

THE POST-OPERAIST APPROACH TO THE FORMAL AND REAL SUBSUMPTION OF LABOR UNDER CAPITAL. SEMINAR WITH MICHAEL HARDT.

We present below the edited transcript of a seminar held over Skype with Prof. Michael Hardt. The seminar took place within the framework of the journal “Praktyka Teoretyczna/Theoretical Practice” annual seminar series. The 2013/2014 seminar – “Labor and production” – took place in “Zemsta” Anarchist Bookshop in Poznań on 28 March, 2014.

Michael Hardt – Thank you for all your questions. I think they are good and I have some thoughts about them. I would like to start with the question asked by Jan Sowa. One of the things that I was thinking... But first I would like to remind you all that I can be a frustrating interlocutor. For two reasons. One is that every time someone poses criticism to me I start agreeing with them. Some people might find this frustrating but this is simply the first way I react. I'm not very good in antagonistic discussion. You know about the debating clubs that we have in the US at the level of secondary schools and universities as well. I hated that when I was in school, I was never any good at that, at arguing for the pure sake of arguing.

So I find two general sets of issues here. One is the general labor theory of value and the other is the issue of formal and real subsumption. With each of them I think I need to have an explanation of why it matters. Because, you know, sometimes with Marxists, but to be honest, this is true with every kind of group, you get lost in all these debates and you cannot get at what matters here anymore. So before posing the questions on formal and real subsumption and the labor theory of value I would like to first find what matters about them.

Krystian Szadkowski – As for the labor theory of value, I think that the thing of the greatest importance here is the relation between it and all the post-operaist readings. That is, mainly that the thesis of the crisis of the law of value creates a foundation for a theory of the commons. So my call for more philological precision is not a call to engage you in one or another Talmudic discussion, but rather a plea for a better understanding of the core of your theory. There are a lot of critiques of the thesis itself, both from empirical and philological perspectives. So I would like to know whether you think that the thesis needs to be defended or how such a defense should be done? Referring back to the questions that I asked, I would like to know your stance on Michael Heinrich's critique. He claims that one can't find any thesis of the crisis of law of value in Marx's "Fragment on the Machines" because there was no Marxian theory of value at this stage. At the same time I fully understand the point that philological precision will not move our contemporary struggles any further. But what interests me is the place and the meaning of the thesis on the crisis of the law of value in your and Negri's project as a whole.

Michael Hardt – Ok let's start with that. Let me step back. You're right that it might be helpful to distinguish the philological questions about Marx's texts and what our own political interests in this are. But let me say some obvious things first. Our thesis on the crisis of the law of value is of course not a way to question that labor is today a source of value. The proposition at the beginning of the first volume of *Capital* is that the exchange value of every commodity is determined in some sense by the quantity of abstract labor that produces them. So the quantity of labor time that goes into making the commodity determines its exchange value. What is being questioned by this thesis on the crisis is not that labor is what produces value, it is rather

that capital's ability to quantify and measure labor's contribution is in crisis. This is what I understand from this heterodox stream from the 1970s, including Negri, that the thesis on crisis that they posed was the thesis on the crisis of measure.

So those who were proposing the notion of crisis still assume that it is labor that produces value, it is just that labor turned out to be immeasurable or not possible to be measured by labor time anymore.

Krystian Szadkowski – If I may interrupt you at this stage to clarify something. There is no disagreement and no doubt with regard to the increasing importance of social relations and even biological processes for the process of value creation. Similarly, there's no doubt with regard to the complications that this causes for any measurement of value by labor time. Social relations are there and yet they can't be measured, quantified, and remunerated by capital because this would make the process valorization irrational – the exchange value of such a commodity would be so high that it would simply cause some fundamental problems. But when we read the “Fragment on Machines”, and I think that this is a point of reference where we get the clearest understanding of the thesis on the crisis of the law of value, we see that there is a thesis regarding the growing social irrationality of a situation where we produce things yet the only thing capital is interested in, and the only thing that it wants to remunerate or include in its calculations is the time of direct labor spent in production, which in reality is not the real source of value. This is analogous to the production of ideas wherein you can't grasp the direct moment of coming out with a specific idea because it is a social process.

Paolo Virno grasped this perfectly using the Marxian distinction between the time of the process of production and the time of the process of labor. In the sphere of immaterial production, as in certain parts of agricultural production, we have an ongoing process of production interrupted by short periods of a process of direct labor. It is only this direct labor time that is remunerated by capital through the wage. This growing social irrationality allows the masses to construct their demands in struggle and resistance on the basis of this irrationality but it is a political idea, with only slight reference to the sphere of the economy. This is how I understand your claims for going beyond measure. It is not an economic tool to explain the changing realities of production, because we are fully aware that even capital is trying to establish various methods of measuring different kinds of immaterial activities. Massimo de Angelis shed some light on this saying that there is always a process of establishing a socially necessary labor time through the market interactions of different capitals.

Michael Hardt – Hmmmm... I think that sometimes I'm really too convinced that what I'm saying is right. And I have not read, for example, Michael Heinrich or Ricardo Bellofiore's critiques. Could you explain why a recognition of the immeasurability of the productivity of

labor undermines the political project of communism? I know that Bellofiore insists on the importance of wage labor and the industrial working class and in some way this is true, but I'm just hypothesizing. In some way it is true that this focus on immeasurability creates a basis for things like a guaranteed income, an income separated from labor inputs.

I guess I'm a little unclear as to why someone would disagree with this proposition. On the one side, I think that even philologically, my reading of *Volume One* sees that Marx is insisting on the quantification of labor time in part for political reasons of the moment. That is, just in order to fit in with the struggles in England about the reduction of the working day. All his diagrams in *Volume One* about "a" to "b" and "b" to "c", all this discussion on necessary labor time, I treat these as having political consequences. But they are not all theoretically necessary to the argument. But this is all on the philological side.

On the political side, this is however a part of what's at stake, so let me develop a little bit on that, I will propose something philologically thick. The insistence on the continuing relevance of the law of value as a quantitative measure is one that I associate politically with the insistence on the centrality of the working class, understood as those waged workers who are directly productive for capital. These are not *necessarily* industrial workers, albeit primarily they are. Conversely, those who insist on the crisis of the law of value are more interested in the expansion of the notion of the proletariat and the working class. They focus on those who are not waged or precariously employed and they think about production as more social and extended beyond wage relations. The theoretical divergence here is simply linked to two separate political subjects. On the one side the working class subject and on the other side the subject of social labor.

Krystian Szadkowski: I think that the point made by the main critics is that we're facing the ongoing inclusion of this social labor or unwaged productive power and at the same time we are seeing an ongoing process of the subsumption of this social labor by capital into its logic and mechanisms of measure. We can see this clearly today especially in contrast with the 1990s when people were writing very optimistic books about immaterial sectors and the conditions for the autonomy of this kind of labor. However, today we can see that the various branches of production are increasingly controlled by capital given its use of increasingly subtle and complex devices of subordination and control.

We can make use here of the concepts of formal and real subsumption in the classical Marxian sense. Capital is searching for new reservoirs of social labor and is trying, first formally and then in real terms, to subsume labor in a new given sector under its logic and rule. A good example here is academia, at least given the recent Polish experience related to ongoing reforms where we observe a changing relationship between labor and capital that takes the form of new ways of measuring academic labor, calculating its output, quantifying its effectiveness,

comparing it across the sector. In some aspects (it's too complex to put it here) I read this process as a shift from formal to real subsumption of academic labor. Another good example comes from recent developments in US higher education – the MOOC which creates a kind of mechanization of academic labor. These are symptoms of the process of real subsumption of immaterial labor under capital but this time not in Negri's sense of real subsumption as a stage of subordination of nearly all that exists to capital, making it productive to capital. I see these two processes (sectorial subsumption and wider, global or even ontological subsumption) as parallel processes. And the second one, at least from my point of view, is not so interesting.

Michael Hardt: Right, let me start from this university example and then I will come back to domestic labor. I definitely agree with what you just said, that the university is a perfect example of the subsumption of labor. It does seem to me that the mechanisms of quantification in the subsumption of academic labor are even more abstract and continuous.

Let me put it that way. There is a kind of quantification. I assume that in Poland, similarly to other countries of Europe and North America, there is more and more teaching that is done in a very precarious way as well as growing crowds of unemployed PhDs. In this context the meaning of this immeasurability thesis is to emphasize the poverty of capital's measurement mechanisms, to emphasize the excessive productivity of labor with regards to measures of quantification. Even in immaterial domains capital always tries to come up with mechanisms of measure, but they are ever more ridiculously disconnected with the actual production of value. This is a little bit abstract, but think about the measurement mechanisms that they have at British universities at the moment. They are hysterically or dramatically rigid in their Research Excellence Framework which is aimed at the complete quantification of intellectual production. They have measured it by the number of articles in this or that type of journal or book. Generally everything is measured.

This is where Bellofiore and other will disagree, but for me the inadequacy of the quantitative side of the law of value based on measure is apparent in the evermore excessive and superfluous streams of value that labor creates. I'm sure that everyone who works in the academic context is easily able to recognize the absurdity of measuring academic labor output in quantitative terms. There is an increasing excess of intellectual production beyond what is captured by those mechanisms of measurement. There is something very important for me in this immeasurability thesis.

Let's compare the academic situation with that of the industrial worker. You could of course say that in the sense Marx was thinking about it, the industrial worker is producing more value than she is being paid. But even in this situation surplus value is being quantified by capital. So in every situation of production under capital reign activities are measured and the worker receives his or her portion of the working day corresponding to the wage, that is, to the

reproduction of the worker. You could also say – and this would be coherent with Marx’s thinking – that even the measurement that capital does with regards to the worker in the factory does not capture the worker’s productivity. But I think that with respect to social production there is a growing prevalence of the gap in intellectual production between our real productivity as intellectual workers and what capital is able to measure. This gap is far greater than the gap between the industrial worker’s productivity and its measure by capital. In other words, there is an increasing lack of correspondence between the two.

I think that in the case of the industrial worker the question is how much of his labor is covered by the wage. But the question is not so much about this irrational gap or the irrationality of the measure... and the latter is also the case in the context of intellectual production or in other kinds of social production. There is simply a greater lack of correspondence between measurement system and productivity in intellectual production. What counts here is what one thinks is important: the kind of labor that resembles industrial production or the kind of labor that is more social in nature?

Krzysztof Król: Do you mean that the problems with the quantification of certain kinds of labor is a technical problem for capital? A problem which does not exist in the context of industrial labor or is this a kind of social problem? From my standpoint it sounds like a technical problem: you can measure manual labor within the factory by units of time but you cannot grasp processes of thinking by the same means. Is this what you mean? In a nutshell, do you see this as a technical or a social problem?

Michael Hardt: It is a good point, and I think that it is both. However the technical problem does not interest me so much. The social problem is what interests me the most and I have some arguments in mind to support that. But once again: referring to Bellofiore and company who argue against a proposed basic income on the grounds that it hurts the working class, he wants to argue from the point of view of the trade unions and he sees in propositions for a guaranteed income a mechanism that could undermine the bargaining power of trade union organizations.

This kind of things relates to social or even political positions. A focus on the notion of the proletariat in the wider sense can come into conflict with a focus on the proletariat primarily as those who are unionized or, if not only those from the industrial sector, then those who share features of the traditional industrial working class. For this reason I appreciate the meaning that sits behind your question. If this is just a technical problem for capital it does not matter much. But what matters are the political differences that it poses for us.

But let’s try another example in addition to the university. Part of my approach comes from feminist discussions of domestic labor. These were hot debates in Italy and the U.S. in the

1980s about whether we should call the work of unwaged women in the home ‘work’; whether house cleaning or childcare. The unwaged nature of this work was central to the argument and the interesting point was the debate around the advantages or disadvantages of calling it work. For example, some people objected that by calling it work we are putting something inside capital that should remain outside of it. But Marxist feminists argued that we have to recognize that this process is essential for capital, for its process of reproduction.

I was just thinking about what Krystian said about university labor. There are certain ways that, at least in the dominant countries, there has been a progressive formal subsumption of the unwaged labor force into the waged labor force. In the U.S and in Italy for example, elderly care labor is almost completely waged. A generation ago care of the elders was mostly the responsibility of their children. It was mostly the responsibility of women and it is now increasingly privatized. In Italy you hire a specific person to care for the elderly, usually women from the Philippines. In the U.S. this is more institutionalized in the sense that there are institutions where grandparents are taken care of. This is an instance of formal subsumption. Something that was outside the rule of capital and something that was unwaged is now subsumed by it. We should talk more about the basic ideas of formal and real subsumption. But in this case of care of the elderly labor is formally subsumed in the sense that it is still the same labor process that is performed but now for a wage. There is a Philippine woman who does the same things for my grandmother that I would have done for her but she is getting a wage for it, so it is a formally subsumed labor in the sense that the labor process is technically the same, it’s just being included in a wage labor system.

Krystian Szadkowski: May I ask a question? The process that you described is not specifically subsumption by capital. Care labor is now waged of course, but the wage is paid from the revenue or income generated elsewhere but not in the form of variable capital. This does not resemble subsumption under capital because in this very situation there is no factory of care labor or a chain employing the care laborers in order to valorize capital. This is not a new process. In order to make a historical argument here we can refer to the situation of nineteenth century England where industrial workers consisted of a hundred thousand people, but at the same time you had millions of servants, and they were waged. For me the situation of domestic wage workers resemble more or less this situation. So my question is how do you deal with such an argument? Where is the capital that employs the domestic workers? During our seminars we have been trying to come to terms with the use of concepts of formal and real subsumption of creative labor, intellectual labor or care labor, the question comes up: where is capital in such a relation?

Piotr Juskowiak: But doesn't this kind of service resemble a network of capital relations? When it comes to a care for the elderly or children there are also some kinds of tools, programs and infrastructure... It's always connected with value in different sort of sectors so I guess that it is somehow subsumed under capital...

Krystian Szadkowski: I think that the important point rests with the question of "who employs?" For example, you've mentioned that in the Unites States you have elderly care homes, so this is similar to what Marx said about schools in *Volume One of Capital*; that it doesn't matter whether it is a school or a sausage factory if there is a capitalist at the top of the place then this amounts to productive labor and a subsumption under capital somehow. But, as you said, the process of employing care labor in Italy is mostly privatized, one is simply a person who employs another person and there is not any relation between labor and capital.

Piotr Juskowiak: Yes, but it is usually mediated by some kind of network, companies...

Krystian Szadkowski: Not always, you put an advertisement 'I am looking for a Philippine woman' and she calls, and you employ her. Of course, there are institutions who employ such people. But for example in Belgium you have publicly run enterprises that also provide care labor in the same way.

Michael Hardt: I just want to put forward one idea here about what is probably going on. For me it's important to break the distinction between productive and reproductive labor. Let me give some examples, at least to understand where I'm coming from for that. Some of the challenges that Marxist feminists had in the 1980s were focused on reproductive labor and care labor. The feminists of this period were told and taught by the Marxists that this type of labor is not important because it is not directly productive for capital. [The Marxists] said that we need to focus our struggle on those who are directly productive for capital and that reproduction is a secondary issue. If you are directly productive for capital you can be a threat to capital, especially when you mobilize workers associations and strikes. But they would say that within the realm of reproductive work workers are in some way powerless. That is the best argument they had although they also argue in philological Marxist terms. They used the old argument: "It's true because Marx himself says this or that". That's why one way of approaching this kind of argument was to point to the fact that reproduction is just as essential as production; that the distinction between productive and reproductive labor is no longer valid.

Another way of putting the same thing is the notion of the 'social factory' that Mario Tronti and Toni Negri and many others were proposing in Italy – arguments that did not take

up the feminist claims at all, but it doesn't matter because I think they approached the problem in the same way. The social factory sought to recognize the wider expanse of productive activity rather than restrict production to the institutional space of the factory. Like the feminists, they too were arguing for breaking down the distinction between productive and reproductive labor. I see something related to Piotr's point here, that there are always a whole web of institutions that surround care work, that it is not an isolated and private affair, it always expands through a whole series of capitalist relations that are both productive and reproductive.

Krzysztof Król: As far as I understand the relation between productive and reproductive labor, I think that we're missing the point here. The point is not to discuss whether a particular form of labor "is productive of surplus value or not?", or "who is your employer? is it a company? or is it me as a private individual?", but rather to look at the activity from the point of view of the worker: is this kind of job an imposed job? Is it imposed labor? That is the point. I have never been interested in the issue of what is directly productive for capital.

Joanna Bednarek: I would like to ask for a few words of clarification on this argument regarding the formal subsumption of care labor. If I understood you correctly, you still want to uphold some distinction between formal and real subsumption. I would ask if it is still valid and is still a useful tool? What would the political aim be of making such a distinction?

Michael Hardt: Right, I need to step back and say how I understand Marx's argument about formal and real subsumption and what problems I have with it. First and foremost I find it a rather useful analytical distinction. In formal subsumption the labor process is only formally subsumed under capital, so that the same type of labor is being done but all that has changed is that now it is being waged. For example, Marx depicts how in the US in the 19th century, following the abolition of slavery many ex-slaves were hired back onto the same plantations but this time they were paid a wage. The form of the production process remained unchanged. I find formal subsumption a useful way of thinking about the expansion of capital. We can call this the 'internalization of the outside', that is, the constant inclusion of non-capitalist territories.

We can now focus on real subsumption. This is the move in which labor processes themselves are transformed and become capitalist. Instead of producing in the same way as in the past, the labor process undergoes a wide set of changes. When discussing real subsumption Marx is mainly focused on the mechanization that takes place within the factory. However, I think that formal subsumption is a much richer concept, because it indicates the permanence of non-capitalist practices and different forms of life that remains under capitalist rule. Formal subsumption indicates a kind of heterogeneity within a capitalist society. What strikes me in

Marx's use of real subsumption is a stage argument: first we have formal and then real subsumption; we have dominant countries where we can find real subsumption and subaltern countries still stuck in the stage of formal subsumption. So I have some reservations.

But there are two problems to be solved. One is the disagreement on whether Marx is really proposing a linear-stage argument and the other deals with the state of real subsumption itself. It can appear as if society under capitalist rule is therefore something homogeneous, either from the point of view of the labor process, or more generally. What then is the possibility of resistance? If there are no differences within real subsumption, if there is no memory of the past, there are no possibilities for non-capitalist relations.

Krystian Szadkowski: Can I ask for one other clarification? When we read Marx we see clearly that his idea of formal and real subsumption is rather a sectorial concept referring to particular branches of production and not a 'stage' concept. There are no big, formation-oriented stages. For example, in *Economic manuscripts of 1861-1863* Marx writes a lot on the residual forms of labor subsumed under capital in a hybrid manner. I feel we need to distinguish a few different concepts for understanding the labor-capital relation in terms of subsumption.

And I think in your contribution to the seminar we can also find at least two different ideas of how to conceptualize subsumption. One is the sectorial idea, when you say that we can see that care labor is formally subsumed under capital. The second is this 'stage' conception, such as when you refer to some countries that are in a general state of formal or real subsumption. The third concept would be something close to the hypothesis of the real subsumption of life under capital, society under capital in a very clearly Negrist manner. Here we are at the level of the globe when we have financial markets extracting value from other social and living processes on the global scale. This is the real subsumption of social life, global life, and economic life under capital as I understand it.

Michael Hardt: I would like to read Marx not as a proponent of some kind of theory of stages. I read him rather as someone who assumes that you can only go through real subsumption after you have gone through the formal subsumption. In some ways real subsumption could be seen as a distinctive feature of a more advanced capitalism, the proper form of subsumption. Take for example Rosa Luxemburg's projection of the formal/real subsumption distinction onto the history of imperialism and the expansion of capital. However, in recent years many people have been arguing for the importance of formal subsumption. For instance, Álvaro García Linera, in *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, is very interested in formal subsumption, because it allows him to look through fundamental differences since conversely, the notion of real subsumption eliminates geographical social, cultural and racial differences from the picture.

Joanna Bednarek: I feared that you tend to think about care-labor in this stage-linear paradigm. This is what I often experience when I explain the role of care labor or reproductive work within the capitalist system. Many Marxists tend to think that it is some kind of archaism or reminder of former modes of production. This interpretation of formal subsumption allows us to see and analyze heterogeneous forms of production.

Michael Hardt: Those who are interested in formal subsumption in political terms are in some ways anti-imperialists. Actually here comes a question I would like to ask you: what do you mean while saying that there is an equal move from formal to real and from real to formal? If subsumption is not a stage argument then doesn't it silence worries that care work will be seen as a subordinate sector?

Krystian Szadkowski: This is quite a good question. I'm not sure I have a similarly good answer. When we see an industrial sector, for example, a particular branch of agriculture which has undergone a shift from formal to real subsumption there is probably no step back (except in rare cases of forced, severe crisis-based reorganizations of production). But when we take a look into the wider picture and include relations of "hegemony" between sectors of production we can observe shifts from the domination of a sector of real subsumed labor to the hegemony of one where labor is just formally subsumed.

Michael Hardt: So let me just add that when I want to argue about a two-way move of subsumption, the only way I do so is when I refer to these predominant, hegemonic kinds of labor. I'm not going to argue that auto manufacturing or agriculture would go backwards. The importance of socialized production rather than factory production is that it is putting more emphasis on the sectors that are really better off while being just formally subsumed. Those - the sectors of formal subsumption - are becoming predominant today.

Krystian Szadkowski: Your argument here is similar to Carlo Vercellone's. The idea that at each moment of its development global capital needs to calculate whether it is more beneficial in real terms to subsume labor sectors where the most important processes of valorization are located or just to dominate them formally. Vercellone emphasized the importance of the falling rate of capitalist control of the division of labor. He says that we are living at the stage of the greatest importance for the sectors where labor is formally subsumed. His claim is that in the epoch of the dominance of the general intellect the most important labor, labor that produces the greatest share of surplus value for capital, has to remain formally subsumed.

Michael Hardt: That is what I was trying to say.

Piotr Juskowiak: But let's put this in another context. David Harvey, for example, is convinced that what is really changing today is the very method of the extraction of value. This is of course connected with the recent shift from the hegemony of profit to the domination of rent. This is why the movement of formal subsumption is so important. The way capital extracts the dominant share of value is changing; its focus moves to creative and intellectual sectors and also to the extraction of natural resources. This move allows capital to extract value without directly coercing processes of labor but by extracting value after the production process is complete.

Michael Hardt: You're putting forward the argument I needed to make. Thank you for combining two hypotheses that go perfectly together. One deals with the shift from profit to rent and the other with the shift from real to formal subsumption. It is rent that generates the forms of value production that are recognized at both the highest levels of the economy (for example, the mechanisms of operation of financial markets) and the lowest levels of the economy (through extraction or accumulation by dispossession). Both finance and accumulation by dispossession are always the ways by which capital produces rent and these processes are accompanied by the movement from real to formal subsumption.

Krystian Szadkowski: Are there any further questions?

Krzysztof Król: Do you still want to develop any kind of theory of value? Jan Sowa posed the question on the role of struggles as a driving factor for the development of capitalism. His reflections on that matter were also a sort of critique of the operaist position. He thinks operaismo puts far too much stress on the issue of struggles in the development of capitalist relations. Would you agree with such a position?

Michael Hardt: I have two answers. I'll start with a bad one and it will make me go to the good one. The bad answer is definitely partly true. It says that workers' refusal is prior to the development of capital. I think this is a compensatory argument. It seems to appear to everyone that capital is a dominant actor and workers only react. Mario Tronti in *Operai e capitale* wanted to compensate for the exclusive ability of capital to act and he inverted this position. I can draw on examples that show that what he's saying is true. Capital is fundamentally conservative. It doesn't want to develop until it's forced to do so.

Here is an example from US history: when I was teenager I used to deliver a newspaper in Washington D.C. The newspaper went on strike for about a month and the strike was caused by typesetters. Typesetting was a very particular profession. They took a lead. They occupied the newspaper building for a very long time until the newspaper's company fired all the

typesetters and computerized the whole process. Where is the happy story for typesetters? They were all sacked. They were all out of work and they couldn't find any work. Capital developed because of the refusal of workers. That is Tronti's idea of capitalist development. Capital generally doesn't develop technology until it has to. It is not always capital which develops technology. The citation from Marx for this is in *Volume One* where he says that you could write a whole history of capitalist technological development based on workers' resistance. This is the way Tronti is taking: where the strikes go there machines follow. Machines are a weapon against workers. This is one way of thinking about this problem, but I don't think it is universally true.

There are times when capitalist technology develops without this process. You can think about Deleuze-Foucault notions here. The idea that resistance is prior to power doesn't mean that resistance chronologically comes before power. Rather, it means that resistance is ontologically prior to power. Resistance is a moment of creativity and power is reaction to this creativity. Deleuze makes this compulsory when he says: "You are all reading Foucault and say 'power is productive' and you say that it is power that leads to historical development, no! It is exactly the opposite. It is resistance that drives history".

The third thing to put this problem together is this notion of "history from below" as E.P. Thompson or Subaltern Studies historians would say. They are saying that the real active and dynamic force is the subaltern and not the dominant. I think all these three are doing the same thing. In the case of Subaltern Studies it is not that the subaltern is really the other. They have to be sub-altern to somebody and they have always been seen at as merely reactive. The same thing goes with the revolts of the working class. They are a really important factor in the innovation, creativity, and development of capital, but they are not exclusive.

Mateusz Janik: I think this perspective is much closer to the one proposed by Beverly Silver who also uses this thesis of the autonomy of workers and says that resistance puts capital into motion, forcing it, for example, to change its geographical positions. At the same time however, capital creates social conditions for new or different struggles in different sectors and areas. I think Janek's argument is also based on this perspective. It is not that there is some kind of priority of workers but rather a mutual dependency between capital's ability to stimulate social conditions for new forms of struggle and workers' resistance obliging new developments to capital.

Krystian Szadkowski: I think that this is pictured well in Karl Polanyi's figure of the pendulum.

Michael Hardt: I want to agree with Silver but I would like to add one thing. In the figure of the pendulum there is a kind of neutrality. I want to argue that labor and capital are not equal. Labor and labor resistance contain a moment of creativity while capital is incapable of creativity. Labor has potential to free itself from capital – they are not in the same position. Power depends on us more than we depend on power. Neutrality of the pendulum implies that there is no alternative for capital. The basis of our perspective is that we are able to live without capital.

I want to stress that what is interesting is that our discussion concerns disagreements within a very narrow club. We are talking about disagreement between friends, and I assume the entire realm of people about whom we are talking assume that there is the possibility of a future without capitalism. Capitalism is not capable of autonomy from work. But it is also incapable of innovation, as Marx said, it has a vampiric nature, it drains creativity from labor.

Mateusz Janik: If I may add something: the point in which this all gets really interesting is when you add the third question about the vague status of ontological communism. For me this is the question about the historical status of ontological notions used in the critique of capital. It makes our former discussion interesting because it allows us to ask about the material conditions determining the form and character of concrete struggles. In other words – if we think about the autonomy of labor as a notion akin to the concept of ontological communism, then in what way is ontological communism constitutive of historical processes and in what way is it constituted by historical processes?

Michael Hardt: I understand ontological communism referenced in Janek's question according to Marx's hypothesis that capitalism creates the conditions of its own overcoming. Janek refers to Slavoj Žižek. As I understand, it is Žižek's argument that Toni and I make the same mistake as Marx by assuming that capitalism creates its own gravediggers – not only subjects but also social conditions for its overthrowing. Maybe this is related to what we were talking about. Capitalism creates the conditions for workers' struggle – this means new modes of domination, of the extraction of surplus value, and of control. But it also creates conditions for workers' autonomy. There is an image in the *Communist Manifesto* of capital as a magician who summoned the powers of the nether world and is not able to control them anymore.

Mateusz Janik: I think that what makes this thesis about the autonomy of labor so interesting is that it completely changes the historical model of the shift from capitalism to communism. According to the autonomist perspective, we are not dealing with a historical process which has to be developed up to a certain point after which capitalism may fall apart. Rather, we have to take into account the thesis that such a possibility of capitalism falling apart is present in

every single struggle and that it is actually present in it, that we are facing the possibility of establishing new forms of social relations each time a struggle erupts. When we confront this perspective with Marxist interpretations of history and capitalism such a thesis becomes very problematic.

Michael Hardt: The most interesting thing in what you are saying is the concept of transition. There are critiques of the notions of transition according to which lived communism is present here and now – and it is not a matter of transition but rather a matter of developing already present forms of communism. The question of transition is a very interesting concept.

Krystian Szadkowski: Heading towards the end of our seminar, I would like to take a step back and ask you once again about your recent focus on formal subsumption and the thesis that in dominant or hegemonic sectors of capital, like ITC, that labor is more and more formally subsumed under capital. How does this relate to the thesis about real subsumption and the homogenization of the whole of reality under the reign of capitalism? Does this mean that you want to drop Negri's thesis about real subsumption? Is it an obstacle for the explanation of what is at stake in the existing form of capitalism?

Michael Hardt: I would not throw Toni under the bus (*laughs*). In a certain metaphorical sense there is no outside to real subsumption – but if this were to be true there would be no place for resistance either. Now I think that we have to think resistance differently in the case of real and formal subsumption. It seems to me that, to use a strictly Marxist notion, resistance does not come from outside but from inside of capitalism. There is an argument to be made that real subsumption is also a moment or situation of resistance and revolt. I see your point that formal subsumption seems to be more convenient if we want to find a place for autonomy, but the same holds for real subsumption, and I do not think that it is homogenous in the same way that the capitalist society that Marx imagines is not homogenous. But this is a point that would need to be explained more fully.

Poznań-Durham 28th of March 2014

Michael Hardt - his writings explore the new forms of domination in the contemporary world as well as the social movements and other forces of liberation that resist them. In the Empire trilogy - *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009) - he and Antonio Negri investigate the political, legal, economic, and social aspects of globalization. They also study the political and economic alternatives that could lead to a more democratic world. Their pamphlet *Declaration* (2012) attempts to articulate the significance of the encampments and occupations that began in 2011, from Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park, and to recognize the primary challenges faced by emerging democratic social movements today.

ADDRESS:

Duke University

106 Friedl Building, Buchanan and Trinity, Durham, NC 27708-0670

Campus Box 90670, United States.

EMAIL: hardt@duke.edu

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