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INTERSTITIALITY: TOWARDS A POST-ALTHUSSERIAN THEORY OF TRANSITION

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to give some insights in order to make the theoretical construction of the concept of interstitiality possible in Marxist theory. For this reason, it is worth to examine how, after reflecting on the crisis of Marxism in the late 1970s, and after being confronted with the failure of social projects directed by the state, Louis Althusser elaborates the elements for an “aleatory” conception of historical passages which goes beyond any deterministic and teleological model of transition, to think the passage beyond capitalism not as transcendence, nor as development of “innate” potential, but as an “activation” of elements of an ontology of the present.

Keywords: *Marxism, Transition, Interstices*

Comment tourner ses regards vers les époques crépusculaires –
où le passé se liquidait sous les yeux
que seul le vide pouvait éblouir –
sans s’attendrir sur ce grand art qu’est la mort d’une civilisation?
Précis de Décomposition, E. M. Cioran

Prelude: The Oak and the Donkey

Let me begin with a short fairy tale. Althusser was told that Lenin himself had told this story during his exile in Switzerland. I don’t know if it is actually an ancient Russian fairy tale, and I don’t know if Lenin really told it. Anyway, it’s about an oak tree and a donkey. We are in a small Russian village amidst the countryside. Terrible blows at his door awaken the old Anton overnight. He gets up and goes to see, and finds a young man, Grigorij, who cries to him: “A horrendous thing has happened! Come and see!” The old man does not want to face the cold of the winter night, but at last he goes out and sees a magnificent oak-tree in the middle of a vast and empty field. The young man then says: “Look, somebody has tied my oak to a donkey!” But the old man replies: “Grig-

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orij, you are crazy, you just have to change your mind: nobody has tied your oak to the donkey, it is the donkey that is tied to your oak! You just have to think in a different way!”²

1. Marxist Transitions

Twentieth century Marxism initially used the concept of “transition” in the light of the political issues raised after Soviet Revolution. A set of topics and approaches to the transition from the capitalist mode of production to the socialist one was needed. In a perspective way, transition from socialism to communism was at stake, although in the long term. After the explosion of the post-colonial liberation movements, another critical topic arose, concerning the very possibility of a “transition” in a context that was not at all the one that former Marxist theory presupposed. A vast theoretical debate arose: how to conceive the passage from one political-economic system to another? How to understand the dynamics which make possible the passing of an old worldliness into a new one? Is a comprehensive theory of history possible?

In classical Marxist representation of the transition beyond capitalism, the contradiction between the capitalist class and the working class, between the owners of the means of production and the workers who have nothing but their labor force has to be concluded by the overcoming of capitalism.³ History, the transformative process shaped by the establishment of different relations of power in the sphere of production, results in a dualism which opposes one class against the other, the people against the ‘oligarchy’, the workers against the ‘command’ of capital. Transition would be possible as liberation of the exploited class, through the expropriation of the expropriators. In essence, the transformation of society and the transition from one mode of production into another, would be the resolution of the main contradiction of history, the fundamental antagonism between productive forces. History was supposed to be intimately dialectic, and to advance through negation of negation: a formerly dominated class becomes the dominant one, and this until the dominated “free” labourer on the industrial manufacture became the leader the other subaltern in the struggle for the overcoming of capitalism and the termination of any form of domination. In any case, a fundamental binary opposition orders and governs

² A version of this fairy tale is published in the “Prelude: Grucha’s donkey”, see *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by G. M. Goshgarian (Althusser 2017, 7-8).

³ We always violate history and justice, when depicting “classical” Marxism as such. I ask reader to allow me to be so unfair. A more sophisticated account of this “level zero” Marxist theory has to be found in Laclau & Mouffe 1985, when they trace back the genealogy of the concept of hegemony.

the others. Each social contradiction may be reduced to the fundamental one, and that one polarizes all conflicts that take place in different spheres of society.

On order to adapt the deterministic presumptions of “classical” Marxism to the actual development of historical facts, since its early formulation by Trotsky, the theory of “uneven and combined development” became part of Marxist conceptual apparatus. Originally formulated to give an account of Russian and European context, it became one of the tenants of “Third World” Marxist theory, and which gave rise to the so-called “Un-equal exchange Theory” (Emmanuel 1972), and later to the World-System Theory (Wallerstein 1974). These approaches try to articulate diachronic elements, like finalism (structurally contained in every theory of “development”), and synchronic elements, like the analysis of the present distribution of labour-power across the world. At its very beginning, uneven and combined theory was intended to explain the simultaneous presence of different social-economic formations, more or less “advanced”, each one situated at a particular “stadium” of history. In one sense, it represented the effort to explain the non-contemporaneity of the contemporary world. A second-wave “evolution” of theory beyond finalism has to be found in post-colonial theorists (Spivak 1987, Chakrabarty 2008). A huge contribution they offered in the task of *displace* (which doesn’t necessarily mean reject) the *grand récit* of universalism. Indeed, popular cultural phenomena, like several metropolitan “subcultures” also mediate or melt, in a syncretistic way, symbols and practices deriving from all over the world (namely, in spirituality, wearing, food) in a process of progressive melting and confusing the rigid identities. From a more “economic” point of view, we could hardly talk about any kind of “mundialization”, because the western-centred emergence of capitalism seems to be out of discussion. At the same time, post-Marxist sociologists like Serge Latouche insisted on the existence of “reservoirs” of “informal” economic practices⁴. These economic “couches” are not – according to this approach – reducible to “survivals” of pre-capitalistic stages. They need to be studied as new forms, in which old and new knowledges, discourses and social relations mix up, so that a displaced concept of the “economic” may be derived.

2. Althusserian Transitions: From Pleromatic Messianism to Communism “Here and Now”

After the end of World War II the future seemed to be within reach to many young intellectuals all over the world: in Africa, America, Asia, Europe. It seemed one just had to catch it and help it to get out of the womb of the old dec-

⁴ Latouche and others have developed new economic insights starting from the studies of the French anthropologist Marcell Mauss. For a general sketch of this neo-Maussian wave see <http://www.revuedumauss.com.fr/> [last cons. 30/05/2020].

adent society. Young Louis Althusser, imbued with catholic ideals, had joined the communist Party because he thought that communism was the secular possibility to realize the message of Christ, his messianic promise of a fulfillment of times. In his Hegelian early philosophical conception deeply influenced by French interpreters like Kojève, Koyré, Wahl, and Hyppolite, historical dialectic was dominated by the contrast between “content” and “form”: a young content was imprisoned in an old form. Every historical period could be regarded from two points of view, but in each case one was transient, while the other was incoming. And since the time to full adequacy between form and content could be, according to Hegel, only a result, it could only be placed back to the resolution of the contradiction between content and form. So, the Pleroma is an Eschaton: The Fulfillment is the End of History.

Christ as a symbol of a specific moment of the Phenomenology of Spirit, on one hand; Enlightenment, on the other, kept the attention of the young French philosopher in his reading of Hegel. Jesus was the disruptor of the happy unity of the Greeks, while the *Aufklärung* represented a secularized form of this same consciousness of the disruption of any original unity as consciousness of the *void*. A void, a sense on worthlessness which was perceived not only from a moral, or existential point of view, but became the opening moment for a superior consciousness at a logical and ontological level: Hegel’s discovery of the coincidence of being and nothingness. Moral experience is now sublimated and transvalued. The void nothingness appears with all its ontological facticity. In other words, existentialism and phenomenology (e.g. Jean Wahl) remained prisoners of the unhappy consciousness, Althusser declares to start from it his search for a fully renewed philosophy, with a completely different tenor. He is in search for reconstruction, realization, totalization. That is the meaning of his peculiar “pleromatic” adhesion to communism: An *Aufhebung* of the (simply) moral unhappiness in the seek for a place for the *Erfüllung*, the “fulfilment” of times. This kind of plenitude is interpreted as a result, and not more as a starting point, so it is fully delivered to history. Reconciliation is at reach through the hard trial of the “knowledge of the concept” which synthetises the passage from Hegelian Phenomenology to the summits of Logic. But the real overcoming will be reached through a successive passage by the “misrecognition of the concept”, so in the descent from Logic to the Philosophy of History. And that’s where Althusser meets Communism. Transition is here no more and no less than a messianic “Advent” (Althusser 2006).

Since 1965 Althusser and his disciples proposed a new, “symptomatic” reading of Marx’s *Capital*. Reading into the gaps in the text of *Capital*, in Marx’s “*bevues*” (the slips, the oversights): that was the programmatic effort of Althus-

er and his group in 1965. He and, with more detail, Etienne Balibar, began to develop a different theory of history which had to rest on the solid basis a general theory of modes of production, supposed to be inside the layers of *Capital's* text. The primary sources of this new theory were supposed to be the final part of Book 1, namely the chapters dedicated to "The problem of primitive accumulation", and in some fundamental chapters of Book 3.

At the very end of his paper on "The Object of *Capital*", Althusser put a few pages long appendix "On the 'Ideal Average' and the Forms of Transition". In this brief section two intertwined theoretical problems are pointed out: the problem of the "object" of *Capital*, and the problem of the forms of transition from one mode of production to another. The philosophical framework in which the solution had to be found was – according to Althusser – a "genealogical" effort marked by the refusal of any empiricism. As for the object of *Capital*, the science of history from the view point of a structure dominated by the combination of "free" labour-force and capital, as for the issue of transition, we always have to manage a historical "example" which is not an example at all, but a peculiar "general type". This was the case for England and its particular historical development, used by Marx as an illustration of the process of combining man-power and capital. Althusser gives us in this small note a very interesting correction of his "supposed" blind anti-historicism, when he says:

[I]f we return to the English example, if we compare it with Marx's apparently purified and simplified object, the two-class capitalist mode of production, we have to admit that we must confront a *real residue*: precisely, restricting ourselves to this one pertinent point, the real existence of *other classes* (landowners, artisans, small-scale agriculturalists). We cannot in honesty suppress this real residue merely by invoking the fact that Marx proposed as his whole object only the concept of the specific difference of the capitalist mode of production, and by invoking the difference between the real and the knowledge of it! (Althusser & Balibar 1970, online version)

Despite its theory of "real subsumption", and although he has often insisted on the tendency of capitalism to enter into every aspect of social life; Marx has never argued that a mode of production presents itself in its purest form, or that it is all-pervasive and characterizes all aspects of society. Each different social-economic formation may be defined as a specific "*Verbindung*" (combination) between factors of production and other political, ideological and social layers. Following the same logic, the relations between different and coexistent modes of production have to be thought out in terms of specific, unique combinations. In history no case presents itself in the pure state, and this is true in the case of England, which was nonetheless the example Marx chose to illustrate the

development of industrial capitalism. Every socio-economic formation brings in itself what Althusser provisionally calls “survivals” of other forms of production and subjectivities within the dominant (capitalist) one.

This supposed ‘impurity’ – Althusser follows – constitutes an object relevant to the theory of modes of production: in particular, to *the theory of the transition from one mode of production to another*, which is the same as *the theory of the process of constitution of a determinate mode of production*, since every mode of production is constituted solely out of the existing forms of an earlier mode of production.

He also recognizes that: “Marx did not give us any theory of the transition from one mode of production to another, i.e., of the constitution of a mode of production”, but at the same time his analysis of so-called “primitive accumulation” gives us some materials and fruitful insights for its development. At that time, the political implications which rendered such a theory of transition dramatically necessary were absolutely evident to Althusser: “without it we shall be unable to complete what is called the construction of socialism, in which the transition from the capitalist mode of production to the socialist mode of production is at stake, or even to solve the problems posed by the so-called ‘under-developed’ countries of the Third World”.

But they still had in mind a heroic and self-confident vision of historical transformation: “knowledge of the modes of production considered provides the basis for posing and solving the problems of transition. That is why we can anticipate the future and theorize not only that future, but also and above all the roads and means that will secure us its reality”.

Without wanting to enter in a detailed analysis of the discontinuity or the porosity of the text of *Capital*,⁵ I would merely point out the fact that, following Althusser’s account of “primitive accumulation”, it is possible to establish a counter-reading, against deterministic theory of modes of production. Is the concept of interstitiality, built from the Marxian text, useful to attain a different theory of history, which can be worthy for our present time? In this project we cannot neglect the counterpart: say, the persistence in Althusserian school of a fully deterministic – although problematic – conception of the actual dynamics of capitalism once established, as to bring us to a double conception of transition, one to be applied to the “history” of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and the other to be applied to the “science” of the transition from capitalism

⁵ A direct “interstitial” investigation of Marx’s *Capital* is not the object of this paper. In that case, I would consider other texts, in addition to those already mentioned. For example, chapter 12, “Division of labor and manufacture”. The effect of such an analysis, although very embryonal, does not allow us to feel as self-confident as an Althusserian reading of *Capital*.

to socialism the issue Balibar tries to solve in his chapter on the “Elements for a Theory of transition”.

Marx spoke of *dominant* mode of production, implying the existence of several modes of production. Althusser says that contradiction, negation, negation of the negation, *Aufhebung*, are the Hegelian terminology, the philosophical concepts that Althusser obsessively tries to substitute. Indeed, it would be possible to trace back the presence of some concepts that we will find in the very late reflection of Althusser on historical passages (*rencontre*), structure formation (*prise*), and transformation (*passage*).

Since the end of the Seventies, Althusser operates a new dislocation of his thought. Forty years after his joining communism, he recognizes, and dissociate himself from, the eschatological nature of this idea, but at the same time he tries to give a new account of it.

At that dramatic time, Althusser was reasoning upon the crisis of Marxism. He ascribed this crisis, among other things, to some basic weaknesses in the theoretical corpus of Marxism, and to some “limits” of Marx’s thought. Marxism had been unable to explain some fundamental dynamics of contemporary society. In particular, the absence of a coherent theory of the State, which Marx himself had not been able to formulate, and which has to be part of a wider theory of transition, was now an insurmountable problem. Indeed, the state apparatus had become a constituent element of a new static and oppressive social-economic formation, in which capitalism was no longer functioning in its purest form. The laws of capitalist exploitation, also thanks to the claims of mass movements and trade-unions, had for better or worse guaranteed the survival capitalism. The total impoverishment of the working class didn’t take place. Marx’s prediction of the extreme crisis, which was supposed to lead to an overcoming of the existing state of things, turned out to be the occasion for a re-adjustment, an intensification and sophistication of capitalist exploitation. The working class had become an integral part of the complex system that ensured the renewal of capitalism through consumerism (Althusser 1994, 367-537).

At that same time, Althusser was gradually breaking with the French Communist Party. The divorce with the Party in which he militated since 1947 came out publicly in a series of articles published in *Le Monde* newspaper in April 1978. In his pamphlet *What must change in the Party* (Althusser 1978, 19-45). On one hand, he disapproved the abandonment by the PCF of the thesis of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, denounced as the abandonment of the political struggle of the exploited, and as the progressive assimilation to “those oligarchic bourgeois parties in which complete domination is exercised by a caste of professionals, experts and intellectuals clearly linked to the higher state admin-

istration” (Althusser 1978, 30). On the other hand, he was more and more interested in analyzing the “understanding of class relations, of the effects of class relations, or even of phenomena that appear on the fringes of class relations (the troublesome youth question, women, ecology, and so on)” (Althusser 1978, 26). A similar reflection was extended in a more general way to the critique of the Socialist Eastern European systems. In fact, since 1977, during the meeting with some Eastern European Left dissidents held in Venice, which was organized by the political group of the Italian newspaper *Il manifesto*, he said that the elites of Socialist Eastern European countries had proven to be a new bourgeoisie that had created a system of control and power; a new mode of class exploitation had been established, which prevented discussions about socialism, let alone of communism. Indeed, the socialist systems were denounced as an exacerbation of the *socialization* process, coupled with the growth of individuals’ dependence. He claimed that the crisis of Marxism had *finally* broken out: a sense of liberation was contained in his shout: “*Enfin la crise du marxisme!*” (Althusser 1998, 267-79).

But what was in crisis? Which is, like in the story of Grigorij, put inside out? What is tied to what? Paradoxically, Althusser defined the crisis of Marxism as a huge absence: “In the universe comprising the ensemble of Marxism’s forms of existence, in other words, in the world of economic, political, ideological, and theoretical Marxism thus defined, we observe an absolutely prodigious phenomenon that humanity hasn’t known on this scale since the period of the Reformation: the generalized phenomenon of absence” (Althusser 2018, 3). As if this supposed crisis were not the crisis of Marxism itself, but the crisis of the absence of an authentic economic, political, ideological, and theoretical Marxism, which had been replaced, in the East as well as in the West by “bourgeois” economic, political, ideological, and theoretical approaches. As far as the economic practice is concerned, according to Althusser the essence of bourgeois economic practice remained untouched: exploitation also continued to exist in the Soviet Union and in the other socialist countries. The same was true in the field of political practice, in which the aim of bourgeois “domination” was to produce submitted subjects, and when we come to the “ideological” field. (Althusser 2018, 5).

In a recently published conference held in Barcelona in 1978 Althusser affirmed that communism: “has already started” (Althusser 2018). Coming back to Marx himself, in stating that communism is not an ideal, “but the real movement that occurs before our eyes” (Ibid.), we assist the re-actualization of a radically immanentistic social ontology: “Communism is an objective tendency already registered in our society”. When asked to explain where communism is

actually located, Althusser would respond: in “the collectivization of capitalist production, [in the] forms of organization and struggle of the workers’ movement, the initiatives of the popular masses, and why not some daring artists, writers, researchers: these are today sketches and traces of communism” (Ibid.). As we can see, in this text Althusser is still firmly linked to the core tradition of revolutionary Marxism, but, notwithstanding, besides the working class movement, he places a wide range of “popular” subjectivities, which are not by no means a direct expression of economic antagonism between the two classes facing one another in the field of, let’s say, “Fordist” production. Moreover, we assist the invocation of some actors of the ideological “reproduction” as artists, researchers and so forth. Everything looks like a slow detachment from the traditional view of social antagonism and social change. Indeed, the farewell to the “working class” as supposedly represented by the Party has begun.

In April 1980, during a conference on the “Paris Commune”, organized in Terni, Italy, Althusser pronounced his likely last public speech. He shocked his audience with statements that are very difficult for us to interpret even today, but which contain some interesting insights with respect to our concern, to think think capitalism and beyond. His invective against socialist systems now sounds definitive: “socialism is nothing but shit”! If that was the diagnosis for socialism (as a political and ideological system, more than as an economic one) what about communism then? As a matter of fact, he remains strongly linked to the idea of communism. But we have to be very accurate in the definition of the term. We can trace this definition in many texts of the Eighties. According to the Althusser communism is no longer elimination/overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of the existing state of things, but it is emerging as a “suspension”, a temporarily interruption, an *ἐποχή*. Communism is wherever people act in order to suspend:

- 1) economic exploitation
- 2) political domination
- 3) ideological mystification

Althusser gives the example of a football pitch, where boys play free from any external compulsion, be it economic, be it political, be it ideological. Althusser also evokes a *situation* in which each person has freely agreed to discuss, outside commodity relations, escaping political domination and exempt from any ideological cover of the facts. According to Althusser, we may, even today, already be beyond capitalism. Right now, we are not only thinking, we could be experiencing a “communism”. Once we had experienced the extreme socialization of our lives, communism could be easily conceived as a de-socialization, in an almost social-anarchist fashion.

We assist to the progressive and uncertain emergence of a new conceptuality, the center of which is the term “interstice”. Textually we find a first trace of the labouring of this concept in Althusser in the preface by Fernanda Navarro to her interview-book with Althusser, published in Mexico in 1988. The term appears on the surface just to re-submerge quickly:

Unfortunately, the health conditions of Althusser for the moment did not permit us to include other themes about our times, which he treated in an informal way beside our conversations, but he wasn't able to ground with the rigor he is accustomed to. New themes, like the “interstices” opened by popular movement, and the alternative they represent before the rigid structure of political parties; [...etc...] (Navarro 1988, 15 [my translation])

We know from the letters published later that Althusser insisted with Navarro to remove all the chapters in which he was dealing with politics, and the passages on “interstices” were amongst them:

I incorporated so many new arguments into my revised version of your interview, and I imprudently advanced so many ideas, so many *words (just words, not demonstrations)* that I lapsed into a sort of political-verbal vertigo (about interstices, margins, the primacy of movements over organizations, about ‘thinking different’, etc., etc.) and *dragged you in after me*, with the following complication: I had reasons for talking the way I did, but I kept them to myself (for lack of time and explanations, and also because I hadn't looked up, in the ponderous text of *Capital*, the crucial lines I had in mind). (Althusser 2006, 244)

These hesitations notwithstanding, it is clear that *politics* is at stake. Interstices are places of new living political practices, and they are political as long as they are in movement. Another, theoretical information we keep from this statement is that Althusser connected clearly his meditation on the interstices with the text of *Capital*. From the theoretical point of view, we may trace a continuum in the meditation of Althusser, back to *Reading Capital*. The sole authorized occurrence of the term “interstices” in the interview with Navarro, expectedly, refers to the field of philosophy:

One last remark: in connection with the conflicts that philosophy has provoked in the course of its history, there appear margins or zones that can escape unequivocal determination by class struggle. Examples: certain areas of reflection on linguistics, epistemology, art, the religious sentiment, customs, folklore, and so on. This is to say that, within philosophy, there exist islands or ‘interstices’ (Althusser 2006, 271).

This passage is useful to construct the concept of interstices, giving us some supplementary determinants. Interstices exist “within”, but at the same time

they escape any direct determination by the structure. In his autobiography, *The Future lasts a long time*, referring to two public speech held in Italy and in Spain in late Seventies, Althusser said:

I went on to claim that ‘islets⁶ of communism’ already exist in the ‘interstices’ of our society (‘interstices’ was the word Marx used to describe the early groups of merchants in the ancient world, copying Epicurus’s idea of gods on earth), where market-based relationships do not exist. I believe the only possible definition of communism—if one day it were to exist in the world—is the absence of market-based relationships, that is to say, on class exploitation and the domination of the state. In saying this I believe I am being true to Marx’s own thought. What is more, I am sure that there already exist in the world today many groups of people whose human relationships are not based on market forces. But how can these interstices of communism be spread to the whole world? (Althusser 1993, 225).

Althusser probably has this passage of *Capital* Book I, chapter I, “The Commodity” in mind. The term ‘interstices’ is not in Marx, but he used it the note by the editors of MEW to explain that “the Greek philosopher Epicurus believed that the gods were resident in *Intermundia*, namely in interstitial spaces [*Zwischenräumen*] among the different worlds that exist next to each other.”⁷ Islet of communism can be viewed as an archipelago, a group of islets who have to cooperate to survive, and make sense together. The trajectories between an islet and another could change, depending on time, space, desires, needs and so forth.

Economy, politics, ideology: these are the three axes of triangulation around which Althusser’s reflection has always moved. We must remember that Althusser was the theoretician of the indispensability of the ideological dimension even if this is opposed to science, politics and practice as resulting from knowledge of reality (the politics of the communist parties was supposed to be nothing more than this). Althusser’s concern was the theoretical *opacity* of the real, and the postulate of a necessary imaginary dimension. From this point of view, ideology does not serve politics more than politics “serves” the transformation of economic relations. Along with Lenin (and Machiavelli), he had theorized the primacy of politics, meant as the primacy of the ability to take advantage

⁶ I am detaching myself from the English translator, who chose the term “oases”. The original French word is “Ilots”, which can be correctly translated with “islets”. This allows us to extend the metaphor in order to reach the image of an archipelago.

⁷ K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital, pp. 50-51, URL: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> [last cons. 04/07/20].

of the contingent situation. Finally, Althusser had never given up the idea of communism as the overcoming of capitalist relations and the transformation of the existent mode of production. All seems to disappear in an instant. How can we imagine suspending the imaginary (ideology)? How can we expect to do without the symbolic (politics)? How can we put the real (economy) within brackets? At that time the dramatic existential and political crisis expressed by the positions of the French philosopher against his Party, intertwined with huge physical and psychological discomfort. Are we allowed to dig a new philosophical strand, or even to theorize a kind of philosophical turn from the multiplication and coalescence of many dramatic events? To what extent can the statements Althusser produced in this period be traced to somewhat a persistent “theory of history”? The answer to this question is “yes”, because we could trace some theoretical links back (and forward) with the whole Althusserian *détour* in philosophy. For example, in a page of *Future lasts forever* Althusser remembers his doubts about the possibility that communism can be truly experienced by humanity. The USSR is nothing but a bureaucratic and oppressive political system. On the other hand, from a *theoretical* point of view, Althusser noticed that communism as Marx thought it was an eschatology, and repeats the same discourse about “islet” of communism.

Indeed, he refers to moments of living together not connected with the production of commodities. It is the production of life itself. The future “lasts a long time,” and the present is a perennial postponement of the fulfillment. But there’s more. In developing these meditations, actually, he takes an upheaval that involves this very notion of deferring, idealizing, transcending. The old Louis, that had never felt young, began to think communism, paradoxically, as something which is already there: “*es gibt*” (“there is”), as de-socialization and suspension of the three oppressive cornerstones (economic, political, ideological), was virtually made possible by certain circumstances: geopolitical tensions (USA-USSR); the disorientation of the trade unions; the crisis of the representative party system; the development of mass movements.

Mass movements deserve particular attention in this new account. Indeed, their composition is not determined by their members’ belonging to one particular class, but from the political participation of individuals and new aggregates, relatively new to politics: the feminist movement, for instance, or individuals speaking up for the first time from the periphery of the system, the poor led by a theology of liberation. These new subjects and the “mass line” have the best chance of carrying out a revolution.

3. After the Fall: Paradoxes of Transition

Today we are in a radically different context. On the one hand we witnessed the collapse of socialist systems; on the other, we experienced the eroding social democratic compromise in the West. In the last twenty years the term “transition” is applied to the problem of passing from socialism to capitalism, and to democracy; a complete overthrow (Buyandelgeriyn 2008).

Extreme liberalism, the shrinking of labor rights, new forms of slavery, of unpaid labor, exploitation of intelligence and individual creativity allow us to diagnose the intensification of “real” capitalistic subsumption. However, despite a changed overall framework, the resources to think beyond capitalism do not seem exhausted at all.

Capitalism is not the “solution” of one fundamental struggle within feudal society. Bourgeoisie is not one pole (the dominated) in feudal “class” division. Bourgeoisie was marginal, like the merchant city-states of Genoa, Florence, and Venice (Hunt 1999) who first set up the system of monetary circulation were marginal; like the first manufacturing districts of England, Holland, Italy were marginal. We may have trouble identifying the place from which the new modes of production arise the myriad of existing porosity, and from my point of view it is not even necessary to do so. Instead, our heuristic hypothesis is to avoid any big, masculine antagonism, and to look closer at what is hidden in the pores of our society, or what may give some impulse (*conatus*, *Trieb*): some resistance that is hidden in the pores of our universal submission to the present state of things. Capitalism is, like any other mode of production, a structure of recursivity (M-C-M' money-commodity-plus-money, or C-M-C, etc.), a world of necessity. But, like any necessity, it is: “a becoming necessary of the encounter of contingencies” (Althusser 2006, 194). Why don't we think of the dominant mode of production beyond capitalism (let's call it communism, just as a “placeholder”) as “a becoming necessary of the encounter of contingencies”? Why do we need to think about it as a necessary result of its immanent nature?

LEAVE	TAKE
CONTRADICTION	ALEATORITY
BINARY OPPOSITION	INTERSTITIALITY
NECESSITY	CONTINGENCY
FUTURE	PRESENT
CENTER	PERIPHERY
LAW OF HISTORY	VIRTUALITY
POWER OF SUBJECTIVITY	NO SUBJECT
FINALISM	NO END
SOCIAL SYSTEM	ARCHIPELAGO

The philosophical effort that we can make is therefore to establish a different terminology, in order to conceptually grasp the inhabitants of the new social order, which live in the interstices of our societies. As far as a real transformation could take place, they have not to be found in any “principal”, or “fundamental” axis of antagonism. Maybe they are “sleeping” right now, or they are occupying margins in the social fabric. They are not necessarily “entire”, fulfilled “subjects”. Rather they are the “queers” in every social context (sexual, economic, racial). Actually, they are not even represented/representable.

Capitalism is not a smooth and plane surface, but rather, as any mode of production, it is fractured, it continues to have porosity. *I define interstitiality as that space of reality which is located between the elements of a mechanism.* From this point of view, a theory of social change cannot be part of a dialectical analysis of the social mechanism, it does not dwell on the definition of power relations between the constituent parts of the social fabric, but rather focuses on those places and subjectivities which are between the binary poles of dominant and dominated. The interstices are visible only if this “combination” (*Verbindung*) exists. We cannot identify them if we dismantle the mechanism, because this removal would leave us with elements that could reveal nothing but the mere functioning or non-functioning of the mechanism itself. An interstitial theory of transition, is not in contradiction with the thesis of class antagonism as a stable character of each social-economic formation. What changes is a kind of

non-deterministic turn: it is not in antagonistic dyad that the new worldliness lurks, but in its latent marginal livelihood. My aim is to focus on subjectivities, places and spaces, *temporalities* that are not currently subsumed by the mainstream social-symbolic production. Numerous research areas already deal with the identification of these issues, working on racial divide, gender differences, sexual minorities, non-work, new forms of solidarity and mutualism, micro-political struggles, nomadism, migrations, loss of identity, illegitimacy. Thus, we have to face a world full of crevices, more porous than ever; or perhaps as porous as it has always been. The Communities of Compost understood their task to be to cultivate and invent the arts of living with and for damaged worlds in place, not as an abstraction or a type, but as and for those living and dying in ruined places (Haraway 2016, 143).

Thinking beyond capitalism does not mean imagining a future. But we may try to look closer into the pores of the present world, and possibly preserve, take care of, the existence of these *Intermundia*, because only by their re/emergence the possibility of an afterlife beyond capitalism depends. Thus, are we talking about the passage from a mode of production to another (theory of transition, in its strict sense), or maybe about the production of a mode of passage beyond capitalism?

Conclusion

When talking about “transition” we have to be aware of more than one century of critique of the historicistic and finalistic category of “development”. Transition should be intended as “deployment”. But, in order to avoid the risks of this latter term, a “multiplication of transformations”, a “coalescence”, a “precipitation”. This deployment has to be conceived as something different from order where there was “chaos”, but, with Althusser, as the “becoming necessary of the contingent”, as “catching” (fr. *prise*). Order is something that the system assigns. Against that order a determined transformation may press, conflict and conflate.

The geography of our “Planet” (Chakrabarty 2020) is the only available dimension in which diverse ontological modalities find “home”. In old-fashioned Marxist vocabulary, we would have said that “contradictions” are part of this system. We assist the conflating of several conflicts about identity and power, wealth distribution, migration and labour-force inequality. At the same time, we can foresee diverse figures of subjectivity: low-income female reproductive labour, “black” underpaid labour, slums, peripheries, from which new forms of “staying with the trouble” emerge, new solidarities, new classes. Centering the “evolution” of capitalism around the backyards of western countries and their

satellites, is one way to miss the point. But a mere “oriental”, or exotic would also be completely erroneous. The real changing in our perspective must be the capability to look at the interstices of the present ontologies.

One of the main tasks of Queering Marxism is to demonstrate that the “truth” that these ontologies carry with them is just the “truth” of a crystalizing process in which subject positions were forced to reproduce as such although they had no internal “move”, or “essence” waiting to be expressed. No “natural” development of content in a new form, no eschatological messianism, no prescribed characters, but the “concrete” movement of catching located relations and being cached by subjectivities. History may not be something more or something less than this. Outside that, there is no need for history.

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