fails to grasp its problematic aspects, nor to its total denial based on a simplistic recognition of its devastating character.[84] In a vein similar to our reflection on individuality, the ambivalence of Marx's discourse needs to be kept open, as it refuses both any apology of progress and any apocalyptic or 'catastrophic' vision. Although, at times, he indulges in one or the other approach, the overall sense of Marx's position must be sought in his attempt to interpret progress politically as something problematic and eccentric in relation to predetermined solutions. Marx's perspective is far-removed from 'total' critiques of modernity: the notion of a devastating progress-as-catastrophe is unthinkable in the *Grundrisse*.[85] Marx's position adheres to the historical 'grand narrative' typical of the nineteenth century, to the rejection

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idea, but is historically constituted with the development and consolidation of the commodity-determined form of social relation'.

83. Marx 1986a, p. 234.

84. See Basso 2001a.

85. Compare Marx's position with that of the Frankfurt school. On this issue, for different interpretations, see Postone 1993; Landry 2000; Cannon 2001.

of any form of 'political romanticism' and any attempt at 'blocking' the course of events and presenting them in one-dimensional terms.

Similarly, the reference to the existence of a structure of domination of the productive forces over individuals is not at all the full extent of Marx's analysis of the capitalist system. Such an approach leads to misleading outcomes at the theoretical and political level. Therefore, rather than concentrating on the separation between forces and relations of production, interpreting the former as social and the latter as private, it is better to appreciate the internal limits of progress and its extreme dynamism and changing nature as it is traversed by fractures. As previously noted, unlike previous social formations, the capitalist system is founded on work-conditions riven by fractures that cannot be mended: the first 'real' society, the capitalist one, is based on a realm of non-relation, as it is structured through the constitution of an extremely complex web of social relations. From this standpoint, the extraordinary impetus of the productive forces is not neutral with regard to the interests at stake in society, because the productivity of capital is intensified at the expense of labour, and thus of the worker who is subjected to an apparently uncontrollable social power. However, productive capital plays a decisive role in the constitution of individuality:

> As the ceaseless striving for the general form of wealth, however, capital forces labour beyond the limits of natural need and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality, which is as varied and comprehensive in its production as it is in its consumption, and whose labour therefore no longer appears as labour but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity has disappeared in its immediate form; because natural need has been replaced by historically produced need. This is why capital is productive, i.e. an essential relationship for the development of the productive forces of society.[86]

Clearly this also presents a 'funereal' character, since individuals seem to identify capital as the exclusive field for their subsistence in what appears to be a paralysing scenario with no exit. However, this is an ambivalent dynamic. The two-fold nature of capital, as accumulation and perpetuation of exchange-value, widens the field of relations as it abolishes the bonds of patriarchy, rank and aristocracy that prevented the movement of the individual, whilst at the same time subjugating him to the social power that Marx frequently refers to:

86. Marx 1986a, p. 251.

> The degree and the universality of development of the capacities in which this kind of individuality becomes possible, presupposes precisely production on the basis of exchange value, which, along with the universality of the estrangement of individuals from themselves and from others, now also produces the universality and generality of all their relations and abilities. During earlier stages of development, the single individual seems more fully developed because he has not yet worked out the fullness of his relations and has not yet set them over against himself as independent social powers and relations.[87]

The notion of a universal individual capable of initiating an unlimited series of social connections is only possible and presupposed with the capitalist system: though Marx sometimes uses the term *Individuum* to refer to the man of precapitalist formations, in its strictest meaning the term only describes the modern condition, and cannot be applied to previous frameworks, if not *cum grano salis*. Having said that, Marx does not always use these terms rigorously, especially in texts that were not meant for publication such as the *Grundrisse*.

In the capitalist mode of production there is, on the one hand, an extraordinary impetus of individual energies, and on the other hand, a real expropriation of the worker and his subjugation to a social power that he cannot control:

> In the bourgeois economy . . . this complete unfolding of man's inner potentiality turns into his total emptying-out [*Entleerung*]. His universal objectification becomes his total alienation [*Entfremdung*], and the demolition of all determined one-sided aims becomes the sacrifice of the [human] end-in-itself to a wholly external purpose.[88]

Here, the two-fold nature of capitalism inherent to Marx's analysis becomes evident. On the one hand, capitalism opens up the possibility of a full and universal development; on the other hand, it creates a condition of emptiness and division within each individual, who refers to it 'not as to the conditions of his own, but of alien wealth, and of his own poverty'.[89] Individual realisation and emptiness are two sides of the same coin. In the passages quoted from the *Grundrisse* the notion of estrangement [*Entfremdung*] returns, but this time it is not foundational, since it is not primarily understood as man's separation from his essence, but rather linked to an analysis of the distinctive

87. Marx 1986a, p. 99.
88. Marx 1986a, p. 412.
89. Marx 1986a, p. 465.

mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production, of the division [*Spaltung*] introduced by them.[90] The two-fold character of the situation of the singular individual is the condition of possibility for identifying new scenarios that differ from the present one:

> The basis as the possibility of the universal development of the individuals, and their actual development from this basis as constant transcendence of their barrier, which is recognised as such, and is not interpreted as a sacred limit. The universality of the individual not as an imaginary concept, but the universality of his real and notional relations.[91]

Therefore, 'if the narrow bourgeois form is peeled off, what is wealth if not the universality of the individual's needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive forces, etc., produced in universal exchange?…Where he does not seek to remain something he has already become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?'[92] The 'bourgeois form', however limited, clearly also makes it possible to open up new horizons for the individual, who is no longer reduced to 'something that he has already become', but instead inserted in the movement [*Bewegung*] of becoming.

At this point, we need to emphasise that we are not merely confronted with the recognition of the constitutively two-fold nature of capital as an element of 'serial' subjugation of singular individuals as well as of their potential liberation. We are also presented with the notion that the abolishment of bonds that were previously a 'barrier' to full individual self-realisation is the outcome of the common activity of the working class and its ability to question the capitalist mechanism and give life to moments of fracture within it. In this sense, universality and emptiness are not merely the two sides of the effects of capital on the condition of individuals, because they are constantly traversed by the subjective insurgencies of the working class. Therefore, in addition to the analysis of the inner workings of the capitalist system and its structurally ambivalent character, we also see the relevance of workers' subjectivity. The latter, through its persistent opposition to capital, challenges the coherence of the present state of things and brings its cracks to the surface, the elements that cannot hold. From this standpoint, we must investigate the way that 'objective' and 'subjective' factors intertwine, as the latter constantly shift the plane of debate and generate a crisis in its merely apparent stability. The affirmation of the individual is not simply an 'objective' result of the development

90. See Wood 1981, p. 7.
91. Marx 1986a, pp. 465–6. On the notion of 'universal subject', see Martin 2002a, pp. 14–19; and Hartley 2003, p. 293, who refers to Rancière's 'singular universal'.
92. Marx 1986a, pp. 411–2.

of the capitalist mode of production, but the outcome of workers' struggles that tend towards the realisation of individuals whilst seeking to withdraw them from the seriality of factory-discipline.

The overcoming of the present situation and of individual emptiness (the other 'side' of universality) cannot occur in 'theory' through a development of existing 'objective' contradictions, because in capitalism the two aspects of this question, that is to say, individual freedom and the subsumption of individuals under social power, mutually implicate one another and, contrary to what socialists claimed, it is impossible to retain one without the other. Here, we find an aspect that we have often drawn attention to: that is, the reference to the 'actual truth of the matter' as a distinctive sign of Marx's materialism. Only a practical 'rupture' in the 'present state of things' can bring the serial nature of capitalism into crisis, because the 'real movement' can not occur only through dynamics internal to capitalist laws and to the 'mechanical' development of existing contradictions. On this basis, Marx's communism must be interpreted as the realisation of singularities beyond organicist frameworks and abstractly anthropocentric notions reminiscent of the concept of *Gattungswesen* found in the *Manuscripts*.[93] In this respect, we are always faced with an endless tendency towards the overcoming of the present state of things, a *conatus* inserted in the existing conditions in order to deconstruct them and generate a crisis in their cohesion.[94] From this standpoint, there is no definition of communism other than that of the 'real movement', unless one falls into an abstract and idyllic construction detached from the conditions in which it is configured, on the basis of outlining a 'pacified' scenario free from contradictions and conflicts. On the contrary, the problem must be interpreted on the grounds of the moments of subjectivation of the working class, from its political 'taking the floor',[95] according to the full immanence of singular situations that are not deducible from an abstract framework.

In any case, this question is only conceivable starting from the recognition of the individual as an element full of potentiality. From there, what is at issue is the debate on individuality and the real and ideal universality that it opens up, which was inconceivable in precapitalist-social formations. Marx's perspective is universalist, but it does not follow a linear and unproblematic logic: the achievement of the universal realm, in some respects, is an

93. Schmidt 1971 moves in this direction, p. 95: 'The attitude of late Marx shows none of the exuberance and absolute positivity that characterised the *Manuscripts* when it comes to the future society'. On the question of humanism in the *Grundrisse*, see Kemple 1995, pp. 47–64.

94. See Webb 2000.

95. See Rancière 1998.

advancement in relation to previous social forms that were deprived of it, but it is also grounded by a deep mystification. Here, it may be productive to reactivate our previous argument on the notions of individual, freedom and equality, and the 'intertwining' of truth and mystification within them: these notions are not a fiction, in the limiting sense of the term, but neither can they be 'innocently' investigated as if they were transparent and unambiguously expansive.

Later, in *Capital,* Marx would adopt the metaphor of an organism to describe the characteristics of the capitalist mode of production: 'within the ruling classes themselves, a foreboding is dawning, that the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing'.[96] The critique of the present state of things cannot move from an interpretation of them as a 'compact whole', or 'solid crystal' free from cracks and internal contradictions. We must continually reconsider its essential instability as it produces unpredictable effects and is open to unexpected developments. Faced with this 'field of forces', it would not be productive to think of a 'restoration' of what the capitalist mode of production has eroded: questioning capitalist disciplinary structures becomes an immanent process inserted in determined situations and knowledge that can 'explode' them where they do not hold. Therefore, the discussion does not result in some one-sided denunciation of the absolute domination of the relations of production over the forces of production and the alienation of the worker: rather, it presents a constitutive double character as operative strategies of subjugation are created alongside new spaces of struggle. This debate runs throughout Marx's analysis, but is particularly exemplary and incisive in the *Grundrisse*: universality and emptiness are kept together as two sides of the same coin, but also exclude one another in a field traversed by fractures and lines of separation. It is important to emphasise that this does not amount to a mere recognition of the ambivalence of capitalism, but also presents the idea that the overcoming of the mutual implication of universality and emptiness is inconceivable 'through theory'. Only a 'practical' fracture with the 'present state of things' can 'explode' this reciprocal implication. In this sense, the 'motor' indicated above is the 'non-relation' between classes and the asymmetry between the proletariat as a 'non-class' class and the bourgeoisie as a particular class with particular interests. The cohesion of this paradoxical nexus of universality and emptiness is eroded by the 'partial universality' of the proletariat that embodies all of the burdens and 'radical chains' of society.

96. Marx 1996b, p. 11.

This element cannot be immediately deduced from the critique of political economy: the latter has political value and is not 'innocent' and neutral, as it is carried out from the standpoint of the working class; however, it cannot *sic et simpliciter* be a practice of subjectivation. To claim to have defined subjectivation once and for all time would lead to 'theoreticism' and make it impossible to 'grasp' concrete social and political dynamics. In fact, the texts that more powerfully point to the emergence of workers' subjectivity are his historical and political writings: rather than a general theory of class or subjectivation, they present a specific and singular subjectivation within specific and singular circumstances, proper to the political event under analysis. From this standpoint, previous observations on the impossibility of hypostatising political subjectivity as something that does not change over time are worth returning to. For instance, we find these in the reference to the great changes on the political scene after the defeat of the notion of a European proletarian revolution after 1848: many years later, the 'social republic' of the Commune would lead to a strong 'revision' of the theoretical and political model of the *Manifesto*. Political subjectivation cannot be deduced from a single scheme that fits all cases; it must constantly be calibrated starting from the uniqueness of the present conjuncture.

This is to highlight the fact that the critique of political economy cannot immediately contain the element of subjectivation, since this can only be 'thought in practice' on the basis of constantly-changing scenarii: the critique of political economy can allow for the emergence of subjects and potentially of subjectivity, but not of specific subjectivations. It is also necessary to emphasise, following Foucault's reflections, that power, and in this case the social and objective power of money, cannot be conceived purely in terms of subjugation and obedience, but also on the basis of the production of subjects that underlies it.[97] The French term *sujet* paradigmatically expresses this ambivalence, as it indicates both the subjected – someone subjugated under the device of domination – and the subject. In any case, let us return to our previous observation on the partial autonomy of thought from the concreteness of existing social and political configurations. The structure of the categories of the critique of political economy cannot merely 'mirror' these configurations, because if this were the case it would be impossible to develop an overall discourse about capitalism detached from the contingent event and its singularity. Therefore, it is necessary to return to the specific analysis of the individual condition in the *Grundrisse* in order to continue our investigation of the ambivalence of the subject as an element within the capitalist system,

97. On this issue, see Foucault 2004.

where the latter presents its 'specific difference' from previous modes of production.

3.5. Isolation: a sentence or a potentiality?

The notion of society plays a decisive role in this question, since it permeates the individual realm. Society, however, rather than an irenic concept, is instead marked by lines of fracture and strategies of subjugation. In the capitalist mode of production, the domination of exchange-value is made autonomous from commodities and comes to take on a separate existence as a commodity in itself, as money, with its social power [*gesellschaftliche Macht*]. The capitalist mode of production does not give rise to a real community, since individuals are subsumed under production rather than *vice versa*. Individual freedom and subjugation to an objective power are two sides of the same coin.[98]

By highlighting the mutual implication of individual development and the domination of an objective social power, Marx demystifies the 'semblance' of freedom and equality that 'seduces democracy':

> In money relations, in a developed system of exchange (and this appearance leads democracy astray)... individuals appear to be independent (this independence, which altogether is merely an illusion and should more correctly be called unconcern, in the sense of indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit – im Sinn der Indifferenz*]), appear to collide with each other freely, and to exchange with each other in this freedom; but they appear independent only to those who abstract from the conditions, the conditions of existence, in which those individuals come into contact with each other.... These objective [*sachlichen*] relations of dependence, in contrast to the personal ones, also appear in such a way that the individuals are now ruled by abstractions whereas previously they were dependent on one another. (The objective relationship of dependence is nothing but the social relations independently confronting the seemingly independent individuals).[99]

When moving from the 'aural' sphere of simple circulation of commodities to the 'underworld' of production, freedom and equality become unfreedom and inequality; the representation of the democratic 'imaginary' is in crisis. It must be emphasised that freedom and equality are understood as constitutively ambivalent, as they represent the actual overcoming of hierarchical

98. See Marx 1986a, p. 540.
99. Marx 1986a, p. 101.

structures that 'blocked' the movement of individuals, but also the mystification that underlies this process, the concealment of the asymmetries present within it. The political nature of these notions also needs to be taken into account: for instance, the abolition of feudal structures of authority is not only an effect of mechanisms internal to capitalism, but is also linked to the moments of subjectivation that we previously mentioned. In this respect, equality is not only a concept, but also a constant practice of emancipation from situations that 'strangle' individuals.

In this context, democracy is the political form adequate to the logic of simple commodity-circulation where subjects seemingly enter into relations characterised by full reciprocity. In *Capital*, Marx stressed that a reference to an 'Eden of the innate rights of men'[100] conceals existing radical unfreedoms and inequalities. The radical character of Marx's critique of democracy, a structure in many ways more adequate to the modern state-form than to its being overcome, is evident, here: as noted earlier, subsequent to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* pregnant with democratic *pathos,* Marx takes his distance from democratic approaches.[101] From this perspective, it would be misleading, or at least problematic, to see Marx as a 'democrat'; in fact, this interpretation would require the neutralisation of Marx's deconstruction of the state-logic, which democracy is fully or partially 'internal' to.[102] The attempt to make Marx's perspective compatible with the democratic framework, to distance him from the tragic experiences of 'actually-existing socialism', is therefore wholly inadequate. If anything, there are significant moments in Marx's analysis, around 1848 in particular, where, rather than a democratic perspective, we find an expansive practice where the border between 'democratic' and 'communist' notions is blurred as he disassembles the distinction between 'social' and 'political'. As the discussion on the 'right to work' in the *Class Struggles in France* shows, the counterposition of reform and revolution is unfounded if examined from the standpoint of the present conjuncture rather than in an abstract conceptual reconstruction.

To return to the passage cited earlier, whilst freedom and equality are constitutive elements of bourgeois society, as soon as one moves from the realm

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100. Marx 1996a, p. 186: 'This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham'.

101. On the problem of democracy in Marx, see Basso 2001b.

102. Amongst the studies that highlight the 'democratic' element in Marx, see the interesting work of Abensour 1989, who moves in a direction that partly differs from our own. For a critical analysis of the notion of democracy that fully grasps its significance in modernity and its conformity to the logic of political obligation, see Duso 2004.

of circulation to that of production they become their opposite and reveal a series of asymmetries. It is important to dwell on his question, in particular on the fact that, in bourgeois society, 'individuals seem to be independent and to collide with each other freely'. Thus far, we have investigated the duplicity of freedom and independence; it is now necessary to look into the idea that independence, given its ambivalence, presents a character of indifference. An examination of these questions reveals a connection between the notion of independence [*Unabhängigkeit*] and that of equal validity [*Gleichgültigkeit*], conceived in the cited passage as a synonym for indifference [*Indifferenz*]. The 'equal validity', to use a literal translation of the term, is configured as indifference insofar as it presupposes the idea of the individuals' reciprocal extraneousness from one another and their common subjugation to social power: the social nexus corresponds to the autonomy of relations between individuals, rather than a real connection between them. Indifference is two-fold: on the one hand, as a result of the domination of exchange-value, it equalises individuals and leads to the creation of social relations; on the other hand, the only connection between individuals is their lack of connection, or rather, their common subjugation to an objective and foreign power materialised in money. The term *Gleichgültigkeit,* sharing its root with equality [*Gleichheit*], literally indicates 'equal validity', and therefore indifference. Its meaning is ambivalent because it entails an element of equalisation and, therefore, equality, but is also the source of a sharp separation between individuals. The reference to 'equal validity' or equivalence brings to light a crucial aspect of Marx's analysis in general, but particularly the *Grundrisse*: that is, the identification of a nexus of sociality-isolation. The relation between individuals is actualised through their subsumption to exchange-value: their common reference to an extraneous, hostile force that has become autonomous points to a real equality between them.[103]

Social relations are formed as soon as individual differences constitute the basis of exchange, which creates a situation of levelling-out:

> Only the difference of their needs and their production is the occasion for exchange and for their being socially equated in it. Hence this natural difference is the precondition of their social equality in the act of exchange and of this relationship in general, in which they relate to each other as productive agents.…This does not make them indifferent to one another [*nicht gleichgültig gegeneinander*], but integrate with one another, they need each other,… they stand not merely in a relation of equality to one another, but also in a social relation.[104]

103. See Givsan 1980, pp. 173–6.
104. Marx 1986a, p. 174.

On the one hand, exchange-value gives rise to an equivalence of individuals that leads to the creation of a social nexus; on the other hand, the only link between them is their lack of connection, their common subjugation to a foreign and objective power. But indifference cannot be linked to the domination of the private realm heralded in Marx's earlier works, because it is not understood in contrast to the social realm. In fact, the capitalist mode of production and the underlying ambivalence of the condition of individuals within it is founded on the mutual implication of sociality and isolation, or the wild development of social relations and the emergence of a structure of indifference: 'capital appears as a collective power, as a social power and as the transcendence of individual isolation [*Vereinzelung*], first of the exchange with the workers, and then of the workers themselves. The isolation of the workers still implies their relative independence [*Unabhängigkeit*]'.[105] But, in Marx's view, sociality is not positive, nor is isolation necessarily negative. With respect to sociality, for the reasons discussed earlier, there is no hypostatisation of society, but, rather, an attempt at questioning the structures of subjugation that sustain it. The second aspect, isolation, is not interpreted as something devastating, because it presupposes an independence of workers unthinkable in precapitalist forms. The organic character of these forms made man bound to the community as if by an umbilical cord, depriving him of his opportunity for autonomous movement.

Therefore, the capitalist system is founded on the mutual implication of sociality and isolation: on the one hand, social forces receive an extraordinary impetus as compared to previous epochs, while, on the other hand, the individual finds himself in a condition of isolation. However, these two aspects, far from being mutually exclusive, refer to one another, since the social nexus constitutes a means of realisation of individual interests. In any case, this situation presupposes the independence of the singular individual:

> Man becomes individualised only through the process of history.... Exchange itself is a major agent of this individuation.... This occurs when matters have changed in such a way that man as an isolated individual relates only to himself, but that the means of positing himself as an isolated individual have become precisely what gives him his general and communal character.[106]

From this standpoint, the social nexus is configured as an 'absolute mutual dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another':

> The dissolution of all products and activities into exchange values presupposes both the dissolution of all established personal (historical)

105. Marx 1986a, p. 508.
106. Marx 1986a, p. 420.

> relations of dependence in production, and the all-round dependence of producers upon one another. . . . It is the interest of private persons; but its content, as well as the form and means of its realisation, are given by social conditions that are independent of them all. The absolute mutual dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another [*der gegeneinander gleichgültigen Individuen*] constitutes their social connection.[107]

Now it is necessary to investigate the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, pivoting on exchange-value, and its ability to give rise to a social connection that is, however, only based on the 'dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another'. The domination of this factor constrains the individual, denies his autonomy and independence and reduces him to a mere appendage of a process, to a function of a social mechanism greater than himself. Marx's view is foreign to any hypostatisation of society; on the contrary, it unmasks the devices of domination that characterise bourgeois society and the sociality-isolation nexus in particular. From this standpoint, individuality is structurally two-fold: on the one hand, it is marked by emptiness and is subservient to a 'dead mechanism' that it merely supports, whilst on the other hand, it is full of expansive potentiality.

This view is based on the idea that 'capital itself is a contradiction [*Widerspruch*]-in-process':[108] after all, as Marx states elsewhere, 'we are the last to deny that contradictions are contained in capital. Indeed, it is our aim to analyse them fully'.[109] The structural contradictions of capital are exponentially augmented by the growth of the social forces of production and the increase in the 'general level of development of science',[110] thus creating the conditions for a subversion of the current state of things: capital 'proclaims the dissolution [*Auflösung*] of capital and of the mode of production based upon it'.[111] In this context, 'just as the system of bourgeois economy unfolds to us only gradually, so also does its negation of itself, which is its ultimate result. . . . Everything that has a solid form . . . appears merely as a moment, a vanishing moment in this movement [*Bewegung*]'.[112] Here, it is useful to return to our earlier argument regarding the extreme dynamism of the capitalist system: unlike previous static forms of production, capitalism is based on a constant movement and tends towards the permanent revolution of present conditions and social and technical innovation. But there are instrinsic limitations to the

107. Marx 1986a, p. 94.
108. Marx 1987a, p. 91.
109. Marx 1986a, p. 277.
110. Marx 1987a, p. 90.
111. Marx 1987a, p. 39.
112. Marx 1987a, p. 98.

idea that capitalism is overcome by leveraging its contradictions, a notion that is so powerful in the *Grundrisse*: it would be illusory to believe that the more marked and dramatic the contradictions of capital, the more they can open up the prospect of a struggle geared to abolishing the 'present state of things'. If anything, it is necessary to politically 'bend' existing contradictions, rather than construe a historical dialectics based on their mechanical development. Already in *The German Ideology*, the productive forces/relations of production nexus had a significant role in Marx's outline of historical development, an outline based on a 'grand narrative' that was not free of determinism. But Marx's trajectory, though displaying these problematic elements, is not reducible to them: at its foundation lies the attempt to adhere to the changes that occurred in history, whilst also questioning the structures of domination that sustain them and allowing their lack of neutrality and 'innocence' to emerge.

The full development of the duality so far discussed and its devastating effects and revolutionary potentials is only achieved when the instrument of labour confronts labour as a machine:

> In machinery, objectified labour physically confronts living labour as the power which dominates it and actively subsumes it under itself – not merely by appropriating living labour, but in the actual production process itself.... To the extent that machinery develops with the accumulation of social knowledge and productive power in general, it is not in the worker but in capital that general social labour is represented.[113]

In the 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes machines as 'the most adequate form of fixed capital, which in turn is the 'most adequate form of capital in general', thus subsuming under itself the whole process of production.[114] Thus machinery initiates a true and proper revolution of

113. Marx 1987a, pp. 83–4.

114. Marx 1987a, p. 84. See the whole passage: 'The accumulation of knowledge and skill, of the general productive forces of the social mind, is thus absorbed in capital as opposed to labour, and hence appears as a property of capital, more precisely, of fixed capital, to the extent that it enters into the production process as means of production in the strict sense. Therefore, machinery appears as the most adequate form of fixed capital; and fixed capital, as far as capital is considered in its relation to itself, as the most adequate form of capital in general'. See also: 'The development of fixed capital shows the degree to which society's general science, *knowledge*, has become an immediate productive force, and hence the degree to which the conditions of the social life process itself have been brought under the control of the *general intellect* and remoulded according to it. It shows the degree to which the social productive forces are produced not merely in the form of knowledge but as immediate organs of social praxis, of the actual life process' (Marx 1987a, p. 92). Italian *operaismo* has ascribed great value to the 'Fragment on Machines' and the notion of *general intellect* that underlies it, emphasising its central role for our understanding not only of

working conditions. On the one hand, it reduces the *Arbeiter*, the worker or labourer, to the function of overseer of the production-process, because with the development of large-scale industry 'labour no longer appears so much as included in the production process, but rather man relates himself to that process as its overseer and regulator.... The worker... stands beside the production process, rather than being its main agent'.[115] On the other hand, machinery creates the possibility for the social individual to break, for the first time in history, with 'the present state of things': 'The productive forces and social relations – two different aspects of the development of the social individual [*das gesellschaftliche Individuum*] – appear to capital merely as the means, and are merely the means, for it to carry on production on its restricted basis. In fact, however, they are the material conditions for exploding that basis'.[116]

The structural contradiction of capital fully unfolds insofar as it creates disposable time whilst converting it into surplus-labour, which means that:

> The growth of the productive forces can no longer be tied to the appropriation of alien *surplus labour*, and that the working masses must, rather, themselves appropriate their surplus labour. Once they have done so... then, on the one hand, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual; and, on the other, society's productive power will develop so rapidly that... the *disposable time* of all will increase.[117]

In this framework, the 'social individual' takes form in all its dynamism: 'Once this transformation has taken place, it is... the appropriation of his own general productive power, his comprehension of Nature and domination of it by virtue of his being a social entity, in a word, the development

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Marx's theory, but also of contemporary or 'post-Fordist' capitalism. Whilst *operaismo* informs our analysis in many respects, for instance with respect to the political conjugation of class-subjectivity and its irreducibility to any sociological hypostasis, we would problematise its emphasis on the development of the contradictions of capital as emerging from the function of the *general intellect*. See, in particular, Negri 1989, pp. 140–9, who considers the chapter on machines – that is, the final part of Notebook VI and the beginning of Notebook VII – the 'apex of Marx's theoretical tension in the project of the *Grundrisse*'. On the question of machines, amongst many interpretations, see Axelos 1965; Rosdolsky 1977, pp. 414–25; Di Marco 2005, pp. 61ff.; Touboul 2010, pp. 48–77.

115. Marx 1987a, p. 91.

116. Marx 1987a, p. 92. See also p. 91: '[There emerges a] free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time in order to posit surplus labour, but in general the reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, to which then corresponds the artistic, scientific, etc., development of individuals, made possible by the time thus set free and the means produced for all of them.'

117. Marx 1987a, p. 94.

of the social individual [*das gesellschaftliche Individuum*] that appears as the cornerstone of production and wealth.'[118]

The argument points to the emergence of an expansive potentiality that is in many ways 'explosive' in the antagonistic dynamics under analysis:

> Real economising – saving – consists in the saving of labour time (the minimum production costs, and their reduction to the minimum). But this saving is identical with the development of the productive power. Hence in no way renunciation of enjoyment but development of *power*, of the capacity [*Fähigkeit*] to produce and hence of both the capacity for and the means of enjoyment. The capacity for enjoyment…is created by the development of an individual disposition, productive power.…Free time – which is both leisure and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessor into another subject [*Subjekt*].[119]

In the 'Fragment on Machines', there is a 'leap' from the first part, where Marx underlines the deadly effects of machinery on workers, and its second part, which pivots on the possibility for the multilateral realisation of 'social individuals'. A strong emphasis is placed on the contradictions of capital that must necessarily fully unfold, almost as if constant technological innovation and the most advanced possible development could push the capitalist mode of production to its end. But this insistence on the notion of development needs to be questioned in order to avoid an uncritical exaltation of the progressive character of capital. Marx's analysis runs the risk of presenting the shift from the present to communism with an excessive 'automatism': communism is conceived of as the outcome of the unfolding of existing contradictions, as if the immanent laws of the economy, due to their inner dialectics, could lead the capitalist mode of production to self-dissolve. This approach is particularly accentuated in the *Grundrisse* and cannot be explained by reference to Marx's overall theory: this particular work is 'febrile' and characterised by a political 'gamble' on the revolutionary consequences of the 1857 crisis of overproduction and on the potential that it unleashed for 'breaking' the capitalist mechanism.[120] Nonetheless, as the rest of our analysis will demonstrate, whilst playing a primary role this approach is not the beginning and end of the debate in the *Grundrisse*.

Marx's perspective is full of the *pathos* of technological development, and is marked by a sort of still-present Prometheanism. In fact, various passages refer back to the notion of *Gattungswesen* or species-being that had played

118. Marx 1987a, p. 91.
119. Marx 1987a, p. 97.
120. See Tomba 2006.

a decisive role in earlier texts, especially from the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* up to and including *The Holy Family*, in Marx's outlining of the structure of individuality. The difficulty inherent to this notion is not so much the construction of an organicist overall structure (as according to a reductive and simplistic interpretation of Marx's theory), but the danger of not distinguishing between 'individual' and 'collective', and of shifting back and forth between 'individualist' Prometheanism and organicism. To return to the *Grundrisse*, it is necessary to emphasise the problematic nature of Marx's insistence on the revolutionary character of capitalism as far as the condition of the individual is concerned, since it demonstrates the persistence of elements of servility in capitalism both at the economic and the juridical level. The overcoming of previous formations, as evident in the analysis of other texts by Marx, and *Capital* in particular, is never completed.[121] The emphasis is placed on the utmost disempowerment of individuality and its subsumption under an objective social power; these contradictory elements are capable of 'exploding' the capitalist structure, a 'grand-narrative' conception typical of the nineteenth century.

At the same time, a sole emphasis on the one-sided Promethean character of species-being would fail to grasp the meaning of the reflection that Marx presents in the *Grundrisse*, because there he rids the debate of all anthropological foundations: rather than human nature and its metaphysical basis, species-being is grounded on individuality and its ambivalence. This is analysed concretely in relation to the materialised processes it embodies, rather than from the standpoint of an abstract-generic being: the *Gattungswesen*, though still present in Marx's argumentation and at times given strong emphasis, is nonetheless subsumed into present dynamics and no longer central to his reasoning. The notion of estrangement (*Entfremdung*, 'to use a term that philosophers understand', as noted in *The German Ideology*), a 'correlative' of the notion of species-being, when used, is identified with the 'theft' of labour-time at the expense of each worker, something achieved through either the lengthening of labour-time as a whole (absolute surplus-value) or the reduction of necessary labour and thus a decrease in the price of the labour-power [*Arbeitsvermögen*] of the worker (relative surplus-value).[122]

In any case, this discussion plays a decisive role in the notion of labour-power: the latter is capacity, *dynamis*, and 'the sum total of the physical and mental faculties which exist in the living person of a human'.[123] The capitalist

121. See Moulier-Boutang 1998. For an appreciation of Marx's critique of slavery, see Nimtz 2000, esp. pp. 48–9.
122. See Marx 1986a, p. 260. See also Postone 1983, p. 28.
123. Marx 1985, p. 244.

relation is founded on the difference between labour-power, with its active character, and actual labour: as soon as something that only exists as a possibility is sold, it cannot be separated from the 'living' singularity of the worker. In the *Grundrisse*, the worker's labour-power is defined as *Arbeitsvermögen*, and presents an important two-fold characteristic: *Vermögen* denotes both capacity and faculty, as well as wealth and assets. The relationship between labour-power and labour can be compared, in Aristotelian terms, to the relation between potential and actual. Marx's argument is based on the attempt to fully develop the energies inherent in labour, the 'the living, form-giving fire'.[124] From this standpoint, labour-power can be assimilated to the *dynamis* that, because of its potentiality, is understood with reference to its material aspects:

> Objectified labour, i.e. labour present in space, can also be opposed as past labour to labour still present in time. If it is to be present in time, present alive, it can only be present as a living subject [*lebendiges Subjekt*], in which it exists as capacity [*Fähigkeit*], as potentiality [*Möglichkeit*]; therefore as worker. The only use value, therefore, which can constitute an antithesis to capital is labour, to be exact, value-creating, i.e. productive labour.[125]

In this context, the antithesis between past, objectified labour – that is to say, capital, and present, living labour, which is full of potential, *dynamis* – is very strong, as Marx also makes clear in the Appendix to the first volume of *Capital*: 'It is not the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the worker. It is not a matter of living labour being realised in objective labour as its objective organ, but of objective labour being preserved and increased by the absorption of living labour, thereby becoming self-valorising value, capital.'[126]

Here, rather than machines in themselves, Marx is referring to their capitalist use: machines in themselves shorten labour-time, but in capitalism they lengthen the working-day. We are confronted with a 'dead mechanism' dominated by capital: 'But capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour. Capital is dead labour,

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124. Marx 1986a, p. 286: 'Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transience of things, their temporality, as the process of their formation by living time'. See Virno 2008, pp. 105–16; Ricciardi 2004, pp. 261–72, especially pp. 265–6.

125. Marx 1986a, p. 202. Tronti underlines the shattering power of labour-power, which is 'not only a commodity-object that passes from the hands of the workers into those of capital, but also an active force' (Tronti 1966, p. 210). According to him, the *Grundrisse* is the text where this notion is most radically comprehended.

126. Marx 1994, p. 397.

that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.'[127]

Here, the main theme of *Capital* clearly emerges: the only aim of capital is to self-valorise, following a mechanism that seems to develop *motu proprio*: 'the capitalist at the same time converts value, i.e., past, materialised, and dead labour into capital, into value big with value a live monster that is fruitful and multiplies'.[128]

In this deadly scenario, it is capital that represents the past, but the worker represents the present and is defined as a 'living subject', 'capacity', 'possibility', not inserted in a determinist fabric that prevents him from acting. But the antithesis of past and present labour must be questioned: though objectified labour is unquestionably past, living labour is not necessarily 'present'. To be precise, there are two forms of past labour, or it would be improper, to say the least, to regard living labour as labour, because the capacity to work that exists in the act of exchange cannot be equated with actual labour.[129] Despite this limitation, the theoretical and political strength of the argument in the *Grundrisse* is its expansive and revolutionary declination of use-value, behind which lies the radical nature of workers' opposition to capital. Living labour, freeing itself and regaining its own use-value, is in conflict with exchange-value and opens up potentials that were previously unthinkable.[130] What the capitalist buys, labour-power (or the capacity to work, *Arbeitsvermögen*), only exists as a possibility and cannot be decoupled from the living singularity of the worker: there is always an excess in the fact that the body of the worker can never be fully 'captured'. In this framework, the importance of living labour is paramount: living labour is the use-value of labour-power. The latter, on the one hand, aims towards the valorisation of capital, but on the other hand is also a shuttering opposition to it that can 'break' its 'deadly mechanism'.[131]

Marx's interpretation of the worker as pure subjectivity is an extremely sharp one. The worker is a subject without object because of the asymmetry between classes caused by the money-form and its spectral character: 'In bourgeois society, e.g., the worker stands there purely subjectively, without

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127. Marx 1996a, p. 241.
128. Marx 1996a, p. 205.
129. On this question, see Virno 1999, p. 140.
130. See Tronti 1966; Negri 1989, p. 165, who claims that 'communism is in no case a product of capitalist development, it is its radical inversion. . . . Work which is liberated is liberation from work . . . The reversal is total, it allows no kind of homology whatsoever'; and Negri 1999, p. 264: 'Living labour is constituent power that opposes constituted power and thus constantly opens new possibilities of freedom'.
131. For a reactivation of the subjectivity of living labour in contemporary dynamics, see Gambino 2003, pp. 129–43.

object; but the thing which confronts him has now become the true community [*das wahre Gemeinwesen*], which he tries to make a meal of and which makes a meal of him'.[132] In this respect, the overall sense of the argument moves towards the identification of an unbridgeable gap between the class of capitalists, which is inevitably the bearer of particular interests, and the class of workers, the 'partial universality' in which wrongs and injustice are materialised, which tends to overcome the class-limits of society starting from a singular and politically circumscribed standpoint. This element is present in the earlier texts, but becomes more developed through Marx's identification of the potentiality of living labour. Therefore, beyond the inherent limits of the 'grand narrative' previously criticised for its intertwining of a philosophy of history and 'Promethean' anthropology, Marx's outline of this revolution-causing contradiction between, on the one hand, the 'appearance' of freedom and equality in their ambivalence and, on the other hand, the worker's 'bare life', or subjectivity without an object, confronting the 'real community' of money, remains unsurpassed.[133]

In the *Grundrisse*, the subjectivity of the worker is strongly appreciated: it confronts determined conditions without being reducible to them; however, it is still bound to a historical 'grand narrative' typical of the nineteenth century and the inherent problems associated with this. This ambivalence and ambiguity is also rooted in the fact that the *Grundrisse* is a work-in-progress that escapes 'systematisations' unable to grasp its immanence to the moment when it was written and to what was then politically at stake. In this respect, the 1857 crisis of overproduction is important to our understanding of the *Grundrisse* and to our thinking-through the conjuncture that pervades the text. This interpretation does not aim to hide its difficulties, nor does it see the *Grundrisse* as a monolith; on the contrary, it brings to light the opposing forces at work in the text in order to appreciate the emergence of subjectivities outlined in a historically and politically determined context.

In any case, this question brings to light the difference between the man of precapitalist-social formations and the individual as an invention of the capitalist system, along with the weight of subjectivity this potentially entails. The ambivalence of the capitalist system means that universality and emptiness are two sides of the same coin and paradoxically allow for the coexistence of the affirmation of individuality and its subsumption to an objective power. The framework outlined so far is characterised by the structural nexus of

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132. Marx 1986a, p. 420.

133. See Negri 1989; and Maurizio Merlo, who stresses that the notion of the working class in the *Grundrisse* is 'irreducible to a social group, part of a unitary totality' (Merlo 1999, p. 375).

sociality and indifference, since capitalism is founded on the mutual implication of the wild development of social forces of production and the emergence of an increasingly sharp fragmentation. At this stage, we must dwell on the notion of isolation and see how Marx interprets it:

> It is not until the 18th century, in 'bourgeois society', that the various forms of the social nexus confront the individual as merely a means towards his private ends, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual [*des vereinzelten einzelnen*], is precisely the epoch of the hitherto most highly developed social (according to this standpoint, general) relations. Man [*Der Mensch*] is a *zoon politikon* in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal [*ein geselliges Tier*], but an animal that can isolate itself only within society [*sich vereinzeln*].[134]

In this passage from the 1857 'Introduction', *Vereinzelung* or isolation is not merely negative, since it presupposes the individual and his independence and liberation from predetermined bonds and frameworks. The reference to Aristotle's *zoon politikon* does not entail a nostalgic vision of ancient Greece, since 'man cannot be a child again without becoming childish': the idea of the revolutionary role of the capitalist mode of production excludes any hypothesis of a return to the 'unity' of the *polis*.[135] The definition of *Mensch* as *zoon politikon* must be interpreted on the basis of the two verbs used. First of all, the modal *können* indicates 'to be able to', to have the chance [*Möglichkeit*], the faculty [*Fähigkeit*] to act: the realm of potentiality previously characterised

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134. Marx 1986c, p. 18, see also the passage in the original: 'der Mensch ist…ein *zoon politikon,* nicht nur ein geselliges Tier, sondern ein Tier, das nur in der Gesellschaft sich vereinzeln kann'. See also Dumont 1977, pp. 195–9; and Dumont 1983, pp. 197–8. In this passage, in a perspective different from ours, Dumont claims that Marx has not recognised that organicism is not compatible with individualism; Janoska 1994, pp. 192–4.

135. An obligatory reference must be made to the passage from the *Politics* of Aristotle 2000, p. 28: 'When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the polis comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing for the sake of a good life.…The final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best. Hence it is evident that the polis is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a polis, is either a bad man or above humanity'. On the relationship between Marx and Aristotle, see Vadée 1998, pp. 327–8, who emphasises the reference to Aristotle's *zoon politikon* and claims that Marx sees it as a higher notion than that of modernity, centred on the atomism of bourgeois society. For the above reasons, I do not share this interpretation. Other works dedicated to Marx's relation to Aristotle and the ancient world are McCarty 1990 and Pike 1999, who insist on the relevance of the notion of 'good life'. On the use of Aristotle's *zoon politikon*, see also Schwartz 1979, pp. 245–66; Cotten 1982, pp. 73–82; Meikle 1985.

with the term *dynamis*. Second, the verb *sich vereinzeln* alludes to the *Isolation* of the individual and its ambivalence, but is not limited to it. In fact, it comes from the term *der einzelne*, which can be translated with the expression 'to count as a singularity', to singularise itself;[136] here, we find the idea of a singularity that, whilst being irreducible to the social and communitarian realm, can only be conceived on its basis, on the basis of actually-existing material circumstances. The isolation of the individual is grounded on a singular practice, a deviation from the predicted course, analogous to the Epicurean *clinamen*,[137] in a unique and specific perspective that cannot be reduced to an overall scheme.

This calls for a further questioning of the relation between individuation and the realm of isolation, to understand whether the latter is a reality or a perspective on reality, that is to say, whether it identifies the structure of things or an interpretation of them that is inevitably partly deformed. To return to our previous observations on the 'swerve' between thought and the 'actual truth of the matter' and the latter's lack of transparency, we might say that both aspects are present in Marx. As was the case with the notions of freedom and equality, the concept of isolation is also a bundle of reality and mystification, because no 'innocent' outlook can grasp things in their immediacy. After all, the passage cited earlier shows how the isolated individual is the product of a 'way of seeing' and not directly linked to an empirically verifiable *datum*. In the 1857 'Introduction', Marx's argument does not present individuals as being absolutely autonomous, since its starting point, contrary to the claims of classical-political economists and natural-right theorists, creators of the Robinsonades, is not an isolated individual; it is the 'socially determined production by individuals',[138] 'production by social individuals'.[139] Marx's critique of Robinsonades is not levelled at their simplistic reduction to an ideology of the present, because imaginary and symbolic constructions constitute reality and are not simple deformations or merely fictitious mystifications of it. The adoption of the isolated individual's 'way of seeing' is resplendent with social figures and situations: from this standpoint, the

136. On the notion of *vereinzeln* as singularisation and individualisation in the passage cited, see Henry 1976 and Touboul 2004, pp. 17–18.

137. To return to the thesis of the young Marx, in the movement of atoms there is a *clinamen*, a deviation from the predicted course, that indicates a unique possibility: 'Lucretius therefore is correct when he maintains that the declination breaks the *fati foedera* and, since he applies this immediately to consciousness, it can be said of the atom that the declination is that something in its breast that can fight back and resist'. Marx 1979a, p. 49.

138. Marx 1986c, p. 17.

139. Marx 1986c, p. 23.

phenomenon of fetishism analysed in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital,* rather than a fictitious and unreal construction, or false perception of the present, is a way in which social reality is seen in its opaqueness.

In any case, without reducing the perspective of bourgeois economists and contract-theorists to mere mystification, Marx still finds their perspective inadequate. It does not make sense to speak of individuals irrespective of their social context, because they are always operating within a *Gesellschaft*: after all, society is not primarily made up of individuals, but of relationships between them. Therefore, the expression 'social individual', though it might initially seem oxymoronic, acquires an important significance. We would add that, as Marx develops the concept (and practice) of communism, the notion of society is evaluated by a new standard: no homology is possible between it and the topology of the relations of domination of the capitalist mode of production. At the heart of the discourse is the attempt to think a 'common being' in practice clearly asymmetrical to the community of money, able to create the mutual implication between sociality and isolation. Interestingly, in the *Grundrisse,* Marx abandons the term *Gemeinschaft* so often found in *The German Ideology*, and instead opts for the term *Gemeinwesen*, which denotes both precapitalist formations and the community founded on money constituted by the capitalist mode of production. Without identifying a too-rigid and systematic distinction between the two, we would argue that, whilst *Gemeinschaft* refers to a determined and constituted community, *Gemeinwesen* better 'captures' the element of the 'common' that cannot be hypostatised in a specific framework. In this respect, more than previous works, the *Grundrisse* present the *conatus* towards 'common being' rather than a circumscribed community: the notion of the 'social individual' reinterprets the categories of individual, society and community as something that individuals can have in common on the basis of a political practice, rather than within an inevitably 'closed' communitarian outlook.[140] Similarly to what was claimed in *The German Ideology* with regard to 'individuals as such', it would be theoretically and politically productive to interpret the 'social individuals' of the *Grundrisse* as irreducible to predetermined belonging, and thus not definable once and for all, in their movement from circumscribed circumstances.

There is always a 'danger' in Marxist theorisations of communism of misunderstanding the 'swerve' between 'common being' and community, and thus

140. See Di Marco 2005, pp. 126–7: 'In communist society . . . individuals do not subsume the conditions of production, but fully develop as social individuals in order to promote the free and multilateral development of each. . . . The multilateral character of man cannot be anything but a process of constant individuation, otherwise it would be a metaphysical "perfection".'

of failing to outline a future society able to fully realise the 'common'.[141] There is a considerable gap between these two notions, because each community, insofar as it is founded on exclusion, on the physical and metaphorical drawing of a 'perimeter' for a territory and on the 'sacrifice' of the singular individual, can never fully 'resolve' the 'common', its dynamism and irreducibility to predetermined belonging. From this standpoint, the most fertile definition of communism is one that highlights its character as a 'real movement', rather than as a perfectly pacified condition free of contradictions. In this sense, the 'social individual' has to be understood on the basis of his tendency towards the 'common': the question of relations plays a decisive role, here.

One might say that singularity is 'all relation' and intercourse its distinctive character: this does not imply a hypostatisation of singularity, as the latter is investigated in its specific determination and constitutive instability. The 'trans-individual' realm, proper to singularity, has an anti-substantialist significance: the crucial reference to what lies 'between' individuals is contextual to the erosion of all absolutisations of predetermined identities.[142] If the 'social individual' has a character of inter-relationality, this does not follow an irenic logic of inter subjectivity. One needs to bear in mind that capital fragments the individual, on the one hand, whilst on the other hand it posits social relation at the foundation of its own structure: the social nexus that 'extends' between civil society and the state, far from being idealised, is the object of Marx's critique and is demystified as it responds to a specific topology of domination. Therefore, the 'common being' is configured as a critical point and 'field of forces' that cannot be immediately recomposed and are often stand in stark contrast to one another. In this perspective, conflict is not simply an effect of the capitalist system, but its fundamental condition, because capital is the 'contradiction in progress' between past, objectified labour and present, living labour.

Capitalism is the first system of production based on the existence of classes engaged in an irreconcilable antagonism: the 'dual' structure of bourgeoisie and proletariat is characterised by a non-relation between classes and a fracture that cannot be mended. The capitalist mode of production, insofar as it is based on social relations, is intrinsically political. Therefore, society, constitutively bound to the capitalist system, is not simply an artificial construction but a framework that reduces singular individuals to their economic function and individuates them on the basis of their possession of money, thus

141. See Nancy 1996, p. 36.

142. On the reciprocity of 'individual' and 'collective', see Balibar 1996, p. 121: 'Marx's philosophy is, between Hegel and Freud, the example of a modern ontology of relations, or…of the trans-individual'.

grounding political 'slavery' on the apparent freedom of labour. The 'social individual' is marked by a broken temporality characterised by the asymmetry of classes from which the subjectivity without object emerges as labourer. Unlike the *Manifesto*, the *Grundrisse* claims that the class-dimension in itself does not characterise all historical epochs, but rather is a distinctive trait of the capitalist system. Even if we recognise class-relations prior to capitalism, their conflict never impinges on the unity of man and land in precapitalist-social formations: it is only capitalism that erodes this unity and gives rise to the first mode of production that is really social, in the expansive and spectral sense of the term. The shift from this kind of subjectivity, only possible in capitalism, to a practice of subjectivation is not an immediate one, as political action in its singularity cannot be derived *sic et simpliciter* from an overall development. In this sense, there is a clear connection between the entirety of 'social individuals' and class-struggle, but this relation does not always appear to be a close one, because the present conjuncture constantly shifts the political plane, which cannot be hypostatised once and for all. From this standpoint, the outline of the 'social individual' is all but systematically 'coherent': on the one hand, it suffers from the developmentist *pathos* found in the 'Fragment on Machines' that suggests that the full unfolding of the contradictions of capital can immediately lead to communism; on the other hand, it is connected to the notion of the subjectivity without a subject of the worker and his radical opposition to capital, as argued earlier.

However, we wish to return to the passage of the 'Introduction' ('Man is not only a social animal, but an animal that can isolate itself only within society'), which confirms our interpretation of Marx's notion of individuality in the *Grundrisse*. At stake in Marx's overall analysis is a search for individual realisation: in *The German Ideology*, this theoretical and political tendency was identified with the expression 'individuals as such', while, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx uses the terms 'social individuals', given the changes in his conceptual framework and the recent political storm. In any case, this question is intimately connected to the recognition of a *novum* brought about by the capitalist mode of production that entails the overcoming of the 'communitarian' logic typical of precapitalist-social formations. The 'social individual' was unthinkable within precapitalist structures, where man was linked to his community as if by an 'umbilical cord', and where both individual and society were, in themselves, strictly inconceivable. In this context, sociality and isolation are two sides of the same coin. Marx's analysis aims to deconstruct both categories: on the one hand, the notion of society, in a polemic with the socialist exaltation of justice and equality, is deprived of all irenic characteristics and investigated starting from the specific relations of dominations it contains; on the other hand, isolation is seen as devastating, but also in terms

of its potential for individuation. On this score, it must be noted that isolation refers to the abstract representation of society aimed to hide its topologies of subjection (see the issue of Robinsonades), but it also presents a 'stronger' character as it is closely related to the notion of individuality and its independence from predetermined constraints.

In order to reactivate Marx's gesture, it seems productive politically and theoretically to adopt the category of singularity, given its uniqueness and contingency and its reference to a circumscribed viewpoint free from any overarching schema. In Leibnizian terms, individuality is configured as a centre of force capable of producing infinite effects, with an inexhaustible tendency towards producing a multiplicity of future-developments. Singularities do not follow pre-established trajectories, but rather are structured through the realm of relations, on mobile coordinates that are never defined once and for all, on the basis of a constant 'exchange' between the 'individual' and the 'collective'. This perspective undermines the apparent counterposition of organicism and individualism: the recognition that the starting point of the debate is the individual, in its independence, and the subsumption of the singular under a social power materialised in money, are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, Marx is foreign to any hypostatisation of the 'social', and also breaks with the modern conception of individuality. The device of the critique of political economy has clearly revealed the mystification in the representation, proper to capitalist modernity, of individuals as able to move freely and fully realise their potential. 'Individuals as such', in *The German Ideology*, and 'social individuals' in the *Grundrisse*, are posited dynamically, involving a questioning of the modern dualism between 'private' and 'social', giving rise to a blurring of the distinction between social and political spheres, grounded on a *praxis* that escapes 'pacified' syntheses and is beyond any hypothesis of recomposition. The tension between the irreducibility of the singular individual [*einzelne*] to a predetermined social and communitarian dimension – proven by the fact that isolation is not only a condemnation but also a potentiality – and its rootedness in specific material circumstances needs to be left open. Singularity is not configured as 'something that has become', but the 'absolute movement of becoming'. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx often highlights the fact that we are confronted with 'workers who are *dynamei*, whose only property is their labour power and the possibility to exchange it with existing values' on the basis of a 'process that has liberated *dynamei*' the objective conditions of labour from their bond with individuals. The notion of potentiality, understood as *dynamis*, allows for an interpretation of singularity in its connection to the circumstances in which man operates, despite its eccentric position in relation to predetermined belonging.

However, this does not result in the development of a strictly theoretical construct, because it is permeated by a confrontation with practice that closely adheres to specific situations that do not exemplify pre-existing dialectical moments. We are not presented with a philosophy of agency, but rather a recognition of the primacy of action *sans phrases*, such that change is conceived in relations that are immanent to specific circumstances, 'activating' the subjective insurgencies of the working class in order to escape from the serial nature of labour. Marx constantly shifts between *praxis* and *poiesis*, effective freedom and material transformation, as the knowledge of reality is not discernible from its transformation. In this framework, Marx keeps the 'swerve' between the critique of political economy and historical actuality in check. In its singularity, the latter can never be fully 'captured' in an overall schema; from this standpoint, politics cannot be derived *sic et simpliciter* from the critique of political economy and its intrinsically political significance. Politics is not immediately deducible from a general and inevitably rigid development, as it is 'played out' in practice on the basis of an 'anti-doctrinaire' vision in need of constant 'revisions', as seen in Marx, as if the flow of events endlessly shifted the political field, to the extent that it is impossible to codify it without reference to the conjuncture in which an action is inscribed. The question of singularity must be interpreted starting from the inherent dynamism of Marx's theory, and from the impossibility of its systematic and 'conclusive' definition. Unlike the 'individuated individual', who is constituted and thus closed in a rigid 'cage' that prevents the realisation of his faculties, singularity, whilst rooted in specific contexts and determinations, is also eccentric in relation to these elements, full of potentiality and open to unpredictable developments. In order to characterise this conceptual and political tendency, it is important to refer not so much to the notion of subject, internal to the modern structure of individuality, as to the notion of subjectivation, which allows for the emergence of a practice of conflict shared by singular individuals rather than a definite centre, starting from specific and determined conditions. This practice makes cooperation between individuals a politically meaningful movement. In this way, man can be 'valued as a singular individual' and inserted in a circumscribed situation but, at the same time, he is not reducible to a framework conceived deterministically, and is thus able to bear the burden of his own actions.

Conclusion

The trajectory outlined in our work has shown that Marx's perspective is neither organicist nor intended to legitimise the submission of the individual to a 'communist' society. On the contrary, the object of Marx's critique is individual subsumption as an element specific to the capitalist system, which founds itself on individuality whilst 'caging' it in structures of social domination. Dealing with Marx's work from the early writings up to the *Grundrisse*, our argument has tried to emphasise the persistence of a critique of capitalism, on the one hand, and the *conatus* towards individual realisation 'named' communism, on the other. This two-fold objective traverses the whole of Marx's itinerary, with different focuses in his perspective.

In the early works, the question centres on the critique of the modern separation between civil society and the state, and between the individual of the former, the *bourgeois*, and the individual in the latter, the *citoyen*. The picture Marx that tries to paint, here, is not homologous with either the state or civil society: in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, this takes the form of an expansive view of democracy; in *On the Jewish Question*, it is human emancipation, beyond political democracy, and subsequently the constituent power of communism. This picture deconstructs the bourgeois-capitalist structure and is based on a search for individual realisation: in the early texts, with a humanist approach, Marx insists on the 'recomposition' of the species-being, and thus on the return of man to his essence. In *The German*

Ideology, he speaks of a 'real community' of 'individuals as such' in their specific determination and their rootedness in a circumscribed social and political context. In the *Grundrisse*, his theoretical framework becomes a device for the critique of political economy, where the central question is the realisation of 'social individuals', which starts from the conditions they find themselves in, but aims to destroy them from within.

The element of class is closely tied to the issue of individuality, and it is a real 'collective singularity', irreducible to any ontological or sociological hypostasis and always connected to the realm of practice: 'separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle against another class'.[1] Society, far from being a coherent and harmonious 'whole', is divided from within, and split into two: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Here, we are presented with a constitutive asymmetry, the *sine qua non* condition of the capitalist system and what differentiates it from previous social formations.

Whilst the bourgeoisie has particular interests, the proletariat is a paradoxical 'partial universal'; it strives towards a universal goal, but from the point of departure of the 'polemical' partiality of its 'taking the floor': this is living labour, materially, the use-value of labour-power, aiming at the valorisation of capital, but also in radical opposition to its 'deadly mechanism'.

This theoretical and political tension intertwines the 'individual' and the 'collective' on mobile coordinates that cannot be defined once and for all. In this tension, the category of singularity is productive, although it is partly foreign to Marx's 'vocabulary' and very present in contemporary French debates. As our argument frequently stresses, the whole of Marx's trajectory displays a tension between two notions of individuality, one of which is criticised, while the other is outlined when communism is 'named': 'individuals as members of a class' and 'individuals as such'. It is necessary to mark the distance that separates 'communist' singularity and modern individuality, though the former is not absolutely 'other' from the present, but immanently constitutive of it. In polemics with the logic of identity of the modern individual, the debate is based on a dynamically conceived realm of multiplicity, because it is revealed to be linked to the dimension of action, circumscribed and 'situated'. From this standpoint, underlying Marx's notion of singularity are two main theoretical and political articulations: individual valorisation beyond the modern individualist structure, and the specificity of political action, irreducible to an overall schema. This is understood not in opposition to the social context, but based on social relations that radically break with the

1. Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 77.

present framework, in discontinuity with existing relations of domination: on this issue, the expression 'social individual', though seemingly oxymoronic, is actually a useful one.

Marx's perspective from the 1860s onwards will be further investigated in a future work, focusing on *Capital,* where Marx theorises the 'fully developed individual', and on the historical and political writings of the late Marx where the framework of the *Manifesto* is constantly 'revised', showing an increasing need to develop a notion of class adequate to the changes that had occurred. From the 1860s onwards, the question of individual realisation is developed in continuity with past theorisations, but the latter are also radically desubstantiated. There emerges the notion of the 'person' as a 'mask' of economic and class-interests. For an understanding of individuality, it is important to refer to the phenomenon of fetishism, understood as the representation that plays a crucial role in capitalist structure: the very nature of social relations is opaque and not immediately intelligible. In this respect, the 'desubstantiation' does not lead to a fully transparent reading of social phenomena, and to a devaluation of the realm of the 'imaginary'. Moreover, in the last years of Marx's theorisation (and practice), ethnological and anthropological studies played an important role alongside the investigation of precapitalist-social formations and the situation of countries that were not capitalistically 'developed', such as Russia, in the context of a complex and articulate theoretical and political discussion.

In any case, what is 'at stake' in the debate is the realisation of singularities (or of 'individuals as such', or 'social individuals') constituted by communism: communism should not be conceived of as simple, perfectly transparent, and free of internal contradictions, but as a 'real movement that abolishes the present state of things', capable of constantly conjugating the relationship between individual and common realms in the specific analysis of the social and political situation. Here, we are not merely referring to a specific community that inevitably involves an element of discipline, but to a 'common' that is extremely dynamic. However, in Marx we also find, especially from 1848 onwards, the recognition of a need to create a political organisation that prevents the dispersal of struggles in disconnected directions impossible to recompose. Therefore, this scenario concerns not only individuals, but also the 'collective singularity' – that is, class – and the distinction between the 'social' and the 'political' no longer holds: 'Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social.'[2]

2. Marx 1976a, p. 212.

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