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The Conceptual Renovation of Class Consciousness, Revolution and Violence: Reflections Concerning the Actuality of Georg Lukács' Work*

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Abstract | One hundred years after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, it is imperative to revisit the classic work of Georg Lukács to discuss the relevance of his ideas in a world where the capitalist mode of production does not cease to show its devastating effects. To do so, we divide the article into two sections. In the first part, we place Lukács' work in dialogue with that of Hegel and Marx in order to clarify the status of violence as an ontological condition of history, allowing us to determine the theoretical-practical framework from which social revolution can be conceptualized. In the second section, we analyze Lukács' notion of class consciousness not as a historical fatality but as an act of self-determination of the proletariat. We compare this proposal with the current situation of gentrification of the proletariat which, far from invalidating the Hungarian author's proposal, constitutes its reversal and the platform for its actualization. Ultimately, it is about the proletarian still today taking control and becoming, through class consciousness, the subject-object of history. We conclude by reinterpreting Lukács' terms in a practice that counters a reactionary position in order to combat both the reactionary movements and the hedonistic immobilism of the proletariat.

Keywords | class consciousness; Hegel; Lukács; Marx; proletariat; revolution

La renovación conceptual de la conciencia de clase, la revolución y la violencia: reflexiones a propósito de la actualidad de la obra de Georg Lukács

Resumen | A cien años de la publicación de *Historia y conciencia de clase*, resulta necesario revisitar la clásica obra de Georg Lukács para discutir la actualidad de sus planteamientos en un mundo donde el modo de producción capitalista no deja de mostrar sus efectos devastadores. Para esto, dividimos el artículo en dos apartados. En la primera parte, ponemos en diálogo la obra de Lukács con la de Hegel y Marx para precisar la violencia como condición ontológica de la historia, y establecer cuál es el estatuto teórico-práctico desde el cual se puede pensar la revolución social. En el segundo apartado, analizamos la noción de conciencia de clase de Lukács no como una fatalidad histórica, sino como un acto de autodeterminación del proletariado.

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Asimismo, cotejamos esta propuesta con la situación actual de aburguesamiento del proletariado que, lejos de invalidar el planteamiento del autor húngaro, constituye su revés y la plataforma de su actualización. Se trata, a fin de cuentas, de que todavía hoy el proletario tome el timón y devenga, por medio de la conciencia de clase, sujeto-objeto de la historia. Concluimos con una reinterpretación de los términos de Lukács en una práctica que deseche una posición reaccionaria para combatir frontalmente tanto los movimientos reaccionarios como el inmovilismo hedonista del proletariado.

Palabras clave | conciencia de clase; Hegel; Lukács; Marx; proletariado; revolución

A renovação conceitual da consciência de classe, revolução e violência: reflexões sobre a atualidade da obra de Georg Lukács

Resumo | cem anos após a publicação de *História e consciência de classe*, é necessário revisitar a obra clássica de Georg Lukács para discutir a atualidade de suas proposições em um mundo onde o modo de produção capitalista continua a mostrar seus efeitos devastadores. Para isso, dividimos o artigo em duas seções. Na primeira parte, colocamos a obra de Lukács em diálogo com a de Hegel e Marx, a fim de definir a violência como condição ontológica da história e estabelecer o status teórico-prático a partir do qual a revolução social pode ser pensada. Na segunda seção, analisamos a noção de Lukács de consciência de classe não como fatalidade histórica, mas como ato de autodeterminação do proletariado. Além disso, comparamos essa proposta com a situação atual de burguesização do proletariado que, longe de invalidar a abordagem do autor húngaro, constitui sua reversão e a plataforma para sua atualização. Em última análise, é uma questão de o proletário ainda hoje assumir o controle e tornar-se, por meio da consciência de classe, o sujeito-objeto da história. Concluímos com uma reinterpretação dos termos de Lukács em uma prática que descarta uma posição reacionária a fim de combater de frente tanto os movimentos reacionários quanto o imobilismo hedonista do proletariado.

Palavras-chave | consciência de classe; Hegel; Lukács; Marx; proletariado; revolução

Proletariat, Take the Wheel: What It Means to Own Up to Our Emancipation

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács addresses the ongoing struggle over the essence of Marxism. At the dawn of the 20th century, the communist horizon was filled with the potential for revolutions as well as their violent suppression. From the east, the Bolshevik revolution had taken hold upon toppling Tsarist Russia. From the west, the seeds for a German revolution and workers' movement were resisting an opportunist deflation of Marxism into a social democracy that viewed capitalism as compatible with its aims. It is no mistake here that Lukács turns to both V.I. Lenin as a theoretician and Rosa Luxemburg as an orthodox Marxist par excellence. For Lukács, Lenin asserts the practical essence of Marxism through a theoretical action that seeks to preserve the correct understanding of the Marxist method. Meanwhile, Luxemburg defends the dialectical core of Marxism that allows it to comprehend the totality of capitalism without getting one-sidedly hung up on isolated facts and piecemeal political agendas that render communism into a mere utopian socialism.

What all three of these Marxists are resisting can be articulated through Carrie Underwood's song *Jesus, Take the Wheel*: "Jesus, take the wheel/ Take it from my hands/ 'Cause I can't do this on my own/ I'm letting go/ So give me one more chance/ And save me from this road I'm on/ Jesus, take the wheel".

The song illustrates a resignation to a higher power, an ideal to realize the path of divine providence without which the voice of the song feels aimlessly lost and unable to continue. She has lost control of the vehicle, losing its grip on the tracks. In essence, this is the revisionism of Marxism forwarded by Eduard Bernstein where the revolutionary means of achieving communism are compromised for the amelioration of capitalism as if emancipation could be achieved without struggle.

What we find in revisionisms such as Bernstein's is a resigned acceptance of capitalism that lets it take the wheel of its disastrous conditions with the faith that this will pave the way for a better society. Marx is rendered into a reformist sympathizer and the fundamental contradictions that give way to fundamental antagonisms as well as catastrophic crises are denied as Bernstein seeks to "dispel the idea that Marx expected the realisation of a socialistic society from one great cataclysm" (Bernstein 1897a). Bernstein thinks that "revolution by force becomes a meaningless phrase" if legislative reform proves to be effective in removing social obstacle (Bernstein 1899). Therefore, revolution is treated as a lost cause by the revisionist since there is no revolution once-and-for-all but a series of revolutionary struggles that are not seen as necessary (Bernstein 1897b).

As Luxemburg notes in *Reform or Revolution* (2006), Bernstein proposes a reformist way out of capitalism through the amelioration of working conditions as well as the elimination of the proletariat by the middle class. This outlook is reproached as flying in the face of both historical materialism which grasps the developmental and societal transformations that make the given socio-economic formations possible as well as dialectical materialism which comprehends the total minutiae of mediations composing capitalism from the exchange of commodities, the employment of labour, and the means of production. As Luxemburg writes of the compromise of scientific socialism for a promissory utopian socialism: "Here we have [...] an idealist explanation of Socialism. The objective necessity of Socialism, the explanation of Socialism as the result of the material development of society, fall to the ground" (2006, 11). We find echoes of this in Lenin's theoretical works such as *On Marxism and Philosophy* (1975) where he comments on the abstract pretense of non-partisans in philosophy in so far as they "are all a wretched mush; they are a contemptible *middle party* in philosophy, who confuse the materialist and the idealist trends in every question. The attempt to escape these two basic trends in philosophy is nothing but 'conciliatory quackery'" (1975, 647).

Reformist revisionisms treat revolution as unnecessary and this case is defended on the basis of denying the constitutive contradictions inherent to capitalism. However, this abstraction of the bad sides of capitalism to preserve the good in capitalism depends on rendering these structural failures as external accidents rather than an internal necessity. Like Luxemburg and Lenin, Lukács reasserts the immanent critique of capitalism as the way in which the need for revolution is grasped as "a necessary connection between the theory and [the] activity; it would be a form that enables the masses to become conscious of their socially necessary or fortuitous actions... ensuring a genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action" (Lukács 2021, 10). Lukács reproaches Bernstein's revisionism as a theory of evolution without revolution, as the reification of fundamental conflicts into the smooth course of a harmonic nature in eternal capitalism (Lukács 2021, 13). Thus, the crux of the titular class consciousness in *History and Class Consciousness* is to twist on Carrie Underwood's "Jesus, Take the Wheel" to affirm that it is the proletariat who must not only become fully aware of the totality of their situation but also take control through collective action, enacting a revolution that their circumstances demand.

In fact, this is what differentiates utopian socialism from scientific socialism for Lukács, as he writes about how historical materialism became possible:

> The path taken by this evolution leads from utopia to the knowledge of reality; from transcendental goals fixed by the first great leaders of the workers' movement to the clear perception by the Commune of 1871 that the working-class has "no ideals to realize," but wishes only "to liberate the elements of the new society." It is the path leading from the "class opposed to capitalism" to the class "for itself". (2021, 33)

Along with dialectical materialism, these developments and processes of history could be grasped in a concrete totality rather than disjointed limbs of history that are described as disjointed factoids without deeper comprehension (Lukács 2021, 22). Revolution is not so much a matter of lofty transcendental theories aiming for utopia, nor is it a matter of the deviant revolts of individuals against conformity in civil society. Revolution requires a consciousness of social being, which became first possible in bourgeois society through the proletariat, whereby class struggle helps comprehend the entirety of society as intelligible—to be exact, the proletariat stands out as a symptom of both the labour that produces commodities and the commodification of that very labour such that "self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge" (Lukács 2021, 30). Therefore, any revolutionary action can be said to be concrete under the considerations of historical and dialectical materialism. Furthermore, it is through the proletariat that we find a unity of theory and praxis whereby the proletariat's misery acts as the practical expression of historical necessity and the theoretical consciousness of a loss are achieved through the alienation from oneself.

When Marx and Engels tell us in *The Holy Family* (1975) that the emancipation of the proletariat is coextensive with both the abolition of the conditions of its life which are identical with the abolition of the conditions of life of bourgeois society, there is a crucial lesson in the actualization of freedom that is best understood as an act of self-abolishing. In more recent literature, we can find this formulation in Alenka Zupančič's *What IS Sex?* (2017) when she writes:

> The Marxian concept of the proletariat could be seen precisely as formulating the fact that, in capitalism, the Worker doesn't exist (a Worker that existed would actually be a slave). This is why the proletariat is not simply one of the social classes, but rather names the point of the concrete constitutive negativity in capitalism… the proletariat is not the sum of all workers, it is the concept that names the symptomatic point of this system, its disavowed and exploited negativity. (2017, 33-34)

The psychoanalytic lesson here is one of subjective destitution—namely, the point where the analysand has to let go and acknowledge the constitutive impasse in their subjectivity as the pass that overcomes it, whereby it is admitted that there is no deeper meaning to the real of the trauma that can be symbolized. This lesson can be further thematized in the context of colonial racism by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) where he writes that "we are witness to the desperate efforts of a black man striving desperately to discover the meaning of black identity" (2008, xviii) and that "the black man is not" (2008, 206). This is precisely what Lukács means when he tells us that there are no ideals to realize, only the act of liberation to be carried out. The self-abolition of the proletariat is an act of subjective destitution, which Slavoj Žižek clarifies as "the passage of a political subject to a radical de-subjectivization, to becoming an object of a political cause" (2023, 69). What it means to own up to our own emancipation is to embrace subjective destitution which realizes that emancipation is experienced as a form of loss.

To Bernstein's retort that revolution is superfluous if it is not once-and-for-all, we must stress that it is necessarily the case that the revolution has to be mobilized again and again. The wager is a matter of two different failures best articulated by Mao Tse-Tung in *Cast Away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle* (1949). Capitalism and its apologists are bound

to fail repeatedly until they meet their doom insofar as capitalism's structural integrity is going to collapse either by civilizational collapse in the crevices of its own corpse or by revolutionary conflict. Communists, however, have to learn to fail and fail again as the path to our victory (Tse-Tung 1949). When the fundamental conflict is looked at from this angle, it makes sense why Marx and Engels declare at the end of *The Communist Manifesto* (1977) that "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win" (1977, 70).

In this article, we have composed some reflections on the influence and impact of Georg Lukács' work. The first section explores the intimate relationship between violence and history in order to discern what constitutes revolutionary violence proper at the moment that the revolutionary subject dispossesses of itself into becoming the object of an emancipatory cause. We will argue that the crucial intersection between violence and history in revolution is that of an alienating violence that belongs to class struggle in its attempts to institute its collectivity, rather than an arbitrary violence which simply would remain inconsequential. In this sense, it is crucial for us to discern which hills are worth dying on in a manner evocative of the words of Huey P. Newton: "Death comes to all of us, but it varies in its significance. To die for the reactionaries, the racists, the capitalists is lighter than a feather. But to die in the service to the people is heavier than any mountain and deeper than any sea" (2009, 234).

The second section continues to explore the formulation of the proletariat in Lukács insofar as it is not just a partial standpoint from which to grasp capitalism but also as it is intrinsically tied up to the whole of its situation. In light of contemporary reactionary subjectivity, however, the achievement of class consciousness and its commitment to a revolutionary cause has become anything but a certainty since the critique of the bourgeois way of life can go in any reactive direction which falls prey to the lure of self-portrayed anti-establishment reactionaries. In a perverted irony, it may be the case that Bernstein's reforms have become the name of the game for neo-liberal capitalist democracies such that the revolution has been rendered superfluous and that the proletariat has been bourgeoisified. As such, we will address this contemporary paradox whereby the proletariat and the bourgeoisie have been flattened into each other by arguing that Lukács' thesis remains true today and that we must become conscious of our bourgeoisification that makes us buy into a compulsory individual freedom that is at odds with our precarity as well as with the existential threat of climate collapse. Therefore, the crux of today's revolution must continue the radical subjective destitution that allows us to let go of oneself into an emancipatory cause that we can only achieve as a collective, so we must open an empty space in ourselves and each other since we only have each other to lean on.

Violence as a Revolutionary Historical Dilemma

Antonino Infranca's work (2017) is significant for discussing violence and history in revolutionary contexts, as it offers a transversal look at Lukács' philosophical-political thought. Since he joined the Hungarian Communist Party and in his early texts, Lukács conceives the proletarian revolution as an act of liberation linked to the ethical task of destroying all forms of oppression and exploitation. However, this entails the dilemma of whether this process of liberation has to be carried out violently or whether it is possible to be accomplished slowly and progressively, through raising consciousness, to begin with (2017, 11). For Infranca, the answer to this predicament is given at two different times: in several writings from 1919, Lukács was prone to point out that only through violence the existing order can be taken down and a new order established. However, 50 years later—in his autobiography—the problem of violence was still latent, as Lukács pointed out the distance that exists between theory and practice (2017, 12-13).

What is interesting is that, for Lukács, violence and revolution are transformed into ethical questions within the framework of the ideal of a philosophy of history. To some extent violence seems inevitable, because of the situation in which the proletariat is subdued within a context of oppression. Likewise, violence can also be seen as a secondary means and it can be dispensed with if conditions permit it by establishing a new order, a liberating order (Infranca 2017, 41). Then, while the violence of capitalism would play the role of an end in itself for the preservation of that system, proletariat violence would assume the role of a means to stop the exploitation:

> For violence is no autonomous principle and never can be. And this violence is nothing but the will of the proletariat which has become conscious and is bent on abolishing the enslaving hold of reified relations over man and the hold of economics over society. (Lukács 1972, 251)

On the one hand, this leads to thinking of violence in relation to the capitalist mode of production and, on the other, to the horizon of an evolutionary violence where an outdated form of production is replaced by a new one. For Lukács, the capitalist model of production is violent in itself and brings with it a violence that produces negative effects on subjectivity. This model of production is sustained by an original accumulation of violent capital, with a State imposing domination in the economic and political sphere, individuals trained to obtain private capital as their only goal, and a system that masks violence and presents it as if it were the natural way of the world (Infranca 2017, 108-110):

> Only under capitalism, where this stabilization means the stable hegemony of the bourgeoisie within an uninterrupted, revolutionary, and dynamic economic process, does it take the shape of the "natural rule" of the "eternal iron laws" of political economy. And because every society tends to "mythologize" the structure of its own system of production, projecting it back into the past, this past—and even more *the future*—appear likewise to be determined and controlled by such laws. It is then forgotten that the birth and the triumph of this system of production is the fruit of the most barbaric, brutal, and naked use of "extra-economic" violence. (Lukács 1972, 241)

Writing on the violence of capital, reification, and class consciousness, Navarro-Fuentes points out that:

> Capital creates and destroys workers; it produces capital which reproduces and creates capital by itself and without the need for workers, assuming free labor. The essence of things never appears by itself as unique in its own nature or being. So class consciousness is presented as the possibility of breaking the commodification, of fracturing it so that human life reaches its maximum possible vitality. (2023, 96)

The idea of an evolutionary violence is related to the historical dimension of the modes of production. Each mode of production establishes the domination of one class over another; however, the difference (or promise) of proletarian violence is that it is not only less violent, but of a new kind which seeks to reverse the violence of capitalism, establishing a new form of relationship between economy and violence: a violence that is justified insofar as it replaces an inhuman situation with an ethical life. This makes, as stated above, violence not an end in itself, but a means to the suppression of objectified relations and the liberation of men (Infranca 2017, 111-112).

> This tendency is expressed during the transition above all as a change in the relationship between economy and violence. For however great the economic importance of violence was in the transition to capitalism, the economy always had the upper hand while violence served and advanced its cause, removing obstacles from its path. But

> now violence is placed at the disposal of principles that could occur only as "superstructure" in previous societies, that is only as factors accompanying the inevitable process and determined by it. Violence is now put to the service of man and the flowering of man. (Lukács 1972, 251)

For Infranca, the theme of violence in Lukács relates to truth by unveiling the falsity of capitalist reality and opening up the possibility of a new order. Through this, the proletariat must have knowledge of how capitalism works in order to subvert it. The above implies a reform of consciousness which is based on a rejection of the undignified life within the capitalist system of production. Gradually, this transforms into a proletarian culture that is an alternative to the bourgeois one, fostering the creation of new institutions and an authentic proletarian education for democracy, rather than focusing on specific objectives (Infranca 2017, 113-114).

Infranca emphasizes that for Lukács the terms *violence* and *force* are inseparable or indistinct, whether in the German *Gewalt,* or in the Hungarian *erőszák* (2017, 110). It is interesting to think about this in the perspective of the following analysis:

> violence serves to overthrow the existing order and then as a force serves to maintain and defend these new institutional and economic forms. The use of violence should not be an end in itself and thus illegal action should not be made the only form of political activity, but should also exploit the political forms of peaceful struggle offered by the bourgeois order, such as parliamentary representation. (Infranca 2017, 115)

To conclude, and to clarify some interpretations of this author's work, the relationship between violence and proletariat in Lukács' view is important. Although Lukács does not reject violence outright or see it as inherently evil—he frames it within the critique of capitalism, viewing it as a response to other forms of violence—this does not mean that he was an intellectual at the service of Stalin's power. On the contrary, he was one of the critics of Stalin's methods (Tardivo and Díaz-Cano 2018, 81-82).

It's the End of the World as We Know It. Or: Why We All Have to Become Proletarians—Georg Lukács in the 21st Century

As we have already discussed, the objective violence of the capitalist system is characterized specifically by the fact that it is a violence without a subject. In other words: The form of structural violence inherent in the capitalist system—as is already evident in the antagonism between master and slave apostrophized by Hegel—is a form of violence that eludes any form of (inter-)subjective form of violence. Rather, violence is constituted by the contradictions/oppositions inherent in the concept itself. If one assumes—as also explained—that revolutionary violence is able to eliminate the violence of alienation (but not the violence of the concept as such), we are left with the following question: Is the emergence of revolutionary violence—even if it is not linked to individual processes of consciousness—tied to an epistemic standpoint? An epistemic (i.e., collective) standpoint which creates itself out of historical necessity? The next step is to ask to what extent it still makes sense to speak of the possibility of a proletarian standpoint in the 21st century. In particular, the philosophical significance of Lukács' work—the relationship between history and violence—will be examined with regard to its practical relevance. To put it more concretely: If revolutionary violence is always to be considered in terms of its historical embeddedness, the second step is to ask (on a practical level) what the revolutionary potential of the proletariat means in the context of the 21st century—which of course also implies the question of the relevance of Lukács' work. To answer this question, we would like to start with a popular song as an example.

During the covid-19 pandemic, the song *It's the End of the World as We Know It* by R.E.M. already experienced an unsurprising revival (Baum 2020). Against the backdrop of the current global situation, marked by the fact that we are dealing with a, to put it in the words of Adam Tooze (2022), *polycrisis*, the song appears to be even more relevant. The refrain goes as follows: "It's the end of the world as we know it/ It's the end of the world as we know it/ It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine".

If one reads this refrain carefully, it becomes clear that it is not primarily concerned with apocalyptic scenarios—such as the destruction of the world by a nuclear confrontation or climate change—but rather with the fact that an end of the world as we have perceived and known it so far (...*as we know it*) has occurred. It is, to put it with reference to the title of Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo's book *Construcción de una nueva normalidad* (2021), an old normality that has been abandoned and, at the same time, the need to construct a new normality that has come to the fore, which acknowledges that the covid-19 pandemic "threatened our sense of 'normality'" (Žižek 2020). The addition of *I feel fine*, in turn, explains that this new world—or this new normality—is seen as something quite welcomed. So, to put it briefly, R.E.M's song is not about an objectively ascertainable end of the world *per se*, but about a subjective shift in the level of perception, which is caused by specific crises and at the same time can (but does not have to) lay the foundation for a new world. This point is essential in order to understand why revolutionary violence must also be considered in relation to a specific form of epistemic standpoint.

According to Lukács, the proletariat, conditioned by the process of reification, is also put in the position to recognize at a certain point that–to formulate it once again with R.E.M.—*it's the end of the world as we know it*. This insight stems from the position of epistemic superiority (Stahl 2023), which the proletariat holds over the bourgeoisie. The reification of proletarian consciousness produced by capitalism results in the situation where, even though the bourgeoisie is also directly confronted with the reality of capitalist reification on an empirical level, the proletariat's class position enables it to recognize the totality of social relations. Consequently, this recognition allows the proletariat to overcome the state of reification produced by capitalist relations. Or to put it differently: To become a subject-object (Peter 2016, 10). While the bourgeoisie confronts the social relations marked by reification through abstract "reflexive categories of quantification", for the proletariat it is a "question of prosperity or ruin to become conscious of the dialectical essence of its existence" (Lukács 1923, 158).

This becoming aware of one's own class situation, as Lukács pointedly draws attention to in his essay *Reification and Consciousness of the Proletariat* (1923), forms the basis for the proletariat to conceive of itself as the subject-object of historical development, which actively creates the objective relations and subsequently no longer conceives itself as something disparate from them, thus dissolving the process of reification (Peter 2016, 10).

At this point, Lukács could easily be accused of assuming a form of historical teleology, characterized by the fact that the contradictions of the capitalist system will inevitably lead to its collapse and the emergence of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject (Jay 2018, 202). Nothing, however, could be further from Lukács' view. In fact, his rejection of the Second International lies precisely in its passive stance, which overtly relied on the eventual collapse of capitalism to create space for the socialist society to emerge (Jay 2018). At this point, however, it is important to be semantically precise: It is true that Lukács assumes that historical developments are capable of producing the proletarian standpoint (which will then generate revolutionary violence) as the proletariat gains insight into the totality of historical development tendencies.

But which conclusions the proletariat draws with regard to its own position as a class, and—even more importantly—whether the proletariat can bring about a change on the basis of its very consciousness as a class (not, as we have argued, on the basis of a subjective/ individualized form of consciousness), is ultimately up to the free act of the proletariat itself. Here it is worth citing Lukács himself once again:

> With regard to the consciousness of the proletariat, the development does not function automatically: for the proletariat applies to an increased degree what the old, visual-mechanical materialism could not comprehend, that the transformation and liberation can only be its own deed [...] The objective economic development was only able to create the position of the proletariat in the production process, which determined its standpoint; it is only able to give the proletariat the possibility and the necessity to transform society. But this transformation itself can only be the—free—act of the proletariat itself. (1923, 191)

According to Lukács, the proletarian standpoint and the accompanying increase in consciousness are to be regarded as a necessary condition for bringing about a revolutionary transformation of social relations—but only a necessary and not a sufficient condition. In the end, it is up to the free act of the proletariat itself (Lukács 1923) whether the existence of its own class consciousness is translated into concrete revolutionary practice (Peter 2016, 11).

The question that inevitably arises at this point, however, is whether the proletarian standpoint as apostrophized by Lukács still exists today. Or, more precisely, is it (still) possible to rely on the proletariat, as a revolutionary subject, to form its own proletarian standpoint? Or is it rather a bourgeois form of projection, according to which "the overcoming of what Lukács calls the 'bourgeois standpoint' [...] occurs not in the thinking or consciousness of the proletariat but in the thought of 'bourgeois intellectuals'—i.e., in 'factions', rebelling against the bourgeoisie itself" (Ignatow 1988, 164-165)?

Does the critique of one's own bourgeois way of life, then, lead to the need for a proletarian subject who seeks for revolutionary change? Reflecting on the past few years, it becomes increasingly evident that the emergence of a proletarian standpoint, as Lukács had in mind, cannot be relied upon. Against the backdrop of Donald Trump's election victory, the current shocking record high of AfD votes in Germany, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marine Le Pen in France, etc., it is becoming increasingly clear that—to use Micha Brumlik's phrase—we have not been dealing with a revolutionary, but rather a *reactionary subject* in recent years (2017).

Nevertheless, these socio-political circumstances—as concerning as they may be—should not lead to the assumption that Lukács' thesis is wrong and would no longer apply in today's world. The only limitations are, first, that there is no longer any reliance on the proletarian standpoint to emerge on its own through tendencies of capitalist development and, second, that we must all become proletarians. In their collaborative exchange *Towards a New Manifesto?*, Adorno responds to Horkheimer's statement that the atomized individual is a necessary product of the capitalist stage of civilization with the following words:

> The reason why this entire question of spare time is so unfortunate is that people unconsciously mimic the work process, whereas what they really want is to stop working altogether. Happiness necessarily presupposes the element of effort. Basically, we should talk to mankind once again as in the eighteenth century: you are upholding a system that threatens to destroy you. The appeal to class won't work any more, since today you are really all proletarians (Adorno and Horkheimer 2011, 40).

Even though Adorno's primary concern is a critique of the concept of leisure (in relation to work), his statement "[...] since today you are really all proletarians" should be taken literally

(Adorno and Horkheimer 2011, 40). But what does the statement that we are all proletarians mean in concrete terms? On a very basic level, one could first answer that—regardless of one's own class situation—it is necessary to adopt the proletarian standpoint. The question then becomes: What does it mean for us, today, to adopt the proletarian standpoint? First of all, it should be mentioned—and here, admittedly, lies the difficulty—that taking the proletarian standpoint cannot rely on any tendency of historical development, but can only be achieved through pure voluntarism—that one cannot rely on historical and social forms of dialectics also becomes clear, as mentioned before, by the fact that a reactionary, rather than a revolutionary, subject (Brumlik 2017) has often emerged. The need to form the proletarian standpoint thus goes hand in hand with Marx's famous demand in his introduction to the *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*: to abandon one's illusions about one's own condition–one's own (precarious) situatedness within the social totality—presupposes that the condition in which one lives is dependent on one's illusions in order to be successfully reproduced (Marx and Engels 1981, 379). The illusion that must be overcome in this context is the notion, characteristic of the 21st century, that human beings are essentially free subjects and that, therefore, there is no longer the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Arthur Bueno illustrates this aspect in an interesting way using the modern concept of the *entrepreneurial self*. According to Bueno, the concept of the entrepreneurial self illustrates that

> [a]s more individuals come to regard themselves as entrepreneurs in a position to dominate the world via calculation (*bourgeoisification*), they may be led—as Lukács already observed—to overlook their interest in overcoming reified social relations since that undertaking would threaten precisely their condition as (apparent) subjects. At the same time, as more of them are placed in a precarized situation which makes the daily struggle for existence a matter of life or death (*proletarianization*), they—as Lukács in turn failed to notice—have too much to lose in any attempt to overcome reification and can thus be impelled to accept the current order. (Bueno 2022, 172)

Bueno precisely points out that the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has often shifted into the individual itself in contemporary times. In this context, increasing proletarianization represents the obscene flip side—or, to put it in modified terms with Fromm: the bourgeoisie unconscious—of an increasing bourgeoisification of one's own self. This internal antagonism can subsequently only be successfully overcome by consistently adopting the proletarian standpoint. This means that, to avoid continuing to serve capitalist reproduction, one must consistently adopt the proletarian perspective and learn to see through the illusion of freedom that modern capitalism tries to sell. The crises we face in the 21st century also demonstrate that only the proletarian standpoint—and the concomitant insight that we are the subject-object of historical totality—can save humanity. In her recent book *Cannibal Capitalism* (2023), Nancy Fraser aptly draws attention to the fact that today we are dealing with a cannibalistic capitalism, which, like the ouroboros, consumes itself and destroys the very foundations necessary for the continuation of humanity (2023, 12). Against the backdrop of the global crises triggered by capitalism—above all climate change—it becomes clear that capitalism is not only destroying itself, but all of humanity with it in the long run.

We are thus faced with a double form of exploitation: internal and external. On the one hand, the internalized struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat suggests that the possession of capital—keyword: *human capital* (Bueno 2022, 172)—often goes hand in hand with self-exploitation. On the other hand, the exploitation of external resources, such as our natural environment, indicates that we are also exploiting ourselves by eliminating our basic conditions of existence. This paradoxical development, wherein many

people are both proletarian and bourgeois at the same time, shows that making conscious the bourgeois unconscious—that is, realizing that what we experience as bourgeois freedoms is linked to our own precarization and the destruction of the environment and elimination of our own conditions of existence—can be the only way to authentically adopt a contemporary proletarian standpoint. However, we cannot rely on history. We can only rely on ourselves.

Conclusion: From Consciousness to Class In-Consciousness

We have seen, then, that violence is the ontological premise of history. Hegel, however, thinks that the State of law mediates violence, when in reality the State is nothing more than a systematic expression of the same: namely, the violence of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. It is a systemic and anonymous violence, as abstract as it is subjective: it is present in capital from end to end, from the very alienating condition of labor to industrial ecological devastation through misery, inequality, and exclusion. That is why Lukács is right to denounce as abstract and illusory the pretension of separating violence and economy, violence, and history. The primordial, founding, structural violence is undoubtedly that of the commodity form. What greater form of violence has been exercised not only on the subjects, but on reality itself by imposing the biased form of exchange-value and abstract labor?

Indeed, what characterizes capital is that it is not a thing. It is a social relation that dominates the totality of acts in society. Capitalism is not only exploitation, inequality or private property: it is all of these, but from the historical singularity of the commodity form. The novelty that comes with the capitalist mode of production is that everything is a commodity. And a commodity is characterized by being both use-value and exchange-value. However, what predominates in capitalism is the exchange value of every entity, in such a way that what is established is the dominion of the quantitative, the comparable, and the abstract (Ayala-Colqui 2021).

Moreover, if the utility of objects and beings no longer matters, but only their value, labor too is modified: it ceases to be concrete labor (singular, particular, differentiated) to become abstract labor (generic, anonymous, undifferentiated). And it is the latter that is also predominant in capitalism, since exchange-value is produced by abstract labor. Thus, every social relation is mediated by abstract labor (Postone 1996) and everything is judged quantitatively according to exchange-value (Sohn-Rethel 1978). Thus, every social act is dominated by abstractions and, more precisely, they point to the logic of capital, which Marx (1983) eloquently defines as valorization of value (*die Verwertung des Werts*)—that is, with an irrational logic of making value become more value from workers' surplus value in capitalist production, since proletarian labor is the only source of value creation:

> Capital, then, is a category of movement, of expansion; it is a dynamic category, "value in motion". This social form is alienated, quasi-independent, exerts a mode of abstract compulsion and constraint on people, and is in motion. Consequently, Marx accords it the attribute of agency. His initial determination of capital, then, is as self-valorizing value, as the self-moving substance that is subject. He describes this self-moving subjective-objective social form in terms of a continuous, ceaseless process of value's self-expansion [...] The movement of capital is without limit, without end. As self-valorizing value, it appears as pure process. In dealing with the category of capital, then, one is dealing with a central category of a society that becomes characterized by a constant directional movement with no determinate external telos, a society driven by production for the sake of production, by a process that exists for the sake of process. (Postone 1996, 269)

This abstract domain, as well as the alienation of which Lukács speaks, is not a way of seeing reality: it is the way of being of reality itself. And this reality, guided by abstractions, nevertheless sustains a concrete antagonism: that of bourgeois and proletarians. It would be utopian, idealized, and naive to think that in the face of the violence constitutive of reality, the position of a pacifying reformism will resolve the conflicts.

But wouldn't this make us fall into an unethical, amoral position? Not at all. It is not a question of making an apology for violence or terrorism (words with which the bourgeoisie and its ideological apparatuses criminalize criticism of capital, assuming a cynical posture that places them in a sort of ideal kingdom of peace). The point here is to point out that violence is an inherent quality of social relations. As Catherine Malabou states:

> We do not at all think that Marx criticizes capitalist violence and its alienating power within the horizon of a communist promise of non-violence. Once again, struggle is the fabric of life. What Marx criticizes in capitalist violence is the fact that it ruins, numbs, and annihilates men by denying and obscuring itself qua violence, in the guise of the naturalistic ideology of the peacefulness of origins and of the equality to come. It is in this sense that this violence is unacceptable. It is in this sense that one must struggle violently against it, always play violence against violence-there is economy here too, but *revolutionary* economy. (2002, 193)

And given this evidence, developing an "economy of violence" becomes necessary; that is, a "violence against violence" (Derrida 1978, 117). Sorel provides an obvious example of this when he distinguishes between force and violence:

> the object of force is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs, while violence tends to the destruction of that order. The bourgeoisie have used force since the beginning of modern times, while the proletariat now reacts against the middle class and against the State by violence. (1999, 165-166)

In keeping with that, Walter Benjamin connects not only economy and violence (of capitalism and State), but also law and violence: ethics itself, law itself, harbors violence. It is not a violence that pursues natural ends, but one that creates law and, moreover, preserves it: "If the first function of violence is law-positing, then this second function of violence can be called law-preserving" (2021, 45). Thus, "the positing of law is the positing of power, and, in this respect, an act of an immediate manifestation of violence" (2021, 56). Benjamin makes a distinction between a "divine violence" that overthrows laws and a "mythical violence" that establishes them:

> If mythic violence is law-positing, divine violence is law-annihilating; if the former establishes boundaries, the latter boundlessly annihilates them; if mythic violence inculpates and expiates at the same time, divine violence de-expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal in a bloodless manner. [...] Mythic violence is blood-violence over mere life for the sake of violence itself; divine violence is pure violence over all of life for the sake of the living. The former demands sacrifice; the latter assumes it. (2021, 57-58)

It is about considering this form of violence in its maximum radicality, which, however lethal, is always "bloodless" and "for the sake of the living." For this, it is necessary to "become proletarian": to be, as Lukács said, the subject and object of its history, which is nothing but history. The premise of this becoming is, evidently, class consciousness. In this regard, Alain Badiou notes that when confronted with the ethical discourses of a supposed humanity, of a universal subject possessing rights, the difficulty is how to think ethically about an event that introduces a unique novelty into history:

> It is thus an *immanent break.* "Immanent" because a truth proceeds in the situation, and nowhere else—there is no heaven of truths. "Break" because what enables the truth-process—the event—meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation. [...] The subject, therefore, in no way pre-exists the process. He is absolutely nonexistent in the situation "before" the event. (2001, 41-42)

To be the *fidélité* subject of a militancy or, from Lukács' vocabulary, to become class conscious is not an automatic fact—something on which the French and the Hungarian agree, beyond their different languages. The fact that we are now witnessing not the cohesive and coherent emergence of a revolutionary proletariat, but the emergence of a reactionary subject—in a sort of "liberfascism" that would go beyond the limits of liberalism and neoliberalism (Ayala-Colqui 2022)—as seen in the collectives that support figures like Trump, Bolsonaro, Le Pen, etc., does not refute or invalidate Lukács' position. It is a matter of taking the wheel and the proletarian taking charge of his own situation. However, this process does not only involve class consciousness; it also requires communication (Ayala-Colqui 2023b). It is true that Deleuze and Guattari (1977) extended this theme, focusing on the Spinozist idea of "voluntary servitude" while also critiquing Lacanian psychoanalysis. Negri (1999 and 2004) also revisited Spinozist ontology to consider emancipatory politics. According to Spinoza (2000), "men are led more by blind desire than by reason" (PT 2, §5) since conatus is the ontological substance of humanity. As a result, they mostly reside in a setting that is perpetually violent:

> Insofar as men are tormented by anger, envy, or any other affect of hatred, they are pulled in different directions, and are opposed to one another. [...] And because (as I said in 1§5) men are by nature subject to these affects most of the time, they are by nature enemies. For my greatest enemy is the one I most have to fear and most have to be on guard against. (PT 2, §14)

However, other passions, like fear or hope, drive men to gather in a political state where they can continue to collectively exercise their capacity to act. Considering affectivity in politics entails more than merely relying on a specific epistemological framework (such as the Spinozist one). Alternatively, we may find another explanation that complements our observations on affectivity in politics. This explanation runs parallel to them and is found in the purely rational terms of Lukács, who continues Marx's logical and non-historical study of capital.

If we establish that capital is not a tangible entity but rather a pervasive influence shaping every societal interaction within the framework of value appreciation, then every action within the social sphere is guided by this particular logic. In other words, all social bonds and relationships, including emotional connections, are influenced by exchange value and abstract labor. Thus, all forms of affective production are inherently estranged by the influence of capital. Numerous instances exemplify this phenomenon: Our consumption patterns are profoundly affective. Our approach to interpersonal relationships, such as love, is marked by a cost/benefit analysis, perceiving the other individual as an object to be utilized and consumed—both emotionally and sexually—and ultimately discarded and replaced (Ayala-Colqui 2023a). This paradigm is evident in various aspects of our lives, such as the regular replacement of certain phone models with more "modern" ones, the disposal of old sneakers, and the exchange of worn-out mattresses, among other examples.

Therefore, the violence of capital no longer dominates only the epistemological spheres, but also the affective and libidinal ones. Elucidating the affective dimension, which is conspicuously absent in Lukács' work, presents a critical endeavor. To address this, our concluding remarks aim not only to synthesize the insights garnered thus far but, more significantly, to chart novel paths of contemplation for prospective scholarly investigations.

We can think, in fact, of a violence that is self-violence, *affectus* as affection, active passion or passive action. This implies, a moment where the proletarian himself is self-violent, by means of the affections, to love capital. Thus, reification is already subject-object, but not the subject-object that gives new meaning to history; instead, it becomes a subject-object of self-violence that closes history upon itself, perpetuating the belief that nothing better and nothing new exists outside of capitalism.

Against this violence, which we would call mythical-affective following Benjamin, we would oppose a divine-affective violence: shifting from a violence where the proletarian is simultaneously subject-object of it to a violence where the proletarian is subject-object of his own history. In this context, affections do not violate the proletarian; rather, the proletarian violates with his affections. Affections are weapons and the proletarian is the subject who must know how to wield them. It would no longer be the self-violent affection, but the affection that enacts violence: yes, the revolution is also affective and all sentiment is, by definition, violent, savage, and bloody.

To make this more concrete, we could draw from psychoanalysis, where this self-violence is akin to the symptom, our symptom. The way to depose it is none other than to identify with it, as Žižek (1989) recalls following the thread of the discussion with Sohn-Rethel (1978): we can only become subject-objects of history because we have already been subject-objects of an alienating self-violence. If we live within the capitalist fantasy of the self-entrepreneur, we must to traverse this fantasy to see ourselves as already self-violent subject-objects. From this violence, we must not aim to end all violence, but to redirect it towards the effective and affective destruction of the capitalist order. This would mark the transition from non-class consciousness to class (in)consciousness: an economy of affective violence or, if you will, an economy of affect.

In this context, Lukács, as a Marxist who consistently emphasized revolution and rejected all petty-bourgeois reformism, is more relevant than ever.

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