

Universidad Politécnica Salesiana

Colección Ciencias Sociales y Humanas II

CRITICAL HISTORY **AND** SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Notes for an Emancipatory Praxis

Saúl Fernando Uribe





CARRERA DE FILOSOFÍA

Grupo de Investigación Estado y Desarrollo (GIEDE)

Can history be an act of resistance? This book is forged from the intersection of lived experience and critical reflection. Throughout his career as a social leader, teacher, and researcher, the author has woven together a perspective committed to the memory of dispossessed peoples, subaltern subjects, and voices denied by dominant narratives. These pages offer no recipes or formulas, but rather notes that invite us to think of history as a living tool, capable of fueling popular action and social transformation in Latin America. In a context where science and capital often intertwine to sustain structures of dispossession and devastation, this book proposes an insurgent reading of history: one that is not content with describing the past, but questions it from the present and projects it toward possible futures. Through three carefully articulated sessions, the text opens paths for those who, without being specialists, seek to understand the emancipatory potential of history as everyday praxis. More than an academic essay, this work is an invitation to think about the future of our peoples from a perspective of dignity, criticism, and hope. Because narrating history can also be a way of fighting for life.



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COLECCIÓN CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANAS II

Saúl Fernando Uribe Taborda

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Notes for an Emancipatory Praxis

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Índice

Dedication	7
Presentation	9
Introduction	11

I

CRITICAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

HISTORY	15
An Emancipatory Practice for Latin America.....	15
History and its potential for social transformation.....	22

II

DIALECTICS AND CAPITALISM

DIALECTICS	35
Notes for a Praxis of Change and Transformation	35
<i>Philosophy and Dialectics</i>	35
Dialectic: work, nature, and society.....	49
Dialectic of capitalism	60

III

HISTORY FOR EMANCIPATION

EMANCIPATION	77
Philosophy and history.....	77
History and historical materialism	83
Walter Benjamin and the possibility of history as an emancipatory practice	91
Bibliography	101
About the author	103

DEDICATION

To my children, Victoria and Santiago,

and to all the children who believe in the hope of a new world filled with happiness and justice.

This book was born from the conviction that history is not only memory, but also resistance and possibility. May each page be a reminder that narrating the lives of our peoples is also fighting for them, and that in their hands—small today, great tomorrow—lies the power to transform what seems unchangeable.

May dignity, critical thinking, and hope always be their quests, and may the future they imagine be woven with joy, justice, and freedom.

PRESENTATION

It is an honor to present the second volume of the Social Sciences and Humanities collection, a work that invites us to view history as an act of resistance. This book emerges from the intersection of lived experience and critical reflection, and is dedicated to the memory of dispossessed peoples, subaltern subjects, and voices silenced by dominant narratives.

Far from offering recipes or formulas, these pages present insights that open pathways to understanding history as a living tool, capable of fueling popular action and social transformation in Latin America. In a context where science and capital often uphold structures of dispossession and devastation, the text offers us an insurgent reading of history: one that does not settle for describing the past, but rather interrogates it from the present and projects it toward possible futures.

We are deeply grateful to the Philosophy Department for its support in the publication of this book, to the International Center for Andean-Amazonian Studies (CIEAAM) and the State and Development Research Group (GIEDE), and to the Psychology Department at the Salesian Polytechnic University, whose support has made this work possible.

This volume is an invitation to think about the future of our peoples from a perspective of dignity, critique, and hope. Because telling history can also be a way of fighting for life.

Saúl Fernando Uribe Taborda
Editor, Social Sciences Collection

INTRODUCTION

The book *Critical History and Social Transformation: Notes for an Emancipatory Praxis* brings together a series of reflections, analyses, and interpretations of past and present reality. These pages are not intended to be an exhaustive treatise on history, but rather a set of theoretical and conceptual keys to addressing issues and phenomena that permeate contemporary social life. Thus, this book is conceived as a tool to activate class consciousness and foster social solidarity, using history as a mechanism for the emancipation of the historical subject.

This work is the result of extensive debates and readings carried out throughout my career as a social leader, student, teacher, and researcher, always with the aim of promoting ethical practices that are socially and politically committed to the history and memory of the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the denied. With this book, I seek to contribute theoretical reflections on history and its potential for social transformation in the Latin American context. These pages should not be understood as a guide or manual, but rather as notes that invite us to conceive history from a critical perspective and to direct it toward a daily praxis at the service of popular and emancipatory action by the peoples.

In this sense, the book also seeks to motivate society to reflect on history and its possibilities for thinking about the social future of Latin America, promoting initiatives focused on the construction of critical practices that challenge the capitalist mode of production and the hegemony of science. Today, as in the past, certain sectors of science are allied with capitalism, putting human existence at risk. However, history remains a valuable way to highlight and denounce how, through the most despotic system known to humanity, we are stripped of all humanistic pretensions, throwing us into the maelstrom of the destruction of our only habitat: the Earth.

The book is structured in three sessions which, taken together, allow the reader to understand fundamental aspects that are often difficult to address for a non-specialist audience or those unfamiliar with the terminology of the philosophy of history.

The first session, entitled *Critical History and Social Transformation*, begins with a discussion titled *History: An Emancipatory Practice for Latin America*. It reflects on the role of history from a critical tradition, outlining its function and potential for social transformation. This session concludes with a reflection that seeks to reveal the role of history as an emancipatory practice in the Latin American context.

The second session, *Dialectics and Capitalism: Notes for a Praxis of Change and Transformation*, addresses the theoretical and conceptual aspects of dialectics in the work of Karl Marx. It is not an exhaustive exposition, given the complexity and importance of this concept in the Marxist system of thought. Instead, it seeks to bring the reader closer to the ontological structure of social praxis, delving into dialectics as a key element in understanding the relationship between work, society, and nature, as well as the genesis of capitalism and social relations of production.

Finally, the third session, *History for Emancipation*, raises the need to decentrate the rational and scholarly role of history and positivist historiography. Here, the reader is invited to understand the collapse of reason and the domination of reality, returning to the discussion of critical history and historical materialism as possible paths for criticizing the capitalist system and its universalist view of history. The book concludes by offering a path for turning history into an emancipatory practice, based on the reflections of Walter Benjamin and his theses on the concept of history.

This book is an invitation to think of history not as a mere record of the past, but as a living and transformative tool, capable of inspiring concrete actions toward social justice and the emancipation of peoples.

I

CRITICAL HISTORY AND
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

HISTORY

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An Emancipatory Practice for Latin America

What does history mean in the midst of the profound, painful, and complex social, political, economic, environmental, and territorial transformations that Latin American societies undergo in the 21st century? This question, along with others we might ask, is an essential starting point for reflecting on the role of history and the historical notions that have underpinned inequality and social asymmetries on our continent. Although the objective of this chapter is not to focus solely on highlighting these realities, it is precisely these realities that motivate reflection, since the role of history is not limited to achieving a rational or descriptive end, but must also generate a profound critique of social events, especially those that perpetuate the exclusion and distancing of large sectors of the population from their own history.

Today, social scientists have the task of stripping history of all scholarly pretensions and its positivist domain, in order to place it in a space-time that allows for the construction of a forceful disquisition of the barbarism of capitalism and its process of dispossession, dehumanization, and destruction of Latin American societies. As Walter Benjamin pointed out in his *Theses on the Concept of History*, “There is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Benjamin, thesis VII, 2005, pp. 22-23). This idea invites us to think of history not as a neutral account or a mere record of the past, but as a field where narratives that legitimize or question the established order are contested.

Thinking about history from a critical tradition necessarily implies revisiting the contributions of the philosopher Karl Marx. Although Marx was not and did not claim to be a historian, his work represents one of the most devastating critiques of the historiography of his time and of the Hegelian philosophy of history. His interest in establishing the scientific foundations of socialism and his scathing critiques of the capitalist mode of production led him to develop what he called the “materialist conception of history”. Marx demonstrated that, beyond human will, social circumstances, and ideas, it is the material conditions of existence that determine the way society is organized and functions.

In Marx’s words, “It is the mode of production of material life that determines the general character of social, political, and spiritual life processes. It is not man’s social consciousness that determines his being, but, on the contrary, his social being that determines his consciousness” (Marx, 1968, p. 71). This approach allows us to understand that the material conditions of existence—i.e. the way in which a society produces and reproduces the material goods that sustain it, as well as its division into social classes—are the basis on which social relations, institutions, and ideologies are built.

Marx’s theoretical and political contributions not only helped to shape critical thinking, but also laid the foundations for what is known as Marxist historiography. This historiographical current, in contrast to traditional historiography, is characterized by its focus on economic and social structures, as well as its commitment to social transformation. As Eric Hobsbawm, one of the leading exponents of this tradition, points out, “[...] the object is not simply to discover the past, but to explain it and thus provide a link with the present” (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 217).

The historical present in the Latin American context takes on particular relevance in the critical tradition of history. Societies in our region have historically been marked by processes of colonization, exploitation, and exclusion that have shaped a profoundly unequal reality. Thinking about history from this perspective involves deep reflection that allows for processes aimed at decolonizing knowledge and recovering the voi-

ces of the oppressed, the subaltern, and the excluded. The approach behind these ideas leads us to the need for a decolonial project, i.e., a project of epistemic, social, political, and cultural unlearning.

For Quijano, epistemological decolonization paves the way for renewed intercultural communication, where the exchange of experiences and meanings lays the foundation for a different rationality, capable of legitimately aspiring to a certain universality. It is irrational to impose the specific worldview of a particular ethnic group, such as that of Western Europe, as if it were universal. This is nothing more than granting provincialism the title of universality, something that lacks foundation (Quijano, 1992, p. 442). This means not only denouncing the power structures that perpetuate injustice, but also rescuing the struggles and resistance that have sought to transform those conditions.

In this sense, critical history cannot be limited to being an academic exercise; it must be, above all, an emancipatory practice. As the Peruvian thinker José Carlos Mariátegui reminds us, history is not merely a repository of past events, but a dynamic terrain from which we can understand, question, and act in the present (Mariátegui, [1928] 2007). Thus, far from being static and fossilized, history allows us to understand it as a tool for seeing, judging, and acting from a praxis that transforms the present reality and social, political, economic, and other contexts. This vision requires us to use history as an instrument to unravel the roots of oppression and to imagine and build alternatives that allow us to move toward more just and equitable societies.

Thinking about history in the critical tradition means assuming it as a space for dispute and transformation. It involves questioning hegemonic narratives, recovering silenced voices, and using historical knowledge as a tool for political and social action. In a world marked by inequality and the crisis of the capitalist mode of production, critical history becomes an indispensable path to understanding our present and building a more humane and humanizing future.

Karl Marx's remarkable interest in explaining historical changes as social constructions, rather than mere products of chance, allowed

him to highlight the socio-historical transformations of the society of his time and analyze the external factors and forces that drove them. However, despite his contributions, the idealistic conceptions of history that prevailed in his time distorted the creative capacity of the historical subject and underestimated their ability to construct and transform history. This was largely because the idealistic conception of history reduced its study to the realm of philosophy, where social facts were interpreted through reason, thought, and the transcendence of the spirit, ignoring the material conditions of existence, which are ultimately the true determinants of human action.

Marx and Engels, in works such as *The German Ideology* (1845-1846), warned about the limits of the idealistic conception of history. They argued that this view ignored the real basis of history: the material conditions of existence. These conditions, which include the way societies produce and reproduce their material life, were considered by idealists to be mere accessories with no relevance to historical development. As Marx and Engels pointed out, the fundamental condition for human existence and, consequently, for the development of history, is that people have the material conditions of existence necessary to live, since only then can they participate in the creation and transformation of history. This statement underscores the importance of understanding that, before any intellectual or spiritual activity, human beings must satisfy their basic material needs (Marx and Engels, 1974).

In contrast to idealistic thinking, Marx set out to construct a critical and scientific theory that would explain the changes brought about by the European Industrial Revolution and the social transformations that resulted from it. This theory, based on the “materialist conception of history”, argues that historical events can only be understood in their specific context, which is constantly changing and linked to the socio-spatial dynamics of each era. As Marx stated in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1895, p. 2). This revolutionary approach invites us to analyze history

not as a succession of isolated ideas or events, but as the result of material conditions and social relations of production.

In this sense, continuing to speak of “history” in the singular is a mistake that must be corrected by studying particular histories, local processes, and social memories. This is especially relevant in the context of Latin America, where ethnic, cultural, and social diversity is the rule rather than the exception. As philosopher Enrique Dussel points out, the other is not simply different, as defined by the totalizing power of universal history, but is distinct, always other, with its own history and culture. However, this other has not been respected nor allowed to truly be other. Instead, they have been absorbed by the foreign, incorporated into a totality that does not belong to them, which seeks to totalize exteriority, systematize it, and deny its singularity (Dussel, 1996). In this context, it is essential to recover the voices of the subalterns, the dispossessed, and the marginalized, whose struggles and resistance have been systematically ignored by the hegemonic narratives that propose a universal, universalist, and totalizing history—in short, a history whose interest lies in the alienation of the subject.

History, understood as an ever-changing social construction, manifests itself as a synthesis of multiple social, spatial, and temporal determinations. It is presented as a concrete, structured, and dialectical totality that establishes the relationship between society, and nature. In essence, it is about understanding that history is not merely an account of events that took place in the past, but rather, history must be understood as an instrument that allows us to comprehend the contradictions of present life and the urgent search for alternatives to a future where equity and social justice prevail. This vision allows us to understand that history is not a linear or predetermined process, but rather the result of struggles, conflicts, and negotiations between different social actors.

The social and critical construction of history is closely linked to the material aspects and processes of life and social organization. This means that the starting point for any social analysis must be an understanding of the material conditions of human existence. In other

words, material life—i.e. the way in which a society produces and distributes its resources—determines the nature of social, political, and economic processes and relationships. The materialist conception of history invites us to think of history not as an abstract or idealized narrative, but as a concrete and dialectical process, marked by material conditions and social struggles. In an increasingly unequal and fragmented world, this critical perspective becomes an indispensable tool for understanding our present and building a more just and equitable future.

The above reflections allow us to address the initial question of this chapter in greater depth and, at the same time, give it even more relevance in order to gauge the magnitude and potential of history as a critique of capitalism. This mode of production, in addition to being intrinsically exclusionary, racist, and xenophobic, has shaped a series of historical conditions that are deeply unfavorable to Latin American populations. In this context, history written under the parameters of capitalism has relegated women, Afro-descendant communities, and indigenous peoples to a marginal role, treating them as outcasts instead of recognizing them as historical subjects and protagonists in the long process of building our Latin America.

As Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (Quijano, 2000) points out, capitalism is not only an economic system, but also a power structure that has imposed a coloniality based on power; i.e., a form of domination and classification of humanity according to categories such as race, gender, and class. This coloniality is reflected in traditional historiography, which has rendered large sectors of the population invisible, denying them their place in the historical narrative that tells the story of the rulers, denying the narratives of the ruled, suppressing their voices and versions of history.

Today, large sectors of the Latin American population are strongly demanding the right to be recognized as historical subjects of social change and transformation. This demand not only questions hegemonic narratives, but also calls for a historical practice and a profession of historians committed to the construction of a critical historiogra-

phy. This historiography must highlight the evolution of human collectives, reclaiming their knowledge, and make visible their visions of their own past, especially when we accept that history and memory are contested spaces and permanent tension in Latin America, particularly because historical narratives either legitimize and perpetuate inequality or question hegemonic and totalizing power.

In this sense, critical history must be a tool for decolonizing knowledge and recovering the voices of those who have been silenced. History cannot be told exclusively from the perspective of the victors; it is also imperative to include the perspectives, memories, struggles, and stories of the vanquished, the excluded, and the resistant. This perspective invites us to think of history not as a single, homogeneous narrative, but as a mosaic of experiences, knowledge, and resistance that have shaped Latin American reality.

The challenges to construct a historiography that not only criticizes capitalism but also recognizes and values the diversity of historical subjects who have participated in the construction of our societies. This implies broadening the horizon of history to rescue and give voice to those who have been silenced, forgotten, or deliberately excluded from official narratives, thus recognizing their fundamental role in the construction of the world we know today. In the case of Latin America, this means recovering the struggles of women, indigenous peoples and their organizations, and Afro-descendant communities, whose contributions have been systematically ignored.

History as a critique of the capitalist mode of production must go beyond denouncing structures of colonial oppression to vindicate marginalized historical subjects. As Walter Benjamin suggests in his *Theses on the Concept of History*, the past should be understood as an instrument of struggle rather than a mere chronological record. On a continent deeply marked by inequality and exclusion, this task demands an ethical and political commitment to constructing a historiography that is inclusive, diverse, and rooted in justice and historical memory.

History and its potential for social transformation

Conceiving history as a critical practice implies recognizing that historical events are part of an ongoing, open, and collective construction in which all individuals—regardless of gender or generation—participate as agents of change. Reflecting on history and its potential for social transformation in Latin America requires acknowledging that social being and historical consciousness constitute the ontological essence shaping our understanding of the world. As Karl Marx stated, ‘it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness’. This premise underscores that history is not an abstract narrative, but the concrete product of the material conditions and social relations that shape human existence.

In Latin America, the historical consciousness of our societies oscillates between the colonial legacy and the fetish of modernity, which has distanced us from the possibility of building just and equitable societies that transcend this colonial vision of history and the modern world, in which Europe stands as a universal model and a benchmark of civility that excludes the “other”. This duality has perpetuated structures of exclusion and inequality, where territories are valued not for their capacity to sustain life, but for their potential to generate profits within the framework of predatory capitalism.

Critical history and historical criticism of the material conditions of existence in Latin America must be rethought, denaturalized, and exposed as elements that, far from promoting the common good, dehumanize and exclude large sectors of the population. This statement reminds us that official history has been, to a large extent, a narrative constructed by and for the powerful, silencing the voices of the oppressed, the dispossessed, and the excluded.

This arduous task of historical reconstruction is only possible if history is brought into classrooms, public squares, and spaces where history is discussed and written. This is not merely a pedagogical exercise, but an ethical and political commitment to the millions of people who have

been marginalized from historical narratives. In this sense, critical history must be an instrument for rescuing silenced memories and making visible the struggles and resistance that have shaped our reality.

This call cannot be limited to a commitment to history for its own sake; rather, it demands the creation of spaces to problematize both history and historiography as catalysts for transforming and illuminating Latin American societies. As social actors, academics, and leaders, the responsibility lies in highlighting the social being and its material conditions of existence, while critically analyzing its social, political, and economic thought. Only through this approach can scholarship contribute to building alternatives to the capitalist mode of production, which currently threatens not only human dignity but life itself on the planet.

Today, more than ever, we must approach historiography as a social process that seeks to expose the tyranny and the profound and painful transformations that affect our continent. At the same time, historians and academics must act with an ethical and political commitment that makes the historical subject visible as an agent of social transformation. However, undertaking processes of change in contexts as asymmetrical as those in Latin America involves not only transforming social, economic, and political structures, but also transforming ourselves as subjects: as historians, as mothers, children, friends, and siblings. It is a matter of reflecting on and problematizing our condition of being, existing, and inhabiting the world, recognizing that our own subjectivity is marked by the inequalities we seek to overcome.

These ideas invite us to understand that the transformation of the conditions of existence and the asymmetrical reality of Latin American societies is not only an economic challenge, but also an intellectual and ethical task. Academia, as a socially constructed space, has the knowledge and expertise to contribute to this process. However, it requires a political commitment that goes beyond mere criticism and translates into concrete actions to address the severe deficit in public education policies in our region.

As academics, researchers, and teachers, we have a responsibility to demystify the idea that valid knowledge is only that which is produced under the parameters of Western thought. These parameters, as sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos warns, have established an “epistemicide” (Santos, 1998, p. 208), i.e., the annulment and delegitimization of non-Western knowledge, including the contributions of Latin American social beings. This exclusion has not only shaped the criteria for the validity of knowledge, but has also constructed an official history in which the achievements of great political figures—mostly white, elite men—have been established as the main references for national identity in Latin American countries.

The perversity of these processes lies in the configuration of societies that only recognize the history and knowledge of academic elites, who, for decades, have enjoyed privileges to construct a historiography that institutionalizes exclusionary knowledge. This hegemonic historiography has prevented large sectors of the Latin American population from recognizing their own history, denying them the possibility of undertaking processes of change and social transformation.

These events must be understood as the result of a historiography that has institutionalized a historical knowledge that discredits and denies the experiences and social processes of subaltern sectors. This reality is increasingly evident and undeniable in the critical eyes of many researchers who, like the author, have made an ethical and political commitment to education and social justice. Our task is to highlight the ideological intentionality of this type of history and its effort to consolidate a false consciousness in which the social being is not recognized as the maker and owner of history.

Gayatri Spivak, a postcolonial theorist, helps us understand that subaltern groups have no voice in universal and hegemonic history, not because they cannot speak, but because oppressed and marginalized groups are not heard in power structures. Among those marginalized and silenced are the proletariat, women, peasants, and those who belong to indigenous communities and Afro-descendants. It is precisely on this point that Spivak focuses part of her critique, deconstructing

the notion of “subaltern” as a monolithic category that presumes a unitary identity and consciousness in the subject. This assertion reminds us of the urgency of constructing a critical historiography that rescues silenced voices and makes visible the struggles and resistance of those who have been excluded from hegemonic narratives.

Contributing to the construction of a historical consciousness that recognizes the diversity of subjects and experiences that have shaped our reality is a critical practice that involves assuming an ethical, political, and transformative commitment, even more so in a continent like ours, which has historically been shaped by inequality and exclusion. Embracing history as an emancipatory praxis becomes an academic duty and an act of justice for millions of people and the dispossessed who demand historical reparation.

This situation poses an enormous challenge for us as teachers and researchers: to deconstruct and reveal, in the lines of history, its ideological power. This power has not only shaped historical narratives, but has also influenced the way societies perceive themselves and their past. During my teaching and research practice, through engagement with various sectors of Latin American societies, we have observed a widespread lack of interest in their own history. This disengagement is not the result of chance, but rather stems from a hegemonic historiography that has systematically excluded large segments of the population, preventing them from recognizing themselves as historical subjects and, consequently, as agents of social transformation.

However, for history to fulfill this transformative role, it is necessary for people to recognize themselves in it, to see their struggles, their resistance, and their hopes reflected in it. This implies, as Walter Benjamin argues, “brushing history against the grain” (Thesis VII, 2005, p. 22), i.e., rescuing the voices and experiences of those who have been silenced by official narratives. Based on these reflections, it is vitally important to highlight the role of history and its potential for social transformation in Latin America.

This should be the main objective of research plans, projects, and proposals: to construct a “history from below”, as British historian E.P. Thompson called it. This perspective seeks to highlight class, gender, and race asymmetries, as well as the dynamics of resistance and the alternatives that have emerged in the face of the power relations imposed by the capitalist mode of production and its ways of constructing knowledge.

In this sense, ‘history from below’ transcends mere methodology; it represents a commitment to subaltern sectors—those excluded from hegemonic narratives yet remaining the protagonists of their own struggles and transformations. In Latin America, this task takes on particular relevance. This subalternity/coloniality is reflected not only in economic and political structures, but also in the production of knowledge, where non-Western epistemologies have been systematically delegitimized. Therefore, it is essential that, as academics and researchers, we commit ourselves to demystifying official history and constructing narratives that recognize the diversity of subjects and experiences that have shaped our reality. Only in this way can we contribute to the construction of a historical consciousness that recognizes the plurality of our societies and, at the same time, inspires processes of change and social transformation.

History as an emancipatory practice in and for Latin America stands as an essential starting point for addressing the question with which this essay begins: What does history mean in the midst of the profound and painful social, *political*, and *economic* transformations gripping 21st-century Latin America? The answer to this question is not found in theoretical abstractions, but in the very pages of history, in its narratives, its silences, and its resistances.

Knowledge and criticism of history should lead us to uncover the deep roots and causal links of the inequalities and oppressions that have marked our continent. It is not a question of positioning ourselves as victims or perpetrators, but of recognizing these realities as an incentive to initiate processes that make us visible as builders and possessors of a long and complex history. As Walter Benjamin states in his *Theses*

on the Concept of History, “the past carries with it a secret index that refers it to redemption” (Thesis II. p. 18). This index invites us to question the past not only to recount it, but to transform it, creating options that allow us to move toward more just and equitable societies.

However, this purpose requires an academic practice that is up to the task of current contexts and moments, characterized by a complex, uncertain, and fluid reality. This implies that any emancipatory initiative must be anchored in a critical function of history, understood as a process that feeds on a changing reality, always dynamic and, often, adverse to social processes. Today, more than ever, the situation in Latin America forces us to think about the structural causes of the political, economic, and social crises unfolding across the continent, opening up the possibility of building a different Latin America.

A different Latin America rests with those who believe in and make history, who have turned our classrooms into spaces for reflection and critical practice. It is worth remembering that education does not transform the world, but it does allow human beings to become historical subjects capable of changing the world. In this sense, historical praxis allows the socio-historical context of our students to be transformed, engaging their sensitivity to the complex reality they live in.

Conceiving an alternative Latin America requires appealing to the narratives of the oppressed and the excluded—those who shape history through daily practices within their neighborhoods and communities. Our task as academics is not to validate historical knowledge, but rather to rescue silenced voices, highlight the collective struggles, and organically support the resistance movements that have shaped our reality. In this sense, critical history cannot be limited to an academic exercise; it must be, above all, an emancipatory practice, a perspective that invites us to use history not only as an instrument for understanding the present, but also as a tool for transforming it.

History as an emancipatory project must be the guiding principle of our teaching and research practices, and not merely a straitjacket within academic curricula. We bear a profound debt to millions of Latin

Americans who have believed in history as a practice that vindicates their struggles, their knowledge, and their wisdom. It is in our hands to expose, denounce, and question the hegemonic history, which serves as a vehicle for the ideological project that conceals the dehumanizing power of the capitalist mode of production. This power, as Karl Marx rightly pointed out, not only imposes unfavorable economic and political conditions, but also shapes a system that threatens human existence and the sustainability of life on the planet.

As Latin Americans, we know very well what we mean when we talk about the imposition of economic and political measures that, in many cases, threaten life and normalize a condition of subordination. This reality, however, is not immutable. From history as an emancipatory practice, it is possible to expose and reverse these structures of domination. However, it is imperative to illuminate alternative forms of knowledge that must allow us to dismantle hegemonic narratives and forge alternatives from and for the Latin American peoples.

Highlighting the historical adversities and contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production is the starting point for envisioning a project that unlearns ‘official’ history. This approach opens spaces grounded in historical critique, inclusion, solidarity, collective participation, and civic plurality. History as an emancipatory project does not consist of destroying historiography, but rather of highlighting and recognizing that we are historical subjects, creators, and possessors of history. In this sense, our task is to denaturalize the historical structures of power that have perpetuated the reproduction of patterns of barbarism and human slavery.

Considering history as an emancipatory project implies analyzing historiography in critical terms, contributing to subverting the conditions of existence and bourgeois consciousness embedded in “official” history. History has always been a field of dispute, expressing the power relations hidden in categories of race, gender, and class, which have determined our historiography.

In our America, the use, access, and control of history, historiography, and social memory remain fiercely contested. My call is to break with the idea of the technical and instrumental scientific progress, which has served as a justification for the domination of nature and human beings. In this battlefield, our task is to create and strengthen spaces that allow us to denaturalize the historical structures that have perpetuated inequality and exclusion. In our hands lies the possibility of building a different Latin America, a Latin America that recognizes the diversity of its historical subjects and draws inspiration from their struggles and resistance to move toward a more humane future.

Indeed, industry and technology, far from being elements for the liberation of human beings, seem to have become tools that increase a market infested with fetishized commodities. These objects, as Karl Marx pointed out in his analysis of commodity fetishism, acquire a symbolic value that obscures the social relations of production and alienates human beings, subjecting them to superfluous and artificial needs. Ultimately, this process has led to the subjugation of human beings to a system that prioritizes consumption over dignity and sustainability of life.

Criticism of history, in this context, lies in denouncing the illusion of progress in its exceptional, linear progress". As Walter Benjamin warns (Ms-BA 480. p. 54), "the idea of linear and inevitable progress is an illusion that conceals the catastrophes that accumulate over time". This illusion, which has been promoted by the hegemonic narratives of modernity, has led us to believe that technical and industrial development is synonymous with human advancement. However, rather than liberating human beings, the technical and instrumental progress of science has turned them into key cogs in the capitalist machine, reducing their critical capacity and autonomy, dehumanizing them, and stripping them of their vital force. In this context, history not only has the task of taking up the tradition of the oppressed, but also of founding it.

If we continue along this path, the homogeneous and accelerated pace of technical and industrial progress will only deepen the social, eco-

conomic, and environmental crises currently unfolding. This statement is not mere speculation, but a reality manifested in climate change, biodiversity loss, and growing global inequality, wars and the imposition of some states over others, death and destruction.

Faced with this situation, critical history has the task of dismantling the narratives that legitimize this model of development and making visible the alternatives that emerge from the margins, because another world is possible if we imagine it, weave it, and build it as an alternative to fierce and insatiable capitalism. These alternatives must be based on principles of social justice, sustainability, and respect for cultural diversity. Critical history must not only denounce the illusions of progress, but also propose new ways of understanding and inhabiting the world. It is in our hands to build a future that is not doomed to catastrophe, but inspired by solidarity, equity, and respect for life in all its forms.

In conclusion, history, understood as a critical and emancipatory practice, stands as a fundamental tool for understanding and transforming the social, political, and economic realities of Latin America. This essay has explored how history transcends a mere chronicle of the past; rather, it constitutes a contested domain where narratives that legitimize or challenge power are actively fought. In a continent marked by inequality, exclusion, and the coloniality of knowledge, being, and existence, critical history becomes an ethical and political urgency.

History is not a mere record of past events, but a dynamic process that clarifies the roots of the inequalities and oppressions we face. This history involves rescuing the voices of the oppressed and making visible the struggles that have been silenced by hegemonic narratives. This means recovering the memories of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, women, and other historically marginalized groups, recognizing them as active subjects in the construction of our history.

The illusion of technical and industrial progress promoted by capitalism has led humanity into a multidimensional crisis. As Karl Marx

warned, commodity fetishism and alienation have subjected human beings to superfluous needs, while the relentless exploitation of nature has brought us to the brink of civilizational catastrophe. Consequently, critical history has the task of denouncing these illusions and proposing alternatives based on social justice, environmental sustainability, and respect for cultural diversity.

As teachers, researchers, and social actors, we have a responsibility to dismantle hegemonic narratives and build an inclusive and transformative historiography. This implies recognizing that alternative epistemologies are possible and that this knowledge must be at the service of the liberation of peoples. Historical education must be a political act that fosters critical awareness and the participation of new generations in the construction of a more just future.

This future brings us face to face with history from below, as proposed by E.P. Thompson, inviting us to focus on the experiences and struggles of subaltern sectors. In Latin America, this means making visible the resistance and alternatives that have emerged in the face of structures of domination, recognizing that the diversity of subjects and knowledge is the basis for building just and more equitable societies. History as an emancipatory practice cannot be limited to theoretical reflection; it must be translated into concrete actions that transform our realities. In our hands lies the possibility of building a different Latin America, one that is inspired by the struggles and resistance of its peoples to move forward into the future.

Critical and emancipatory history is a commitment to life, dignity, and justice. In a world fractured by inequality and the crisis of the capitalist model of production, this task becomes an urgent necessity. As social and academic actors, we have a responsibility to contribute to the construction of a future that is not doomed to catastrophe, but rather inspired by solidarity, equity, and respect for life in all its forms.

II

DIALECTICS AND CAPITALISM

DIALECTICS

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Notes for a Praxis of Change and Transformation

Philosophy and Dialectics

The following lines will attempt to explain the precise concept of dialectics in the work of Karl Marx. Understanding that this concept is one of the most important in this thinker's system, and which has represented one of the most ambitious projects to explain not only the gnoseological structure of reality, but also the latter in an ontological order.

It follows that logic and ontology are two dimensions of the same reality, namely, being. And although this formula occupied the *ratio* of the Hegelian system, it should be agreed that Karl Marx opted for praxis as the *sine qua non* of all movement of both being and consciousness. However, before getting to the heart of the matter, it is necessary to discuss both the idiosyncrasy of dialectics and its importance within philosophical programs. In truth, the exposition of dialectics, in its broadest sense, is not only justifiable in order to understand the meaning that the author of *Capital* is trying to convey, but also to demarcate it from the myriad misinterpretations that have been abusively labeled as dialectical"

With all this in mind, exposition will begin with the genesis of philosophical thought in Greece. This is because it is only in the systems of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Plato that we find the first seeds of dialectics. However, this study limits its scope strictly to Platonic thought,

since it is the dialectical structure left by this author that was taken up and perfected by Hegel, as Marcuse has pointed out (1978).

Thus, Platonic dialectic represents the highest thought on being, insofar as it reveals the reality of the latter. Therefore, it is here that we find that dialectics, although according to tradition it is a method of knowledge and truth, it would seem rather that the very structure of thought is dialectical.

Needless to say, there is equivalence in the rational structure of being and thought. To clarify this last point, it suffices to consider that, according to Platonic philosophy, everything that is true *in itself* is the result of dialogue, whereby thesis, and antithesis constitute a mechanism by which common opinions are purged in order to arrive at true being. It is Socrates, the rhetorical protagonist of the Platonic dialogues, who presides over the moments of refutation and synthesis.

That said, Plato understood that dialectics, as an aspiration to know true being, resides in the *logos*—a *foundational term of Western thought that implies the articulation of reality in conceptual terms*. This does not mean, however, that the multiplicity of reality is derived from logical, universal, and necessary principles. Here is what Marcuse (1978) says to clarify this assertion:

[...] dialectics is directed in all cases to the “true being,” to the entity as it “really” is, as opposed to any “improper entity” or “apparently real entity” it belongs to the highest level of human knowledge, to reason, therefore, to *Logos* itself, precisely in its double Greek meaning, as *Logos* of being and as *Logos* of human discourse that makes true being visible. (p. 89)

With all this, it is clear that dialectic, beyond being a method, is the highest faculty of the human being, inasmuch as with it, one knows the identical about the multiple, the true about the apparent. Reason at its zenith achieves unity over the multiple attributes, or accidents, of being. It is certainly the unity of being, its identity between being and reality, that is one of the most elementary premises of Platonic

thought, insofar as the unity of being lies in its immutability, its indivisibility, and its permanence.

In other words, contrary to the realm of change where all things fluctuate Plato conceived that the reality of being lies in its unity. Moreover, as has been pointed out, the conception of being in its authenticity lies in the faculty of reason, which is dialectical *par excellence*.

However, contrary to his previous system, Plato conceives that if being lies in its unity, it can only be grasped in its becoming. Thus, there is nothing, but everything becomes. It follows that unity and movement are the attributes of being. Every entity is one and multiple. Hence, what Marcuse expounds (1978) is decisive for understanding the further development of the Platonic system.

In place of uniqueness, isolation, and the univocal determination of being (of the Idea), there is its multiplication [...], in which, however, a unity and univocity are constituted. This is now the central problem: how can the One be both one and multiple at the same time. (Marcuse, 1978, p. 90)

In addition to the meaning of being conceptualized by Plato, it should be noted that the movements of being are equivalent to those of consciousness. From this it follows that being and thought are fully identified in the Platonic system—a convergence that serves as a foundational reference point for Hegel's ontological logic. However, leaving this discussion for later, let us return to the thread of our reflections.

Although Plato conceives that only being is revealed in becoming, this should not cause confusion about the Greek author's conception of dialectics. As we stated earlier, dialectical thinking consists of the knowledge of the truth of being. So, what we are dealing with here is the conception of the truth of the apparent, the authenticity of inauthenticity.

According to Marcuse (1978): "(...) being itself is neither movement nor permanence nor sameness, nor difference, but something different, other, with respect to all of these". In other words, everything that is, is rooted in its difference from what it is not. In a word, being

is other in its being. Or, if you will, the genus of being is becoming. Having established this, it only remains to mention that if being is neither sameness nor difference, but becoming, it is easy to understand that being is dialectical, and thought can reveal the genus of being, insofar as its structure comprises a dialectical aspect. With all this, the premises that Hegel would take up for the elaboration of his system, which stands out for its originality, have been established, and it stands as one of the first philosophical systems, where history, a key concept for this philosopher, was conceived as movement. That is, as a dialectical structure.

Before entering into a detailed exposition of Hegelian thought, which is very useful for a deep and rigorous understanding of dialectical materialism, it is necessary to take into consideration that *reality itself*, for both Plato and Hegel, is dialectical.

This reminds us of what was stated earlier, namely, that everything that is, is effective insofar as it differentiates itself from its other-being. However, in addition to the decisive influence of Platonism on Hegel's work, the impact of Schelling's idealism cannot be ignored. Not to mention this author's conceptualizations of spirit and nature, which earned Hegel a point of reference not only for understanding the unity between the two, but also for the original determination of his system.

Understanding the assumptions of German idealism is significant when it comes to comprehending nature, as well as its movement and determinations. The initial considerations on the dialectic between nature and spirit, between being and thought, found in Schelling's thinking are invaluable. In fact, this philosopher's system represents a turning point in the development of both Kant's and Fichte's systems, insofar as they conceived of the forms of intuition and thought as immutable and given a priori in consciousness.

This translates into Kant's *transcendental self* and Fichte's *absolute self* as the referents of all reality. Hence, against these systems where the exteriority of being—i.e., nature, is posited through the synthetic uni-

ty of reason, Schelling understood that the identity of opposites does not lie merely in consciousness, but in a genetic historical process, in and through which nature is at first an entity independent of consciousness, which is later conceptualized by the birth of the spirit within it. In the words of Kofler (1972):

[...] this identity is historical-genetic: consciousness is born within the universal process of the empowerment of reality from the preconscious and the unconscious; on the other hand, from there arises the capacity of consciousness to reproduce in thought the whole of reality, that is, the identity of subject and object, of form and content of knowledge. (p. 26)

Consciousness, traditionally understood as a logical unity, although it presupposes the self in opposition to the non-self (nature), derives from a historical process, and not as a providential gesture of an unknown divinity. It is certainly in that specialization, or empowerment of nature or reality, if you will, in Kofler's terms, where the only speaking entity, which can pass judgment on nature, is realized. This is the human being, the substance of all reality. However, this statement should not cause confusion, since the historical entity never ceases to be part of nature, since nature is nothing but *the substrate*, the *condition* of its existence.

Beyond these considerations it should be noted that in Schelling this process by which the identification between subject and object is produced is not conceived in material terms, since this author, as heir to objective idealism and German romanticism, dispatches this whole process precisely to that supra-sensible entity which, although not placed outside reality, as conceived by the scholastics, is inherent in the nature. And this, finally, is constituted from a divine telos, whose final realization is nothing less than its rationalization—a process culminating in the emergence of the subject.

In short, Schelling's philosophy appears to be an attempt to explain nature, which, although mediated by the knowing subject, does not derive as a stratum of a transcendental self, as conceived by previous systems, notably those of Fichte and Kant. Thus, in Schelling, the epis-

temology, whose ultimate aspiration is to respond to the identification between subject and object, is placed within the historical-genetic evolution of both humanity and nature. Although Schelling's system requires detailed analysis, we have limited ourselves to pointing out these aspects, which we consider fundamental to the historical conception of Hegelianism.

Now, in Hegel's system, as in Schelling's, such a unity of opposites, or identification between being and nature, is one of the central problems. However, the way of approaching this relationship is entirely concrete, despite the disparaging attacks that this system has received, ultimately branding it as mysticism. And while it is true that the *absolute spirit*, the highest concept in this author's thought, points to a certain divine teleology, it cannot be denied that the unity between nature and spirit contained in this concept reflects an effort to explain the progressive development of consciousness by virtue of the presuppositions presented by exteriority, that is, nature.

This concept, like many others in Hegelian dialectics was reconfigured in more solid terms by Karl Marx. It will be agreed that *praxis* receives a treatment that, while not central, is at least relevant to the foundation of reality that Hegel sought to demonstrate. Likewise, dialectics, a central point of Hegelian thought, is a decisive approach to explaining reality in ontological and logical terms. In the words of Marcuse (1978) "its element is not the abstract or the unreal, but the real, which sets itself and lives in itself, existence in its concept" (1978, p. 94).

Indeed, all effective reality is nothing but the result of the concept that is constituted in the moments that are inherent to it. At this point, it is necessary to recall one of Hegel's theses, namely: "Everything real is rational, and everything rational is real" (Hegel, 1807), thus demonstrating the logical ontological structure of both being and thought.

For Hegel, dialectics, beyond being a method, represents reality itself and its effective condition. Thus, the tripartite structure of being already comprises a dialectical, logical, and rational dimension. This does

not mean that being is only revealed through the concept, through the word. However, for such a revelation, concept and reality develop through previous movements. This is the dialectic of negativity, through which the concept denies this or that aspect of being, so that ultimately the concept fits perfectly with being. It is the effort of the concept that Hegel never ceases to remind us of, whereby being is revealed through the word, in an uninterrupted development in which a previous stage represents the truth of the next. Understanding the tripartite structure of being is important for identifying the demonstration between being and concept that Hegel carried out. In the words of Kojève (1939):

The structure of thought is thus determined by the structure of Being that it reveals. Therefore, if “logical” thought has three parts, if, in other words, it is dialectical (in the broad sense), it is only because Being itself is dialectical (in the broad sense), due to the fact that it implies a “constitutive element” or a negative or negating “aspect” (“dialectical” in the strict and precise sense of the term). Thought is dialectical only to the extent that it correctly reveals the dialectic of Being that is and of the Real that exists. (p. 9)

In other words, being is logical insofar as it is revealed by the word, by the logos, while its negative aspect lies in the fact that the identity between concept and being is only achieved on the condition that being, which remains identical with itself, is denied and conceptualized. It follows from this that being is only real insofar as there is a thought that reveals it. However, the latter is preceded by praxis, since all activity negates the given, that is, *Dasein*, which remains in identity with itself.

Hence, thought is inherent to being, insofar as there is no nature from which subjects who speak of it and reveal it emerge. In this regard, it is necessary to note that Kojève (1939) has pointed out that “the real Being existing as Nature is that which produces Man who reveals that Nature (and himself) through the word. It is the real Being that thus becomes ‘truth’ or reality revealed by the word” (p. 12).

As can be seen, effective reality, as well as its true revelation, has no *sine qua non* other than a subject, insofar as reality implies precisely

that which is spoken about. Hence, the Hegelian thesis “everything real is rational and everything rational is real” points to the dialectical aspect between subject and object, since everything that is spoken about is mediated by the subject.

In short, objects are nothing more than the product of the negating activity of the given, carried out by a subject who has attained the order of self-consciousness. Thus, in contrast to subjective idealism, Hegelianism comprises a dialectical order, through which the real movement of being and consciousness is exposed, whose unity is called absolute spirit, insofar as this instance reflects the historical and real process not only of figures in the world but also of consciousness. However, without lingering on the intricate dimensions of this problem, which was important in the constitution of historical materialism, it is necessary to point out what Kofler (1972) said to bring us closer to the idea of development that Hegel saw, both in the effectiveness of reality and in its knowledge, which, as we have seen, lies in the identification between concept and being:

Specifically, Hegel represents the identity produced by genesis as a double identity: on the one hand, as the staggered series of forms of the externalization of the absolute spirit, in which he discerns the teleological-rational foundation of all cosmic existence; on the other hand, and conversely, the epistemological identity of being and consciousness is for him nothing more than the becoming for itself that is historically fulfilled (self-knowledge) of those same stages of externalization, or the self-knowledge of the spirit, identical to the world. (p. 32)

The ambiguity pointed out by Kofler lies in the fact that the absolute spirit presupposes a rigid metaphysical framework. Thus, the absolute spirit is nothing less than the subject that presides over all the movements of reality. Consequently, for Feuerbach (1984), “what in theism is an object, in speculative philosophy is a subject; what in the former is the being solely thought, represented, by reason, in speculative philosophy is the thinking being of reason itself” (p. 53).

On the other hand, the identification between being and object, whose unity, as noted, is the absolute spirit, is one of the most salient points

of Hegelianism, inasmuch as what is at stake here is the process by which the subject and the object are constituted in a relationship that is not only negative but also mediated between the two terms, which was decisive for the epistemology implicit in historical materialism. In the words of Kofler (1972): “the point of historical development at which consciousness springs forth is, at the same time, the initial moment of nature’s self-knowledge” (p. 32).

Thus far, our analysis has focused exclusively on the ontological and gnoseological dimensions of Hegelianism. Thus, an approach to the idea of history in his system would satisfactorily complete the exposition of the latter. Understanding the concept of history in Hegel not only contributes to the identification of its dialectical structure, but also to the driving force, the *ratio* that underpins its movement, namely, the desire for recognition and freedom in Hegel, and class struggle in Marx. Moreover, it is not surprising that desire and freedom play a univocal role in both philosophical systems.

That said, effective reality, being, has become as its genus. Everything is real insofar as it constitutes itself in its other being. However, for reality to exist and for someone to account for its becoming nature, a speaking consciousness is necessary to account for the real movement of spirit and nature. Each historical phase is nothing more than the result of the negation of that phase which precedes it. To this, it would be appropriate to agree that the only entity that has historicity as its genus of being is the human being (Marcuse, 1978). Through desire and the negation of its natural state, the human being is not only space but also time.

Far from being a detached process, this means that human beings, through science, art, and religion, bequeath to posterity an itinerary of instruments and knowledge to take possession of reality. To make the *in-itself* of things their *for-itself* (Kojève, 1939). By denying the animal state that remains in identity with itself, human beings have been able to understand reality. Moreover, such mediation between subject and object, or between consciousness and nature, is nothing but the result of human praxis. In the words of Adorno (2005):

[...] the real, living man, the one who does all this, the one who possesses the struggle; it is not, let us say, “history” that uses man as a means to work for its ends—as if it were a separate person—but rather it is nothing more than the activity of man pursuing his goals. (p. 287)

Only anthropogenic desire, insofar as it involves desired activity and the pursuit of goals, has earned human beings the most daring aspirations and undertakings to shatter the cycle of natural immediacy and enter the historical realm. However, if desire accounts for that aspiration to deny the given, being there (*dasein*), its materialization implies subordinating each member of the community, or the herd, to its desire. Only through this desire for recognition does effective reality exist, all the more so because there is another who recognizes it.

In other words, effective reality does not exist unless there is another who recognizes that reality as his own. The one who imposes a notion of reality is called the master, while the one who recognizes it is nothing more than a slave. At the dawn of an entirely anthropogenic order, two consciousnesses are thrown into the world, whose confrontation to the death, incidentally, involves the imposition of one notion of reality on another.

Moreover, this fight to the death becomes a condition of reality, insofar as the negation of the other does not imply real death, but rather its dialectical sublation i.e., only by leaving the adversary alive and denying their desire for recognition can that dialectical movement be affected, whereby the master has constituted himself in plenary and authentic reality. Meanwhile, the slave, by not risking his life for the desire for recognition, has been unable to achieve the authenticity and reality of consciousness, remaining subject to necessity and fused with the given being, that is, maintaining the identity of being there. To clarify this point, Kojève’s words (1982) are decisive:

The Master is the Consciousness that exists for itself. And it is not only the [abstract] concept of Consciousness, but a [real] Consciousness that exists for itself, which is mediated with itself by another Consciousness. Namely, by a Consciousness that belongs to its essential reality because it is fused with the [given being], that is, with thingness-

as-such. [This “Consciousness” is the Slave who, in solidarity with his animal life, joins the natural world of things. Refusing to risk his life in a struggle for pure prestige, he does not rise above the animal. He therefore considers himself as such, and as such is accepted by the Master. (p. 9)]

The solidarity that the slave maintains with natural things translates into alienated labor, insofar as the objects transformed by the slave do not serve his satisfaction, but rather his labor, which is nothing less than the enjoyment of the master. Thus, the slave is the one who mediates between the master and nature.

Here, anthropogenic reality arises from its inception under the dialectic between masters and slaves. This dialectical form of social relations ultimately crystallizes into in legal, political, and economic institutions that legitimize the principle of recognition of the masters. Hence, it is not surprising that, in this struggle for recognition, all social formations have been orchestrated, as Hegel fully understood.

In truth, freedom and the desire for recognition pull the strings of history, the latter being the judge of all those transformations. In this sense, as can be seen, Hegel, beyond being an author of metaphysics, focused on the capital problems that occupied society. In Kofler’s opinion (1972) “Hegel overcame the unilateral nature of Schelling’s conception, which focused exclusively on the philosophy of nature, by approaching social problems, which provided him with a richer and deeper understanding of the dialectical nature of reality” (p. 30).

Although Hegel understood better than anyone that *phenomenology* is the only method for determining a logical meaning of historical processes—without, however, intervening in or criticizing the alienated formations of capitalism as Marx later would—it must be emphasized that he discovered the dialectical form of these processes. This implies recognizing that all effective reality is resolved through dialogue and discussion. However, as Kojève has pointed out (1939), this dialogue “differs from a philosophical dialogue or discussion. It is ‘discussed’ not by means of verbal arguments, but by blows from clubs

and swords or cannons on the one hand, and sickles and hammers or machines on the other” (p. 27).

Against this backdrop, it becomes clearer why history is the judge of all these processes. History does nothing but demonstrate the multiple dialogues that have been established in different social formations, by virtue of the desire for recognition. By virtue of freedom and the domination of nature. This implies not being subordinate to needs. So far, we have arrived at Hegel, leaving for the rest of the work the understanding of dialectics in terms of historical materialism.

Although the introduction to historical materialism must be preceded by an analysis of the influence of Feuerbach’s humanism, it is sufficient to note that this author represents precisely that turning point, whereby metaphysical explanations of both reality and the substance of nature and human beings would be abolished.

The return of theory to sensible things indicates an attempt to conceptualize being and knowledge in terms of a real subject, committed to the objects necessary for its realization. Or, in his words: “the real in its reality and totality, the object (*Gegenstand*) of the new philosophy, is only an object for a real and complete being” (Feuerbach, 1984, p. 118). In short, the true being of things is only accessible to a being that experiences them, since it is nothing but sensitivity and the object that provokes it that are the foundations of reality.

In this vein, although Feuerbach indicates the realization of the human and the real in terms of mediation with nature, as Alfred Schmidt (1976) has argued that nature in this author is presented as an unscathed, realized, and immutable entity. In short, as a metaphysical entity, as a substrate from which all things are derived by accident. Thus, where Feuerbach failed to resolve the dialectic of nature, subordinated to human labor, Marx would undertake this task by discerning the reciprocal transformations between nature and society through the appropriation of the former by means of technology. Conversely, all changes produced in nature determine social formations. Here, implicitly, Marx, although he did not follow a gnoseological line like Hegel

or Feuerbach, left valuable assumptions for identifying the inextricable relationship between science, work, and nature, which would be useful for understanding the gnoseological structure of reality. As Mark Rosental (1961) observes:

Marxism was the first to put an end to the idealistic falsification of logic and the theory of knowledge. [...], dialectical materialism studies these forms by linking them inextricably to the real content that knowledge extracts from the objective world. It is not logical forms that engender and shape the laws of the world, but the laws of nature that determine the logical forms of thought. (p. 15)

Rosental undoubtedly wrote these lines with Engels' work, *The Dialectic of Nature*, as his main influence. Thus, the objective laws of nature and their representation in thought do not fail to point out what Schmitt (1976) reproaches as metaphysics in the nature conceived by both Feuerbach and Engels, insofar as it is presented as an immutable entity, independent of its historical processes.

Rosenthal, in his analysis of the theory of knowledge in material terms, assumes a vestige of those unchangeable and dialectical laws of nature collected by Engels. It should be noted that although this author acknowledges the natural research of modern science in his writings, he rejects, like the latter, the concept of physical nature. Therefore, he fails to understand its constitution based on the mediation of human labor. However, to clarify this statement, it suffices to consider Schmitt's argument (1976):

While nature and history are inextricably intertwined in Marx, Engels sees in them two distinct "domains of application" of the dialectical materialist method. Since the moments of dialectics are detached from concrete historical content and become atrophied, they are hypostasized in the three "fundamental laws" already mentioned in *Dialectics of Nature*. (p. 52)

Hypostasizing three fundamental laws, independently of the historical contents of their legality and human praxis, represents a paroxysmal attempt to sever all ties with idealism. This has certainly been the

spirit of all objective science, which presupposes neutrality, without reflecting on its work and the means of production of a given era. Crucially, despite the mysticism that can be reproached to Hegel, he understood that the unity between spirit and nature, which translates into identity between subject and object, is only possible insofar as there is a subject who accounts for and speaks about a reality, ultimately created by him.

Thus, the subject is constituted as it takes possession of an alienated reality. This is the transition by which the *in-itself* of things becomes an *for-itself*. Ultimately, an object only exists through its appropriation by a subject. Thus, Marx explains in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1980) the Hegelian insight: “every reappropriation of the alienated objective essence appears as an incorporation into self-consciousness; the man who takes possession of his real essence is nothing other than self-consciousness taking possession of the objective essence”.

That said, historical formations are reciprocally orchestrated by all transformations of nature. This dynamic accounts for the core of human nature, namely its fundamental historicity, insofar as the unfolding of the attributes of their being is possible on condition of technical and scientific mastery over nature. Before delving fully into the dialectical formations between society and nature, it is necessary to point out that, according to Kojève (1939) “experience is made by a man who lives in the bosom of Nature and is inextricably linked to it, [...], science is born of the desire to transform the World according to man” (p. 16).

Science, like religion and art, has emerged as an aspiration to rationalize, dominate, and transform everything that presented itself to human beings as hostile and alien, i.e., nature. This aligns with the perspective of Horkheimer and Adorno (1998) when understanding the meaning of the dialectic of enlightenment, namely, domination over disenchanting nature. Or, in their words: “What men want to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate it completely, both na-

ture and men. Nothing else matters. Without consideration for itself” (p. 60).

In reality, all science beyond understanding an objective or contemplative spirit represents, at its core, human praxis. That is, the transformation of the given. All theoretical constructions about nature are subject to work. Hence, it is not surprising that Marx conceived that the industrialization of the means of production in capitalism has failed to fulfill its emancipatory potential, namely, freedom through the development of technology. Instead, modes of existence that are completely impoverished and alienated have emerged.

It is the proletariat that, instead of accessing the products of the spirit, has been thrown into the quagmire of unrealization. It is their alienated labor that deprives them of the objects necessary for the unfolding of their being, as Marcuse has pointed out (2016). They are therefore at the mercy of the necessities of physical existence.

In this regard, Marx (1980) has had the last word: “Work, vital activity, productive life itself, appears to man only as a means to the satisfaction of a need, the need to maintain physical existence” (p. 111). With all this in mind, labor constitutes nothing less than a fundamental ontological category insofar as it represents the genus of the human being. Therefore, in the remainder of this section, we will focus on the mediation between nature and society through work.

Dialectic: work, nature, and society

Anthropogenic reality is a topic that occupies a decisive place in philosophy. Thus, the foundation of the conditions of possibility of this reality was one of the concerns, as evidenced in both idealism and materialism. For the former, reality constituted a given fact, accessible through the synthetic unity of apperception.

Hence, the transcendental self. Meanwhile, for materialism in its non-dialectical version, it was presented in the same way as a mere

fact of experience. Thus, in contrast to the conceptual bias implicit in the two philosophical movements, dialectical materialism arose as a theory about the formations of matter. Consequently, for this type of materialism, represented by Marx and Engels, the fundamental property of matter is movement.

However, as explained above, the Hegelian system already showed signs of an epistemological break with the tradition of Western thought. Thus, reality and its understanding are subject to change. The dialectical mapping of reality allows us to glimpse not only the multiple forms of human associations that have appeared throughout history, but also the idiosyncrasies of science.

If the gnoseological and logical structure of the sciences implies a subject and an object, it is easy to understand that in Hegel such a relationship involves a dialectical movement, inasmuch as the truth of the object implies conceptual transformations in the mind of the subject. Hence, the identity between being and thought unfolds exclusively through the condition of its historical development.

Beyond the gnoseological and logical implications of the Hegelian system, there is a concern for the essence and existence of reality—a dimension resolved within its logico-ontological framework. This allows us to infer that where Hegel applied a dialectical scheme to conceptualize reality, freedom as a fundamental attribute of human essence was not exempt.

In fact, work as *a sine qua non* of freedom is presented in Hegel as one of the most vital concepts in his system. Despite its overt theology, his system includes an ontological approach to work, namely, as a process of forming self-consciousness, insofar as the contents of the latter are freedom and dignity.

Regarding Hegel's concept of work, Marcuse (1994) has pointed out that "the process of work also determines the development of consciousness. The 'life-and-death struggle' between master and servant opens the way to self-conscious freedom" (p. 255).

The historical conditions in which Hegelian philosophy developed allow us to glimpse the meaning of its assumptions. Thus, the *absolute spirit* as the identity between being and thought () presents as a concept inherent in the events of the French Revolution. This does not mean that, for Hegel, this event was presented as the synthesis of opposites, but rather that the values contained in this revolution represented for this author the essential attributes of humanity, so undermined in previous historical movements.

Thus, bourgeois ideals, materialized in the nation-state, justified all the suffering endured by humanity. As a result, in its dialectical movement, history presents itself to us as the panacea for human pain. The same would apply to capitalism, insofar as it, as a mode of production, contained within itself the values of the free exercise of labor, only to be ultimately enclosed—much like the Hegelian totality—within bourgeois class values”. When speaking of totality in Hegel, it is essential to address two key concepts discussed earlier, namely reason and freedom. In reality, beyond being ideals or abstractions, these represent par excellence attributes inherent to the human race.

Reason, like freedom, within totality are the conditions of possibility of reality. In its theoretical and practical aspects, reason points to the faculty of both knowing the object and imposing an entirely rational order on the multiplicity of phenomena. In other words, since Kant, reason has become the universal judge of human reality. The same applies to the concept of freedom, insofar as it derives solely from reason. In this sense, freedom in the face of necessity constitutes the essence of the human being’s nature.

Indeed, this universality of reason is precisely what defines the Hegelian totality, insofar as it presupposes the unity of opposites and the reconciliation of diversity. Consequently, universal reason, interpolated into the legal sphere, legitimized the orchestration of the nation-state. In the words of Marcuse (1994), Hegel “made reason the sole universal norm of society; he recognized the role played by abstract labor in integrating divergent individual interests within a unified ‘system’ of ‘needs’” (p. 256).

Hence, it is not surprising that the Hegelian totality, insofar as it encompasses not only a general form of labor but also class values, became a controversial concept for Marx. Within this totality remains a contradiction, namely, the proletarianized class. This class, as previously noted does not have access to spiritual products, let alone the conditions indispensable for its own realization.

From all this, it can be inferred that labor in capitalism does not fulfill its essential function, namely, the materialization of common goals and the realm of freedom. Marcuse (1994), solidifies this critique, observing that:

The existence of the proletariat contradicts the supposed reality of reason, since it represents an entire class that demonstrates the very negation of reason. The destiny of the proletariat is not the realization of human potential, but the opposite. If property constitutes the main endowment of a free person, the proletariat is neither free nor a person, since he possesses no property whatsoever. If the exercise of the absolute spirit, art, religion, and philosophy constitute the essence of man, the proletariat is definitively excluded from this essence, since his existence does not allow him time to devote himself to these activities. (p. 257)

In fact, religion, like art and philosophy, are nothing less than aspects of the same thing, namely, rational dominion over nature. At the dawn of humanity, nature, in its strangeness to man, posed a threat. So it is only through this fear of the strange that the artistic, religious, and philosophical tendencies of man, in beautiful unity, sought to explain it.

Thus, in the religious spirit, we discern an aspiration to bridge the gap between man and nature. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer (1998): "The splitting of nature into appearance and essence, action and force, which makes both myth and science possible, arises from man's fear, whose expression becomes explanation" (p. 70). Thus, the naming of natural things as gods already accounts for man's essential activity. This is nothing more than explanation and consequent domination, inasmuch as the possibilities for the realization of the

human being's nature lie in reducing the primacy of nature over the conditions of existence. And the same would apply to science, wherein, since Bacon, the possibilities of that realm of freedom based on technology became the source of hope for human beings.

This parenthesis is very important, inasmuch as the proletariat, in accordance with the rhythms and times of work, has been unable to exercise spiritual practices such as those indicated. In addition, the conditions of alienated labor represent the negation of freedom and reason, insofar as the proletariat produces objects that are not even worth their fulfillment, much less for them to recognize themselves in the products of their labor. Consequently, the proletariat represents the antithesis of the human being's essence, which lies in freedom from necessity, in rational consciousness as opposed to that which remains in identity, namely, the animal. In the words of Marx (1980):

[...] the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more worthless and unworthy he is; the more elaborate his product, the more deformed the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbaric the worker; the richer the work becomes spiritually, the more de-spiritualized and tied to nature the worker remains. (p. 107)

Marx, accepting Hegel's ideas, demonstrates throughout his work that capitalism, as the historical horizon of human beings, represents precisely the antithesis, or in any case an inverted formation of the true nature of human beings. Thus, not only the remnants of the contradictions pointed out, but also theology disguised as philosophy, as well as abstract law, constitute the objects of Marx's analysis. Thus, in a theoretical and practical program of critical inspiration, the author of *Capital* proposed the elements necessary to overcome the condition of alienation produced by capitalism.

By deploying elementary concepts of political economy, Marx enabled reflection on this historical formation, rooted in alienation. However, before examining these dynamics in detail, however, it is necessary to make another digression and thus try to understand the shift in philosophy that historical materialism represents par excellence.

This is not a reversal of Hegelian concepts, since Marx, although he takes assumptions from this system, inscribes his plan of objects in a new theory of an economic nature. Thus, as Herbert Marcuse stated (1994) in the following lines: “It is not possible to approach Marxist theory by showing the metamorphosis of the old philosophical categories. Each of the concepts of Marxist theory has a materially different foundation” (p. 254).

Consequently, dialectics in Marx comprises a new position. It is no longer a question of understanding the dialectical structure between being and thought, whose method is nothing less than phenomenology, but of making dialectics a critical theory that demonstrates the permanence of negation. This does not mean that, in Marx, the dialectic of negativity is understood as an instrument for transforming the social conditions of his time. Instead, his entire theoretical enterprise is designed to abolish the absolute structures of bourgeois consciousness, capitalist labor, and the restrictive modes of appropriation.

Historical materialism remains deeply indebted Hegel’s ideas. Thus, beyond the critical meaning imprinted on dialectics in this philosophical current, the original structure of the Hegelian approach is preserved, insofar as class struggle, as well as the need for revolution, demonstrates nothing more than the dialectical movement of reality in its authenticity and truth. This does not mean that the class struggle demonstrates precisely that engine that drives the threads of history, namely, the desire for recognition and freedom.

Furthermore, Marx is part of philosophical thought in that he develops a kind of cartography that encompasses the nature of human beings and their social reality. This is the topic we will address in the following lines. It is easy to guess that concepts such as nature, society, and work must be understood in the philosophical terms that Marx used in his early writings.

According to what he wrote in *Grundrisse (Fundamental Elements for a Critique of Political Economy)* (1953), Marx understands that every type of society is characterized by its way of producing objects. Thus,

ancient times, the Middle Ages, and modernity—the zenith of which is the Industrial Revolution—must first and foremost be analyzed by their means of production, since this indicates not only the level achieved in a technical order, but also labor relations, as well as the division of labor and the stratification into social classes, with their consequent table of values.

In this sense, human production represents the degree of appropriation of nature. It follows that the evolution of humanity based on its means of production it becomes theoretically transparent” insofar as the simple transformation of material elements into primitive tools accounts for this trend. In this order of things, if we accept the idea of development inherent in historical-social movements, it is clear that analyzing the historical context of a current social formation, such as capitalism, requires a review of the movements prior to its constitution. Or, in Marx’s own terms (1953):

Bourgeois society is the most complex and developed historical organization of production. The categories that express its conditions and the understanding of its organization allow us to understand the organization and relations of production of all past forms of society, on whose ruins and elements it was built and whose vestiges, not yet overcome, it continues to drag along.

Here, the dialectical structure of history can be seen. This does not mean that historical formations possess positivity at the expense of negating the contents of a previous one. However, what was true in that previous formation is preserved in a new form. This is the dialectic of negativity, in that it dialectically sublated the false and establishes a truth. But it also implies the presentation of a thesis, which will lead to its subsequent negation. This, taken to the analysis of capitalism, allows us to understand it as a historical formation, which is not the result of anything other than the negation of a previous formation such as feudalism.

Marx (1980) develops this argument in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Although the conditions of labor within this historical formation contain a moment of truth, insofar as they presuppose the

free and creative activity of the human subject, the universal commodification characteristic of capitalism has led not to the resolution but to the reproduction of its fundamental contradictions. The Marxist project therefore seeks to expose the historical and economic foundations of these contradictions, demonstrating that their effective supersession ultimately requires a revolutionary transformation of existing social relations.

In relation to what has been pointed out above, although this thinker takes several assumptions from Hegel, among which those referring to dialectics stand out, it is impossible to omit that the meaning that Marx has given to dialectics, as a *sine qua non* condition of revolution, on the one hand, and as a material analysis of historical formations, on the other, was proposed in order to expose, in *the strict sense*, the essence of the social subject's being. And the same would be true for the realization of that realm of freedom. This clarifies the author's disquisitions on social formations, both in terms of the means of production and their material conditions. In Rosenthal's words (1961):

Materialist dialectics fundamentally opposes any theory that considers reality to be chaos, an accumulation of random events and phenomena, devoid of any objective logic. It considers phenomena to be interlinked, mutually conditioned, and encourages, in each particular case, the pursuit of this correlation, because it is only possible to understand and explain them under this condition. (p. 23)

Marx's demonstration on capitalism highlights key concepts such as: alienated labor, fetishization of objects with exchange values, and the de-realization of the genus of being. From this, Marx, through his critique of these concepts within the framework of classical economic thought, proposes overcoming their appearance and thus revealing their true essence.

Before entering into a detailed exposition of these categories, it is necessary to understand the concept of nature in Marx, since, unlike Hegel, it does not become a moment of the spirit, but a material and fundamental reality, on which the being of anthropological reality and therefore of the human being is founded. Already in the *Economic and*

Philosophical Manuscripts (1980), Marx announces that human beings and nature are aspects of the same thing. In other words, human beings and their fulfillment are possible in and through nature. Or, in his own words: "The worker cannot create anything without *nature*, without the *sensible external world*. This is the matter in which his work is carried out, in which he works, in which and with which he produces".

In fact, this concept of nature allows us to glimpse the decisive influence that Feuerbach had on the founder of historical materialism. This is because, in *The Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1984), this thinker understands that being is not a predicate of thinking, but quite the opposite. Therefore, a being lacking in sensitivity is simply nothing. All of which means that human beings without their material substrate, without their inorganic body, which is nature, simply cannot exist in reality. In Marx's work (1980), we find the following statement, which clarifies the above: "Nature is the *inorganic body* of man [...]. That man *lives* from nature means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous process in order not to die" (p. 111).

On the other hand, nature in Marx comprises a primacy over his theory, not only insofar as it relates to the unfolding of the genus of being, but also to the nomothetic idiosyncrasy of the sciences. Historical materialism in its scientific aspect represents par excellence a naturalistic humanism (Marx, 1980). On the other hand, nature, as it uses a dialectical movement, as indicated in the first section, involves, in the first instance, a form that is foreign or alien to man, and, in the second instance, the construction of nature and the construction of man, based on the essential activity of work. In Schmidt's opinion (1976):

[...] the material world encompasses both subject and object, but the fact remains that, from a historical point of view, the unity of man with nature is irreconcilable, that is, ultimately, the necessity of work. Marx is interested in nature, first and foremost, as a moment of human praxis. (p. 26)

Two basic premises for understanding Marx's concept of nature emerge from Schmidt's impeccable exposition. First, the material world referred to represents par excellence the sphere of being and thinking. Thus,

the objectification of work as a world of objects is the only reality that human beings can understand and where they can realize themselves.

Second, although human beings and nature are aspects of the same thing, the latter, insofar as it is external, otherness, implies the necessity of work. Since it could be agreed that the human species only fulfills itself when it converts given natural conditions into social conditions.

Thus, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1980), Marx states that “as the objective reality of human essential forces, human reality and, therefore, the reality of their own essential forces, becomes reality for man in society, all *objects* become for him *an objectification of himself*” (p. 149). It is through the transformation of the conditions given in nature that human beings realize themselves in objects that are already entirely socialized for their use. In short, the human species, insofar as it presupposes universality, shapes a world to its own measure, where it can recognize itself.

As can be glimpsed, history reflects nothing more than this appropriation of nature by human beings. Human beings are the only entities that can construct a reality independent of a world based on immediacy and necessity. Thus, as human beings deny their immediate condition, they become time rather than merely space (Kojève, 1982). Moreover, their gender of being, insofar as it is rooted in universality, implies creating the necessary conditions to establish the realm of freedom.

In other words, it is only through history that human beings, through the various dialectical forms of society, have been able to realize themselves as free, sovereign, and rational subjects. And this implies the true objectification of their social nature. This is agreed upon in that “(...) all production is the appropriation of nature by the individual within and through a particular form of society” (p. 7).

From all that has been said, it follows those human beings, through their different modes of production, have overcome natural conditions and become historical subjects. In other words, modes of production,

through their historical movement, create the necessary conditions for human production. In the words of Marx (1953): “When we speak of production, we are always speaking of production at a given stage of social development, of the production of individuals in society” (p. 5).

However, it should not cause confusion to point to production as an entirely human activity and, consequently, independent of nature. In reality, as Marx indicates (1953), “Production is determined by general laws of nature” (p. 9). In terms of historical materialism, this unbreakable relationship between man and nature is called *organic exchange*. This concept synthesizes the process of humanization of nature. From this it follows that if the means of production are subject to the laws of nature, they only transform matter in order to convert it into objects with use values. In Schmidt’s opinion (1976):

With the concept of “organic exchange”, Marx introduces a totally new conception of man’s relationship with nature. With the Enlightenment, as it has been manifested particularly on this point since Bacon, Marx shares the idea that nature must be considered essentially from the point of view of human utility. (p. 86)

Thus, it is through the *organic exchange* between nature and man that the foundational relevance of labor becomes manifest. This is nothing less than the mediating activity between nature and human beings. In this way, work, in the sense that Marx uses it, means the condition by which matter is transformed into its own properties. Likewise, man produces himself through work. In other words, it is only through social praxis that human beings become a universal genus, insofar as they create an objective reality in which to recognize and fulfill themselves. In Marx’s words (1980):

[...] it is precisely in the elaboration of the objective world that man truly affirms himself as a *generic being*. This production is his active generic life. Through it, nature appears as *his work* and his reality. The object of work is therefore the *objectification of man’s generic life*, for he unfolds not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but actively and really, and contemplates himself in a world created by him. (p. 112)

This quote explains with surprising clarity the conditions of possibility of anthropogenic reality. These are nothing less than the essential forces of human beings that translate into social praxis. Hence, work is the fundamental activity of human beings, inasmuch as it reflects the freedom to create and produce at the expense of its material substrate, unlike animals, which remain in immediate contact with nature.

We have reviewed concepts such as nature, society, and work in Marx's own philosophical terms. We have emphasized that the elaboration of these concepts in this thinker's work represented a critique of their inauthenticity within the framework of capitalism. From this, in the following lines we will expose *ipso facto* the alienation that the proletariat experiences in its object of work, in its activity, and in its relationship not only with its own kind, but also with nature.

Dialectic of capitalism

The economic expressions of our time reflect the stagnant progress of the human spirit. The productive forces have not reached their full development and freedom, in terms of mastery of material conditions. These expressions, specific to the economic scenario, are testimony to the subjugation of human beings to forces totally foreign to their true essence. Late capitalism, whose origins possibly date back to the 1960s and which goes by the name of globalization, certainly represents a step backward in the evolution of the human spirit. Not only the inequalities forged within geographical divisions, but also labor relations themselves exemplify the rule of irrational forces over human consciousness. In a word, in capitalism, economic forces govern human beings, when, on the contrary, they should be subordinate to the ends of self-consciousness.

These initial lines are important insofar as they introduce the idea that will be developed below, namely, the dialectic of capitalism. Understanding the formations of the human spirit based on the development of

its productive forces¹ requires, first and foremost, knowledge of some components inherent to political economy. Labor, commodities, capital, the state, and land ownership are some of these components, which make visible, to the greatest extent possible, the functioning not only of our social relations but also of reality. In fact, since Marx, numerous philosophical and economic works have been produced to demonstrate the articulation between the economic base and its superstructure.

That is, between the development of social forces, means of production, and formations of consciousness, which together ultimately represent a particular ideology of an era. Likewise, a particular world-image can be inferred from the development of these productive forces, insofar as science, in addition to fulfilling a nomothetic function, already has a horizon through which we understand the world. Achieving an understanding of the dialectic of capitalism already implies an inherent critique of its structure. Previously, it was judged as a historical formation governed by irrational forces. Now, what is at stake is nothing less than its demonstration.

In an era such as ours, where most people share the common designation of wage workers, and where living conditions have been enhanced by technical development in certain historically privileged regions, one is compelled to judge this system as an inherently irrational historical formation". Moreover, if there is a moment of truth in capitalism, as Marx conceptualized, it is necessary to take the negativity of dialectics to its ultimate consequences and overcome this historical formation, so that the essence of humankind can appropriate all the conditions necessary for its unfolding.

1 In the social production of their existence, men establish certain necessary relations, independent of their will, relations of production that correspond to a certain stage of their material productive forces. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a legal and political superstructure [Uberbau] is built, and to which certain forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines [bedingen] the social, political, and intellectual process of life in general (Marx, 1980, pp. 4-5).

If, under capitalism, commodities have been imbued with a certain magical aura, turning them into objects of worship (fetishism), it is easy to understand that labor forces, instead of being devoted to the satisfaction of material interests, are subordinated to the production of these objects with exchange values. Thus, broadly speaking, we can glimpse how fables and aggressive forms of consumption of these commodities are combined in the international market. As a result, countries located on the periphery of the geographical division of this global system are increasingly dependent on market fluctuations, governed by the spirit of fetishism.

This dependence on the global market has suspiciously become the cross these countries must bear, as the laws of the free market cunningly demand integration into this global system and the consequent income of the main leaders of these countries' economies. In the final analysis, the ideology of the free market has become the imperative of these nations. The aforementioned terms of political economy must be analyzed within the legality of capitalism in order to make a clear judgment on the inequitable formations that have occurred throughout our era. This implies pointing out the contradictions that have been exacerbated by the interference of an ideology such as neoliberalism.

Therefore, a rigorous assessment of late capitalism demands a multi-dimensional analysis that encompasses philosophical, economic, anthropological, and political aspects. However, before delving into the analysis of these concepts, it is important to understand, in dialectical terms, the *positivity of capitalism in the historical order of humanity*.

For classical economists, capitalism represented an immutable economic formation that largely reflected the universal essence of human beings. Capitalism found legality and deep acceptance in the 18th century due to the overcoming of the old regime: feudalism. Thus, the rejection of this preceding historical formation and the preservation of what was possibly true about it justified and subsequently materialized some elements inherent to capitalism, namely private property, the state, free trade, and wages.

However, the overcoming of feudalism and its ideological forms represented, within the development of the human spirit, a revolution of such dimensions that even human beings' perception of themselves and their place in the world was profoundly transformed. This is the French Revolution, a process that marks the beginning of a new world. The French Revolution carried within its ideas that were considered universal, namely freedom, democracy, and equality. its avowedly secular character, these ideals were nothing less than the result of the theological heritage of the old regime. Thus, equality before God, as well as freedom from sin, were reflected in the French Revolution, and their content was equivalent.

It was Hegel, the great thinker of modernity, who saw in the French Revolution and the Restoration of the Prussian state a reconciliation between divinity and humanity. In other words, for Hegel, these values were updated in a new order, where the divine would no longer exist outside the earthly world. This is the realm of freedom, guaranteed by the state. his Hegelian interpretation, which reconciled the Church with the state, was the subject of criticism and attack by Marx. Freedom, as well as equality, which were embodied in the state, beyond representing a real and true totality, were, in Marx's time, class values. This does not mean that these values within the latter's *theoretical corpus* are not universal, since the thinker of *Capital* tried to take the realization of this realm of freedom to its ultimate consequences.

However, in its dialectical movement, capitalism certainly possesses a truth, namely, the freedom and autonomy of human beings to procure the necessary conditions for their fulfillment. However, private property and wage labor are sources of contradiction, insofar as the proletariat, not being owners and having nothing but their labor, is unable to orchestrate the material conditions for its fulfillment in terms of autonomy and freedom.

Consequently, wage labor represents a new form of slavery.² Private property and wage labor, being the substance of capitalism, result in a series of contradictions that ultimately lead to a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx, as pointed out in the previous section, reflected on contradiction as the element that pulls the strings of history. Hence, the dialectical form of reality, through the moments it preserves, ultimately enables the full development of the productive forces and the long-awaited realm of freedom.

On the other hand, the reconciliation between Church and State, carried out by Hegel, translated for Marx into the legality of class values. Hence, it is not surprising that the legal framework of the nation-state legitimizes rights that guarantee the permanence of bourgeois modes of existence. Thus, private property, so defended by classical economists, gradually became an indisputable reality. The same would apply to the income and profits that capitalists could receive from the income from their property. However, the contradictions became apparent throughout the development of capitalism. The theft of private property, as well as the chain of unemployment and the impoverishment of the material conditions of the proletariat, bear witness to this.

Throughout his work, Marx criticizes not only the legal framework of the state as realized in Hegel, but also the economic and political thinking of his time, insofar as the latter reflects the laws of an alienated reality, i.e. a reality that, in Hegelian terms, has fallen far short of being appropriate in its universality. However, unlike Hegel, Marx treats universality not in metaphysical terms, but in a material order.

2 Marx concludes, based on the real and existing relations of production, that even a “particular” activity can alienate the *whole* person, even if they have legal control over themselves, insofar as no one can force them to sell their labor power. However, in their actual existence, the “free” wage worker is less free than the ancient slave, for even though he is the owner of his ability to work and the possession of the means of production is equally justified, and he only alienates a special work for a limited time, he becomes a slave, totally and absolutely, to the labor market, because his already sold capacity to work was the only thing he effectively possessed and had in order to exist in general.

This justifies the economic and political project pioneered by Marx,, since the realization of the human being is not due to the formation of a cosmic spirit, but is above all an undertaking inherent in the very essence of the human being. In short, the humanization of human beings has as its *sine qua non* condition the conscious development of the productive forces, as well as their rational and autonomous distribution in tasks that enable the realization of human beings. In capitalism, at a glance, there is no such realization of human beings. This economic formation, throughout its historical development, has caused serious contradictions. The accumulation of capital in small groups, as well as the enjoyment of it solely by these groups, bears witness to this assertion.

Capitalism has proven to be unscathed and irrefutable, for two possible reasons. The first lies in its dialectical aspect, in that it possesses a moment of truth that has possibly been taken to its ultimate consequences in developed countries, namely autonomy and freedom to procure material means. Secondly, capitalism has become an insurmountable historical formation, for reasons inherent in the suspension of the dialectical movement. This aspect is pivotal insofar as it translates the absorption of the proletariat into a particular ideology and class consciousness, so problematized by Gramsci (1975).³

In short, this aspect of the dialectical movement of capitalism points to the negation of any possibility of revolution, insofar as the proletariat, seduced by the luxuries offered by the free market, is exonerated from its critical faculties to question the capitalist system. This second aspect of the problem has been superbly intuited by Herbert Marcuse (1968). For this author, the mechanisms of repression of self-awareness and freedom lie in the manipulation of the proletariat based on

3 Religion and common sense cannot constitute an intellectual order because they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even in individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness; they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence “freely,” although through “authoritarian” imposition this could occur, as it did in the past within certain limits (Gramsci, 1975, p. 14).

its desires. Thus, society instills needs⁴ that are completely opposite to those considered indispensable.

Capitalism offers objects with exchange values, cloaked in ideology. Entertainment, as well as the cost of trips to cosmopolitan centers, facilitated by the media, gradually become hypothetical imperatives of consciousness. For this reason, the proletariat, in its passion to access these consumer objects, becomes a slave to them. This is the logic of capitalism, as it understands the dominance of the market over the existence of the subject.

For Gramsci, common sense represents the antithesis of the self-reflective thinking characteristic of philosophy. This does not mean that philosophy is the privileged heritage of certain intellectual groups. On the contrary, it represents the understanding of the phenomena of social reality, in the broadest sense of the word. In other words, it is a form of thinking rooted in the understanding of what is, and the questioning of why the existent should not be otherwise.

In the words of Löwith (2008): “What is ‘is not [...] an ‘eternal present’, but transitory existence, something that still subsists, but is devoid of true reality. To conceive does not mean, as it does not mean in Marx, mere understanding, but criticism and alteration” (p. 220). Marx, taking Hegel’s ontological disquisitions on reality in its dialectical aspect literally, conceived precisely the same thing as the latter, i.e. the alienation of humans from their own humanity.

Marx concluded this premise by elaborating an itinerary through the main concepts of political economy,⁵ as they translated effective reality. Meanwhile, questioning these concepts was a preliminary step toward

4 A distinction can be made between true and false needs. “False” needs are those that serve the interests of individuals in their repression [...]. These needs have a social content and function, determined by external powers over which the individual has no control; the development and satisfaction of these needs is heteronomous (Marcuse, 1968, p. 32).

5 Marx’s theory is a “critique” in the sense that all concepts are a denunciation of the totality of the existing order (Marcuse, 1994, p. 255).

the complete realization of that reality. It cannot be overlooked that the treatment of these concepts represents a project to carry out the universality of the anthropological genus of being. And this implies a denial of "all that is". Finally, before unpacking specific economic and political categories, it is necessary to point out an aspect of capitalism that allows us to settle its irrational nature. Paradoxically it is the *technical rationality* that has accompanied it since its inception.

From the celebration of Francis Bacon to the heyday of the cultural industry, technology has become the *sine qua non* of progress and freedom, but we cannot ignore the fact that human beings have gradually been subjugated to the automatism of the machine itself. The same could be said of the exacerbated exploitation of nature based on an unsustainable technical order, which could be attributed to capitalism's irrational nature. From this, it can be concluded that, not only economically but also technically, human beings have been subordinated to two irrational forces that have not yet been fully assumed in self-awareness. Among the elements that complete the series of contradictions of capitalism, commodities stand out for their irrational value.

Unlike historical formations of human beings, objects with exchange values have completely occupied all spheres of reality. From the commodification of intellectual productions, through artistic ones, to human life itself, the imperative of alienation has been fulfilled, as it is not human beings who freely exercise their power over objects. On the contrary, dead objects rule over human forces, to the point that the realization of a foreign object leads not only to the dissatisfaction of material interests, but also to the starvation of the proletariat. This is Marx's opinion (1980) regarding the alienation suffered by the proletariat in its object:

[...] the object that the worker produces, his product, confronts him as a strange being, as a power *independent* of the producer. [...]. The realization of work is its objectification. This realization of work appears in the stage of Political Economy as *the de-realization* of the worker, objectification as *loss of the object* and servitude to it, appropriation as *estrangement*, as alienation. (pp. 105-106)

If the being of the human being is possible insofar as it possesses objects⁶ for its realization, in capitalism the subject subordinated to wage labor produces objects for another, the owner of the means of production. The objects vital to human development become means for the owner's profit. Thus, the proletariat, in addition to producing objects foreign to itself, receives a completely insubstantial wage to take possession of the very objects it produced.

Consequently, although the proletarian has his labor power at his disposal for the production and enjoyment of objects, he is not free to do so, since private property rights make his object a commodity that will be valued only by those who have a social position. Hence, in capitalism, the human being is not a free man, but the subject of the economy, insofar as he is recognized only by his purchasing power.

Unlike objects with exchange value, objects with use value represent real needs. Marx, in his critical analysis of the concepts of political economy, concluded that the true reality of human beings is subtly concealed by the fetishization of the market. The legality of capitalism consists in the production of insubstantial objects for the deployment of the anthropological genus. As a result, the proletariat is not only deprived of the objects needed, but also produces commodities to such an extent that the very production of these commodities leads to his inevitable ruin.

In capitalism, commodities are covered by that magical aura, which Marx called the commodity fetish. This refers to objects mediated by ideological components of a particular social class. Thus, the proletariat in its work is constrained by the ideological interests of the class, since the fluctuations of the latter's capriciousness and⁷ ism determine

6 A thing realizes its own determination by being used and utilized by another. For the thing itself, this use is not external or alien, for it is there to be used; its entire existence is an existence-for-something. The full use of a thing constitutes the thing itself, just as a field realizes its peculiar being through its yield (Löwith, 2008, p. 204).

7 In the course of appropriation, the object manifests itself as the "otherness" of man. Man is not "with himself" when dealing with the objects of his desires and

the production of these objects and the consequent need to employ the worker in their manufacture. The unrealization of the proletariat is not only its own heritage, but also that of the subject who enjoys the thing, i.e., the owner.

In other words, the object has reached such a point of acquiring an autonomous life that human beings, understood in their universality, are governed by foreign forces emanating from the fetish of the commodity. In Löwith's opinion (2008): "such independence of the object of use, converted into 'commodity', exemplifies the universal relationship by which, in the bourgeois-capitalist world, the product dominates man" (p. 208). In a word, commodities within the framework of capitalism represent the very irrationality of an era that has not achieved self-awareness.

In capitalism, the production of commodities determines the alienation⁸ of objects from the proletariat, and the life of the proletariat and social relations. It is alienation from objects, as the proletarian does not consume them, and they appear hostile to him, since their production involves the reduction of the life of the proletariat.

On the other hand, it represents alienation in the worker himself, as what he has at his disposal to be able to approach the enjoyment of objects is his labor. Thus, by offering only his labor power, the proletariat becomes a commodity, for which he exchanges the *right not to die* (Marx, 1980). Finally, it is the alienation of social relations, as human beings only relate to others for the exchange value that can be produced in that relationship. In the final analysis, the rule of the dead over the subject is a symptom of an era where autonomy and freedom are ideas still upheld in a supersensible world.

his work, but depends on an external power. He has to contend with nature, chance, and the interests of other owners (Marcuse, 1994, p. 256).

8 The commercial nature of all our objects of use, and the corresponding human consumption, not only constitute an economic characteristic, but ultimately determine, as alienation, the entire character of the manifestations of human life and the modes of its production (Löwith, 2008, p. 203).

The irrationality inherent in capitalism is largely due to the production of goods. Moreover, wage labor, together with private property rights, completes the series of these contradictions. In the modern world system, these contradictions have reached such a paroxysmal point that a substitute to remedy them is a trivial undertaking to develop real solutions. The above discussion of *labor* has thus left us with two basic premises for understanding its ontological implications and the realization of that realm of freedom conceived by Hegel and staunchly defended by Marx.

The first lies precisely in its ontological aspect, in that it fully translates the human species. The self-conscious and desired transformation of a nature foreign to man, which remains true to itself, has been identified as the original behavior of human beings. This is work, as it is a mediating element between human beings and things. This means that human beings, as they realize themselves solely through their objects, owe this to their social praxis. In Marcuse's opinion (1994) "Far from being a mere economic activity (*Erwerbstätigkeit*), work is man's 'existential activity', his 'free conscious activity'; not a means of sustaining his life (*Lebensmittel*), but a means of developing his 'universal nature'" (p. 270).

Indeed, labor constitutes an existential activity, since it is nothing less than a condition for the objectification of human reality. All things that enter the field of human action become objects that condition the materiality of their existence.⁹ The same would apply to nature, since it is nothing but the material source of all object's indispensable to humanity. The transformation of nature and the things it holds within itself become an objectified world, i.e. a world where human beings not only recognize themselves, but where they are possible.¹⁰ Thus,

9 Physically, man lives only from these natural products, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothing, housing, etc. (Marx, 1980, p. 110).

10 The practical production of an *objective world*, the elaboration of inorganic nature, is the affirmation of man as a conscious generic being, that is, the affirmation of a being that relates to the genus as to its own essence or that relates to itself as a generic being. (Marx, 1980, p. 112).

a human being deprived of the means of realization becomes a total non-being. Human beings only exist insofar as they are founded in their other being.

The second aspect of *labor* comprises a dimension that is equally ontological. Moreover, this second position satisfactorily fulfills Marx's critical denunciation of the validity and legality of reality. In contrast to Hegel's development of the universal spirit, Marx conceived that humanity represents that universality, whose condition of realization is labor. In reality, if human beings are only free from the thing (), insofar as they transform and consume it, such freedom presupposes work rooted in the full realization of the productive forces. Ultimately, the true realization of the effective conditions of reality will determine the self-awareness of the distribution of productive forces, and the social enjoyment of the thing. In capitalism, on the contrary, human beings cannot be satisfied with the social product, which is in fact an indispensable object for the unfolding of the genus of being. The understanding of effective reality presupposes a prior moment not only for its critique, but also for putting into action the very dialectic of negativity.

In other words, the understanding of reality in its immediacy and validity is a moment inherent to dialectics, since the revelation of the true essence of a historical formation lies in the negation of its immediacy. In short, the immediacy of capitalism lies precisely in a right legitimized by class interests, insofar as private property and market laws pave the way for the exploitation of man by man. In light of the evidence of working conditions in peripheral countries, one cannot fail to observe how that right has justified the exploitation and enrichment of small power groups.

Capitalism is an entirely irrational formation, whose suspended dialectic has led to the preponderance of alienated labor¹¹ over its true

11 Marx explains the alienation of labor as it manifests itself, first, in the worker's relationship to the product of his labor and, second, in the worker's relationship to his own activity. The worker in capitalist society produces goods. Large-scale production of goods requires capital, that is, large amounts of wealth used exclu-

essence. Contrary to the realization of history, capitalism represents a quagmire. In other words, the organized development of the productive forces, which could very well be used to dominate human nature in its complete social realization, is still governed by alienated forces in capitalism. The being in and for itself of things is still far from effective. The same would apply to the social nature of human beings, since this is still denied by current working conditions. Hence, in capitalism, work, instead of representing fulfillment, is precisely a means of de-realization. The more spirituality objects with exchange values have attained, the more brutality the worker has suffered, since he is only employed at moments of overproduction of those objects, whose demand is subject not only to the division of labor but also to bourgeois ideology.

Consequently, workers are treated solely as commodities in their work. In the words of Marx (1980): "The worker is poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production grows in potential and volume. The worker becomes a cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces" (p. 105). The idiosyncrasy of wages lies in accumulated and unrewarded labor. Thus, wage labor represents a new form of slavery, in that the worker's freedom to produce is subject to the whims of the capitalist and the trade in commodities.

Thus, freedom of labor within the framework of capitalism is a completely contradictory issue, since the very nature of private property will dispose of the productive force of the dispossessed for its use and abuse. Meanwhile, this group is ultimately forced to seek work in any branch of commerce at the minimum price set by the owner of the means of production. As can be seen, the production of fetishized objects and the idiosyncrasies of wage labor together determine two aspects that are very important in revealing the contradictory nature of capitalism.

sively to promote the production of goods. Goods are produced by independent private entrepreneurs for the purpose of profitable sale. The worker works for the capitalist, to whom he delivers the product of his labor in exchange for a contractually fixed wage (Marcuse, 1994, p. 271).

First, the worker works not for the satisfaction of his material interests, but to produce objects that will be valued on the market. As a result, the interest generated by the sale of these products is captured as much as possible by the owner of the means of production. Second, the proletariat, lacking the means of production, finds in its productive forces the only means to exchange objects of use value. In the end, the worker receives only what is necessary to survive. Hence, the worker's labor becomes a commodity, whose use is subordinated to the fluctuations of bourgeois sentiment and market demands.

Likewise, although the division of labor is linked to the intellectual and physical abilities of each individual, under capitalism, this division of labor has become the cross that the proletariat must bear, as the reduction of their potential to a specific branch of labor creates the conditions for their own unemployment. The mass production of fetishized objects is inexorable to the demands of a particular class, and the ideology of that class will have the final say on the production of objects. Consequently, the worker merely employed in a branch of labor is subject to the fluctuations of capitalism.

The division of labor has become increasingly specialized with the advancement of technology. Initially, with the development of gunpowder, the compass, and printing, there were high hopes for the universalization of the human being. For this reason, these objects were seen as elements to defeat Cronos and make the rhythms of production more effective.

However, what was once a promise turned into disillusionment. This is the result of modernity, whose imperative was to dominate nature through calculation, observation, and experimentation. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno (2005): "From now on, matter must finally be mastered without the illusion of superior or immanent forces, of hidden qualities. Anything that does not bow to the criteria of calculation and utility is suspect to the Enlightenment" (p. 62).

The banner of progress and freedom, based on the domination of nature through technology, was not lacking. Although the development

of technology has meant greater efficiency in production processes for most industrialized countries, and thus an improvement in living conditions, it is undeniable that the technical order has orchestrated a new series of contradictions. Not only has its use in the production of fetishized objects, which in the final analysis become conditions for driving the cultural industry of the masses, but also the consequent specialization of the different branches of the division of labor, exacerbated the contradictions between the dispossessed and the owners. The former are forced to compete with a large number of unemployed workers and machines.

The distribution and use of industrialized means of production are driven by the same irrational forces of capitalism, in that instead of producing the conditions necessary for the realization of the human being's genus, they fulfill a diametrically opposite function, namely: greater productivity of fetishized objects, reduction of wage prices, and, in the most extreme case, unemployment. The combination of these results, which are not limited to them, has ultimately meant the complete derealization of the worker, his alienation from his work, his object of work, and ultimately his life.

III

HISTORY FOR EMANCIPATION

EMANCIPATION

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Philosophy and history

Perhaps the most significant expressions of the *philosophy of history* that have obsessed researchers and inspired hundreds of studies were the ideas professed by Hegel, who argued that history has a rational purpose and that it is the judge of such purposes. Since their formulation, these ideas have been the subject of great debate in the scholarly world, in both the speculative philosophy and in the positivist historiography. In the twilight of Hegelianism and its vision of a *system*, Hegel's followers developed various arguments to defend and draw the ultimate conclusions from a thesis that was insurmountable due to its metaphysical nature. It is not surprising that the exhaustion of reason in its historical development justifies domination, since taking control of reality in its universality implicitly entails the need to exercise power.

This entanglement of power and culture is coeval with human civilization itself. Drawing causes and conclusions through myth is already a form of exercising power. Rationalization, as well as explanation, already implies *ipso facto* a form of domination over the strange and its hostile and untamed forces. This has been well understood by Adorno and Horkheimer, who argue that "(...) myth wanted to narrate, name, tell the origin: and with that, therefore, represent, fix, explain" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1998, p. 63). Only human beings have been able to transform nature and transform themselves in the process, an exercise of power that provides them with an order tailored to their needs. Only human beings turn nature into a servant of their taste.

Moreover, domination applies to nature and to human beings, or at least, this is the judgment of history.

To affirm with Hegel that history is the judge of the universal process by which human beings orchestrate the necessary conditions for their freedom, outside of necessity, implies, from the outset, an element of domination. What we have gained in the history of ideas, in the development of science and technology, is not a negligible matter, but rather a whole heritage that reflects the struggles between human beings and nature.

Heritage that, according to the author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, indicates the bond between *being* and *thinking*, between *essence* and *existence*, i.e. the only being that participates in the totality of *being*, as Heidegger (2001) would say and that can make a judgment as a human being. But making a judgment presupposes a certain violence over things, and a certain politics of truth. Nature does not present providential signs; on the contrary, it is human beings who create patterns and, ultimately, laws that have facilitated our survival as *a universal genus*. In other words, human beings are a part of nature that compels nature itself to speak. A similar opinion can be found in Kojève, who argues that:

(...) the real Being existing as Nature is that which produces Man, who reveals that Nature (and himself) through speech. It is the real Being that thus transforms itself into “truth” or reality-revealed-by-speech and becomes an increasingly “significant” truth as its discursive revelation becomes more adequate and complete. (Kojève, 1982)

Kojève’s thesis on the ontological, logical, and dialectical investigation of *being* in Hegel must be understood in accordance with a fundamental distinction that lies in the word. *Being*¹² is dialectical insofar as its revelation is preceded by the negation of its inauthentic aspect. Moreover, its truth, as can be glimpsed, is only accessible to a being

12 For dialectical logic, being is a process that evolves through contradictions that determine the content and development of all reality (Marcuse, 1994, p. 220).

that presupposes a dialectical structure in its consciousness. In simpler terms, statements about *being* and the purification of its truth are carried out in a conceptual order. This is the effort of the concept that Hegel never ceased to teach us throughout his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (2005).

Based on the above, the German thinker is an author of general ontology, insofar as he attempts to explain *being* in its logical and existential order. However, as stated in the first lines, he is an author of a system, insofar as his notion of experience was not exhausted in a noetic resolution, but in an overall vision. In the opinion of Jean Hippolyte (1946), Hegel "(...) considerably broadens the notion of experience, so that the critique of experience extends in Hegel to ethical, legal, and religious experience and is not limited to theoretical experience" (p. 11).

Indeed, throughout Hegel's work, there is not only an investigation of the logical structure of consciousness. In contrast to Kant, who assumed the categories of knowledge to be unalterable and *a priori* given to consciousness, Hegel understood that these were nothing more than the result of its historical development. In collaboration with Hippolyte's exposition, it is easy to glimpse that the author of *Phenomenology* sought to expound both the contents of theoretical and practical reason in their historical unfolding.

Consequently, freedom—the central theme of practical philosophy—is not only a moral framework (whose ultimate goal is the realization of a realm of ends according to Kant -1946), but also an idea that encompasses historical development and has manifested itself in areas where the spirit has come together. Thus, for Hegel, the idea of freedom in its formation has traveled a path from East to West, which in the final analysis was realized in the Prussian state. Here is what Löwith said to clarify the Hegelian view:

In his philosophy of history, the most important steps in the self-liberation of the spirit are found at the beginning, that is, in the East, and, in the end, in the West. Universal history begins with the great empires of the Ancient East, with China, India, and Persia; it continues, through the decisive triumph of the Greeks over the Persians, with the

state formations of Greece and Rome in the Mediterranean, and ends with the Germanic-Christian empires of the Western Nordics. (Löwith, 2008, pp. 56-57)

It is important to recognize the theological aspects inherent in Hegel's work in order to have a precise idea of fundamental concepts such as *spirit* and *freedom*. It is commonplace in 18th- and 19th-century metaphysics (collectively known as German idealism) to conceive of reason as sovereign and free from human affairs. From Kant, through Fichte and Schelling, to Hegel, we find the dichotomy between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom.

The former was governed by the *iron law* (Hegel, 1997) of Newtonian mechanics, while the latter represented free will, proposed by Epicureanism but taken to its ultimate conclusion in Christianity. Hence, it is not surprising that, at that time, the life of Jesus Christ represented not only the realization of the idea of freedom (as in Hegel), but also a framework for morality (as in Kant).

According to Löwith, "(...) the ultimate foundation for Hegel's historical-final construction lies in his absolute appreciation of Christianity, according to whose eschatological faith the end and fulfillment of time appear in Christ" (Löwith, 2008, p. 60). In collaboration with Löwith's argument, one can understand why Hegel made history a sublime article of faith, as opposed to *the* dogmatic *apriorism* of the Church, which promulgated the idea of a spirit that governed over the contingent and singular aspects of the development of peoples. In his own words, Löwith points out that: "(...) that faith is (...) indeterminate; it is a faith in Providence in general, and does not pass to the determined, to the application, to the whole, to the entire course of events in the universe" (Hegel, 2005, p.107).

Contrary to the common assessment of his time, it can be presumed that Hegel made God a *very real entity* in development. To appreciate the decisive influence that this thinker had not only on historiography but also on the aspirations of the revolutionary movements of the 19th century, one need only consider his insights into the development of *the free spirit* based on his dialectical movement. Thus, for

this author, the struggle between the Greeks and the Eastern peoples meant not only the assumption of a government of free men but also the manifestation of reason.

The same would apply to the French Revolution, which, for Hegel, represented the forces that underlie and struggle for the idea of freedom, whose inspiration was certainly the ideas of the Enlightenment. With the restoration of the Prussian state, a reconciliation between faith and politics was achieved, in which Hegel sensed the realization of *the Kingdom of Freedom*. This idea, however, was seized upon by the Young Hegelians—most notably Feuerbach and Marx—who reinterpreted it as an urgent crisis of contemporary consciousness. In conclusion, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* essentially represents an attempt to demonstrate the evolution of reason from its historical moments, which, in Marcuse's words, argues that:

(...) the *Philosophy of History* exposes the historical content of reason. In other words, here the content of reason is the same as the content of history, although by content we do not mean the miscellany of historical facts, but rather what makes history a rational whole, the laws and trends to which the facts point and from which they derive their meaning. (Marcuse, 1994, p. 220)

Everything real is rational, and everything rational is real. This expression, which has often been interpreted out of context, to the detriment of its authentic philosophical value, translates the aspirations of the system that Hegel sought to endow his philosophy with. Hence, the difficulty implicit in interpreting it. We will limit ourselves to pointing out that its meaning is linked to the very concept of history.

The development of philosophy through its own dialectical movement has shown us greater effectiveness in the identity between *being* and *thinking*, between *reality* and *concept*, between *subject* and *object*. It is inevitable that history will, at a given moment, satisfactorily fulfill this identity. Furthermore, this expression implies the aspirations of a system and signifies the development of the forces of the free spirit and their correlation with reality, insofar as the latter facilitates the necessary conditions for their unfolding.

For Hegel, the series of events characteristic of modernity, among which the rise of new science and the legality of the nation-state stand out, represented nothing less than the conditions under which the totality of reason would be orchestrated. Teleology of reason and freedom are the key words for defining the dialectical nature of the absolute spirit, insofar as this concept accounts for totality, since it is the reflection of all the moments prior to its constitution and, therefore, its complete realization. In other words, its constitution is the result of overcoming certain historical moments, which start from nature, move towards conceptual reflection, and return as a spiritual product, both in gnoseological and existential terms.

In the words of Walter Jaeschke (1998), the Absolute Spirit is the “(...) sphere of spiritual life in which the spirit detaches itself from external effective reality, returns to itself and makes itself its object, and precisely to this extent it is absolute: it fits and is free because of this” (p. 39). Although the absolute spirit ultimately represented the being that thinks itself, the identity between object and subject is surprising to observe in the relative esteem that Hegel gave to labor.

In truth, absolute and effective reality are interchangeable terms, but despite Hegel’s metaphysical insights, reality is nothing less than the product of human labor. However, in the context of industrial capitalism at that time, it was Marx who diagnosed the contradictions that had not yet been resolved in Hegel’s totality. These contradictions, developed throughout the work of the thinker of *Capital*, can be summed up in one: the proletariat. In this regard, it is important to consider what Marcuse said:

Truth, according to Hegel, is a whole that must be present in each of the elements, so that if a material element or fact cannot be connected to the process of reason, the truth of the whole is destroyed. According to Marx, such an element existed: it was the *proletariat*. The existence of the proletariat contradicts the supposed reality of reason, since it represents an entire class that demonstrates the very negation of reason. (Marcuse, 1994, p. 257)

Hence, it is not surprising that Marx, as an epigone of Hegelianism, took the realization of this rational totality to its ultimate consequences. In order to achieve absolute freedom, Marx carried out a critical program of the material conditions of human beings within the framework of capitalism. Accepting history as the judge of the processes of freedom, it is important, in accordance with the legacy of this philosopher, to erode the structures that have made the subject a slave and make him the complete heir to history, so that his revolution may be liberation for all. Liberation that implies true domination of society over reality.

History and historical materialism

The idea of *history* in Hegelian philosophy, as seen, essentially presupposes the uninterrupted development of *the absolute spirit*, i.e. the stage at which *being* and *thought* are identified. This does not mean, however, that the contradictions between the forms of knowledge and reality have been overcome. The evolution of *consciousness* throughout history and the true description of *being* was the conclusion Hegel reached after his research on *universal history*. This is the totality, the character of the spirit. In the same sense, the contradictions between *reason* and *reality*, between *essence* and *existence*, were resolved without further ado in the construction of the system. Thus, for Hegel, modernity and all its conclusions were the touchstone for all the sufferings of humanity.

Viewed thus, the dialectical structure of history functions as a panacea for all the disappointments and disagreements that humanity has faced. Under this lens, slavery was nothing more than a preliminary stage in the realization of the idea of freedom. The same would apply to the social relations between the baron and the serfs in a historical formation such as feudalism, whose overcoming represented nothing less than the illusion of autonomy and the unfolding of the productive forces of human beings in capitalism, this was precisely the alienated reality that Marx observed in the 19th century.

The very dialectical structure of knowledge and *being* paves the way for new contradictions. In other words, everything that becomes true in one era inevitably becomes false in the next. Reality in its ontological aspect, in order to become effective, comprises the necessary conditions for its realization and an entirely rational meaning. *Everything real is rational, and everything rational is real*, superbly synthesizes the development of spirit and knowledge. This expression essentially translates the effectiveness of reality, whose necessity is absolute.

Hegel's hermetic totality, therefore, would imply the resolution of all irrational aspects of reality. Thus, despotism as a social fact and dogmatism overcome by the *age of reason* (modernity and the use of science) represented the necessary conditions for the effective reality of the author of *Phenomenology's* era. Regarding the Hegelian thesis, Frederick Engels pointed out:

(...) everything that is real within the realm of human history becomes irrational over time; it is already irrational, therefore, by its destiny, carrying within itself the germ of the irrational; and everything that is rational in the mind of man is destined to one day become real, however much it may still clash with the apparent existing reality. (Engels, 2006, pp. 10-11)

Consequently, everything that was necessary for one era is abolished in a subsequent one. In this light, for the establishment of civil government, the French Revolution presented itself as an absolute necessity. The promise that reason would guarantee the conditions for the realization of the human being in total freedom was at least one of the assumptions on which Hegel indirectly pronounced the *end of history*. Herein lies the controversy and debate reached by the Young Hegelians,¹³ among whom Engels and Marx diagnosed the obstacle to the realization of that totality.

13 The so-called "Young Hegelians" represented a group composed of authors who were completely dissimilar in their theories. However, they all started from a common point: the Hegelian system and its dignity in the context of the revolutions of 1840. Thus, the criticism and dissolution of the Hegelian system carried

Unlike the overcoming of the contradictions between essence and existence achieved in the establishment of civil government, it is difficult not to observe that the state and the law presented themselves as the new instruments of slavery. These are the contradictions that Marx understood as the driving forces of history.

The irresolution implicit in the very structure of reality allows us to infer that history is nothing more than an infinite process, where the *absolute* was, in truth, a theoretical justification for the legality of a certain class consciousness. This is the bourgeoisie, whose legal foothold materialized in civil law, which in turn justified private property and the exploitation of labor based on its jurisdiction.

In other words, what Hegel conceptualized as the ultimate realization of a rational totality inspired by the idea of freedom, was for Marx a moment of alienation. It is certainly the proletariat that is the contradiction forged by the new social relations of civil government. To conceptualize what has been stated, it suffices to point out what Karl Löwith said:

(...) in his real existence, the “free” wage worker is less free than the ancient slave, for although he is the owner of his ability to work and the possession of the means of production is equally justified, and he only alienates a special skill for a limited time, he becomes a slave, totally and absolutely, to the labor market, because his already sold ability to work was the only thing he effectively possessed and had in order to exist in general. (Löwith, 2008, p. 203)

Indeed, freedom for Hegel, in its absolute aspect, although it is an undeniable prerequisite for the authenticity of *being* and knowing, cannot eliminate the idea that its possession became a matter of class. In

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out by authors such as Feuerbach, Marx, Stirner, Bauer, among others, were due to ontological, political, and theological reasons deeply rooted in the historical situation of their time, which, in Marx’s opinion, presented a completely inverted nature. In the words of Löwith: “[...] all of them withdrew from their ties to the existing world or, through revolutionary criticism, sought to subvert the current condition of existence” (2008, p. 11).

Marx's view, this is nothing more than the consequence of an inverted world. On the other hand, the identity between *being* and *thinking*, between *essence* and *existence*, is not resolved in Marx's eyes through a critique of consciousness, but rather through a true revolution of the material conditions of existence in a given era. Hence, for the author of *Capital*, in Hegel's absolute totality, there was no overcoming of contradictions, but a permanence of negation.

In this regard, Marcuse has pointed out that dialectics in Marx takes a critical position insofar as "(...) it characterizes its meaning as 'understanding the inseparability of oppositions in philosophical foundation and as preservation (and not overcoming) of contradiction in the result'" (Marcuse, 1998, p. 87). And indeed, if the problem of validity between *essence* and *existence* translates into the fair correlation between material conditions and the unfolding of human attributes, it is easy to guess that the proletariat, as a universal class, does not possess the necessary means for its realization, much less access to the products of spiritual life. In Marx's words:

(...) the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more worthless, the more unworthy he is; the more elaborate his product, the more deformed the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbaric the worker; the richer the work becomes spiritually, the more de-spiritualized and bound to nature the worker remains. (Marx, 1980, p. 107)

For Marx, the alienation of the proletariat's existence represented the irresolution of the contradictions orchestrated in universal history. Capitalism, as an improvement on the feudal mode of production, has a moment of truth in the development of the spirit, as it allows for autonomy in the deployment of productive forces and freedom of individuality. However, it is undeniable that the very structure of private property and the resulting wage labor produce objects that are not intended to satisfy immediate needs, but rather for the market. Capitalism is understood, according to Marx, as a historical formation where dead things, i.e., commodities, take precedence over existence.

To substantiate this conclusion, the founder of historical materialism began by analyzing the historical conditions of a stage in which human productive forces had reached such a peak that industry and science could guarantee the much-celebrated *realm of freedom*. Likewise, the derogations both at the level of consciousness and in the legality of social relations, arising in a chronological order that goes from reform to enlightenment and culminates in the French Revolution, presented an internal law by which Hegel's thesis was more than proven. However, in their subsequent consequences, such revolutions in both human consciousness and praxis revealed class interests and needs.

Evading moralistic reductions, it is understandable that history holds key moments where necessity and passion exceeded the actual conditions of a given era. Understanding *all that is* requires a historical examination of *the* particular and general *pathos* of an era, insofar as it is nothing but conscious motives and desires that inspire great revolutions. In the words of Engels, human beings, "(...) each pursuing their own ends with consciousness and will (...); and the result of these numerous wills, projected in various directions, and their multiple influence on the outside world, is precisely history" (Engels, 2006, p. 43).

Agreeing that only human beings are the subjects or substance of history is already a good sign for grasping the theory and task bequeathed to us by Karl Marx. Already in his phenomenological analyses, Hegel was able to glimpse the evolution of consciousness from the negation of *being there*. This does not mean that human beings are only human insofar as they transcend the condition of animals, since all spiritual formation, understood in *the strict sense*, namely as the common and historical heritage of all entirely human products (science, art, religion), is nothing but the result of the negation of what remains in identity with itself (nature).

The negation or transformation of nature, in its most original sense, translates the very essence of human beings, given that the desire to transform matter arises from an organic need. In his dissertation on the *dialectic of masters and slaves*, Kojève pointed out that "(...) born of Desire, action tends to satisfy it, and can only do so by 'negation',

destruction or at least transformation of the desired object in order to satisfy hunger, for example” (Kojève, 1982, p. 2).

However, according to Kojève, unlike desire directed toward a natural object, only the desire for recognition over a multiplicity of desires will ultimately determine the revelation of self-awareness, of the Self. Human reality exists insofar as there is recognition and revelation through speech. For all these reasons, such a desire for recognition initially assumes the *dialectical* structure *between masters and slaves*, one of the starting points of Karl Marx’s theory.

The *dialectic between masters and slaves* revealed to the latter thinker the meaning of history. If human beings are defined through the active transformation of nature, it is undeniable that the historical appropriation of the means of subsistence has required, as its ultimate condition, the structural matrix of multiple revolutions. The abolition of the existing world translates, in its entirety, the aspirations to legitimize a new order, whereby the desire for recognition will be equivalent to the appropriation of the means of production. Thus, the history that runs from East to West, according to Hegel, translated this desire for recognition, as the government of all would guarantee the necessary conditions for subsistence.

Which, in the final analysis, meant for Marx the realization of an entirely social reality. Here, in contrast to Hegelian philosophy, as it was nothing more than an imitation of an inverted reality, Marx understood that the abolition of *all that is* would not take place in a *purple haze in heaven*, but in the revolution of existing conditions, whose heart was the proletariat and whose head was historical materialism.

From the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1980) this thinker never ceased to theorize about the revolutionary aspect inherent in dialectics. According to Marcuse, the early writings “(...) in their meaning and goal are by no means purely philosophical, but practical-revolutionary: the overthrow of capitalist society by the economically and politically combative proletariat” (Marcuse, 2016, p. 67).

It would not be surprising that the author of *Capital*, in his project to revolutionize the structures of effective reality, undertook an economic, political, and historical analysis to demonstrate precisely the absolute necessity of turning the irrational into the rational., To discover that behind social relations, as well as the organization of productive forces within the framework of capitalism, lay the true essence of human beings. To understand the meaning that Marx sought to impart to his work, it is important to take into consideration what Kosík professed:

For materialism, social reality can be known in its concreteness (totality) on condition that the *nature* of social reality is discovered, that pseudo concreteness is destroyed, and that social reality is known as the dialectical unity of base and superstructure, and man as an objective, historical-social subject. (Kosík, 1967, p. 65)

By pseudo-concreteness of reality, Kosík means the contradiction between the *nature* of human beings and the material conditions of capitalism. The alienation of the subject within the framework of this historical formation, the worship of objects with exchange values, wages as an element of slavery, and the mass production of objects that are not owned by the proletariat all determine the pseudo-concreteness of social reality.

Analysis in historical and material terms consists of identifying the ontological structures of social beings. Thus, if the transformation of nature has been the permanent condition of reality, it is clear that labor is essentially social. Hence, only the socialization of the means of production is the factor for the true concretization of reality. Herbert Marcuse, in *Phenomenological Contributions to Historical Materialism* (2010) in Martin Heidegger's ontological terms, understands that in its original aspect, *Dasein* and its realization comprise a practical element. In other words, only work and the multiple techniques developed throughout history have enabled human beings not only to take possession of reality, but also to reproduce themselves.

Consequently history, as an element inherent to the essence of human beings, represents the process of transforming the conditions given in nature into a social reality, where human beings not only realize

themselves, but also find themselves. In the words of Marcuse, "(...) this determination of existence is historical, it is circumscribed by the historical situation of existence; the possibilities that concrete human beings have in each case are traced by it, as are their reality and their future" (2016, p. 88). The analysis of historical formations started precisely from capitalism, as its economic categories encompassed, at their core, aspects of previous modes of production. Thus, the critique of political economy represented an effort to demonstrate the rigidity of concepts referring to an alienated, inverted reality.

Thus, wage labor, private property, and capital, in addition to justifying the exploitation of the proletariat, meant for Marx components of prehistoric times, since as a whole they inscribed relations of exploitation and subordination in society, which in the opinion of Marx and Hegel were elements of barbarism. In relation to his own historical method, the author states:

Bourgeois society is the most complex and developed historical organization of production. The categories that express its conditions and the understanding of its organization allow us to understand the organization and relations of production of all past forms of society, on whose ruins and elements it was built and whose vestiges, not yet overcome, it continues to drag along. (Marx, 1953, p. 26)

History carries within it the contents of all epochs, where the Hegelian spirit has come together. Its development bore witness to an internal law that produced it. The contradictions resolved throughout it, as well as the realization of freedom outside of necessity through technification and industrialization, allowed us to assume that its internal law, its meaning, was nothing less than progress. However, the failure to overcome capitalism has led to the possibility of objectifying a common world based on work, and to the complete unrealization of the universal human being.

Only in the full freedom of the productive forces can human beings produce an entirely social reality. Only through historical consciousness can human beings carry out the revolution of the existing conditions of this era, and thereby make reality a true social fact, where

human beings satisfy not only their physical needs, but also their spiritual ambitions. This would mean, in a word, the assumption of *the zoon politikon* (political animal) insofar as “(...) their freedom consists in being-for-themselves in being- other” (Löwith, 2008, p. 211). In short, only human beings *are*, as they produce under the imprint of their own *genus of being*, which is social.

History never ceases to teach us about the series of dominations. Its meaning, beyond corresponding to an internal law based on overcoming contradictions and the illusion of progress, presents as a *document of barbarism*. Or at least, this was Walter Benjamin’s conclusion (Benjamin, 1986). Hence, the emancipation of alienated reality is possible as soon as we suspend the historical dialectic of this document of barbarism, a true article of faith of the oppressive classes.

Walter Benjamin and the possibility of history as an emancipatory practice

Within the heterodox tradition of Marxism, Walter Benjamin is probably one of the most enigmatic and brilliant figures. Not only because his research in the fields of art, politics, and history has achieved a beautiful unity, worthy of such dignity, but also because of his assiduous commitment to the dispossessed, to those who, as *outcasts*, revealed the shadows precisely where everything was cloaked in the aura of progress.

Symptoms of modernity such as Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe have received their due appreciation in Walter Benjamin’s work. Beyond being an art critic, Benjamin possessed the keen intuition to make materialist aesthetics an emancipatory element. For the topic at hand, we will try to find the unity achieved by this author in the aforementioned domains, in order to appropriate his critical and emancipatory component, so necessary for Latin Americans.

Perhaps *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Benjamin, 2015) and *Theses on the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 2008) are

this thinker's most iconic works, in that they convey his critical and revolutionary spirit. Where Walter Benjamin identified the transformations and functions of art in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, he also orchestrated the necessary conditions for art to rise as an instrument for social transformation and emancipatory practice.

Meanwhile, in the second work, he testified to his unshakeable faith in revolution through the powerful element of history. It is in the contents of this work that the first glimpses of emancipation can be found. Thus, *the dialectic in suspense*, a key concept that reflects the possibilities that the dispossessed have in breaking with the mechanical cycle of universal history, Hegelian history, which, in the author's opinion, represented the accumulation of ruins upon ruins.

For Walter Benjamin, historical materialism plays a fundamental role in the redemption of humanity. Recognizing the series of events unfolding throughout history, however simple it may seem, was not an encyclopedic task, but a revolutionary, entirely human one. Beyond reconciliation with reality, in historical terms, according to the Hegelian legacy, Walter Benjamin understood that history as a whole reflected an endless series of oppressions that determine our present.

Hence, contrary to the internal law of history, rooted in progress as understood by Hegel and even Marx, this thinker saw nothing less than a series of catastrophes, the accumulation of which seriously compromised not only the present but also the entire future. In contrast to the ideas of progress of social democracy and its confidence in the laws of history, Benjamin evoked the inexorable need for proletarian revolution, rejecting all passivity and confidence in the dialectical laws of history.

In the second thesis of his work *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin pointed out that "(...) the past carries a hidden index that never ceases to refer it to redemption" (2008, p. 36). By this he did not mean that the need to recover the motives of past revolutions becomes a commitment of our time, insofar as the repeal of a present that denies the proletariat redeems those who previously fought

against it. Thus, by virtue of failed revolutions such as that of 1840, history has an ultra-meaning, namely, to remember the blood of the vanquished. The same would apply in the case of Latin America, as the conquest and the wars of independence glorify the oppressors rather than the vanquished.

Women, men, black, and indigenous peoples were erased from the pages of Latin America's social, political, military, economic, and cultural history, giving rise to a systematic process of ethnic, cultural, and intellectual whitening, downplaying the struggles and intellectual creations of social sectors that were not part of the Creole, white, and intellectual society of the time, subordinating hopes for freedom, justice, and equal rights to the logic and dynamics of internal colonialism.

Napoleon Bonaparte's triumph in the French Revolution and his expansive force in the battles for Latin American independence did not bring redemption for the indigenous peoples, but rather the materialization of the interests of the Creoles, not to mention the bourgeois elite that had settled in this region. Michael Löwy, in his work dedicated to Benjamin, entitled *Fire Alarm*, has pointed out that:

Little by little, I realized [...] the universal scope of Benjamin's propositions, his interest in understanding from the point of view of the vanquished, not only the history of the oppressed classes but also that of women—half of humanity—Jews, Gypsies, Indians of the Americas, Kurds, Blacks, sexual minorities; in short, of the outcasts, in the sense that Hannah Arendt gave to this term, from all eras and all continents. (2003, pp. 45-46)

In fact, official historiography has rescued from the past only those famous figures who represented class values. And the same would apply to the past carved in marble: colossal cathedrals that rise to the sky continue to tell us the story of the oppressors. In this sense, history, insofar as it redeems the vanquished, is a preliminary step toward the revolution of all *that is*.

As seen, the contents inherent in historical materialism in its traditional meaning have been sharply disrupted by Benjamin. In Marx,

historical possibility lies in the ontological foundation of *the universal being*, and its realization through the revolution of the proletariat, while for Benjamin, history, according to what has been stated so far, presents itself in its messianic potentiality, i.e. as the redemption of the vanquished.

Leaving this aspect aside, the *outcasts* mentioned at the beginning of this second section represent the group of the declassed, of all those who were marginalized from any form of rights. In Latin America, it is commonplace in history to observe the denial of rights to both indigenous peoples and African Americans.

History continues to operate in the present. Thus, poverty and violence in these groups are recurring patterns in this document of barbarism, which bears the title: *culture*. Feudalism and modernity brought about profound transformations in the social structures of these groups, whose establishment was often justified in the name of civilization and God.

However, although this concept (culture) originated in Ancient Greece, it came into full use in Roman culture, which has represented the primacy of Western *Ethos* over any other form of culture. In the modernization project that has taken place since the 16th century, and whose greatest theorist could probably be Hegel, there are traces of the West's rejection of any subordinate form of existence. Have the Hegelian absolute spirit and the legitimization of rational government not represented the rejection of any other form of social organization?

According to the assumptions of Walter Benjamin's work, the legality of a univocal culture represents the triumph of the ruling classes throughout history. The products we call spiritual are nothing less than testimony to the ideological and cultural imposition of the West on Latin America. In the seventh thesis of the concept of history, it is stated:

The name given to it refers to cultural goods, the same ones that the historical materialist will find as an observer who takes a step back. Because all the cultural goods that fall within his gaze, without exception, have an origin that he cannot think of without horror. They all

owe their existence not only to the fatigue of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous servitude of their contemporaries. (Benjamin, 2008, p. 42)

In truth, the production of cultural assets inscribed in a particular regime of ideological domination, in addition to presenting a contradiction with the cultural formations inherent to a subordinate group, involves the exploitation of the vanquished, insofar as the great monuments extolling the triumph of civilization over barbarism have been produced by slaves since time immemorial. The same applies to Latin America, since the producers of a large number of ecclesiastical monuments have been mostly indigenous people. Immersing oneself in the history of the vanquished requires creating possibilities to slow down the historical movement which, in the name of progress, has delegitimized all subaltern cultural productions.

Art may well be one of those possibilities, as its contents can illustrate the history that unfolds on the other side of the official one. Thus, Michael Löwy, in his reading of the *Theses on the Concept of History*, understood that “(...) Diego Rivera’s frescoes in the Palace of Cortés (...) in Cuernavaca mark a true turning point in the history of Latin American culture, due to their iconoclastic demystification of the conquistador and the artist’s sympathy for the Indian warriors” (Löwy, 2003, p. 94).

In the same vein, the dialectic postulated by Marx between economic structure and ideological superstructure has been able to demonstrate how spiritual productions (art, religion, philosophy) do not simply emerge from consciousness, but obey the organization of productive forces and modes of production. This scheme, applied by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, has been able to demonstrate a direct consequence of the capitalist mode of production on the work of art, which stands out for its relevance in the present. It is the mass industry and the mechanisms by which the commodification of art is reproduced.

Thus, cinema, as a tribute to capitalist ideology, stripped the work of art of its contemplative element, turning it into a mere object of

entertainment. In the words of Walter Benjamin, this phenomenon suggests that “(...) the film industry strives to stimulate the interest of the masses through viewers who encourage illusion and speculation” (Benjamin, 2015, p. 49). This phenomenon, on the other hand, suggests the correlation between the capitalist system and the rise of the proletarianized masses.

Understanding the unity between politics, history, and art inherent in this author’s philosophy requires a reflective exercise to find possibilities in the face of the commodification and instrumentalization of all things, including human beings. In his essays on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin analyzed the historical conditions experienced by the poet during the rise of industrial capitalism. His poems are true signs of the emergence of a new class characterized by its large numbers, anonymity, poverty, and automation.

This is the proletariat class and its conditions of existence, which became the *leitmotif* of the French poet. A universal class characterized above all by its inability to harbor experiences that could serve to develop a future project. Instead, the experience of *shock* and the consequent automation of behavior due to factory work represented the hallmarks of these large masses that passed through the district centers (Paris, London, New York), where capitalism had revolutionized past modes of existence. In Benjamin’s words:

Baudelaire speaks of the man who immerses himself in the crowd as in a *reservoir* of electrical energy. And he immediately defines him, describing the experience of *shock* as “a *kaleidoscope* endowed with consciousness”. If Poe’s passersby still cast aimless glances in all directions, today’s passersby must do so in order to pay attention to traffic signals. Technology thus subjected man’s sensory system to complex *training*. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 33)

Beyond the analysis of the material and historical conditions of industrial capitalism, based on literary material, Walter Benjamin found in criticism a powerful element for social transformation, as has been emphasized throughout this section. The exaltation of the prostitute, the thief, the beggar, and the dissolute are four figures that interested

Baudelaire and made up the picture of his *artificial paradises*, where all suffering was purified by the poet's pen.

For Benjamin, Baudelaire's work represented the rebel's attack on bourgeois consciousness. Here we see how art, through its historical criticism, can become a turning point. Consequently, for Michael Löwith, "Benjamin is interested in safeguarding the subversive and anti-bourgeois forms of culture, and seeks to prevent them from being embalmed, neutralized, academized, and incensed (Baudelaire) by the cultural establishment" (2003, p. 93).

In the case of Latin America, it is difficult to deny that analyzing art in terms of historical materialism would contribute to subverting both the modes of existence and bourgeois consciousness. Isn't the work of Pablo Palacios and his army of marginalized people a testament to this? Finally, the purpose of the *Theses on the Concept of History* is to break with the homogeneous rhythm of universal history and elevate the true "state of exception" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 43). In other words, if the norm, based on Benjamin, lies in technical and instrumental progress and the consequent domination of nature and human beings, the state of exception translates the need to interrupt this process, which would otherwise reproduce the patterns of barbarism and slavery.

Indeed, industry and technology have not been elements for the liberation of human beings; rather, it would seem that their destiny is to increase a market crammed with fetishized objects, which, ultimately, have led to the subjection of human beings to superfluous needs. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, in civilization, the "(...) cultivated use of mere instrumental objects (...) has finally become intolerable in itself, and that men are now almost, if not entirely, no longer masters of this apparatus, but rather its functionaries" (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1969, p. 100).

Hence, the critique of history lies in the denunciation of the illusion of progress in its exceptional sense. It is worth noting that if history continues at its homogeneous pace, its sentence would indeed be an inevitable catastrophe. It is undeniable that history contains the con-

tents of all the social, political, cultural, and artistic epochs of humanity, just as Hegelian thought contributed to the academic positioning of the historical discipline of his time. His voluminous work contains countless philosophical ideas about history and constitutes a great intellectual legacy for humanity.

Crucially, Hegel's ideas raise several problems. First, the central category of the philosophy of history posits a universalist character in which the particular histories of humanity depend on History. Second, they supported the discourses of a positivist, exclusionary, and erudite historiography that proposed a theoretical model of History as a universal phenomenon. Third, the universal ideas of History constituted a historiography whose vision denied the "other" and the "otherness," and rendered invisible and excluded all the particular knowledge and histories of humanity.

Hegelian ideas consolidated a historiography of exclusion. However, they also made it possible to establish theoretical positions contrary to those of the time. The existence of particular histories, parallel and excluded by the grand narratives of universal history, formed the basis for a turning point with Marx's critiques of the idealistic, speculative, positivist, and erudite history practiced by circles of Hegelian historians.

Marx identified profound contradictions in the Hegelian model of history, especially between *essence* and *existence*. Unlike the overcoming of the contradictions between essence and existence achieved in the establishment of civil government, Marx noted that the state and the law presented themselves as the new instruments of slavery; contradictions that Marx understood as the driving forces of history. Marx's criticism lies in Hegel's belief in human freedom as rational totality, which in Marxist analysis meant the moment of alienation of the proletariat. Hegelian freedom could only be possible through the new social relations that were founded with the emergence of civil government, and not through the creative capacity of the social consciousness of the human species.

The historical conception founded by Marx conceived of history and social events as a whole immersed in the dynamics of the society in

which they occur and not in the phenomenon of universal history. Marxist thought allows us to understand that history never ceases to teach us about the complex system of domination and barbarism. These ideas were further developed by Benjamin in his famous work *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Benjamin's work is dominated by Marxist thought and a critique of the universalism of Hegelian history. His work opens up the possibility of thinking about an emancipatory practice of history in Latin America. This practice needs to emphasize the "material" aspects and processes of social life as phenomena that explain the transformation of human beings and as a strategy for understanding social dynamism and the "class struggle".

The idea of an emancipatory history requires a critical historiography and, a critical historian who articulates theoretical production and social research with political practice, recognizing the leading role of the popular sectors and their potential as subjects of historical knowledge. In light of these reflections, it must be remembered that all social events, however minor, are immersed in the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics in which they occur.

It is vital to recognize that social events can never be understood in their entirety, especially if they are interpreted partially or simply separated from the context of their production at the whim of the historian. Understanding the contexts and the social events that took place within them must be the main criterion for constructing a critical historiography that confronts the universalisms of the positivist history inherited from Hegel.

It should be noted that an emancipatory practice of history must not only pay attention to contexts and social events, but also to the material aspects and processes of social life, i.e., to the mode of production of material life as a determinant of the social, political, and spiritual processes of human beings.

It is not through ideas that human beings define their consciousness, but rather, it is their *social being* that determines their consciousness. Benjamin understood Marx's formulation very well and worked tire-

lessly throughout his work, which today represents a path for constructing a historiography of the emancipation of *the social being* as an ontological foundation.

Finally, in order to construct an emancipatory historiography, the perspective and voice of the subaltern classes must be acknowledged, and the use of sources and techniques of analysis and social research must be expanded, the results of which will have an impact on representation and collective and popular action. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that it is real women and men who make, possess, struggle for, and construct history. History does not use human beings to achieve its own ends; we must recognize that it is the daily lives of women and men that construct history; thus, history is nothing more than the activity of women and men who struggle to achieve their goals.

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