

Schismatic Theory for a Liminal Time: On Reproduction, Feminism and Imperialism

Natalia Romé

Abstract:

Marxist theory finds, in the current conjuncture, the possibility of a reading exercise that manages to grasp, in the gaps and dislocations of discourse, a conceptual and political vitality. Based on the notion of "schismatic sciences" offered by Etienne Balibar, I propose to recall a constellation of readings of the Marxist problem of social reproduction in which the contributions of Rosa Luxemburg and Louis Althusser converge, interrogated through the questions posed by feminist and anti-imperialist Marxisms.

Keywords: Social Reproduction, Imperialism, Schismatic Theories, Feminism, Symptomatic Reading

I: Schismatic Sciences for a Liminal Present

None of the predictions that many theorists sketched out in the early 2020s, driven by fascination or horror, are likely to come true. Neither disaster nor redemption seem yet to find their moment in the agonizing decline of an imperialist barbarism that became the norm decades ago. What is almost impossible to deny, however, is that the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt the final blow to a tendency that since the 1980s had dominated the left-wing intellectual field: a renunciation of the question of social totality, and the complexity of the multiple regimes of materiality and temporality.

Outside of the dynamics within academia, the logics of the internal development of theoretical processes or the specific concerns of its intellectual communities, it is practically impossible today, for a thinking that claims to be critical, to renounce the task of inscribing the processes

it seeks to illuminate in the broader question of social totality and the horizon of historical transformation. Over and above the vicissitudes of theory, it is the historical conjuncture itself that raises the question.

In his recent writings and interventions, Alvaro García Linera speaks of the opening of a *liminal time* in our present. A hermeneutic schism associated with the "collapse of the predictive horizon of society" in which we must also read the "divergence of the elites", the fragilization and fragmentation of the ideological unity of late capitalism, strained from inside.¹

A revitalized vocation based on a return to Marx's writings may no longer be unthinkable. After decades of the de-Marxification of the social sciences, philosophy and the so-called humanities, and after the multiple attempts to replace every category, whose resonances would bring back the echoes of the "totalitarianism" of theory, it seems that the time has come to pose once again the question of the links between ontology and history, the universal and the singular.²

Of course, there is no guarantee that this concern itself will give rise to a body of theory capable of posing the proper questions concerning

1. Álvaro García Linera, "Tiempo histórico liminal", *JacobinLat* (January, 2021)

2 The process of effacement of the Marxist component can be clearly read in the vicissitudes of the reception of the work of various thinkers linked to Althusser. A very significant case is that of Pêcheux, whose contributions, stripped of Marxism, would give rise to the tradition of discourse analysis known as the "French school". In this sense, Maldidier's reading of the so-called "third moment of Pecheuxian writing", which is usually characterized as a theoretical shift (overcoming) resulting from the abandonment of old political dogmatisms, is very illustrative: « Dès la seconde moitié des années 1970 apparaissent en France les premiers craquements, les prémisses de la crise qui aboutit à un véritable retournement de la conjoncture théorique vers 1980. Une crise qui, en France, est peut-être d'abord et surtout, crise de la politique, avec la rupture du Programme Commun en 1977. Cette fracture va de pair avec la dévalorisation du politique, la mise en cause des positivités et des cohérences globalisantes. Le repli sur le privé, le retour du sujet dessinent un horizon nouveau. La crise n'épargne pas le champ de la linguistique où la critique des linguistiques formelles ouvre sur le déferlement, longtemps retardé, il est vrai en France, de la pragmatique anglo-saxonne, l'engouement pour les linguistiques de l'énonciation, les approches textuelles, la lecture pandialogique d'un Bakhtine soudain redécouvert. » « La "rectification" touche au principe même de la grande construction théorique. Elle met à mal le fantasme de totalité. Le projet de démonter les mécanismes de l'interpellation, de débusquer le narcissisme du sujet débouche en fin de compte sur la double forclusion du sujet et de l'histoire. Tant sur le plan individuel que sur le plan de l'histoire, la machine ne fait pas de place aux failles et aux ratés. Le sujet est trop bien assujéti, l'idéologie dominante domine trop bien. La singularité du sujet, tout comme celle de l'événement, sont exclues de cette construction qui finalement reste dans la double maîtrise de l'Homme et de l'Histoire. Dans la clôture du sens. » Denise Maldidier, "L'inquiétude du discours", *Semen*, no.8, (1993).

our present, but the conjuncture seems to have opened at least the possibility of such a development.

But with this opportunity comes the crucial question of what we have lost. We cannot pretend that it is enough simply to cite various fragments from Marx to magically recover in an instant the illumination of his concepts.

To produce Marxist theory today is to inhabit what remains of theory. The classic question: “what is it to read?”, acquires today a new density. When reading old texts, we are forced to pose the question of the conditions of our current reading and our conditions are those of loss, of a political defeat that is constantly denied in the contemporary theories that remain, blind to their increasing political weakness, their theoretical impoverishment and the deactivation of their critical capacities. We must read together the losses and the survivals of the phenomenal twist that marked the heritage of Marxism in the 1980s and which Balibar managed to characterize as no one else could, in “The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser”:

It seems important now to deny that there was intellectual activity—therefore productivity—within Marxism, not only illusions. Marxist intellectuals, and especially communist intellectuals, must be portrayed as either passive victims or impostors, the mere instruments of a gigantic conspiracy. They should not have been able to think by themselves, just as Marxism and communism should not have had any real history, except the history of a catastrophic imposture. (...) Intellectuals might pay a high price for accepting this amnesiac view of their own history, just as Marxist intellectuals paid a high price indeed for their distorted view of the philosophical and cultural background of their own ideas.³

The virulence of the silencing of Louis Althusser's work is symptomatic. And it is to the same extent that its revisiting reveals itself to be strategic

3. Étienne Balibar “The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser” In *The Althusserian Legacy*. Ed. Ann Kaplan and, Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1993), 2.

today. To read Althusser is to produce once again the question he asked himself when reading Marx: what is it to read?

But how to read Althusser today? Our reading can no longer be pure repetition, among other things, because, one of the most deactivating operations carried out on Marxism in recent decades has been its museification, its becoming merely part of the history of ideas, merely an ancestor, an object of caricature or blind veneration. This is seen not only in works devoted exclusively to exegesis, but, also, in certain ways of bringing Marx to the stage, entirely literary ways with no heuristic impulse, no curiosity informed by the present, without even poetic experimentation.

Our challenge nowadays is still and especially to read in theory its living capacity to measure “a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real”.⁴

Marxist theory for the coming years cannot be made if we lose between our fingers the delicate thread that was suspended a few decades ago. That thread, which we must grasp in order to find the way is its immanent tension or its internal dislocation. This supposes to be suspicious of any operation of disciplining thought in its internal agitation, even of those operations of closure that are performed in the name of old tactical debates, supposedly resolved by victory or defeat.

Far from the repetition of a dead, inoffensive lyric, it is necessary today to take up Marxist conceptuality at its critical point, in its internal tension. We must take Marxist concepts in their precise “schismatic condition”.

“Schismatic sciences,” says Balibar, such as Marx’s and Freud’s, are determined in their constitution by the way in which they are inscribed in the conflict whose knowledge they represent. They are not spectators of an object but rather stakeholders in a *conflictive process*.⁵ These are sciences, says Balibar, quoting Althusser, in which words fight against themselves as enemies. What does this mean?

We may read here the deep foundation of a materialist epistemology that rests on the permanent dis-identification between concept and discourse. Isn't that what Althusser tells us in *Lire le Capital*?

4. Louis Althusser “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy” In Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*. (London-NY: NLB, 1970), 17.

5. Etienne Balibar « Tais-toi encore, Althusser ! » *Les Temps Modernes*. 509, (décembre 1988)

Concepts act, they work in words but they separate themselves from them, insofar as concepts tend towards the true and words tend towards history. Of course, there is no other way for concepts to exist than in discourses (at least if we do not profess faith in the transparency of language, characteristic, for example, of analytic philosophy with its concern with disambiguating categories). Our language in its material consistency is inevitably pregnant with ideology, but , the conceptual dimension of theoretical discourse is an activity that does not cease to separate itself from discursive expression, it inhabits it uncomfortably, polemically.

Balibar, thus, reads in this light the activity of crossing-out that Althusser was obliged to undertake to allow conceptuality to unfold against the inertia of the discourses from which it inevitably had to draw. The trajectory of Althusser's writing, which advanced by cancelling itself out, as Balibar writes, with a *non-null effect*, was a strategy of unfolding in time a contradictory unity of words and their crossing out, in order to say what he had to say about Marxism and its crisis. It presupposes an activity which, by exposing the non-truth of words, constitutes the only way of access to the truth they are able to communicate to us. This activity of writing does not dissolve into the characterization of a style or a tactic to overcome the inanity of the *event* in discourse. It is, instead, a decisive philosophical affirmation: the operation of the non-null trace, says Althusser in *Lénine et la philosophie*⁶, is the way of inscribing history in philosophy, as the void of a distance taken that, in the form of dislocation or mismatch, traces the space always full of philosophy. But this has another consequence for our task, the consequence of indicating to us a horizon for theoretical work on the basis of the following statement: it is because they *exist* in a state of conflict that concepts can aspire to objectivity. This *materialist position* poses a conflictive, agonal, contradictory or divided conception of objectivity that offers a demarcation criterion to distinguish the zones of theoretical discourses in which conceptuality hinders, from within and through perpetual combat, the centripetal, unifying, homogenizing forces that characterize ideological work.

By the 1970s Althusser conceived Marxist theory as totally involved in workers' movement struggles, in its discoveries and in its *lacunae* and

6. Louis Althusser *Lenin et la philosophie* (Paris: Maspero. 1969)

contradictions.⁷ This statement has often been identified as a mark of the abandonment of Althusserian theoreticism after the events of 1968. This historicist and relativist reading, which assumes that political materiality immediately "touches" theoretical materiality, is frankly opposed by Althusser, from the beginning to the end of his days. Instead, it is a question of rigorously formulating the question of an objectivity capable of containing, in its immanence, the alterity of political logic. And this question has been the driving force of his reading of Marxist theory since the early 1960s. Thus, we find in *Lire le Capital* an often-overlooked expression which nevertheless has a profound philosophical lesson:

What philosophers who are able to pose *Capital* the question of its object and of the specific difference that distinguishes Marx's object from the object of Political Economy, classical or modern, have read *Capital* and posed it this question?...The only philosophers ready to take *Capital* for an object worthy of a philosopher's concern could only be Marxist militants...⁸

It is the "theoreticist" Althusser who produces a theoretical necessity into which the political enters, not to be subsumed and co-opted by the cognitive objective, but to mark theory, to divide it in itself, so that it cannot advance without assuming this polemical, agonal condition of its object; or, so that it assumes it at the price of a tension or even a rupture.

If this is so, if the Althusserian gesture is still able to address us today, if it can take us by surprise with "strange familiarity," it is because it involves an activity of knowledge production that exceeds its own discourse and touches something of the *real* order of theory. *Political* is the practice of reading the *real* in a theoretical discourse, and that is why it is a substantive theoretical statement that finds its best readers among militants.

It is precisely here that I would like to pose my question.

7. Louis Althusser *Écrits philosophiques et politiques* (Paris: Stock-IMEC, 1994), 371-386

8. Louis Althusser "The Object of Capital" In Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London-NY: NLB 1970), 76-77

Who are the militants who today are revisiting the problem of the link between structure and conjuncture, the universal and the singular, the part and the whole, recovering in their debates the abandoned Marxist question of historical causality and dialectics? Who defines, nowadays, the urgent time of conjunctural questions as the pulse of a theoretical inquiry capable of taking up the philosophical problem of historical causality and social totality that many forms of left-wing thinking and political theory abandoned in the 1980s?

These militants, capable of reading the present in Marxist theory, are today's feminist militants. The feminist movement with its complexity and heterogeneity; even though, or perhaps *because* it cannot be thought of as a *political subject*, but rather as a process of the rarefaction of the conjuncture, a counter-tendency of transindividual composition that takes shape in the time of an interval, the time of the crisis of Marxism, as Althusser enunciated it, with all its promising ambivalence. Feminist theoretical practices, crisscrossed by tendencies and countertendencies, alliances and heterogeneities are today involved in a process of practical and collective thinking that brings together (massive) concrete struggles, processes of transformation from within institutions, reticular,-territorial and at the same time international forms of organization, with an impulse of genuine theoretical curiosity (that overflows the established frameworks for the production and circulation of theory and knowledge). This real and singular *conjunction* of theoretical and political practices can be the occasion for a resumption of a materialist interrogation about historical causality, non-contemporary plural conception of time and a transindividual approach to the articulation between the psychic and the collective.

Whether the concrete and actually existing feminisms - or at least a part of them - are capable of taking on this task is not something we can establish here. What we can state is that it is certainly not a question of feminism "in general" (as an ideal unity) nor a question of some particular feminist theories, but about the very *controversies* (without authors) that traverse the feminist field tracing a program of work that constitutes, I

dare say, the resumption of the Marxist battle by other means, the active and productive presence of an *impasse* that sounds hollow.⁹

It is the very *partisan* and *peripheral* condition of feminist *controversies* that make it possible to understand the current feminist ability to embody the *conjunction* of the struggles and suffering of discarded human beings in the present crisis of humanist-capitalism with a singular position in theoretical field, a specific “point of view” organized around the question of the *duration* of the present order.

It is in this specific sense that feminist developments offer a surface for a new detour of on the part of the Althusserian reading of Marxist theory, one that promises a significant re-commencement, especially around the reformulation of the problem of social reproduction and the controversies raised around it. It is not just a matter of describing late-capitalist social formations, but a matter of restarting the profoundly theoretical work of materialist dialectics, capable of developing the proper questions for the struggles of the twenty-first century.

It should be pointed out here that there is no coincidence in placing this *partisan-controversial* theoretical potency around the question of *social reproduction* and that it is in relation to it that we can read the traces of the Marxist legacy interrupted in the seventies and perhaps recovered today in the feminist debates.

As Balibar conceives it, the concept of social reproduction produces the ambivalent effect of an opening of Marxist theory at the very moment in which, literally, Althusser does nothing more than show its limits. This specificity is immediately linked, in Balibar’s reading, to what he considers as Althusser’s fundamental ontological proposal: that which

9 As Mara Montanaro has maintained this singular feminism singularly placed: “South American feminists know very well that living a feminist life means above all to be interested in the experiences of multiple subordination that give a central place to the way in which race is determined by gender, to the way in which gender is racialized and, finally, to how these movements are linked to the persistence and social and political transformation of a multiplicity of geographical spaces (...) Latin American feminists are capable of repoliticizing feminism, as Françoise Vergès would say.” Mara Montaro, “La revolución que viene del sur. Entrevista a Mara Montanaro”. Entrevista realizada por Carla Biguliak y por Jules Fevre. Caracaj. Flechas de sentido. (9th, March, 2020, my translation)

identifies the notions of "struggle" and "existence",¹⁰ where we can find the materialist notion of overdetermined contradiction. As Balibar notes, in terms of the question of reproduction, Althusser conceives the perseverance of a structure as the *necessary effect of an irreducible contingency*, which is to say, that it is in the nature of structurality that the *chance* of a crisis resides. Balibar shows that, insofar as Althusser critically unfolds the complexity of the Marxist *topique* and advances into the superstructural relations, the "structuralist" argument turns on itself, by virtue of the *primacy of the relations*, to achieve a conception of structure which, far from being offered as a *primary form*, is conceived as the effect of contradictory relations.¹¹

To understand the importance of this idea, we may recall here that while reading *Capital*, Althusser argues that Marx's scientificity rests on the distinction between *two* different problems:

This attitude may be paradoxical, but Marx insists on it in categorical terms as the absolute condition of possibility of his theory of history; it reveals the existence of *two problems*, distinct in their disjoint unity. There is a theoretical problem which must be posed and resolved in order to explain the mechanism by which history has produced as its result the contemporary capitalist mode of production. But at the same time there is another absolutely distinct problem which must be posed and resolved, in order to understand that this result is indeed a *social* mode of production, that this result is precisely a form of *social* existence and not just any form of existence: this second problem is the object of the theory in *Capital* — and not for one moment is it ever confused with the first problem.¹²

But, once this question is posed, Althusser devotes all his efforts to demonstrating the impurity of this distinction — its *disjunctive unity* — by

10. Balibar, "Tais-toi...". This statement can also be explicitly found in Louis Althusser, *Positions* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1976) 63, 148 among others.

11. Balibar, "Tais-toi...".

12. Althusser, "The Object of Capital", 65

showing, as Balibar suggests, that it is the variations that explain the invariance of structure as *duration* (and not inversely), noting that the play of a structural *combinatory* is subject to the contingent logic of *combination*. He first enunciates it in the category of overdetermination itself, but simultaneously deploys it as a theory of the duration of a concrete social formation, that is, as a theory of its reproduction.¹³ We know that Althusser does not stop there either, but only by continuing to draw new philosophical conclusions that will lead him to aleatory materialism, supported by the thesis that Vittorio Morfino calls the *primacy of encounter over form* and of *relation over its elements*.¹⁴ We could say that these theses are the philosophical translation of what Michel Pêcheux in the seventies conceived as the materialist key to the Althusserian theory of reproduction: *the primacy of struggle over classes and the primacy of the unconscious over consciousness*,¹⁵ recalling also that this theory of reproduction is precisely the point at which Marxism and psychoanalysis meet, in their condition of *schismatic sciences*.

It is in this sense that I suggest that the theory of social reproduction allows us to deploy by other means, the concept of *décalage*¹⁶ that can be read as a division produced in theoretical discourse by the effect of the transition of knowledge to the singular of the concrete case. It is in this sense that Althusser finds in *Capital* a practical theory of *reading*.

Capital exactly measures a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real, inscribed in its *structure*, a distance and a dislocation such as to make their own effects themselves illegible, and the illusion of an immediate reading of them the ultimate apex of their effects: *fetishism*.¹⁷

This positive statement of the specificity of Marxist theoretical practice is the result of a predisposition, a state of suspicion.

13. Louis Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: PUF, 2011)

14. Vittorio Morfino, *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory Between Spinoza and Althusser*. (NY: Brill, 2014)

15. Michel Pêcheux, *Les vérités de La Palice*. (Paris: Maspero, 1975)

16. Louis Althusser *For Marx* (NY- London: Verso, 2005) 17

17. Louis Althusser "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy" In Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London-NY: NLB 1970), 17

Only since Freud have we begun to suspect what listening, and hence what speaking (and keeping silent), *means* (*vent dire*); that this 'meaning' (*vouloir dire*) of speaking and listening reveals beneath the innocence of speech and hearing the culpable depth of a second, *quite different* discourse, the discourse of the unconscious. I dare maintain that only since Marx have we had to begin to suspect what, in theory at least, *reading* and hence writing means (*vent dire*).¹⁸

As every informed reader knows, this problem constitutes a central question in Althusser's thought from his early Marxist writings, such as "*Sur la dialectique materialiste*"¹⁹, to the late reflections on the singular-universal condition of theoretical regularities, in "The Only Materialist Tradition. Part 1: Spinoza".²⁰

I want to underline this idea: we can find, in this way, the enigma of *reproduction* at the heart of structural causality, as a twist of theoretical discourse that exposes the schismatic activity of theory that opens it up from its very immanence.

And it is there, in the suspended links of this material dialectic, where Marx's legacy opens up to our current theoretical debates and to the critical thinking of our historical conjuncture. And I believe that this twist that Balibar underlines in Althusserian theoretical discourse is what makes it at once unbearable for its time — the time of a neoliberalization of left-wing thinking — and simultaneously leaves it open, both suspended and disposed for our reading. It is the point of non-contemporaneity or anachronism of the Althusserian problematic, the index of the non-relation that connects the theoretical conjuncture of the 1960s with those of the post-1980s. And I believe that it is of the most

18. *Ibid*, 16

19. Althusser, *For Marx*

20. Louis Althusser, "The only materialist tradition. Part 1: Spinoza" [1985] trans. by Ted Stolze, In *The new Spinoza*, ed. by Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press 1997). I point out as a hint that one could read in this sense the Althusserian intuition with respect to Spinoza's theory of the three genera of knowledge, as a search capable of accounting for the work of immanent causality in theoretical discourse, in its transit towards the concrete.

strategic value for the development of the critique of our conjuncture that we place ourselves within that *impasse*.

Focusing the question of reproduction, we reach a sort of *liminal space* where a specific temporality of theory is opened to the chance of history. There, the theoretical development not only enables but also claims for the political analysis of the concrete situation. The comprehension of the concrete of a social formation in the struggles of its existence, called by Althusser as the specific “reproduction point of view” in the volume *Sur la reproduction*,²¹ is a necessary detour for the development of the materialist position in theory. And I will add that it is, in short, another way of thinking the question of the presence of structure in its effects, as an *absent cause*.²²

In this sense, I suggest that the hollow space of the “point of view of reproduction” is indicated in the writings prior to 1968, in the terms of a conceptual hierarchization of the notion of *conditions of the situation* -e.g., “*Sur la dialectique materialiste*”²³ - which maintains an immanent relation both to overdetermination and to the conception of plural, non-contemporary and unequally articulated historical time.²⁴

21. Louis Althusser *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), 82

22. “The present of one level is, so to speak, the absence of another, and this co-existence of a ‘presence’ and absences is simply the effect of the structure of the whole in its articulated decentricity. What is thus grasped as absences in a localized presence is precisely the non-localization of the structure of the whole, or more accurately, the type of effectivity peculiar to the structure of the whole on its ‘levels’ (which are themselves structured) and on the ‘elements’ of those levels. What the impossibility of this essential section reveals, even in the absences it shows up negatively, is the form of historical existence peculiar to a social formation arising from a determinate mode of production, the peculiar type of what Marx calls the development process of the determinate mode of production. And this process, too, is what Marx, discussing the capitalist mode of production in *Capital*, calls the type of *intertwining of the different times* (and here he only mentions the economic level), i.e., the type of ‘dislocation’ (*décalage*) and torsion of the different temporalities produced by the different levels of the structure, the complex combination of which constitutes the peculiar time of the process’s development.” Althusser, “The Errors of Classical Economics: An Outline for a Concept of Historical Time”, In Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London-NY: NLB 1970), 105

23. Althusser *For Marx*, 208-209

24. “Overdetermination designates the following essential quality of contradiction: the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole. This is not a univocal ‘situation’. It is not just its situation ‘in principle’ (the one it occupies in the hierarchy of instances in relation to the determinant instance: in society, the economy) nor just its situation ‘in fact’ (whether, in the phase under consideration, it is dominant or subordinate) but the relation of this situation in fact to this situation in principle, that is, the very relation which makes of this situation in fact a ‘variation’ of the — ‘invariant’ — structure, in dominance, of the totality” Althusser *For Marx*, 209.

But it is not a question, here, of suggesting Althusser as an inventor of this materialist causality, nor even less of the Marxist problem of reproduction. It is not even a question of finding him in the originality of his readings, but of making a counter-move and recognizing him as a materialist reader. In relation to the problem of social reproduction, Althusser's contributions teach us how to read. That is his inheritance, and like any inheritance, it offers us the possibility of a task that has something to do with the future, because it allows us to take a step backwards.

II: A Detour Through the (Schismatic) Problem of Social Reproduction

The question of social reproduction is today strongly revitalized by various feminist theorists and entails a peculiar polemic way of producing theory: it is achieved and shaped through an agonistic collective activity, built on debates and combats within Marx's and Freud's heritages²⁵, between feminism and Marxism²⁶, between different approaches to materialist thinking²⁷; with and against psychoanalysis²⁸, among other controversies. According to what has been said in the previous pages, it is possible to conceive that this controversial and schismatic consistency is not an ornament or a mere matter of style, but is constitutive of an adequate approach to the problem of social reproduction. And this is so because, as we have read in Balibar and Althusser, the question of social reproduction is a recursive question that confronts theory against its own

25. Michele Barret, *Women's Oppression Today*. (London-NY: Verso, 1989); Shulamith Firestone *The dialectic of the sex*. (NY: The women Press, 1970); Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner. "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 15: 38-404, 1989.)

26. Heidi Hartmann, "The unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" (*Capital and Class*, 3: 1-33, 1979); Cinzia Arruza *Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, trans. Marie Lagatta and Dave Kelly (Wales, UK: Merlin Books, 2013); Silvia Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*. (PM Press, 2020)

27. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History". (*New Left review* 56, 2009: 97-117); Ashley Bohrer, *Marxism and Intersectionality. Race, gender, Class and sexuality under contemporary capitalism*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 2020); Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural" (*Social Text*, No. 52/53, Autum- Winter, 1997), 265-277

28. Delphi, Christine. 1999. *L'ennemi principal. Tome I. Economie du patriarcat*. Paris: Syllepse. ; Merteuil, Morgane. 2017. "Le travail du sexe contre le sexe : pour un anayse materialiste du desir": "Le travail du sexe contre le travail. In *Pour un féminisme de la totalité*. Paris: Periode- Editions Amsterdam.

limits. This liminal condition is usually presented as a work on the boundaries of Marxist theory, but this is only the theoretical indication of an epistemological problem that does not concern the specific limitations of one or another theory but the borders of the theoretical itself (the frontiers between theory and politics, between ontology and history, between science and philosophy...).

In "How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," published in *Viewpoint Magazine*, Bhattacharya states that:

Social Reproduction theorists rightly want to develop further what Marx leaves unexamined. That is, what are the *implications* of labor power being produced outside the circuit of commodity production, yet being essential to it? (...) What other social relationships and institutions are comprised by the circuit of social reproduction? ²⁹

What Bhattacharya suggests is that the reproductive “point of view” allows us to take seriously that “there is already intimation of a *complex totality* when considering Marx’s ‘hidden abode of production’ and its structuring impulse on the surface ‘economy’”³⁰. And this could help us in developing in a non-schematic way Marx’s *topique* towards a myriad of social relations:

... a wider social whole, sustained and co-produced by human labor in contradictory yet constitutive ways. If we direct our attention to those deep veins of embodying social relations, in any actual society today, how can we fail to find the chaotic, multiethnic, multigendered, differently abled subject that is the global working class³¹

29. Tithi Bhattacharya, “How not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class” (*Viewpoint Magazine*, 2015)

30. *Ibid.*, my emphasize

31. Bhattacharya, “How not to Skip...”

From these passages, a few ideas should be emphasized. Social reproduction cannot be thought of in terms of an individual scene, an enterprise, a house, a family; interrogated as a whole problem, it not only excludes the scheme of individual reproduction but also excludes the scheme of a homogeneous social formation: its subject is no longer a homogeneous and identitarian working class but "the chaotic, multi-ethnic, multigrade, multi-capacity subject that is the global working class."³² So, the problem of social reproduction does not "leave the factory" to find in the home a separate space of pure reproduction (neither subsidiary nor prior to), but it requires to completely dismantle the schematic frontier between production and reproduction,³³ in order to:

...address the relationship between *exploitation* (normally tethered to class) and *oppression* (normally understood through gender, race, etc.) and reflect on whether this division adequately expresses the complications of an *abstract level* of analysis where we forge our conceptual equipment, and a *concrete level* of analysis, i.e., the historical reality where we apply those tools.³⁴

It is in relation to these principles that feminist theorists of social reproduction would reach the limits of Marxist theory, pointing out its gaps and blind spots. However, we may say that is necessary to go one step back in order to go two steps forward and find that it is Rosa Luxemburg, in *The Accumulation of Capital*,³⁵ who produces the reading of

32. "What other social relationships and institutions are comprised by the circuit of social reproduction? Public education and health care systems, leisure facilities in the community, pensions and benefits for the elderly all compose together those historically determined "habits." Similarly, generational replacement through childbirth in the kin-based family unit, although dominant, is not the only way a labor force may be replaced. Slavery and immigration are two of the most common ways in which capital has replaced labor within national boundaries." *Ibid.*

33. Which implies in the long term to reject the regionalization of other social relations, while it blurs not only the philosophical demarcation between the biological and the cultural but it also tensions the national frontiers of a social formation, since it involves the logics of slavery and migration as diverse strategies of reproduction

34. Thitti Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory", In *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, Ed. Thiti Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 3

35. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* [1913], trans. Agnes Schwarzschild. (London-NY: Routledge. 2003

Marx that places the problem of reproduction in the remarkably precise terms of a constitutive *schismatic* theoretical practice: read and developed by Luxemburg, the question of reproduction is the place where Marxist theoretical discourse itself twists and moves from the abstract theoretical schema of the *mode of production*, to the knowledge of the concrete processes of *social formations*.

More precisely, Rosa Luxemburg demonstrates in *The Accumulation of Capital* that when we pose the problem of global social reproduction, the schema that envisages a closed, homogeneously capitalist economy whose productive forces are entirely capital and labor is no longer sufficient. From the *point of view of reproduction*, and particularly of extended reproduction, the capitalist system appears in its course as a *decentered process* that leads us to the question of the concrete historical formations in which reproduction takes shape, where the schema of a pure-conceptual capitalist society -developed in its homogeneous and contemporaneous temporality- breaks down and calls for a non-capitalist "exterior" and non-capitalist productive forces intertwined in a complex historical totality which claims for an heterogeneous concept of time.

Luxemburg appeals to suggestive images and metaphors such as the "circle" and the "spiral" to expose to the kind of movement of thought that goes from the abstract to the concrete, gaining in complexity (cf. Luxemburg 2003, 89). What she argues is that it is *because* of its own expansive logic, that capital can advance only if a non-capitalist zone of the world exists. Thus, the question of accumulation and the expanded reproduction of capital claim for a singular reading that takes us from Volume I of *Capital* to Volume III and to the preparing manuscripts generated by Marx in the 1860s and 1870s.

In this sense, it can be said that Luxemburg performs a symptomatic reading of Marx that shows the way in which he was captured by the schema of classical political economy and dominated by the polemic with Smith, which limits his consideration of reproduction by establishing as a starting assumption the exclusive domain of plain capitalist relations in a social formation. However, the characterization of the extended capitalist reproduction process that can be found in the preparatory fragments of Volume III, indicates the path to an opening movement by suggesting that the scheme of extended reproduction refers

in its relations to heterogeneous circumstances, different from or “exterior” to the pure development of capitalist productive forces:

The decisive fact is that the surplus value cannot be realized by sale either to workers or to capitalists, but only if it is sold to such social organizations or strata whose own mode of production is not capitalistic.³⁶

And:

Since capitalist production can develop fully only with complete access to all territories and climes, it can no more confine itself to the natural resources and productive forces of the temperate zone than it can manage with white labour alone. Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the white man cannot work. It must be able to mobilize world labour power without restriction in order to utilize all productive forces of the globe—up to the limits imposed by a system of producing surplus value.³⁷

I am interested in underlining this movement in which Luxemburg, by reading the *lacunae* in Marx and the finite, limited, incomplete condition of his theory, deploys a theoretical practice that can well be considered a putting into action of what Althusser would consider a proper reading of Marx's rigorously materialist “problematic.” It is a critical analysis that starts from a question enabled by the formal theory of the capitalist mode of production (i.e., by the *abstract* level of its theoretical concepts) which, in order to deploy its theoretical power, must open up to another level of problems, a dimension that no longer responds to the abstract universality of the theory of the mode of production but demands a concrete question about historical “cases”, a question about *social formations* actually given in history. At this concrete level, the two premises of Marxist abstraction are revealed. The first one is the assumption of a society entirely regulated by pure capitalist relations. A homogeneous society with no outside, no

36. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 332

37. *Ibid*, 343

otherness. The second one consists in supposing the complexity of concrete social relations as entirely traceable to the capital/labour productive forces, which implies a concept of reproduction of the social whole fully translatable into these two categories to the extent that they participate in constant capital, variable capital or consumed surplus value.

Beyond the various critiques that have been made to Luxemburg's theory of imperialism but, above all, leaving aside the clumsiness of rushing the discussion of political strategy to cancel the specific reading of the theoretical arguments, I am interested in underlining the practical move made by Luxemburg in this book. Two consequences follow from it. The first one, of an epistemic nature, allows us to see that Rosa produces a theory of imperialism which provides elements for the Marxist theory of history. Fundamentally, a complex and differential conception of historical time that aims to think the articulation of diverse genealogies under the efficacy of capitalist subsumption.³⁸ This plural and articulated theory of time, in which the productive forces of diverse modes of production coexist, also implies a temporal dislocation that tensions Luxemburg's own words, which, on several occasions, reflect a positivist or evolutionist ideology; for, what ultimately follows from her concrete discoveries is that the possibility of the "development" of capitalism, on the logic of the extended reproduction of capital, requires the existence of "archaic", or as Luxemburg puts it, "precapitalist" modes of production. On the other hand, she shows that if we want to think about the extended reproduction of capital, that is, the very *existence* of capitalism in its *duration*, not only do we have to go from the abstract theory of capitalist mode of production to the concrete question of social formations, but we also have to go beyond the imaginary scene of the English economy understood as an abstract model closed in on itself, to the scene of the English economy

38. "From the very beginning, the forms and laws of capitalist production aim to comprise the entire globe as a store of productive forces. Capital, impelled to appropriate productive forces for purposes of exploitation, ransacks the whole world, it procures its means of production from all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary, by force, from all levels of civilization and from all forms of society. The problem of the material elements of capitalist accumulation, far from being solved by the material form of the surplus value that has been produced, takes on quite a different aspect. It becomes necessary for capital progressively to dispose ever more fully of the whole globe, to acquire an unlimited choice of means of production, with regard to both quality and quantity, so as to find productive employment for the surplus value it has realized" Luxemburg *The Accumulation of Capital*, 338).

as the headquarters of *imperialism*; which is to say, understood as a concrete heterogeneous social formation where capitalist relations subsume non-capitalist ones. But Luxemburg goes one step further: it is not only that there is no theory of *imperialism* without a decentered *topique* and a complex conception of time, but that there is no theory of the reproduction of capital either.

From “the point of view of reproduction”, the image of the circular space of depurated, entirely capitalist social relations of production (i.e. a reproduction at a vegetative rate that depends on the pure impulse of capital and the biological reproduction of labour power) is, as Rosa Luxemburg shows, *abstract*. And it is the immanent theoretical force of Marxist theory of capitalist mode of production that demands a shift and a transition to the *concrete* of social formations where new complexities arise.³⁹

So, there is a second consequence of Luxemburg's work which has to do with the philosophical or dialectical dimension of Marxist theory of reproduction, where a kind of torsion or *schisma* can be recognize. In this torsion, the spatial metaphor (infrastructure/superstructure) explodes into time, into the complex history of multiple genealogies. But her theoretical movement is not about a sort of “historization”, it is about a deep comprehension of the materialist critique of epistemological idealism which involves a singular relation between the *abstract* and the *concrete*, between structures and formations, levels and processes, regimes of materiality and regimes of temporality, within a complex approach to the *real* of history.

This movement, which shows that the capitalist mode of production only lasts in a world with non-capitalist relations, is read by Rosa Luxemburg in the tension between Volume I of *Capital* and Marx's late writings. Some of these have recently been translated for the first time

39. This is also an interesting contribution to current feminist debates that, some times, get caught up in contrived empiricist distributions of productive and reproductive labour and of “the cultural” and “economics.” In this sense, e.g. Cinzia Arruza and Thitti Bhattacharya “Teoría de la Reproducción Social. Elementos fundamentales para un feminismo marxista” (*Archivos de Historia del Movimiento Obrero y la Izquierda*. VIII, n° 16, 2020) 37-69; Silvia Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*. (NY: PM Press, 2020) or Judith Butler. “Merely Cultural” (*Social Text*, No. 52/53, Winter, 1997), 265-277 and Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. (London-Verso, 2013), 237-254.

into Spanish under the guidance of Álvaro García Linera, precisely searching the schismatic Marx: a non-Eurocentric, non-abstract, non-evolutionary Marx against Marx. In the volume published as *Comunidad, Nacionalismos y Capital. Textos inéditos*, we find the so-called writings of 61-63, where García Linera finds in the process of real subsumption of non-capitalist productive forces by capitalist relations of production and in the diverse temporalities explored by Marx, "a conception of historical development that differs antagonistically from the linear, schematic and sometimes racist schemes with which the representatives of the Second International characterized historical development and which were later continued by Stalin in his famous text *Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism* and by all the Marxist manuals".⁴⁰ Silvia Federici has also worked on this idea, thinking about the consolidation processes of the family wage and the sexual division of labour as a real subsumption of reproductive labour, in the context of the passage from absolute to relative surplus-value at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Luxemburg allows us to articulate the two modes of real subsumption — of gendered labour and of racialized labour — in the process of the consolidation of imperialism.

It is important to underline, here, that Luxemburg's merit is less that of criticizing or rewriting Marx than that of having understood that the problem of reproduction requires a *peripheral* or *borderline* "point of view". And this is interesting and paradoxical because, to some extent, Luxemburg remains halfway in this effort to push Marxist theory to its limits, as has been pointed out by some criticisms formulated from Latin American thought to the theories of imperialism. But what she achieves is that it is the very problem of reproduction itself which claims for a *decentered topique* and, therefore, it is a privileged zone for thinking about the "schismatic" condition of Marxist theory, understood as a science which does not limit itself to taking note of the complexity of the real, in a philosophical way, but which interrogates the ontological condition of

40. Álvaro García Linera, In Marx, Karl (2018) *Comunidad, Nacionalismos y Capital. Textos inéditos*. éd. Álvaro García Linera. (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2018), 23-24, my translation.

41. Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage...*

this complexity by means of a detour through the *concrete* conditions of real processes. And it does so in the form of a torsion that compromises its own discourse, forcing it to move forward by separating from itself, performing the discourse of its own discursive limits.

III: Schism, *Impasse* and Recommencement

The reproduction question detects a *schism* in Marxist theory. Developing it requires to read immanent tensions and inner agonal forces inhabiting Marxist theoretical discourse. But, if this practice of reading shows itself capable of making old texts “speak”, the possibility of such a reading does not rest on will; there are conjunctural conditions that impel or obstruct it. Well, it is in this sense that, today, animated by the strategic horizon and a political desire for the true, the concrete questions built within feminist theoretical controversies seem to be capable of placing the Marxist inheritance in its schismatic, uncomplete and therefore vital condition.

The questions and controversies which today traverse the field of critical feminism are located in the space of a historical *impasse* which is at the same time the suspended point, the *schism* of the crisis of Marxism. And that is why the kind of theoretical practice capable of traversing that impasse can't be but an heterogeneous and controversial composition of *partisan* approaches.

On the other hand, as suggested, this *schism* offers the index of the specific form that materialist theory assumes, in its aspiration to the truth of a *conflicting objectivity*. We have indicated it as a torsion and an insufficiency in Rosa Luxemburg's writings, a *décalage* that separates and connects the abstract theory of the capitalist mode of production with the concrete analysis of imperialist centre-periphery relations indicates the suspended horizon of our theories. But we can also read a recommencement of this impulse in the current controversies of the feminist field where the “schismatic” condition marks the theoretical activity and its polemical, controversial step in the intellectual conjuncture, weaving alliances and drawing demarcations.

On the one hand, we read it as the return of a question of historical totality and specially about the question of the nature of the relations between the whole and the parts, the abstract and the concrete and the structural causality. Such is the case of the Foreword of the book compiled by Titti Bachattarya, *Social Reproduction Theory Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, where Luise Vogel proposes the direction of the theoretical program that could make it possible to articulate in terms of the problem of what we could call *historical causality*, some contributions considered to be in conflict with each other: that of Social Reproduction Theory itself, with studies on *intersectionality* and other concrete analyses of singular social and subjective processes in the field of feminist studies. Vogel recalls the principle of differential and hierarchical articulation of the complex of differences, which allows not only to account for its connections, but also for its various indices of efficacy in the articulated whole, by rejecting “two dearly-held assumptions.”:

First, the assumption that the various dimensions of difference — for example, race, class, and gender — are comparable. Second, the implication that the various categories are equal in causal weight. (...) Our theoretical task would then be to focus on the specificities of each dimension and to develop an understanding of how it all fits — or does not fit —together.⁴²

It is by assuming the schismatic scene of feminist theoretical developments that Vogel opens up a position with respect to the non-empiricist way of understanding material and historical concrete processes and events.

Secondly, we may also read it in the terms of a research on the complex and plural consistency of historical temporality. In contributions, such as Cinzia Arruza’s “Gender as social temporality: Butler (and Marx)”, the agonistic theoretical movement appears to be raised in relation to a specific question of temporality and historical time concerning social reproduction. Arruza has posed a possible dialogue between Marxist studies on the problem of historical temporality and the subjective

⁴² Louise Vogel “Preface” In, Thiti Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*..., xi

temporality studied by queer theory, developing a critical reading of Judith Butler's works on subjective temporality and performativity, in order to restore the distinction between formal temporality (the processual dispositive of gender subjectivation) and concrete historical time (in the case of a specific social formation: that of imperialist consolidation in the so-called developed economies). If on the one hand, as we read in Vogel, the development of a finer conceptualization of historical causality would allow feminists to understand the way in which differences coalesce in their unequal efficacies; the postulation of the problem of temporality underlined by Arruzza would make the processual condition of that articulation thinkable in the long term of historical transformation, and to place within it the singular forms of subjectivation that constitute the concrete fleshing out of its superstructural relations and tendencies in determined social formations.

On the other hand, Butler's research on *identity* and *difference* tends to identify another level that involves a philosophical question about materiality regimes which are irreducible to historical formations, insofar that they suppose the ontological problem of *individuation* posed by Althusser in terms of the coincidence between "struggle" and "existence".⁴³ This question implies, for Balibar, a dialectical definition of identity in terms of division (or to put it in our present terms, of schismatic entities) that inhabits the very Marxist definition of human being given in his *Thesis VI on Feuerbach*, in terms of a *relational ontology*,⁴⁴ that is to say, abstracted from the specific forms that these relations adopt in concrete historical societies.⁴⁵ So, thirdly, we can also find a recommencement of Marxist deepest questions under the form of an argument about the relation between history and ontology regarding the philosophical question of dialectical materialism itself.

This detour through the feminist controversies concerning historical whole, structural causality, plural temporality and transindividual

43. On individuation as an object of ontology, cf. Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza politique. Le transindividuel* (Paris: PUF, 2018), and on Althusser ontological position, cf. Balibar, "Tais-toi..." (vide supra).

44. Etienne Balibar, *The philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London-New York: Verso, 1995).

45. I've analyzed this controversy between Judith Butler and Marxist feminist in "La manzana de la discordia. Hacia un feminismo transindividual" In, *Notas Materialistas. Para un Feminismo Transindividual*. Natalia Romé, ed. (Santiago de Chile: Doble Ciencia, 2021)

ontology, allows us to return to Althusser's intervention in Marxist heritage, in order to explore the ways in which current feminist theorization of reproduction could be thought of a recommencement of the impasse opened with his silencing. For this purpose, it is necessary to consider the political dimension of his intervention in the intellectual conjuncture and to trace the fine thread that connects his theoretical theses with the conditions of the concrete situation of his involvement within the crisis of Marxism.

Thus, it is worth remembering that Althusser's preoccupation for deploying the anti-humanist and anti-historicist imprint in his philosophical reading of Marx constitutes the specifically theoretical intervention of a specific struggle against two complementary ideological tendencies that outlined and shaped the dominant ideological in the early sixties up to nowadays (and I could say that is still the environment of dominant ideology): humanitarianism and technocracy. The entire theoretical effort of his posthumous volume, *Sur la reproduction*, mostly written in 1969, is organized in terms of demonstrating the profound connection between a way of reading Marx — more precisely a way of understanding the unity between relations of production and productive forces — and a way of drawing demarcations in the field of ideological struggle, assuming the political-strategic consequences that derive from this. Briefly, Althusser's concern in developing the theory of social reproduction is due to his resistance against the stalking of the economist-humanist ideology that permanently threatens Marxist thought in its theoretical and political forms.

As he explicitly poses, regarding the conception of reproduction, the affirmation of the *primacy of the relations of production over productive forces* divides the history of Marxist political movement, on one side it places Bernstein, Kautsky and Stalin; on the other Lenin and Mao. The theoretical understanding of this political demarcation demands an immense development that lies in the conceptual distinction between a mode of production and a social formation and the connected consideration of the temporal plurality of social formations, where there is never a unique mode of production.⁴⁶

46. Louis Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, 240-248

This recalls Luxemburg's idea regarding the fact that idea of a society where capital-labour relations fully totalize the real is an abstract one; a theoretical conjecture, not a historical account. Similarly, there is never for Althusser, a pure coincidence or perfect fitting between a social formation and unique mode of production. This calls for a consideration regarding the kind of unity of productive forces and relations of production that can be found in a concrete social formation, in which a dominant form of relations of production unifies under its dominance various productive forces relative to other relations of production; and this implies a complex and plural-differential concept of time.

Furthermore, this statement has political consequences in the specific conjuncture of the barbarization of imperialism⁴⁷, in which Althusser intervenes. The consideration of this plural temporality of a concrete social formation tendentially unified under the primacy of relations of production let us notice, according to Althusser, the omission of the concept of overdetermined contradiction in the simplified temporality that support technocratic and evolutionist perspectives. Moreover, the concept of plural temporality confers to class struggle a complexity irreducible to any economicist,⁴⁸ humanist⁴⁹ or politician⁵⁰ simplification, while conceives it as a set of mismatched relations; in other words, a complex *disjoint-unity* of relations and non-relations, necessary and contingent. For classes are not "identities," nor "social groups", their struggle is not an immediate relation and does not take the form of an intersubjectivity, nor the form of an opposition between two armies. Far from that, it is a unstable knot of multiple temporalities, the effect of diverse productive forms with diverse genealogies, that connect and contradict each other, in their articulation under the dominance of contradictory relations of a mode of production, where it is no longer possible to find "pure" productive forces involved in a simple productive relation,⁵¹ but neither the absolute domination of a pure of State-

47. Louis Althusser, *History and Imperialism. Writings (1963-1986)*, trans. G. Goshgarian. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

48. Cf. Althusser, *For Marx*, 87-128

49. Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, 240-248

50. *Ibid.*,

51. « Les évidences tenaces (évidences idéologiques de type empiriste) du point de vue de la seule production, voir the la simple pratique productive (elle-même abstraite par rapport au procès de

machine,⁵² but an *ensemble* of times with heterogeneous dynamics, that produce economic exploitation as its ensemble-whole effect.⁵³

Neo-anarchism and technocratism are, according to Althusser's theory of reproduction, the new versions of old leftist reductionisms: in one case, it is a matter of explaining the relational complex of a social formation under the theory of domination without exploitation, and in the other, of explaining it with a theory of the accelerated development of the productive forces, without contradiction.⁵⁴ Seemingly opposing extremes which nevertheless converge; a theory of power and a theory of technical sovereignty or formal causality, without overdetermination, which is to say, without unconsciousness and without class struggle. Theorizations that have lost the *schismatic* condition of their readings.

Once again we face the struggle of materialism against humanism and historicism, within Marx's heritage. More precisely, against a conception of alienation that expresses itself in the dialectic of correspondence and non-correspondence between Form and Content, that reinscribes the unity of productive forces and relations of production in a genetic and impoverished temporality. Under the guise of complexity, a philosophy of history in its humanist modulation, that is, accommodated to the circular scheme of an *interiority* or a *conscience*, is trafficked at both economic-technocratic and politicist-neoanarchist extremes.

production) font tellement corps avec notre 'conscience' quotidienne qu'il est extrêmement difficile (...) de s'élever au point de vue de la reproduction » Ibid., 82

52. « C'est une erreur anarchiste de prétendre que 'la production marche à la répression' donc de mettre au premier plan du procès de production-exploitation un seul de ses éléments, de surcroît subordonné : la répression ». Ibid., 77

53. Without this complexification of the abstract schema of a single mode of production posed by the point of view of reproduction the history of the structurally heterogeneous dependent capitalist formations, with their variegated peripheral temporalities, cannot be thought of. But neither can we think the center of imperialist Europe. And this is what Althusser warns in 1969: that the Paris of "*l'imagination au pouvoir*" is contradictory involved with agonistic imperialism. This is what we read in the volume *Sur la reproduction*, which can be considered a response to the events of May '68, but not because of a rediscovery of class struggle, as has been said, but to warn us of the risks of the loss of its concept. The risk of re-simplifying our reading of Marxist theory, under the pretext of eliminating determinism, while reinstating it in another way, in terms of the primacy of the development of productive forces over relations of production.

54. Louis Althusser, « Technocratie et humanisme » *Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine* (IMEC : 20 ALT/3/9, 1963).

While we know that the concern for the elucidation and development of a rigorously materialistic dialectic based on a conception of differential historical time coherent with the concept of totality in terms of a “pre-given complex structured whole”,⁵⁵ is found in the heart of the Althusserian reading of Marx, by evoking Freud’s concept of *time of the unconscious*. For Althusser, the research destined to give account of the non-contemporary, non-homogeneous temporality radically distinguishes the Marxist concept of historical time in the terms of a plural *but unequally articulated* historical temporality; so that, the relative and differential condition of the concept of plural time requires a concept of its *historical contradictory unity*.

It is not enough, therefore, to say...that each time has its own rhythms, some short, some long; we must also think these differences in rhythm and punctuation in their foundation, in the type of articulation, displacement and torsion which harmonizes these different times with one another...we must, -says Althusser- pose the question of the mode of existence of *invisible times*...the time of economic production as a specific time...a complex and non-linear time, a *time of times*, a complex time that cannot be read in the continuity of the time of life.⁵⁶

Without a *concept* of temporal contradictory and unequal unity, which is to say without a concept of the hierarchical and conflictive articulation of *differences*, the plurality of “observable” genealogies is caught up in Hegelian contemporary time; as the *inverted* form of the counter-mythical operation that reduces critical reading to an unveiling of “hidden” histories (by means of an *inversion* of the myth of small producer that involves *salary* and *property*, to find the truth of *slavery* and *community*).

The detour within anti-racist and antiimperialist feminist thinking could be of great importance to evaluate whether there is any theoretical productivity in Althusserian developments of social reproduction; while

55. Althusser, *For Marx*, 193-218

56. Louis Althusser, “The Errors of Classical Economics: An Outline for a Concept of Historical Time” In Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970), 101

in the other way around, Althusser's remarks would also help us to trace the schismatic thread within feminist developments. This is crucial for us to recognize some risks that could menace different feminists and postcolonial studies which tend to subsume the consideration of reproduction under schemes that subordinate productive relations to the primacy of productive forces, with the effect of a simplification of plural time and an impoverishment of overdetermined contradiction.

These risks menace feminist theories in diverse unnoticed ways, including the works of those who make great steps forward in the development of feminist social reproduction theorization.⁵⁷ The various forms of politicism and economicism that can be found in a varied spectrum of feminist writings coincide in the tendentially restricted consideration of reproduction as the reproduction of productive forces. The absence of specific concepts such as *imperialism*, *peripheral capitalism* or *dependency* in some of these developments symptomize the tendency to blur singular historical determinations in an abstract temporality which contributes to crystallize a relatively abstract scheme of reproduction and simplifies the temporal complexity, the overdetermined-contradictory dialectics and the singular condition of the concrete conjunctures.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that, from the point of view of social reproduction understood in its temporal complexity, these tendencies of *politicist* leftism coincide with developments intended to deploy an opposite strategy, based on a historicist or *economicist* reading.⁵⁹

57. In previous works I discussed these tendencies in Federici and Butler. cf. Romé, "La manzana de la Discordia..."

58. Such is the case with some sort of projection of so-called originary accumulation over the forms of capital accumulation -found in some Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*- that has as its effect the subsumption of the notion of expanded *reproduction* of capital to an abstract image of "colonialism", with the subsequent omission of temporal distinctions such as those implied in the concepts of *reproduction* and that of *transition*. A politicist simplification can also be found in Butler's *The psychic life of power* where the idea of subjection is entirely committed to a concept of social whole according the Hegelian principle of the State as a concrete universal. In many of these developments the plurality of times becomes then irrelevant, if it does not offer in the concrete condition of its determinations more than the possibility of finding behind the modern myth of the bourgeois State, the "truth" of the Absolute Power.

59 Such as the critique developed by Nancy Fraser to Judith Butler's *Merely Cultural*, to the thesis that heteronormative regulation of sexuality is part of economic structure because it regards the production of productive forces, where Fraser intends to solve the question by "historizing" the anthropological difference involved in the ontological dimension of the sexual-being. For expositive economy I can't develop *in extenso* these arguments, but they can be read in Romé, "La manzana de la discordia..."

IV: Instead of a conclusion, a desire for future

In a manuscript from 1963 Althusser describes the new forms of economicism and politicism as parts of a constellation that connect theoretical ideologies, such as empiricism, formalism and pragmatism to “new topics and forms,” in sum, “everything that, from up close or afar touches, not reality, but the myth of computers, cybernetics and electronics”. This renewed tendency of technocratic economism meets its “soul supplement,” says Althusser, in the diverse forms with which humanism is reissued as leftism and neo-anarchism, modern forms of aestheticism and of the “religion of art and the artist” that extol the condition of the “creator” and are grounded on “a spontaneous ideology of liberty and revolt.”⁶⁰

This controversy sketched out by Althusser in 1963 will receive a renewed impulse after the episodes of May ‘68, at the heat of which he wrote the posthumous published *Sur la reproduction*, where *technocratism* and *neo-anarchism* would constitute the two tendencies that embody the pincer-like device into which materialist thought falls as Marxism’s theoretical and political crisis worsens. “Technocratism” supposes the reduction of the conception of reproduction (of social *relations* of production) to the primacy of technical-economic conception of *productive forces*, be that the reproduction of labour force (including its skills and technical competences) or the reproduction of capital technology. And what is called “politicism” (or neo-anarchism) consists in reducing the reproduction of social relations of production to a juridical-political dimension of “property” or reducing economic exploitation into an abstract notion of “domination”, repression, or “violence”.

We can now understand these two tendencies as specular-complementary: accents that not in an absolute way, but as emphasis or slips tend to simplify the overdetermined-contradictory social totality and the concept of heterogenous-articulated times while hypertrophying some instances or practices over the complex ensemble. Finally, we could say that what Althusser’s intervention placed on stage in the early 60’s was

60. Althusser, “*Technocratie et humanisme*”, 23

that this kind of tendential simplifications of historical and material heterogeneity can, thus, be considered as the strategy of capital ideological struggle in theoretical field, renewed neoliberal figures of humanism and historicism.

In its ideological aspects, what is nowadays called neoliberalism can be considered as a process of transformation of humanist dominant ideology: its extreme deployment or its ominous reverse (exposed in the framework of the agonizing crisis of the humanist sovereign subject and the crisis of the historicist illusion of progressive future) associated with the “barbarization” of the long-lasting decline of the imperialist regime of accumulation, in which it took its dominant tendency, in a global scale.

Barbarism,

Regression while remaining in place, stagnation while remaining in place, of a kind of which human history offers examples by hundreds. Yes, our ‘civilization’ can perish in place, (...), but in accumulating all the suffering of a childbirth that will not end, of a stillbirth that is not a delivery.⁶¹

Neoliberalism can be the name of this barbarization of imperialist capitalism. The imaginary contemporaneity of dominant ideological time that dissolves real material-historical differences (and the contradictions that their coexistence entails) in a single, homogeneous time — to whose critique both Marx and Freud devoted their schismatic theories. If neoliberalism has come in order to confront the liminal time of imperialism, it is this very conjuncture that shows us the path of an extremely necessary recommencement of anti-humanist and anti-historicist materialism, and I believe that a great portion of antiracist and antiimperialist feminist thinking is ready to take on this historical task.

61. Althusser, *History and imperialism*, 49-50

Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis. *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*. Tome I. Paris: Stock-IMEC, 1994.
- . *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. NY- London: Verso, 2005.
- . *Lenin et la philosophie*. Paris: Maspero, 1969.
- . *Positions* Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1976.
- . “The only materialist tradition. Part 1: Spinoza”. [1985] In *The new Spinoza*. Translated by Ted Stolze. Edited by Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . *Sur la reproduction*. (ms.1969). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011.
- . *History and Imperialism. Writings (1963-1986)*. Translated G. Goshgarian. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.
- . « Technocratie et humanisme » *Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine* (IMEC), 20 ALT/3/9, 1963.
- Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Etienne. *Reading Capital*. London-NY: NLB, 1970.
- Arruza, Cinzia. *Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, trans. Marie Lagatta and Dave Kelly. Wales, UK: Merlin Books, 2013.
- . “Gender as social temporality: Butler (and Marx)”. *Historical Materialism* 23, n. 1: 28-52, 2015.

- Arruza, Cinzia y Bhattacharya, Thitti. “Teoría de la Reproducción Social. Elementos fundamentales para un feminismo marxista”. *Archivos de Historia del Movimiento Obrero y la Izquierda* VIII, n° 16, (2020): 37-69.
- Balibar, Étienne. « Tais-toi encore, Althusser ! » *Les Temps Modernes* 509, (décembre 1988).
- . “The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser” In, *The Althusserian Legacy*. Edited by Kaplan, Ann and Sprinker, Michael, 1-16. London: Verso, 1993.
- . *The philosophy of Marx*. Translated by Chris Turner. London-New York: Verso, 1995.
- . *Spinoza politique. Le transindividuel*. Paris: PUF, 2018.
- Barret, Michele. *Women’s Oppression Today*. London-NY: Verso, 1989.
- Bhattacharya, Tithi. “How not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class”. *Viewpoint Magazine* (31st., October, 2015). <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/how-not-to-skip-class-social-reproduction-of-labor-and-the-global-working-class/>
- . *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Bachattarya, Tithi. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
- Bohrer, Ashley. *Marxism and Intersectionality. Race, gender, Class and sexuality under contemporary capitalism*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Butler, Judith. “Merely Cultural” *Social Text*, No. 52/53, Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender (Autumn -Winter, 1997), 265-277.
- . *The physic life of power. Theories on subjection*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Delphi, Christine. *L’ennemi principal. Tome I. Economie du patriarcat*. Paris: Syllepse, 1999.

- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, Body and Primitive Accumulation*. NY: Autonomedia, 2004.
- . *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*. PM Press, 2020.
- Firestone, Shulamith. *The dialectic of the sex*. NY: The women Press, 1970
- Fraser, Nancy. *Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. London-Verso, 2013.
- . "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History". *New Left review* 56, (2009): 97-117.
- . "Tiempo histórico liminal" *Jacobin. América Latina*. (Enero, 2021). Available on-line:
<https://jacobinlat.com/2021/01/05/tiempo-historico-liminal/>
- Hartmann, Heidi. "The unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" *Capital and Class*, 3: 1-33, (1979).
- Laslett, Barbara and Johanna Brenner. "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives" *Annual Review of Sociology* 15: 38-404 (1989).
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Accumulation of Capital* [1913]. Trans. by Agnes Schwarzschild. London-NY: Routledge, 2013.
- Maldidier, Denise. « L'inquiétude du discours. Un trajet dans l'histoire de l'analyse du discours : le travail de Michel Pêcheux » *Semen. Revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours*. Num. 8 (1993)
<https://journals.openedition.org/semen/4351>
- Marx, Karl. *Comunidad, Nacionalismos y Capital*. Textos inéditos. Edited by Álvaro García Linera. La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2018.

- Merteuil, Morgane. “Le travail du sexe contre le sexe : pour un anayse materialiste du desir”: “Le travail du sexe contre le travail. In *Pour un féminisme de la totalité*. Coord. By Félix Boggio Éwanj’e-Epée ; Stella Magliani-Belkacem; Morgane Merteuil; Frédéric Monferrand. Paris: Periode- Editions Amsterdam, 2017.
- Montaro, Mara. “La revolución que viene del sur. Entrevista a Mara Montanaro”. Entrevista realizada por Carla Biguliak y por Jules Fevre. *Caracaj. Flechas de sentido* (9th, March, 2020. <http://carcaj.cl/la-revolucion-que-viene-del-sur-entrevista-a-mara-montanaro/>
- Morfino, Vittorio. *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory Between Spinoza and Althusser*. NY: Brill, 2014.
- Pêcheux, Michel. *Les verities de La Palice*. Paris: Maspero, 1975.
- Romé, Natalia. “La manzana de la discordia. Hacia un feminismo transindividual” In, *Notas Materialistas. Para un Feminismo Transindividual*. Edited by Natalia Romé. Santiago de Chile: Doble Ciencia, 2021.