

# ‘Use-value’

## Ontology and semiotics

### Bolívar Echeverría

The only objective forms of commodities are their use forms, their natural forms.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (1867)

Does Marx’s discourse have something to say to the current problematization of the foundations of a new practice of politics? Certainly not, if Marx’s dispute with political economy, which forms the central part of his work, is ‘no more than a storm in a children’s paddling pool’, as Foucault affirmed from the standpoint of a ‘new radicality’; if it is a dispute that ‘introduced no real discontinuity’ with the modern, nineteenth-century [*decimonónico*] way to speak of things; if all it achieves is to ‘stir up a few waves and cause a few surface ripples’ in an obsolete ‘episteme’. It does have something to say, however, if, as we believe, the concept of ‘use-value’ that Marx opposes to modern thought shatters the horizon of intelligibility within which that thought moves.<sup>1</sup>

The following pages take as their point of departure the idea that the central contribution of Marx’s discourse to the comprehension of modern civilization lies in the discovery, formulation and critical analysis of a structuring behavioural disposition [*comportamiento*] of that civilized life on the basic plane of the economy. It is the behavioural disposition of labour [*trabajo*] and enjoyment that the human subject maintains with nature, constituted as a contradictory reality: on one side, as a process of the production and consumption of ‘use-values’ and, on the other, as a process of the ‘valorization of’ the commodity ‘value’ of those same objects. In strictly theoretical terms, a conception of the objects of practical life in their fundamental or ‘natural’ form, in their presence as ‘use-values’, necessarily precedes and determines Marx’s perception of that which comes to contradict this mode of being and this presence: of Being [*ser*] for valorization and of being [*estar*] as self-valorizing values. This is an implicit conception that sustains the entire edifice of the critique of political economy.

We think, however, that Marx’s central contribution to a critical comprehension of modernity suffers from an asymmetry or unilaterality; that the extensive and penetrating investigations into the process of accumulation of capitalist value – into one of the two sides of the contradictory economic disposition of modern society – are not accompanied by similar investigations, able to counterbalance them, on the terrain of the other side of that disposition, that of ‘use-value’ and its reproduction. We justify our work thus, as a contribution to the reconstruction of this conception of the ‘natural form’ of things as ‘use-values’, a conception implicit in the ‘critique of political economy’, without whose clarification the latter remains incomplete and in many senses enigmatic.

In any case, a question remains in the air: if the reference to ‘natural form’ or ‘use-value’ is the background to the critique of capitalism, why does Marx use it with so much caution, only where it ‘plays a role as an economic category’?<sup>2</sup> Why does he not oppose his own, developed concept to the erratic lucubrations upon the words ‘value’ and ‘use-value’?<sup>3</sup> Why not proceed deductively from a theory of production in general, which would include this concept? Marx’s discourse is a critical discourse, deconstructive: it works upon the positive or ideological discourse that modern society spontaneously generates. In his epoch, the concepts of ‘natural form’ and ‘use-value’, also to be subject to his critique, had barely received an incipient formulation from political economy. In such conditions, it was possible only to trace the general outlines of their critical form; it was not yet time for their developed elaboration. The problem of the ‘natural-ness’ of social forms and of the definitions of ‘use-value’ appears emphatically in real life only when capitalist development shatters everywhere the millennial local equilibria between the system of needs for consumption and

\* This is a translation of Bolívar Echeverría, ‘El “Valor de Uso”: Ontología y Semiótica’, published in the collection *Valor de Uso y Utopía*, Siglo XXI, Mexico City, 1998, pp. 153–97. It appears here by kind permission of the author’s estate.

that of productive capacities; when, in the imperialist enterprise, European Man experienced the relativity of its humanity. It appeared as a theoretical problem, treated with an explicit or implicit positivity, together with the 'social sciences' that in Marx's time were only in their beginnings. For this reason, the state of uncertainty in which the content of the concept of 'natural form' remains – despite the *Paris Manuscripts* (1844) – should not be seen as an indication of a boundary that forecloses, but rather of one that opens up Marx's discourse to the new problems of contemporary politics. The reconstruction of that content and of its critical efficacy for the present is possible. Its orientation and measure are there: demarcated by the radicality of Marx's critique of capitalism. This leads explicitly to the questioning of the form in which subjectness [*sujetidad*], as much as objectivity, is constituted in the modern epoch, and sets out therefore an idea of 'revolution' that, far from remaining trapped in the illusions of the previous century, implies a proposal whose full force only shows itself in light of the disillusionments of the present.\*

The concept of 'production in general' that Marx employs in his critique of political economy, taken in the widest possible sense, which is to say considered as a complete process of social reproduction, implies the existence of an essential structure, transhistorical and supra-ethnic, whose presence only acquires actuality or reality to the extent in which it is actualized or given form within innumerable particular situations or specific conjunctions of historical and ethnic conditions. Each one of the forms in which this structure is actualized constitutes the concrete figure or identity of a society.<sup>4</sup> For Marx, the mode in which this actualization takes place in the capitalist situation differs radically from the mode in which it occurred in previous historical epochs and must also differ from the mode it could acquire in a desirable future. Whilst in precapitalist situations the formation of the structure was simple, in the capitalist epoch it is double and therefore complex: it does not solely obey 'natural' conditioning by the historical and the ethnic, but is subjected also to a 'pseudo-natural' conditioning, originating from its economic organization as constituted in a 'subject'.<sup>†</sup>

According to Marx, the process of social reproduction includes, as a characteristic function of concrete human existence, a particular organization of the ensemble of inter-individual relations of coexistence. That is to say, it implies a classification of social individuals according to their involvement as much in the activity of labour as in that of enjoyment; it implies therefore a definition of property relations, a distribution of the object of social wealth – means of production and goods for enjoyment – between the distinct members of the global social subject. That which distinguishes the capitalist mode of social reproduction is the fact that only in it does this organization of the relations of coexistence cease to be an order established by the 'natural' formation of the structure and establish itself as an autonomous source of determination – of overdetermination – of the concrete figure of society.<sup>5</sup> The relations of production/consumption appear here as an entity actually external to the subject, endowed with a formative capacity. Alienated from the life in which the 'natural form' of society constitutes itself, these relations turn back upon it and compel it to de-form its actualization of the structure of the process of social reproduction. For Marx, the capitalist mode of reproduction determines the concretion of social life in a dual manner: as donation of primary form, of the 'socio-natural' order, and as donation of secondary form, devoid of 'socio-natural' necessity, revolving around that which he calls the 'autonomized process of the formation and valorization of value'. It is a dual and therefore complex determination, since according to him the concrete figure of capitalist societies is the result of a conflict and compromise between these two formative tendencies that contradict one another.<sup>6</sup> The first, proper to the 'natural' social constitution, has as its goal an ideal image of society as a qualitative totality; the second, by contrast, imposed by reified relations of production/consumption as an 'abstract dynamic of self-valorizing value', has as its goal precisely the accumulation of capital. The first goal, the only one of interest to the social subject taken as such, can only be pursued in capitalism to the extent that, when translated into the terms that the achievement of the second imposes, it betrays its own essence.

\* Echeverría coins the Spanish neologism *sujetidad*, which we have rendered as 'subjectness'. In distinction from the multiple meanings associated with *subjetividad* (subjectivity), *sujetidad* more narrowly indicates the quality of being a subject, which he defines further below as 'the capacity to constitute the concretion of sociality' or 'to give an identified form to its [own] sociality'. Although he does not explicitly account for the origin of this term, it is likely that Echeverría is here drawing on Heidegger's distinction between *Subjektivität* and *Subjektivität*. Cf. Martin Heidegger, 'Hegel's Concept of Experience', in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 86–156. [Trans.]

† In the 1984 version of the text 'second nature' appears here in place of 'a subject'. [Trans.]

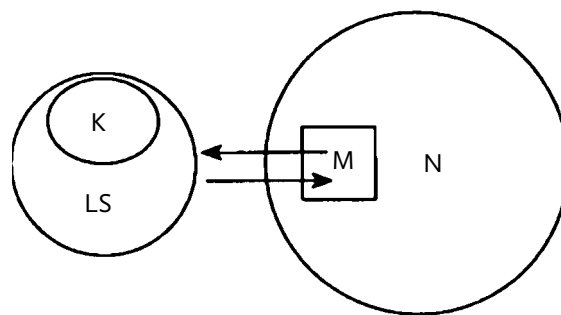
As can be seen, the concept of the ‘natural form’ of social life, which includes the ‘use-value’ of those objects involved in it, occupies a central place in Marx’s discourse. Both the specific critique of the economic disposition and discourse of the capitalist epoch and that other, general, critique of the totality of modern social life become unthinkable without this contrasting concept that allows his theoretical discourse to specify the meaning of its critical labour. Nevertheless, although ubiquitous in the text of *Capital*, the concept of ‘natural form’ remains only an outline and an indication; as such it makes itself evident in its peculiar theoretical effects. Its content is more of an unknown than an implicit solution. This work brings together in a first approximation a series of ideas, some of which are already present in the contemporary Marxist discussion, that could assist its adequate formulation. They are ideas gathered in reference to a distinction between that which would properly be the socio-natural form of the process of human life, as a reality that – even in its transhistorical and supra-ethnic permanence – necessarily implies an elemental degree of concretion, and that which would be the fundamental structure of that process, as a necessarily abstract essence that only becomes effective by means of a concretization, whose initial step comes precisely in the socio-natural form. Beyond this, they are all ideas that are understood as variations on a single theme: freedom as a characteristic fact of human life.

### Animal life and social life

#### 1. The behavioural structure of life

The ‘natural form’ of the process of social reproduction consists in a particular actualization of its general structure. At the same time, this structure is, in its most elementary characteristics, similar to the structure of the reproductive process of the live organism’s living matter. Considered on a certain primary level, the behaviour [*comportamiento*] of the human being is equal to the behaviour of the animal, to the extent that as a living being it has actualized in the most complete manner the possibilities of material behaviour that we call ‘life’. This behaviour of a sector of nature is characterized, as Hegel explained and Marx mentioned, by the autonomous organization of an ensemble of inorganic elements, as a partial totality that confronts the global totality of nature in a ‘metabolic’ process;<sup>7</sup> the organic totality acts upon a zone or territory of nature in order to receive a reaction that is favourable to the maintenance of its principle of organization.<sup>8</sup>

DIAGRAM 1 The behavioural structure of life I



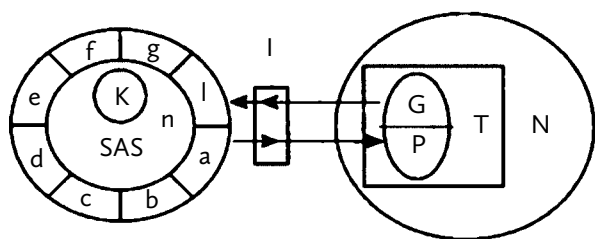
N = Nature M = Means K = Matter  
LS = Living subject/singular organism

An autonomous principle of organization of matter (K) is only realized in a multiplicity of singular organisms (LS) and is only maintained through the cyclical reproduction of each one of them by way of their action upon a natural means (M in N) and the integration of favourable reactions coming from this means. The structure of this behaviour of living matter has a *goal* that is evident: the maintenance of the *integrity* of the *singular* organism in its capacity as representative or exemplar of the *identity of its species*; the maintenance, ultimately, of a particular autonomous principle of totalization of the matter that, at the same time as it gives a new law unto it [*re-legaliza*], also obeys and consummates the general lawfulness of nature. It is to the structure and *telos* of this natural behaviour that Marx makes reference in his materialist affirmation of the profound naturalness of the human being.

It should be added that the behavioural disposition of life that Marx takes into account in this affirmation is the most refined behaviour of the living animal, which carries the general structure of life to its maximum degree of complexity (Diagram 2).

This animal subject is social (SAS): its singularity, its ‘abstract individuality’, is distributed in an ensemble of specialized versions (a-n) that are combined with each other in different reproductive functions (the bee as queen, worker and drone). The coexistence of the distinct members of the social subject is made possible by a determinate elemental system of communication by signals.<sup>9</sup> (The figures that the bee composes with the trajectory of its flight.) The result of the action of this subject, the reaction of nature, is concentrated in a transformation of the latter that presents itself as an independent object, as a *good [bien] of nature produced by the subject (G/P)* (honey). The relation between animal subject and natural territory (T) – action of ‘S’, reaction of ‘N’ – is made possible by a specially produced good, by an object of intermediate effectivity (I) (the hive).

DIAGRAM 2 The behavioural structure of life II



N = Nature T = Territory K = Matter  
 I = Object of intermediate effectivity  
 a-n = Individual members of the living subject  
 G/P = Good that has been produced  
 SAS = Social animal subject

## 2. The characteristic telos of social life

Animality, the prehistoric background of anthropogenesis [*hominización*], or effective ground of actual humanity, is only the substance with which properly social life is formed. The best way of conceptually specifying the idea that Marx has of the peculiarity of the human or social being is probably to show, following his discourse, the essential difference that exists between the process of animal reproduction and the process of social reproduction.

We are not just dealing here with a *differentia specifica*: the human being is not only a peculiarly gifted animal – with reason, with language, with civil, practical, religious sense, and so on – or, if it is, its characteristic attributes imply a leap beyond the strictly animal quality.<sup>10</sup> All those behaviours that seem to offer the key to the definition of the human – the use and fabrication of instruments as well as the capacity to distinguish between the just and unjust, to imagine as well as to play and to lie, and so on – can be understood from a description of the reproductive process of the human being as one in which the reproduction of its *animal* materiality is the bearer of a reproduction that transcends it, that of its *social* materiality.

The structural *telos* of the behaviour of ‘life’ is the reproduction of a particular principle of organization for an inorganic material, by maintaining the physical integrity of the distinct singular organisms in which this principle is actualized. In the case of socially individual animals, this principle necessarily includes a special criterion of distribution, situation or differential individuation of all the members or exemplars of the social subject within a system of functions necessary for its global reproduction. The ensemble of relations of opposition and complementarity that connect the distinct members of the social subject – and that therefore constitute its identity as animal species – consist in an ordering

of these individuals that is tirelessly repeated from one reproductive cycle to another, from one millennium to another, as the disciplinary manifestation of the optimal survival strategy found congealed in its principle of organicity.<sup>11</sup>

The peculiarity of human social behaviour appears when one takes into account that which in its structure would correspond to this principle of global identification and differential individuation, or principle of constitution of the relations that connect the members of the subject with one another. Although the presence and validity of this principle is as necessary for nature as it is for the process of social reproduction, the determination of its concrete figure is nevertheless delivered over to the side of freedom.<sup>12</sup> As such, the human being is deprived of the support granted to the animal by the all-encompassing bosom of natural law.<sup>13</sup> The definitive characteristics of its identity are not inscribed in the general principle of its organicity, nor have therefore an instinctive validity. Its identity is in play: it is not a given fact; it has always to be concretized anew. That which it was in a previous reproductive cycle is an antecedent that conditions but does not compel it to be what it will in a later cycle.

The ensemble of relations of interdependence between the members of the social subject requires a concrete figure that must be synthesized by the social subject itself. The *sociality* itself of this subject exists as the matter with which it, as the totalization of social individuals, constructs its identity and the differential identity of its members. To be a subject, *subjectness* [*sujetidad*], consists thus in the capacity to constitute the concretion of sociality.

The structural *telos* that animates the behaviour of the human or social being therefore differs essentially from that presented by the purely animal dimension of nature. It is not the conservation of a principle of sociality that would have already been given in animal organicity, but the foundation and constant re-foundation of this principle. This peculiar sense of social reproduction makes the confrontation of the subject with nature – that is now not only external or of the objective *world*, but also internal or of the *body* of the subject [*sujetivo*] – an indirect confrontation, mediated by the confrontation of the subject with its own sociability.<sup>14</sup> The structure of the reproductive process itself thus ends up being a structure that is dual and fundamentally contradictory. Upon the stratum in which reproduction is the achievement and absorption of favourable reactions provoked in nature by the subject another is superimposed, in

which the same evaluative notion of 'favourable' is placed in question, the stratum in which the subject defines and redefines its own identity.

To produce and to consume transformations of nature ends up being, simultaneously and above all, to ratify and to modify the concrete figure of sociality. There are two processes in one: in the reproduction of the human being the physical reproduction of the integrity of the communitarian body of the subject is only accomplished to the extent that it is reproduction of the political (*polis*) form of the community (*koinonía*).<sup>15</sup> This is a dual process that is always contradictory, because its 'political' stratum necessarily implies an excess (*hybris*), a forcing of the lawfulness proper to its *physical* stratum.<sup>16</sup>

### Labour and enjoyment

The peculiarity of the reproductive behaviour of the social being (*zoon politikón*) is evident in the structure that connects the distinct elements belonging to this process and in the constitution of those same elements. There are two different ways in which this complex interconnection can be analysed: on one side, the productive phase and, on the other, the consumptive phase are constituted necessarily as a moment of *objectification* [*objetivación*], in the first case, and as a moment of *subjectivation* [*sujetivación*], in the second.<sup>17</sup>

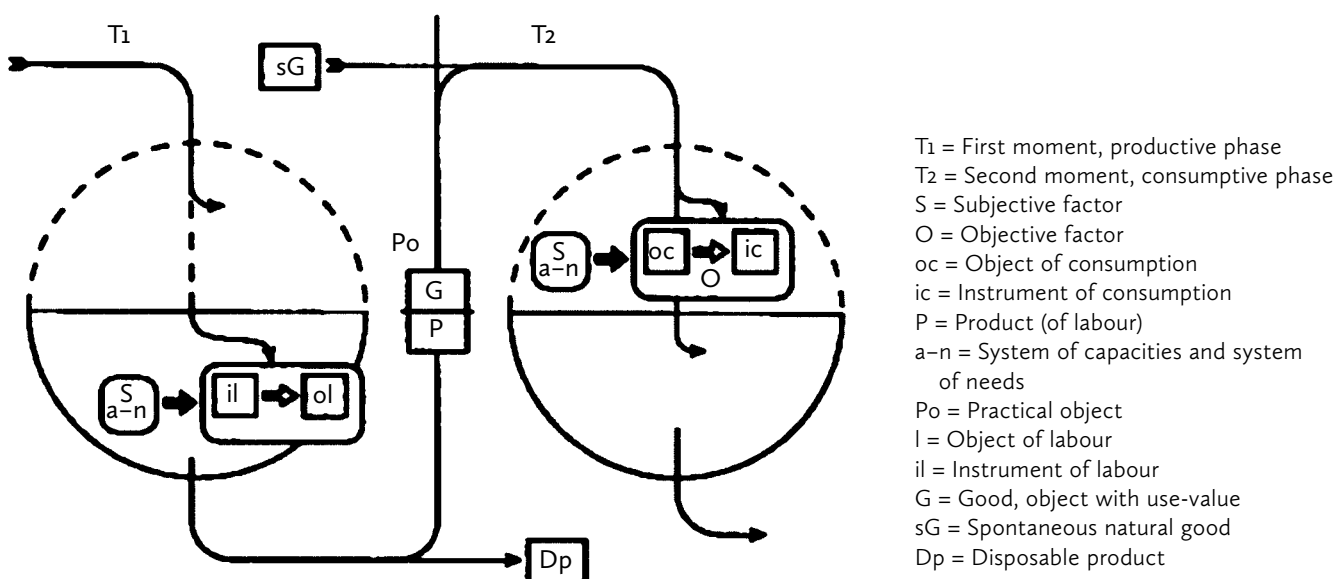
Each of the large circles in Diagram 3 represent a *reproductive moment* in the abstract (T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>), in the terms of the relation: social subject–natural means. (The reproduction of the subject as a process that puts it into relation with itself and as a donation of form to its body or to internal nature remains

beyond this schematic representation.) The double presence of the relation between *subjective* [*sujetivo*] *factor* and *objective factor* (S–N) attempts to show separately the two phases of the reproductive moment that in fact compose a totality: the *phase of labour*, production or productive consumption and the *phase of enjoyment*, absorption or unproductive consumption. The relation between phases is indicated by the element 'Po', *practical object*, or 'P/G', produced/good (or product with use-value), which constitutes the outcome of the first phase and the condition of the second.

The line that traverses the large circles and connects them with one another through the element 'Po' represents the flow of produced goods, as a reality that secures the continuity of the reproductive process or the repetition of reproductive moments. The elements 'G' (above) and 'P' (below) indicate: first, the presence of goods or conditions with a spontaneous or directly natural use-value; second, products or accidental transformations that the subject provokes in nature (products that, in certain cases, affect the subject adversely and thus result in being 'destructions' of nature).

During both productive and consumptive phases, respectively, the circle of elements ('a–n' around 'S') show the presence of a system of capacities and a system of needs in the social subject. Equally, the elements 'i' and 'o' show the double composition of the objective factor, in both production and in consumption. It is, on the one hand, a mediating instrumental field and, on the other, an object of action or reception for the subject (raw material of labour and raw material of enjoyment).

DIAGRAM 3 Social reproduction as production/consumption of objects



The social subject, in transforming the natural material, cannot be the simple executor of a plan that would rule over it, through its own actions, for this is mixed up with its organic composition. It must *choose the form* to which its transformation of the material is directed, and must do so because the form that a good that has been produced has is never neutral or innocent; it always has a concrete use-value that determines, in turn, the form that the subject that will consume it should have. Labour has a *poietic* dimension; its giving form is a *realization*, Marx says.<sup>18</sup> It is an invention and the carrying out of a project; a project that is only immediately the construction of a thing, which indirectly but ultimately is the construction of the subject itself. In using *this* thing and not *another* that could take its place, the subject not only satisfies its general – animal – need for this kind of thing, but also its need for the form of this concrete thing. In the process of social reproduction the character of (the subject's) self-realization inspires the realization of the product itself. It pervades each and every realization of the labour process: to produce is to objectify, to inscribe in the form of the product a *transformative intention* addressed to the subject itself, as a consumer; an intention that becomes effective or is subjectivized [*subjetiva*] in the moment in which the subject uses (enjoys or utilizes) that product, qua good, in an *appropriate* manner, which is to say in the moment in which, in making use of the thing, the subject absorbs its form and allows itself to be transformed by it.

In so far as it is an agent of enjoyment or an unproductive consumer, the social subject is not a simple receiver of the favourable transformation that labour has provoked in nature. It must discern and select between the different possibilities of adequate use that it can give to the good that been produced; it must decide the moment in, and the intensity with which, it will be affected by the form of the thing, and the extent and manner in which it takes heed of the transformative intention that the thing carries within it.

### 1. *The subject*

The subjectness [*subjetividad*] of the social subject resides in its capacity to give an identified form to its sociality, a capacity that it performs on a fundamental level in reproducing its physical integrity as a social animal organism. To give form to sociality means to situate the different members of which it is composed within a system of relations of coexistence, which is to say of *co-laboration* and *co-enjoyment*. The ensemble of

diacritical or differential identities of the multiple social individuals within this system of relations of production and consumption constitutes the global identity of the subject. To give form to sociality implies, therefore, to establish – beyond the purely natural association – an agreement and equilibrium, always unstable, between a defined system of needs for enjoyment and a defined system of capacities for labour.

The way in which this latter responds to and questions the first, the way in which both yield to and demand the fulfilment of their agreement, is governed fundamentally by the process of *circulation* of the innumerable singular objects which have been produced and are going to be consumed. In this 'changing of hands' through which all of them must pass in abandoning their producer and arriving at their consumer a project of *distribution* is always in effect that divides them up among the ensemble of social individuals.<sup>19</sup> This project deems certain attempts to present products as socially productive or acceptable and only to certain requirements for goods, to be valid or susceptible to being satisfactory for society. The 'politics' of the process of social reproduction thus show themselves in the capacity that the subject has to establish and modify this 'harmony' between its system of capacities and system of needs, by means of the determination of the effective *access* social individuals have, as producers and consumers, to the totality of goods that have been produced.

The double adscription of all members of the social subject within these two systems – as individuals in need and as capable individuals – that interrelate them socially for consumption and production is such that, in its unity and agreement, confers upon each of them their individual identity. Likewise, it is a particular situation of the ensemble of social individuals within the harmonized system of needs and capacities that determines the identity, the specific form of sociality or ensemble of relations of coexistence between subjects [*intersubjetivas*].

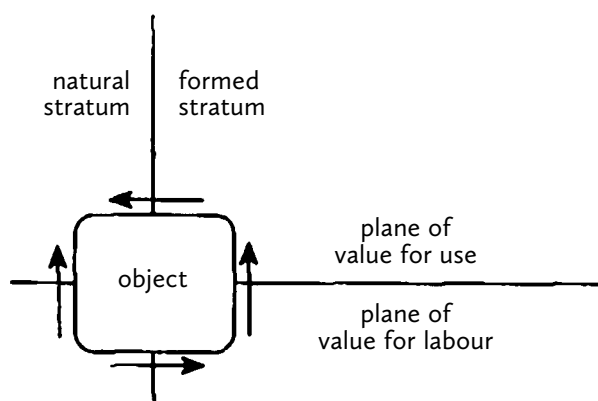
To produce and consume objects proves to be, for the social subject, a constant reproduction – instauration, ratification or modification – of the form of the relations of production and consumption. Always in the process of re-synthesis – even if only in order to reaffirm itself in what it is – the identity of the social subject is permanently in play, as is the global identity of the community (*politiké koinonía*) and the differential identity of each of its social individuals. If the global subject must make itself, in the sense that it must give itself a 'political'

identity that it has not received from nature, the social individuals that compose it are also, necessarily, participants in that destiny. Their situation in the system of relations of coexistence is also, in essence, always in play. All of their acts imply an intervention in the process which ascribes to them their determinate productive/consumptive functions and which identify them differentially in relating them to one another. Social individuals are 'concrete individual' subjects – and not 'abstract' as mere social exemplars – to the extent that every single act each one of them carries out affects, directly or through a transformation of nature, its own identity and the identity of the others. All individual doing is, in this sense, action upon oneself, action upon others and allowing others to act upon oneself.<sup>20</sup> In the social subject (*polis*), all its members are subjects (*polites*) in so far as they live their individual reproduction as a reciprocal and necessary transformation of their respective identities and as a collective transformation of the global social identity.

## 2. The object

The objectivity of the object resides in its practicality, in its character as a natural element integrated into a particular process of the reproduction of life that, at the same time that it is physical, is also 'political'. As a simple 'natural means' of the living organism, nature is already integrated into a process of reproduction; its totality has been re-totalized according to the perspective of the action exerted upon it by the reproducing organism. The infinite dimension of nature is delimited and, in its limitation, potentialized as an ensemble of 'conditions for life'; these conditions, (trans)formed by the 'subject'-organism, are converted into 'objects' favourable or hostile to its survival. The *form* that appears in this (trans)formation, and that in the purely animal process is the simple expression [*plasmación*] of a programme of activity inherent to the instinctive structure of the 'subject', is instead, in the process of social reproduction, the vehicle of the subject's project of self-realization. Here, the practicality or form of the object is chosen from among many possibilities, and its selection is designed to provoke a definite change in the subject who will heed this transformation in consuming the object appropriately. The form of the object is a site with a double aspect: in its production renders objective a transformative intention addressed to the subject of enjoyment, then from here consumption renders that intention subject [*objetiva*] (de-objectified), accepting it according to its own willingness.

DIAGRAM 4 The structure of the practical object



The belonging of the social object to a process of reproduction in which the physical stratum of its realization is functionalized by a 'political' stratum is not only disclosed in the global experience of it as an objective totality gifted with a distributive intentionality. Already as an object produced for enjoyment or unproductive consumption, but especially as an object produced for labour or productive consumption, the social object possesses a form that, both in order to be composed and to be acknowledged, requires a free subject or process of self-constitution.

As the outcome, on the one hand, and the condition, on the other, of the social life of individuals, the practical object is the mediating instance that accompanies to a greater or lesser extent the entire sphere of reciprocal action that characterizes these individuals as concrete individuals. For this reason, the structure of the practical or social object involves two levels or a double stratum of objectivity.<sup>21</sup> On the first level, as purely natural, the object *would be* the mediating entity of the purely animal reproduction of producers/consumers, of that functioning to which social reproduction would be reduced if it could cease to be what it is. In this barely imaginable stratum, since it only exists as already transcended, the object would be nature transformed according to an ensemble of instinctive capacities and needs pertaining to the subject. On the second level, where the first stratum is encountered as *formed* or refunctionalized, the object is the entity that makes possible this physical or animal reproduction of the subject and social individuals, but in terms of the strictly 'political' or subject-relating [*intersubjetiva*] substrate of their reproduction.

The distinctiveness of the social object in its double stratum of objectivity is shown in the fact that this objectivity can only be effectively synthesized in

the encounter of production and consumption. The final figure of practicality or objective form is played out within the double tension that comes, on the one hand, from the *intention* of form proposed by the labour through which it was composed and, on the other hand, from the *expectation* of form, provided by the consumption through which it must be accepted.<sup>22</sup> The form of the object is thus *biplanar* or twofold; it corresponds to a *product* that only is such to the extent that it is a *good* (which does not exclude, of course, the possibility that it is also an 'evil'); that is to say, a thing whose importance or value for concrete use refers necessarily to an importance or value for concrete labour.

In the use of the means of production – intermediate goods, produced not for direct enjoyment, but for productive consumption – the reciprocity of consumption and production is given as full equality; to consume them is to produce, to produce is to consume them. To *give* form *with* certain means of production is the same as to *draw* that form *from* out of them.<sup>23</sup> However, this giving/drawing out of form that takes place in productive consumption is not a mere execution, as in the animal world. The means of production do not compel the subject to always repeat the same operation, to always achieve the same result. Their efficacy is not tied to the expression [*plasmación*] of a *singular* form. It is, on the contrary, an open efficacy: it allows for the composition of distinct versions of a *general* form, of an entire ensemble of different singular forms. Within certain limits, the subject ('*tool making animal*') can find in the means of production new ways of using them, to realize unforeseen objective forms. It can even also – since the means of production are *produced* goods – transform or substitute them: construct other sources of determination for what will be produced.

Among the means involved in productive consumption there are some that only provide an indication of *their own* form: raw materials or objects of labour. There are others, however, which unfold *before labour* itself a whole set of possibilities of giving form, from among which it can choose in order to transform raw materials: these are instruments.

The most developed form of the social object is without doubt that of the *instrument*. In it, the two tensions that determine all objective form – the intention of form for the subject and the disposition of this subject to adopt it – remain in a state of confrontation, in an unstable compromise that can have a different outcome in every case. The *proposition* of a formative action upon the raw materials, inscribed

in the instrumental form as a technical structure, not only *allows* – like every social object – but requires, in order to be effective, a *will* to formative action that assumes it and makes it concrete. The general transformative dynamic that the instrument carries with it *needs* to be completed and singularized by labour.<sup>24</sup>

The duration of a particular instrument or a particular ensemble of instruments ensures the continuity in time of production and consumption of a particular *class* of practical objects. It is always the means of a productive or consumptive *transoperation* involving *successive* different social individuals. But no instrument exists in isolation; in reality it forms part of a whole in which its particular efficacy is included and defined differentially. It is always a means of a productive or consumptive *cooperation* in which different social individuals participate, in relative *proximity* to one another. The form of each instrumental object is characterized thus as much because it endures over a series of society's reproductive cycles as because it co-determines, within a single reproductive cycle, the form of the other instrumental objects. It is a creation of the past that remains active in the productive/consumptive realizations of countless renewed presents, as well as being a locally circumscribed creation that acts through spatial contiguity in a greater or lesser expansive contour than other productive/consumptive realizations.

The ensemble of instruments constitutes a complex totality, temporally and spatially organized: it is the *instrumental field* of society. The countless particular effectivities of all instrumental objects are unified in it as a single global effectiveness. The *effectiveness* of the instrumental field is not reducible to its productivity; this is only its quantitative determination – the degree to which the global instrument enables the subject to dominate or transform nature. Effectiveness is the qualitative content of productivity; it establishes an entire defined horizon of *possibilities of form* for the global object of production and consumption. In this sense, in presenting certain possibilities of form and leaving aside others, in being 'specialized' in a determinate axiological direction, the global effectiveness itself possesses a particular form, which rests upon the technological structure of the instrumental field.

The necessity, for the instrumental field, of possessing a particular form comes from the fact that its function is to mediate or facilitate, through the subject's physical reproduction, its 'political' reproduction. The horizon of possibilities of form that the subject delimits for the object is, ultimately, a



horizon of possibilities for the self-transformation of the subject. The instrumental means connect what the subject has been in the past with what it can be in the future: it ensures the *historical continuity* of its existence.<sup>25</sup> Objectified in the technological structure, it is the subject's own identity that is put into play, that which delivers and receives its particular form by means of the instrumental field.

### Social reproduction and semiosis

The characteristic sense of the process of reproduction as a properly human or social process – a realization of its physical *telos* that at the same time supports a 'political' *telos* – is not solely evident in the structure of this process, in its functioning and in the constitution of the (subjective [*sujetivo*] and objective) factors involved in it. It is equally manifested as much in the presence of an entire *dimension* of productive/consumptive existence that cannot be found in the natural universe, a properly *semiotic* reproductive dimension, as in that of a special process of production/consumption proper to this dimension and that is also exclusive to the total [human] universe: *language* or independent semiotic process.<sup>26</sup>

#### 1. Production/consumption and communication/interpretation

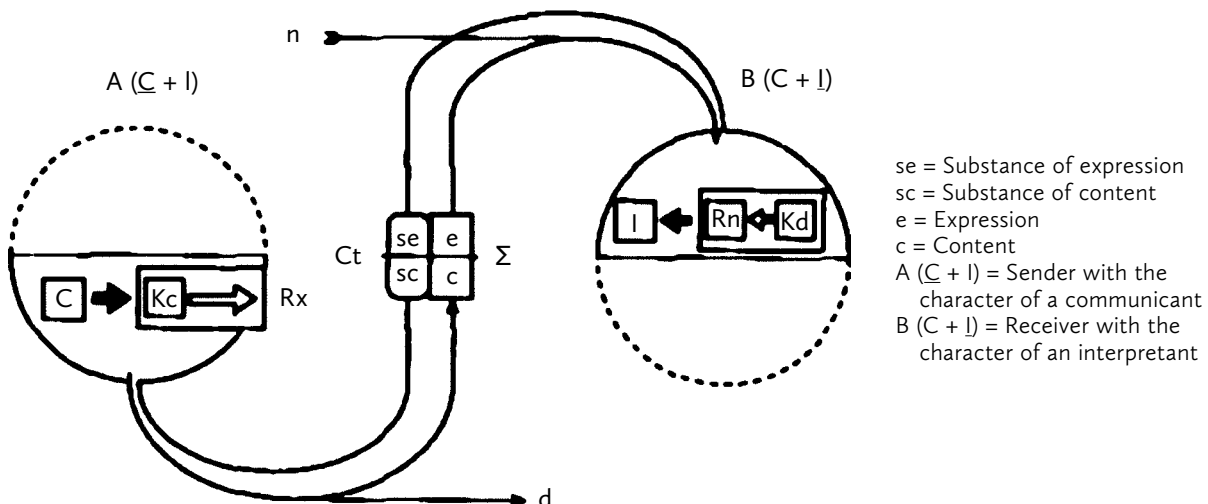
To transform nature by making use of means of production is for the producer-subject an attempt to give form to the subject of consumption; for whom, to accept this, making use of the means of consumption, the form of nature converted into a good, allows itself to be formed. In the form of the object, the subject of production has ciphered, upon its substance (upon the nourishment there is in a comestible, the shelter

offered by a habitable space, the assistance given by a service, etc.), a transformative intention that the consumer-subject deciphers in adequately absorbing this sustenance. The appropriation of nature by the social subject is simultaneously a self-transformation of the subject. To produce and consume objects is to produce and consume significations. To produce is to communicate [*mitteilen*], to propose another a use-value for nature; to consume is to interpret [*auslegen*], to validate that use-value found by another. To appropriate nature is to convert it into significance.<sup>27</sup>

In Diagram 5 the *communicant* (C) and the *interpretant* (I) are found in different situations: the first is open towards the *referent* external to both (Rx); the second is closed in front of it. Between the two situations exists a proto-significative common territory or *physical (animal) contact* (Ct). The emission of the transformative intention or *message* (M) from C to I consists in a modification that the communicant makes to the spontaneous state in which the contact is encountered, in order to convert it into significance, which is to say a carrier of a certain possibility of appropriating the referent considered important by C for the realization of that sought after in its intention.

The requisite conditions for this symbolization to take place, which is to say this action that is at the same time signifying (upon the contact) and appropriative (upon the referent), are found established in the code (K). The signification ( $\Sigma$ ) produced by means of the code (Kc) gives form to the contact (which would be its *substance*, se and sc), becomes the expression (e, signifier) of a content (c, signified) and constitutes thus the semic [*semico*] stratum of the social object.

DIAGRAM 5 The practical process of communication/interpretation



The reception of the message consists, for its part, in the action that the interpretant exercises upon the form of the contact in order, consuming or deconstructing it by means of its own use of the code (Kd), to assume the transformative intention that it carries and thus appropriate the referent (Rn).

Six communicative/interpretative functions are synthesized in the social process of the production/consumption of significations, each linked to one of the principal elements involved in it. (Although the relative importance of each one can vary between predominant and accessory, the presence of all is indispensable.) The first axis (Diagram 6) is composed by the emotive, conative and phatic functions. The first and the second consist in the realization of the subject's self-transformative *telos*: the communicant proposes an intention, the interpretant assumes it. The third consists in the recuperation of the natural basis of the process as the minimum carrier of the relation between C and I.

The second axis is composed of signifying, meta-signifying and aesthetic functions. The first and the second consist in the double inclusion that the process needs to make in the code in order for it to be possible: as a *medium with* which and *in* which it signifies. The third consists in the recognition of the message as an intention that puts the possibilities of the code in crisis.

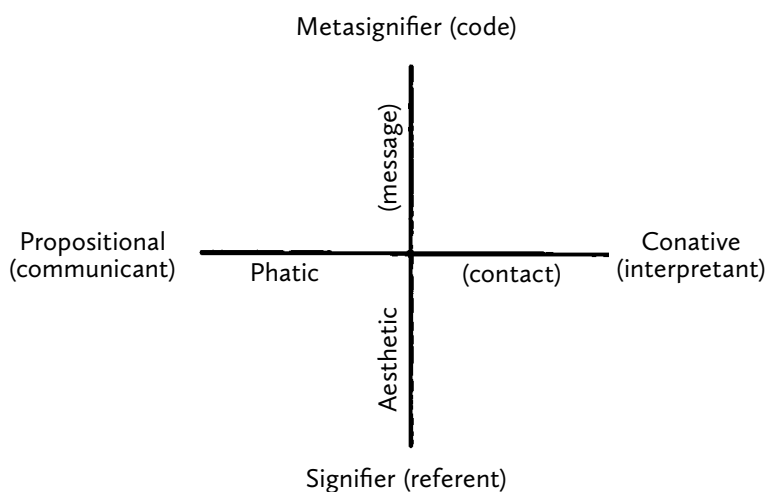
Both the action which communicates and that which interprets consist in the selection – projected in one, realized in the other – of one possibility of form from among an entire ensemble that the

instrumental field deploys upon nature. The form of the object cannot come to be as such, which is to say stand out from the formless or natural, be invented and perceived as the sense of the object, if it does not result from the use – active or productive and passive or consumptive – of a *medium* that delimits the border between the sense and senselessness of the infinity of natural phenomena. The cycle of reproduction as a process of social life is only a production/consumption of significations, a ciphering/deciphering of transformative intentions to the extent in which it composes and decomposes its cipher-objects in accordance with a *code* inherent in the technological structure of the instrumental field itself. Only the presence of this fundamental *symbolizing* entity that establishes the conditions in which sense is conjoined or articulated with natural matter, which is to say the conditions in which this matter can present the coincidence between a *content* or signified and an *expression* or signifier, makes possible the realization of the production/consumption of objects as a process of communication/interpretation.

It is characteristic of the social process of production/consumption that its use of the instrumental field is not reducible to its employment in the appropriation of nature, in the composition of a practical or objective form from nature. To make use of the instrumental field consists, on the one hand, in *obeying* and, on the other, in *rebellling* from the project of objectivity that it carries with it in its technical structure; it is to intervene in the history of production/consumption as the history of the

	Elements	Functions
C	communicator	Propositional (expressive)
I	interpreter	Conative (assumptive, appellative)
Ct	contact	Phatic
K	code	Metasemic (metasignifying)
	c to code	
	d to decode	
R	referent or context	Semic (signifying or referential)
	x without sense	
	n with sense	
M	message	Aesthetic (poetic)
Σ	sign	

DIAGRAM 6 The functions of communication/interpretation<sup>28</sup>



subject-object relation. The selection of a possibility of form necessarily implies a ratification or a contestation of the entire horizon of possibilities of form; an emphasis or modification of the line that demarcates the border between that which is form in general and that which is not. Therefore, the semiotic dimension of the process of social reproduction consists in a producing-ciphering and a consuming-deciphering of signification-objects that can only be accomplished to the extent in which it uses a different code to all those that govern the behaviour of purely natural living beings; a code which, in being employed in order to constitute the sense of things, must likewise be, simultaneously, *re-constituted*, reaffirmed with either the same or another constitution. The process of production/consumption as a process of communication/interpretation is thus a process not only of signification but also, equally, of *metasignification*.

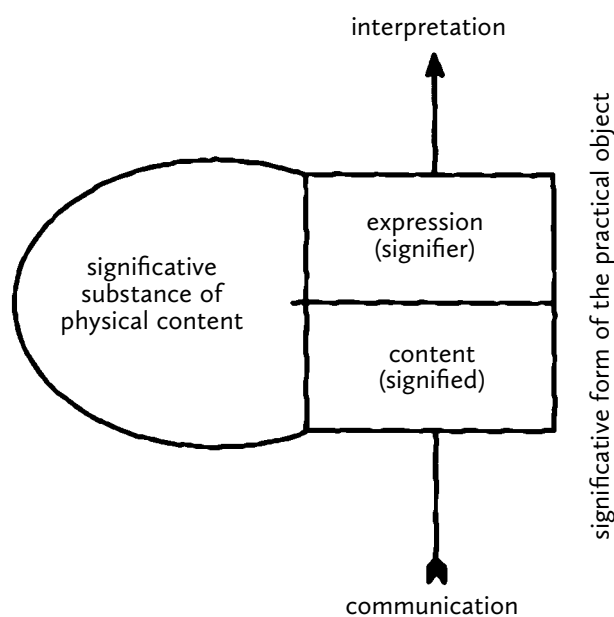
The free composition/decomposition of the form of the practical object is a production/consumption of significations that plays with the limits of the code, that exceeds the blind obedience to the rules that govern its realization. The possibility of this free signification or meta-signifier is guaranteed by the code of human behaviour itself. To give significative form to natural material is to act upon it, on one side, from a *paradigmatic* perspective: to diacritically distinguish it, within an ensemble of comparable objects, according to its similarity or dissimilarity with them. On the other side, simultaneously, from a *syntagmatic* perspective, it is to act upon it in order to distinguish it according to its relative location, spatial and temporal, with respect to the other objects of this ensemble.<sup>29</sup> These are the conditions that the code establishes, in agreement with the combination of these two orders or perspectives. For a material to be articulated with a form and to acquire the significative presence of signifier/signified, there are conditions that adhere to two levels of this articulation. There is a primary level, on which to a given material a determinate figure and location correspond 'by nature', which is to say that proves to be spontaneously significative; and a secondary level, on which freedom is exercised and significative form, the combination of the figure and location of that material, must be, unavoidably, invented.<sup>30</sup>

The code inherent to the instrumental field of the process of social reproduction, that fundamental symbolizing entity, can only establish the conditions of articulation between sense and matter, which is to say of the composition of objective forms, to the extent in which it is found constantly constituting

those conditions from a given state of things, in which these forms are merely outlined as possibilities. The articulation pertaining to the social code is a constant constitution of its own symbolizing effect from its pre-existing natural state. The *senselessness* from which the originary project establishes the conditions for the presence of sense in objects is always, in reality, a *proto-sense*.<sup>31</sup> The originary project of symbolization consists precisely in a transcendence of the spontaneous articulation that the behavioural disposition of the animal, as the deep stratum of the behavioural disposition of the human, establishes between the natural phenomena external to its organic life and their presence in so far as they are functionalized for the reproduction of its principle of living organicity. The process of animal life delivers to the process of human life a '*protoform*' from nature; human existence converts this into the *substance of the socio-natural form*.

Between the producer-communicator subject and the consumer-interpreter subject there always exists a *physical contact* that, considered in its most primary presence, relates them as co-participants in a purely animal process of reproduction. The elements of this physical contact or natural environment of life, as 'transformations' of nature provoked by one and expected by the other, that 'express' for this second subject a 'content' posited in them by the first, are thus (seen from the horizon of social life) *proto-significative materials*: possessing the *substance* (sc and se, in Diagram 5) that, *formed* by the properly human conjunction of signifier (c) and signified (e),

DIAGRAM 7 The significative dimension of the practical object



comes to constitute the true significative character of the practical object. The physical contact between producer–communicator and consumer–interpreter is in every case, including this one, its originary or elemental version, a contact charged in-itself with outlines of signification, a ‘rumour’ (*fatis*)<sup>32</sup> in which one and the other are immersed. Only upon the base of this spontaneous communication/interpretation, primary or derivatively ‘natural’, does there arise properly free or human communication.

Just as with the instrumental field to which it belongs, the code has a history because the process of communication/interpretation is accomplished not only *with* it but equally *in* it; because the code itself, in serving the obvious, is modified profoundly.<sup>33</sup> In principle, every time the code is used in the production/consumption of significations, its project of sense is put in play and can enter into danger of ceasing to be what it is. The project of sense, which is the instauration of a horizon of possible significations, can be *transcended* by another project and comes to constitute the *substantial stratum of a new instauration of semic possibilities*. In truth, the history of the code takes place as a succession of imbrications [*encabalgamientos*] between projects of sense,<sup>34</sup> resulting from the refunctionalization – more or less profound and more or less expansive – of preceding projects by new sense-giving impulses.

## 2. Communication/interpretation as language

The semiotic dimension of social life is not distinguished in general from the *practical* process of production/consumption. It is nothing other than the mode in which the duality of this process – its physical and ‘political’ being in turn – characterizes the effective realization of all acts, both of the global subject and of individual subjects. However, within this duality, the predominance of the ‘political’ over the physical requires that the process of communication/interpretation, as a process that makes the political evident, is accomplished independently of the practical accomplishment of production/consumption. It implies the necessity of an autonomous existence for the semiotic dimension of social existence. *Semiotics*, while remaining within the *practical*, ceases to be confused with it and is established as a special, ‘purified’ process of production/consumption of significations. It can be said, therefore, that the human being, in so far as it is the ‘political animal’, is also the ‘animal endowed with language’ (*zoon logon echon*).

Language, in its basic, verbal realization is also a process of production/consumption of *objects*. The

speaker delivers to the listener a transformation of nature: its voice modifies the acoustic state of the atmosphere, and that change, that object, is perceived or consumed as such by the ear of the other.<sup>35</sup> But the production/consumption of this acoustic transformation of the atmosphere is distinguished from all other particular processes of production/consumption. It is characterized by the fact that it combines a minimum of practicality with a maximum of semioticity.

The greater the relative importance of a particular process of production/consumption is with reference to the combined system of the social subject’s needs and capacities, the lower its chance of freely bringing into play the form of the practical object that it produces/consumes and therefore the smaller the repertoire of significations that can be communicated/interpreted in it. The linguistic transformation of matter as subtle, flexible and widespread as the acoustic state of the atmosphere is without doubt occupies an almost non-existent place of relative importance in the system of needs for consumption and productive capacities.<sup>36</sup> The practical objects that enter and exit this process are in principle ‘always’ possible, ‘easy’ to construct and ‘serve’ for almost nothing. Their practicality is extremely rarefied and therefore their semioticity especially dense. The repertoire of forms/significations that can be articulated with its matter is infinitely greater than the ones that can be achieved with any other type of object. The production/consumption of these objects offers thus the privileged path for communication/interpretation.

If that which characterizes the human being resides in the necessity to which it is subjected of producing and reproducing the form of its sociability, and if the semiotic dimension of its existence is the mode in which the assumption of this need is manifested in all its productive/consumptive activity, then language is the instance in which the self-projection and self-realization of the social subject finds its proper ‘instrument’. Thanks to it, this characteristic function of the social subject is ‘liberated’ from its subjection to the basic level of production/consumption of objects as the activity of appropriating nature. *To imagine*, that is, to negate and transcend a given ‘form’ by the composition of another possibility:<sup>37</sup> this activity, exclusive to the animal which submits its physical reproduction to its ‘political’ reproduction, does not thus solely consist in inventing ‘captive’ forms of the object’s practicality. The projecting that imagines through the production/consumption of linguistic significations can be done ‘in a void’ ignoring the direct, physical and

social limitations, to which it would have to submit if it only 'spoke with facts'.

The potentialization of the semiotic capacity that language supplies to social life distinguishes it functionally from all other pathways that, through their particular practicality, direct the signifying flow of social life. Social life is necessarily *logocentric*:<sup>38</sup> language not only passively condenses and refines the semiotic realizations of practice; on the contrary, it penetrates and interferes in each and every one of them with its own perspective. It not only serves, but also dominates them. In virtue of the confrontation that is thus established between communication/interpretation in general and language, social semiosis enters into a particular dynamic of 'translation' and 're-translation' between doing and saying. However indirectly, that which occurs with language always represents, on the stage of pure imagination, that which occurs on the terrain of projection/practical realization; but, in turn, nothing occurs on this terrain that does not also constitute a representation of that which is in play in language.

#### **On the elemental figure of use-value**

If freedom is established as the characteristic fact of human existence – that is to say, if the process of social reproduction is defined as one that structurally subordinates its physical stratum of functioning to its 'political' stratum – it is impossible not to recognize a fundamental *conflict* present within it: the conflict between the social as form and the natural as formed substance. The natural rules in the social, but the social is not a continuation of the natural: it is on the other side of an abyss that, paradoxically, within the natural, separates the social from it.<sup>39</sup> For the social, to transcend and give form to the natural substance necessarily implies to create from it, dependent on it, an autonomous order. At the same time as maintaining in its general features the order that it possesses spontaneously, the social forces itself upon this substance and recomposes its particular validity: it transforms it into the material of its own creation.

The process of social reproduction *trans-naturalizes* the realization of each and every one of the functions proper to the process of the reproduction of life. From the perspective of nature, it is a 'perversion' of the animal. The production/consumption of food, social coexistence, procreation, the maintenance of the species, in general, are functions that the human being must accomplish, but that it accomplishes not for them in themselves but for something that is

beyond the animal, which is alien to its universe: 'production' and 'consumption' of *the form* of sociality.

Strictly speaking, the 'socio-natural form' of the process of social reproduction is constituted around the conflict that brings with it the transnaturalization of animal life. The concrete incarnation of this conflict is, by necessity, *multiple*. Its constitution sets out from an originary self-selection, from a selection of *identity*, and this always takes place in a particular situation that makes it possible, in a determinate framework of natural events and conditions, both ethnic and territorial.<sup>40</sup> The socio-natural form thus implies a founding pact that the subject reaches with itself, in which a strategy of auto-affirmation is crystallized as a guarantee of survival. It is a commitment to maintain and cultivate the particular manner in which the subject achieves its trans-naturalization, which is to say the initial selection made by the subject of that which, from the animal material, should be taken up and potentialized and that which must be abandoned and repressed. From its simple and pure to its most complex and reworked versions, the socio-natural form traverses a history that is a succession of fidelities and betrayals of this original commitment.

To follow step by step the mode in which this trans-naturalization confers its *elemental level of concretion* upon the 'natural form' of the process of social production, to examine what occurs in production/consumption, both practical and semiotic, when its realization is not only free in the abstract but *free* and *committed* to a particular project of humanity, would be the task of another set of notes, complementary to the present text.

With regard to the conclusions that can be drawn from the present work, it should be noted only that the concept of 'natural form' in Marx's discourse in *Capital* does not refer to a paradisiacal mode of existence for the human being, from which it was expelled by a fall into the original sin of capitalist life and the commodity. The socio-natural form of human existence that Marx the communist seeks to liberate from its subjection to the 'tyranny of capital' is itself conflicted, torn; both happiness and unhappiness are possible in it. Its liberation would not be access to an angelic world, but rather entry into a history in which the human being would live its own drama and not, as now, an alien drama that sacrifices it day by day and directs it towards destruction, without allowing it to intervene in any way.

**Translated by Andrés Sáenz De Sicilia  
and Sandro Brito Rojas**

## Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, pp. 284–5. The incomprehension of what Marx achieved, which impoverishes Foucault's magnificent work, can be justified by the author's limited proximity to the text of *Capital*. The same cannot be said for the voluntary incomprehension boasted by Jean Baudrillard, one of the most acute contemporary theorists of the exchange, production and consumption of goods. Baudrillard (*For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin, Telos, St Louis, 1981, pp. 130–36) refuses to distinguish between utility in the abstract or the exchange-value of an object and its concrete utility or use-value, which is always, necessarily, symbolic, both in the collective and in the intimate, in public and in private. In order to reserve for himself the originality of exploring the latter in 'symbolic exchange', Baudrillard ignores Marx's statement on the concrete singularity and 'incommensurability' of use-values, ascribes to him the flattest of utilitarianisms and disqualifies all that, in line with Marx but beyond him, can be said about a use-value directed towards an enjoyment that exceeds the limits of 'do ut des'. [In an earlier, 1984 version of the text, published as 'The Natural Form of Social Reproduction', Echeverría ends the last line: 'can be said about a use-value whose theoretical apprehension necessarily transcends Western metaphysics'. *Cuadernos Políticos* 41, July–December 1984, p. 46. Trans.]
2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Penguin/New Left Review, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 646.
3. Karl Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Wagner's *Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie*', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 24: 1874–83, Lawrence & Wishart, London, p. 546.
4. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 85.
5. See 'a social relation existing as being-for-itself', *ibid.*, p. 302.
6. 'Labour as a social and natural force does not develop within the valorization process as such, but within the actual labour process.' Karl Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Production Process', in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I: *The Process of Production of Capital* (3rd edn, 1883), trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin/New Left Review, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 1056.
7. See Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, ch. 7.
8. Hegel, in his particular terminology, goes on to say that with the natural behaviour called 'life' 'the individual' appears, which has in itself a 'principle of self-configuration', and as 'subject' faces the 'objective world', which serves as a 'condition' of its existence and which it 'deprives of its own state by turning it into one of its means', with which to 'give its own subject as substance'. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopädie philosophischen der Wissenschaften*, 1817, § 260–98.
9. 'it is not a language but a signal code...' Émile Benveniste, 'Animal Communication and Human Language', in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, University of Miami Press, Florida, 1971, p. 54.
10. Discontinuity in continuity. Continuity in discontinuity. Roger Caillois: 'Man is an animal like the others, his biology is that of the other living things; he is subject to all the laws of the universe... Why suppose that to claim to find elsewhere the characteristics of his nature, or, on the other hand to rediscover in him the laws that one sees operating in other species, is necessarily cranky, delusion or a mirage.' *The Mask of Medusa*, trans. George Ordish, Victor Gollancz, London, 1964, p. 16. Martin Heidegger: 'even what we attribute to the human being as *animalitas* on the basis of the comparison with 'beasts' is itself grounded in the essence of *ek-sistence*.' 'Letter on Humanism', trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, HarperCollins, New York, 1993, p. 228.
11. 'every worthwhile adaptation, every modification which has value over thousands of centuries, is incorporated and preserved in the organism. Witness the perfection of every part, of the antennae, of the feelers, of the compound eyes, quite apart from the somnambulistic infallibility of its instincts.' Caillois, *The Mask of Medusa*, p. 125.
12. 'Freedom as transcendence, however, is not only a unique "kind" of ground, but the origin of ground in general. Freedom is freedom for ground.' Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Ground', trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 127.
13. 'Man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself. The being which is what it is can not be free. Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is *made-to-be* at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to *make itself* instead of *to be*. As we have seen, for human reality, to be is to *choose oneself*; nothing comes to it either from the outside or from within which it can *receive or accept*. Without any help whatsoever, it is entirely abandoned to the intolerable necessity of making itself be – down to the slightest detail. Thus freedom is not a being; it is the *being* of man – i.e., his nothingness of being.' J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 462–3.
14. See Georg Lukács, 'Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats', in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, Berlin, 1923, p. 203.
15. See Aristotle, *Politics*, A 1252a.
16. See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Volume 1: *Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley, Zone, New York, 1991, pp. 35–7.
17. See Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 89.
18. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, ch. 7.
19. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 95.
20. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Volume 1: *Theory of Practical Ensembles* (1960), trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, Verso, London and New York, 2004, pp. 99–101.
21. Louis Hjelmslev, 'La stratification du langage' (1954), in *Essais linguistiques*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1971, p. 55: It is probable that all scientific analysis, of any given object ... implies, by necessity, the distinction between two strata, or hierarchies, that we can identify as form and substance, in the (general) Saussurian definition of these terms.'
22. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 93.
23. Cf. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism'.
24. 'Living labour must seize on these things, awaken them from the dead, change them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values.' Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 289.
25. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. 1, p. 183 ff.
26. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (1916), trans. Roy Harris, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, pp. 18, 79.
27. See A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1993, p. 114.
28. See the origin of these schematizations in Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1960, p. 353 ff.
29. See Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: *World and Language*, Mouton, The Hague, 1971, p. 243.
30. See A. Martinet, 'La doble articulación del lenguaje', in *La lingüística sincrónica*, Gredos, Madrid, 1968, p. 10.
31. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in *Signs* (1960), trans. R.C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 1964.
32. This 'atmosphere of sociability' that establishes a 'phatic communion' between sender and receiver was highlighted

- by Bronislaw Malinowski, 'The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages', in Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards, eds, *The Meaning of Meaning*, Harcourt, New York, 1968, p. 315. See also Hjelmslev, 'La stratification du langage', p. 61.
33. The insistence on the idea that human signification is not only the communication/interpretation of messages but always the history of itself comes, formulated in terms of Jewish mysticism, from Walter Benjamin. 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man' (1916), in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: 1913–1926, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1996, pp. 62–74. Taken up again by Heidegger ('Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry' in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller, Humanity Books, Amherst NY, 2000, pp. 51–65), it has since been developed unilaterally by poststructuralist metaphysics. It is also the implicit condition of Hjelmslev's discovery (in 'La stratification du langage') that the movement which constitutes the biplanarity of the sign depends on another, that which constitutes its double stratum of substance and form.
34. See Hjelmslev, 'La stratification du langage', pp. 56–7.
35. We are dealing here with words, phonic tonalities or audible phenomena endowed with signification, which, in the manner of sonorous 'silhouettes', are differentiated from each other by certain 'distinctive marks', phonemes. See N.S. Troubetzkoy, *Principes de Phonologie*, Klincksieck, Paris, 1970, p. 38.
36. See Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 79.
37. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination [L'imaginaire]*, Paris, 1940], Methuen, London, 1972, pp. 207–19.
38. See Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (1964), trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, Hill & Wang, New York, 1967.
39. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1967), Beacon Press, Boston MA, 1977.
40. Karl A. Wittfogel, 'Die natürlichen Ursachen der Wirtschaftsgeschichte', in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Tübingen, 1932.

5 4 3 2 1...

## radical philosophy conference 2015

House of World Cultures/  
Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Berlin 16–17 January 2015

Fahim Amir	Stewart Martin
David Blacker	Mark Neocleous
Christa Blümlinger	Peter Osborne
Gregoire Chamayou	Silvia Posocco Nina
Matthew Charles	Power
David Cunningham	Rahul Rao
Antke Engel	Frank Ruda
Frank Engster	Nora Sterfeld
Arianna Ferrari	Hito Steyerl
Claire Fontaine	Chris Wilbert
Peter Hallward	Burkhardt Wolf
Gertrud Koch	Alenka Zupančič
Esther Leslie	

Acceleration & the new  
Animalities  
Artistic strike  
On organization  
Pedagogization  
Philosophy of the essay-film  
Queer theory & geopolitics  
Secrecy & surveillance

details [www.radicalphilosophy.com](http://www.radicalphilosophy.com)