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SCIENCE, CLASS, AND REPRODUCTION
REFLECTIONS ON A "GLOBAL" MARX

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ABSTRACT
Relying on the perspective of a "global" Marx, which emphasizes the need to avoid separating the various levels of his theoretical and practical engagement with historical reality, this essay raises three key questions to Michael Heinrich's *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*. The first concerns the Marxian concept of science and its inherent connection to the class struggle. The second challenges the priority Heinrich places on the worker as a self-interested individual and poses the problem of its relation to the workers as a collective. The third addresses social reproduction, questioning the link Heinrich establishes between the historical preconditions of capital and its fully developed form.

KEYWORDS
Class struggle; theory of history; social reproduction; State

In *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*[1], Michael Heinrich's main thesis is that Karl Marx's theory represents a scientific revolution in the history of the social sciences. According to him, Marx did not simply elaborate a new theory, but rather created an entirely new scientific field. In other words, he introduced a wholly new *Problematik* – a fundamentally different structure of questions posed to the historical material – when compared both to the classical political economy and to the later marginalist school. Heinrich is very clear in highlighting the pillars of political economy Marx undermines: anthropologism, individualism, a-historism and empiricism. The entire book is dedicated to a detailed and thorough analysis of this conceptual innovation, as well as the areas where Marx fails to fully break away from the scientific terrains he critiques.

I would like to pose some questions to Heinrich's volume from a perspective on Marx that is not exclusively focused on the critique of political economy, but rather revolves around the problem of politics and history in a global scenario. Throughout my Marxian studies, I have been constantly confronted with two levels

[1] I will refer to the recent Italian translation around which this debate was re-ignited Heinrich, Michael (2023), *La scienza del valore. La critica marxiana dell'economia politica tra rivoluzione scientifica e tradizione classica*, Milano, PGreco.

of analysis that, in my opinion, need to be considered together. To borrow a distinction made by Harry Harootunian, one level is the historical time of capitalism – its logistics, one could say – and the other is the level of the relationship between capital and history, between capital and historical difference[2]. To avoid separating these two aspects, one must consider a "global Marx" in the sense of not isolating the "scientist" from the historian of the present, and the man who was active in the construction of a political movement of the working class. This movement, in order to assert itself, had to confront the power of capital, as well as multifaceted historical conditions, internal divisions, individualization processes, raising nationalisms, dynamics related to States, to wars, to nature itself[3].

Certainly, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert* does not represent of Heinrich's entire body of work, and discussing it in isolation from his later texts runs the risk of failing to give the author full credit. Nonetheless, in this work, Heinrich radically disjoints the various aspects of the living and historical Marx. While he is inspired by Louis Althusser's idea of an epistemological rupture that separates the anthropological approach of the young Marx from the later scientific works, Heinrich rejects Althusser's later self-critical claims, dismissing them as a "dubitable stand-point logic"[4]. Heinrich argues that science cannot be reduced to a battlefield, as doing so would risk vulgarizing Marx' theory and undermining the value of his scientific endeavor, which aimed to innovate the scientific field, rather than merely adding a new theory to a series of economic theories. Yet, it seems that in this innovation, the parameters of what counts as science – such as objectivity, neutrality, demonstrability, and, to some extent, quantification – are, in fact, presupposed. Is this not a way of reinstating a sort of scientific transcendental that places Marx within the history of economic science, thus building a sort of continuity despite and beyond the radicality of the epistemological rupture that one can recognize at play in Marx's theory?

Derived from Marx's distinction between political economy as a science and vulgar economy, it is unclear why any partisan understanding of science should be discarded as a sort of vulgarized version of a truer science. Not in a deterministic way, Marx maintains that science is a product of the historical movement. In the postface to the second edition of *Capital*, after stating that the distinction between classical political economy and vulgar economy is tied to the level of class struggle, he adds that the critique of political economy "can only represent the class whose

[2] Harootunian, Harry (2017): *Marx after Marx. History and Time in the Expansion of Capital*, Columbia University Press, New York. See also Consolati, Isabella (2018), "Verso una teoria del presente storico globale. Marx e il problema della contemporaneità", in *Storia del pensiero politico*, n.2, pp. 283-294.

[3] See Battistini, Matteo; Cappuccilli, Eleonora; Ricciardi, Maurizio (2023): *Global Marx. History and Critique of the Social Movement in the World Market*, Brill, Boston.

[4] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 107, n. 15. See also the essay by Morfino, Vittorio, *Una nota su Heinrich e Althusser*, in Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, pp. 71-86.

historical task is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production"[5]. Furthermore, in the Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association, while discussing the reduction of the working day to 10 hours, Marx states that, after 30 years of struggle, "it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class"[6]. In contrast, Heinrich's account of the concept of science seems to lose all connection to the working class and the class struggle.

This issue runs through the book from beginning to end. It relates to his conclusion on socialism, in which Heinrich focuses on criticizing readings that see a normative understanding at the basis of Marx's critique of political economy. Here, Heinrich separates scientific critique with political critique: "political critique is not the presupposition of the scientific results, but rather their consequence".[7] In other words, as Heinrich states towards the end of the book, "there can be a scientific socialism but not a socialist science"[8], arguing that Marx and Engles wanted to "lay the scientific foundations of socialism starting from the evolutionary tendencies of the capitalist society"[9]. However, the role and space that the working class has in shaping and challenging those tendencies is not, for Marx, a derivative, but rather a constitutive one. What type of agency, if any, does Heinrich attribute to the working class in this evolution, whose "laws" have been singled out by Marx and Engels?

The reference to the factory legislation in the Inaugural Address allows me to raise a second point. Heinrich exposes with an incredible precision and an abundance of references the monetary theory of value that Marx formulates, distinguishing it from that of political economists. from the political economists. Heinrich convincingly emphasizes the centrality of money as the new sovereign and the new representative of societal synthesis, which is undeniable in Marx's analysis. Money also defines the category of abstract labor, because it is only through money in exchange that different labors can be compared. Abstract labor is a specifically social determination of labour, which only comes into being through exchange. This centrality of exchange is why both the issues of production and reproduction receive a comparatively less attention throughout the book. I will return to reproduction in my third point, but for now I will briefly focus on the issue of production.

Factories and the labor process are strikingly not very present in the book. This has the merit of highlighting the capacity of the capital relation to transform the overall societal organization. The exploitation of labor is not limited to the

[5] Marx, Karl, *Postface to the Second Edition,* in *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 94-103, p. 98.

[6] Marx, Karl (1964), „Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association", Engels, Friedrich and Marx, Karl, *Collected Works*, vol. 20, London, Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 5-13, p. 11.

[7] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 504.

[8] Ibidem.

[9] Ivi, pp. 505-506.

relationship between capitalists and workers in the factory; the factory is not the only place where the capital relation operates. However, there is a problem I would like to raise. Marx says that in the act of exchanging his/her labor force as a commodity, the worker follows his/her own interest and aims at valorizing the commodity that he/she is as much as he/she can. He/she is here *ein Einzelner*, an individual. Yet, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx clearly states in a passage that Heinrich relegates to a footnote, that while the purchase of labor-power works formally as an exchange of commodities, the appropriation of living labor in the labor process can hardly be considered an *exchange* even though it is the consequence of an exchange of equivalents[10]. This is why, as Maurizio Ricciardi demonstrates in his book *Il potere temporaneo*[11], Marx often uses terms associated with slavery to describe this appropriation, even though he clearly distinguishes between slavery and free labor. Moreover, it is in the sphere of production, and in confronting this appropriation, when capital is forced to come into contact with non-capital. Here, a collective dimension emerges because the valorization process is also a labor process. The struggle that resulted in the factory acts , according to Marx, is the struggle between two collective subjects: collective capitalist and collective worker.

In Heinrich book, the "Einzelner" of the exchange is way more present as a subject than the "Arbeiterklasse", which is mentioned comparatively few times. It is not, of course, the original individual of the classical political economy, but rather the individual who is individualized through the value form and through exchange. But my question is: how does Heinrich address the problem of the constitution of a collective subject, which was an undeniable priority for Marx? Marx repeatedly returns to the issue of the organization of the working class as a political movement, not simply within the workplaces but in society at large. I had the impression that throughout the book the wheel somehow comes full circle, and that Heinrich ends up describing the worker as a sort of *homo oeconomicus*, a depoliticized individual driven by an exclusively economic rationality and motivated solely by self-interest.

For my final point, I want to turn to the issue of social reproduction. Henrich briefly mentions some feminist critics of Marx who argue that he did not consider the relationship between unpaid reproductive labor and waged labor, and that there is a need to place reproductive labor, rather than factory work, at the center of a revised theory of surplus value[12]. I would like to focus not on the economic relation between the unpaid reproductive labor and the waged labor, but rather on the way Heinrich frames the subordination of women in the households, which is clearly a precondition of this unpaid labor. Heinrich states that the idea that the exploitation

[10] Ivi, p. 367, n. 13.

[11] Ricciardi, Maurizio (2019), *Il potere temporaneo. Marx e la politica come critica della società*, Roma, Meltemi (trad. en., *The Provisional Power. Marx and Politics as a Critique of Society*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014).

[12] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, pp. 368 ff.

of men in the factories is possible only thanks to the exploitation of women in the houses confuses "concrete historical conditions (in particular in countries of the so called Third World) with the possibility of exploitation in general"[13]. And he adds: "The fact that a great part of reproductive labor is still realized in the family is more a remnant of a pre-capitalistic past, and characterized by a non-completely developed capitalism, rather than being a general condition of exploitation"[14]. Heinrich suggests that the capitalist tendency is to "free women from housework and subdue them to direct exploitation by capital"[15], thanks to a public (or private) organization of reproduction. In this view, the development of capital seems to go hand in hand with women's freedom from housework, evolving independently of their own struggles.

I have some issues with relegating housework and the subordination it presupposes to the "Third World" and would not so easily link women's emancipation from the home with capitalistic development. This suggestion contradicts the ongoing persistence of a patriarchal division of labour on a global scale and of sexed relationships of domination around the world.

Heinrich argues that the employment of both husband and wife is more advantageous to capital because it decreases the value of the individual labor force, as now two wages - not just one – cover the reproductive costs of the household. I do not want to delve into the technicalities of labor value determination, but I would like to ask Heinrich how he engages with other readings of this issue, such as Immanuel Wallerstein's claims that "four hundred years at least into the existence of a historical social system, the amount of fully proletarianized labour in the capitalist world-economy today cannot be said to total even fifty per cent"[16]. The reliance on unpaid and non-completely marketized forms of labor is key to keeping the value of the labor force low. Even when reproductive labor is partially monetized, as is the case today with migrant care workers, there exists a whole discursive patriarchal apparatus that intertwines sexism and racism to keep the value of migrant women's labor as low as possible. This shows that capital repositions past forms of domination, and that the issue of women's reproductive labor cannot be faced only in terms of an economical calculus – it is tied with the political conditions of exploitation. Some labor cost less also on the market because they are considered "natural" as natural and less developed is its "Trägerin". The measure of wages is the result also of the "political devaluation" of labor, where the work of some, based on sex or on race, is regarded as less valuable, less disciplined, and less skilled than that of the others. This is evident today with migrant labor. Needless to say, this

[13] Ivi, p. 370.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Wallerstein, Immanuel (1986), *Historical Capitalism*, London, Verso, p. 23.

issue is central to the problem of what is the working class and what shapes does class struggle assume.

In general, this relates to do with what Heinrich calls the "extra-economical constraints"[17] of capitalism. Heinrich maintains that once capital has asserted itself in its fully developed form, it requires nothing but the mute compulsion of economic relationships. For example, Heinrich states that State violence is key to establishing the capital relation, but once this relation is fully instituted, the State's role is to ensure that is continues to function normally[18]. I would be curious to know how Heinrich interprets the repressive and disciplining functions of the State. But returning to the factory legislation on the normal working day: Heinrich reads this as the result of the State acting on behalf of the collective capitalist, even against the immediate interests of the individual capitalists[19]. This is certainly true, as Marx himself points out, but why does Marx ultimately consider it a victory for the working class as a political movement? I don't think it is because the legislation forced capital to develop itself further and intensify its subsumption of labor, eventually bringing it closer to its final crisis. This ascetic logic of sacrifice is nowhere to be found in Marx. He views it as a political victory because he understands the State as a battlefield, an arena that the political movement of the working class must occupy "from without" its representative mechanisms. Otherwise, one is resigned to the mute compulsion of capital and its iron laws, or left waiting for conditions to ripen for a change to happen.

[17] Ivi, p. 371.
[18] See pp. 372 ff.
[19] See p. 376.