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The three engines in Marx's social theory: towards a renewal of the left

Esteban Torres

In the article I present the general outline of a new interpretation of the characteristics and constitutive elements of Marx's modern project. There is now a broad consensus that the recovery and updating of the intellectual project of the German sociologist becomes a sine qua non condition for the renewal of the Left worldwide. The central premise that I will sustain in this work is that Marxian theoretical practice is composed of three motors, irreducible to each other and inherently related: a rational-scientific engine, a critical engine and a transformative engine. One of the key misleadings of Marxism in the last two decades is produced by the failure to understand the relationships that Marx sets between the abovementioned engines. In this article I will try to demonstrate that there is primacy of the scientific motor in the three-engine dynamics of Marx's theoretical practice. Acceptance of such a record entails, among other aspects, a thorough review of the anti-capitalist dispositions of the Left today, as well as the horizon of post-capitalist expectations.

Keywords: Marx; Crisis of Marxism; New Theories of Social Change; Future of the Left; Sociology

As in any other point in history, the recovery and update of Marx's modern project becomes a *sine qua non* for the renewal of the left globally. Such a demand for renewal is produced in a moment of retraction and generalised turmoil facing the unprecedented expansion of neoliberal programmes throughout the world. In this work, I will show how the bet that underlies this pair of assertions differs radically from the typical and recurrent Marxist call to return to Marx, a call that social sciences have not addressed for ages.

Marx's modern project fits the notion of Marxian identity perfectly. What I understand as Marxian identity is a dynamic component which is defined from the shape that Marx's practice takes as a whole. The Marxian practice, in turn, is a general practice that *envisages and binds* a theoretical practice and a political practice. Despite the immeasurable number of discussions that Marxism has accumulated over the course

of more than a century, it is noteworthy that the question of the way in which both practices combine with each other has been barely explored.

As I understand it, the Marxian theoretical practice consists of three kernels or engines, inseparable from each other and related in an inherent way: a rational-scientific engine, a critical engine and a transformative engine. This distinction is drawn from considering and expanding the general methodological equation that Marx himself suggests in the preface of *Capital*, Volume I. There, the sociologist points out that dialectics is, likewise, 'rational, critical and revolutionary'.¹ Supported by all his work, I will hold that Marxian theoretical practice is a *dialectical identity*, in the same way as dialectics in itself defines its identity principle. That said, I have been able to prove that such identity is dialectical in a double register: in the unleashed movement between theoretical practice and political practice, and then to the interior of the theoretical practice itself. The dialectics to the interior of the theory operates mainly through binding the three above-mentioned kernels: the rational-scientific, the critical and the transformative ones. This interpenetration allows us to record, among other points, the shape and the dimension that politics to the interior of the theory takes. As we will see later, this register is commanded by the rational-scientific kernel. The above-mentioned double movement is set up, in turn, in a chain of mediations that involves the array of the socio-historical framework in which the sociologist's vital pathway is engraved. Marx's modern project, as I understand it from its identity redrawing, could be conceived of as a *socio-scientific force oriented to social transformation*. Each of the small and big dialectical solutions provided by the author becomes a counterpoint and a substantive clue to explain the Last Left's misdirection and failure, at least in Latin America.

1. The triadic motorisation of theoretical practice

Although efforts to reveal Marx's process of social theorisation have been recorded in the last two decades, there is a general tendency to offer a reductionist appreciation as regards the way in which the theoretical-scientific, the critical and the transformative work and interact in their theoretical practice. Some authors confine themselves to acknowledging the existence of a unique engine in Marx's theory, others mention a two-engine scheme and a few authors are able to identify the three engines in the Marxian theoretical movement.

A highlighted case of *single-engine reductionism* is offered by Slavoj Žižek. The Slovenian intellectual acknowledges that both Marxism and Psychoanalysis 'are not only two theories about struggle, but they are also struggling theories, committed in a struggle'.² In

¹ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Buch 1* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2011) [In Spanish: *El Capital. Crítica de la economía política, Tomo1*. El proceso de producción del capital (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002), p. 12].

² Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008). [In Spanish: *En defensa de causas perdidas* (Madrid: Akal), p. 11].

this way, he highlights the theoretical realisation of one of the three modes that make the transformative engine of the Marxian practice exclusively: the activation mode (see point 4 of the text). Another single-engine vision is that of Ignacio Lewkowicz. For the Argentinian historian, the Marxian Project *does not* bring together an analytics of society and a strategy of subjectivation, or a theory of history and a theory of revolution, but either one or the other of these elements.³

Another case of a single-engine appropriation of the Marxian legacy is offered by Jaques Bidet. By holding that Marxism is not a religion but a modern social science,⁴ the French intellectual prefers to highlight the scientific engine of the Marxian theory.

Double-engine appropriations of the Marxian theoretical practice can be observed in Marxist authors like Terry Eagleton, Alain Badiou and Michael Burawoy, among others. Eagleton will say that 'Marxism is much more than a critical method, it is a political practice'.⁵ In his idea of 'critical method', both the scientific engine and the critical engine are envisaged. The missing engine in the English intellectual's vision is the transformative engine, which refers to the political and projective components of the theory.⁶ The conceptualisation of the Marxian legacy offered by Badiou also falls under a double-engine vision, but its definition is more complex and changing. In 2007, the French philosopher said that the Marxian theoretical practice is 'organised knowledge of the political tools required to undo the existing society and display, at last, an egalitarian and rational figure of the collective organisation, whose name is «communism»'.⁷ Such an assertion both excludes the critical engine and mitigates the scientific one. As regards this, Badiou does not warn readers that such politically-oriented knowledge is regulated from a sociological theory with scientific claims. He partially addresses these deficits years later. In 2012, the author acknowledges the existence of three different versions of Marx. Marx the scientist, related to the criticism of political economy; Marx the philosopher, promoter of dialectical materialism; and finally Marx the political activist, who states what has to be done in order to be able to make the Communist Idea real. In this classification, Badiou chooses to differentiate between science and dialectics, elements which – because of their level of interdependence – are contained in the Marxian scientific engine. The solution devised by the French philosopher here approaches his previous scheme. In both of them, Badiou finally overrides the specificity and autonomy of the critical engine by subsuming it into the logics of production of methodical knowledge. Moreover, once his three

³ Ignacio Lewkowicz, 'Marxismo: Legado y Herencia', *Revista Gradocero*, 1:1 (Rosario, Noviembre del 2000), p. 1.

⁴ Jacques Bidet, 'What is Marxism Today?', Lecture at Fudan University, Shanghai, 2005, p. 8.

⁵ Alejandra Ríos and Ariane Díaz, 'El Marxismo es mucho más que un método crítico. Entrevista con Terry Eagleton', *Ideas de Izquierda*, 5 (Noviembre de 2013), pp. 37–39.

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) [In Spanish: *Por qué Marx tenía razón* (Barcelona: Península, 2011)].

⁷ Alain Badiou, *Le Reveil de l'Histoire* (Paris: Éditions Lignes, 2007) [In Spanish: *El despertar de la Historia* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires, 2012), p. 14].

Marx's have been introduced, Badiou chooses a favourite: 'the Marx that I am most interested in, even admitting the huge merit that all the Marx deserve, is the Marx who tries to bind the communist idea in its ideological and philosophical purity to concrete circumstances'.⁸ In so doing, in addition to removing specificity from the criticism component, Badiou splits Marx's intellectual project by breaking the logics of articulation that binds such elements. The critical issue is that Badiou introduces such a divisive activity under a discourse of continuity, rather than break from the Marxian legacy.

Consequently, it is possible to note that both Eagleton's and Badiou's conceptualisations record a subordination of the theoretical-scientific component to the political component. In the case of Burawoy, the opposite happens: the prevailing element is the scientific element. The North American sociologist will state that 'Marxism is an analytically powerful tradition of the social theory, one of vital importance to understand the dilemmas and the possibilities of change and of social reproduction in contemporary society scientifically';⁹ see similar in Burawoy.¹⁰

In this way, under the three commented authors' vision, the supremacy of one of the engines over the others is recognised. Then, there are authors who do not show any priority. This last position is usually backed up by lack of reflection as regards the relationship between the engines involved. What is caused is a discourse of non-related cohabitation between two engines. The conceptualisation offered by Marcello Musto is a good example of this latter modality. The Italian political scientist will say that the indispensable Marx are two: the one who criticises the capitalist mode of production and the theorist of socialism.¹¹ Apart from breaking down Marx's project, we see how Musto removes the scientific specificity of the Marxian practice from his definition.

Now, among the last group who recognise three engines, the record tends to be partial and, to a large extent, oblivious as regards the nature of relationships and of feedback that make the firing that ignites Marx's modern device possible.

One of the intellectuals who detect the *three-engine formation* of Marx's social theory is Erik Olin Wright. The North-American sociologist is ready to acknowledge that the Marxist tradition is made up of three elements: 'The criticism of capitalism, class analysis and a normative vision beyond capitalism'.¹² Now, Olin Wright's characterisation fails to address both the transformative engine and, to a lesser extent, the critical engine. The author does not consider that the 'normative vision beyond capitalism' is the result of a certain ignition moment in the transformative engine, and that such an engine is part of a mass policy oriented by a strategic principle.

⁸ Eduardo Febrro, 'Entrevista con Alain Badiou. Todo lo que necesitas es amor', *Página 12*, 4 May 2012.

⁹ Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright, 'Sociological Marxism', in Jonathan Turner (ed.) *Handbook of Sociological Theory* (New York: Springer, 2001), p. 4.

¹⁰ Michael Burawoy, 'For a Sociological Marxism: The Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi', *Politics & Society*, 31:2 (2003), pp. 193–261.

¹¹ Marcello Musto, 'Introduction', in Marcello Musto (ed.) *Marx for Today* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 14.

¹² Modesto Gayo and Andrea Cerda, 'Entrevista a Erik Olin Wright', *Revista de Sociología*, 27 (2012), pp. 123–137.

The idea of 'beyond capitalism' can be neither hypostatised as a pre-determined horizon of expectations nor can it be supposed that Marx's horizon of expectations as regards such a movement of improvement could resemble the one presented currently for a modern sociology of lefts.

A three-engine vision is also present in NYU political scientist Bertell Ollman's definitions. The author defines Marxism as 'an unusual combination, probably unique, between science, criticism, vision and recipe for revolution'.¹³ For Ollman, these elements are usually so much interrelated and interdependent that it is very difficult to separate them. That said, the author makes quite a frequent mistake among Marxist intellectuals here: he does not distinguish the several levels of abstraction that make up the Marxian transformative engine, which leads him to confuse the progression-form of the transformative engine as regards its specific socio-historical realisation in a theory of revolution (about this topic, see point 4 of the text).

Now, one of the best achieved conceptualisations in the Marxian three-engine project is the one provided by the late Spanish philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, exiled in Mexico. Sánchez Vázquez will hold that the Marxian enterprise is a 'really existing world transformation project, from its criticism and from its interpretation or knowledge'.¹⁴ In any case, such an assertion would deserve correction in two aspects: there is no equivalence between interpretation and knowledge in Marx's theoretical practice, and the criticism does not precede scientific knowledge. Finally, a virtuous and applied combination of the three Marxian engines can be observed in the concept *Capitalist Landnahme* that Klaus Dörre develops. The German sociologist starts from the original record of a socio-historical movement of capitalist expropriation and, from there, displays different programmings of concrete action.¹⁵

Among other aspects, the three-engine dynamics in Marx's thought shows the existence of a *relationship of immanence between scientific reason, critical ethics and transforming will*. They would be three elements that have to be provided with concrete theoretical contents and constructs for every historical moment. By defining his perspective as a 'permanent revolution',¹⁶ Marx is referring to a rationalist dynamism of the scientific, critical and political sort non-reducible to a specific political theory. The acknowledgement of triadic motorisation makes it possible to indicate that it is the mode of contextual resolution of such a combination that, according to the author,

¹³ Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 115.

¹⁴ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, '¿Se puede ser marxista hoy?' (Discurso de Investidura, Doctorado Honoris Causa, Universidad de La Habana, Cuba, 16 de septiembre de 2004), p. 4.

¹⁵ Klaus Dörre, 'Social Capitalism and Crisis: From the Internal to the External Landnahme', in Klaus Dörre, Stephan Lessenich and Hartmut Rosa (eds) *Sociology - Capitalism - Critique* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 247–277. Klaus Dörre, 'The Limits of Landnahme: Capitalism will not Die by Itself, but It can be Overcome', in Judith Dellheim and Frieder Otto Wolf (eds) *Europe - What's Left? Working on the Strategies* (Brüssel: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Büro Brüssel, 2016), pp. S. 60–77.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850* (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1960) [In Spanish: *Las luchas de clases en Francia de 1848 a 1850* (Buenos Aires: Luxemburg, 2005), p. 225].

defines *the horizon of expectations* and the contents of the *political programme* for social transformation. What does this mean in more specific terms? It means that, in the Marxian theoretical device, neither an anti-capitalist essence nor a post-capitalist one operates at first. Post-capitalist emanation, in the prototypical ways of communism or socialism, is the result of a specific resolution of the scientific-critical-transforming equation for a specific socio-historical situation. One of the key mistakes of the Last Left, and of a significant portion of contemporary Marxism is produced by the failure to understand the relationships that Marx sets between these engines. Confusions in this intellectual sector also grow due to lack of knowledge about the dynamics that connect the abstract and concrete levels in the German sociologist's theoretical practice.

2. The scientific engine: permanent innovation

As viewed within the body of classical social theory, element number one in Marx's theoretical practice is its scientific kernel. Modern science is the dominant propulsive force in Marxian thought. Such a confirmation allows us to clear a number of prejudices collected by the Last Left. From the beginning of the 80s, Contemporary Marxism and Post-Marxism, at least in Latin America, worked on deactivating the Marxian scientific engine, thereby nurturing a scepticism and an irrationalism that has only grown since then. The Marxian method is a method of classical knowledge in that it is oriented to scientific clarification and to desires for scientific-technical control of the socio-historical movement. It is a laborious and creative project that has a collectivist interest in contributing to the blueprint of the destiny of societies. Such a method does not equate, firstly, to an economic interpretation of history, as Schumpeter¹⁷ suggests, but to a *set of principles* under constant revision, from which the German sociologist builds and projects a *theory of the shape and of the movement of objects, subjects and ideas*. Against that extended prejudice that conceives of the Marxian science as a guarantor of an auspicious post-capitalist future, the Marxian scientific engine only guarantees a commitment that has an explanatory and later transformative claim on socio-historical processes. Such integral rationalism does not suppress the acknowledgement of the contingent character of socio-historical processes by any means.

Different from the Frankfurtian project, the Marxian rational kernel sets a relationship of immanence between criticism and instrumental science enabling a *positive moment* for the apprehension of the world. In one of his most illustrative fragments, Marx will say about it that 'there, where speculation in real life ends, real and positive science, exposition of the practical action and of the practical process of the development of men also start'.¹⁸ In any case, being faithful to the German sociologist's

¹⁷ Joseph. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Perrenial, 2008) [In Spanish: *Capitalismo, socialismo y democracia. Tomo I* (Barcelona: Folio, 1996), p. 67].

¹⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie* (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1969) [In Spanish: *La ideología alemana* (Buenos Aires: Pueblos Unidos, 1985), p. 130].

scientific project, it would be correct to point out that if social reality changes, each of the engines in the Marxian theoretical practice needs to be revised and readjusted. Such readjustment is demanded by the scientific engine, and defined within the framework of the relationships that each of the engines establishes with the others at every moment. Deactivating the logics of continuous update of the scientific engine leads to increasing obsolescence and insurmountable error.

Marx was fully convinced that there is no better future without science, and that there is no development of the scientific engine of theoretical practice without the bonding to an *imperative of permanent innovation* that discredits any predetermined political form. An easily made assumption from the principle of update is that there are no stable or imperishable utopian horizons. Marx would be ready to hold that, as long as there exist real expectations of social mobilisation of masses and the practical realisation of superior societies, it is necessary to process structuring data about the social world methodically and to adjust one's own ideals according to the society's ideals. *Sociological* or scientific-social *surveillance* of the ethical-political projection is a constituting feature of the Marxian theoretical practice. Referring to the classical link between politics and economy, the German sociologist will say that 'empirical observation necessarily has to highlight in every concrete case, empirically and without any sort of counterfeit, the interlocking existing between social and political organisation and production'.¹⁹ The engine of science for Marx is not political interest, even less the political-partisan one, but a type of will to know that we could call disinterested, as it is not determined by political appetites and exceeds any particularism. In the German sociologist's always clever words, it would be about 'understanding science as knowledge with no other interest than disinterested thought'.²⁰ Later on, we will see how scientific explanation is the basis for social prognosis and how the power of anticipation that lies in prospective reason is the starting point for a successful strategy of political change.

3. The critical engine: criticism and the critical I-II

Marx's critical engine refers firstly to the moral dimension of his theoretical practice, made from an egalitarian ethics. In this way, in its intimate kernel, first of all it is a *criticism of social inequality* instead of a criticism of capitalism. When the German sociologist states that the keynote of criticism is denunciation and, likewise, that criticism is a form of indignation or of reply to embarrassment,²¹ he is referring to the moral kernel of his criticism in a restricted sense. The equivalence that can be set between the Marxian criticism and the criticism of capitalism is not abstract but concrete. Such an equivalence is produced by acknowledging, from a certain horizon of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, op. cit., p. 10.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelischen Rechts-Philosophie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976) [In Spanish: *Crítica de la filosofía del derecho de Hegel* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2004), p. 53].

visibility, that not only is capitalism a producer of social inequality in a general way but also that it is so *in specific terms*; comparative to a record of the other existing socio-economic forms of organisation, or to those with definite probabilities of existing in the short/middle term.

Now, if the critical kernel of Marxian thought is associated with a moral force subject to an egalitarian parametrisation, the fact that this kernel gets shaped in the triadic movement of its general theoretical practice should not be lost from sight. Marx's notion of criticism, as I understand it, is a rationalist force that passes – like an arrow – through the three engines, defining *three gears* that in their operative reality are boosted by the scientific engine: I am referring to *the critical I* (rational-scientific), *criticism* (equality/inequality) and *the critical II* (transformative). The critical engine as a whole is the one that indicates, in a more sensitive way, how the relationship between objectivity and stance taking is processed; and consequently, it is the one that expresses if there is any sort of predominance of the scientific gear or of the political gear in criticism-building. In Marxian criticism the traces of the dispute between two of the above gears (the critical I and II) can be observed. If the engine of criticism, as I pointed out, refers to a moral, more or less outraged rejection as regards a situation of structural inequality, both instances of the critical (I and II) are associated with two parameters of relevance. *The critical I* is the gear that aims at acknowledging the key aspects that have to be *known* in order to be able to offer a plausible synthetic-general explanation of the current socio-historical processes. If criticism in the Last Left has become innocuous and irrelevant, this is because it firstly failed to address the critical I in Marx's theoretical practice.

On the other hand, *the critical II* refers to the key aspects that have to be *known* about the opponent *and* to the key movements that have to be *made* in order to defeat the former and to transform the previously explained and partially denied social reality. The three moments described (criticism, the critical I and the critical II) make up the German sociologist's general concept of criticism. It is from such a compound and unstable method that the assertion that Marx's social theory is a critical theory should be interpreted. If the founding gear of criticism is moral, concrete criticism as a whole, which unfolds as a sociological criticism, is a scientific ground force with transformative orientation. The movement of criticism is elevated from a permanent surveillance spiral of each of the gears in relation to the others. Criticism would be, in some way, as Walter Benjamin states, a question of 'fair distance',²² if we understand a claim for balanced combination in the processing of a series of contradictory elements by this. It is not the moral but the scientific gear of criticism that defines the sense of the radical nature of criticism. This is generally misinterpreted in contemporary critical thought, prone to reducing the Marxian criticism to the gear of *criticism*. The fact that the Marxian criticism has a political gear (the critical II), that is, that it has claims for social transformation, puts pressure on Marx to

²² Walter Benjamin, *Dirección única* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2005/1955), p. 76.

envisage criticism without losing sight of the need to defeat his opponent in the social game of appropriation in which he is immersed.

The participation of this political component of criticism is evidenced when the author states that 'the aim of criticism is an 'enemy' that it seeks to destroy'.²³ The political gear comes up again when Marx admits that criticism 'does not close its path in itself but it extends to the problems for whose solution there is no more than one means: practice'.²⁴ That said, as I have been stating, it does not mean that such a political gear determines the shape and the general movement of criticism in any case. By contrast, such an interweaving alerts us that there is not a split *in the theory*, to the interior of the concept of criticism, between scientific discovery, egalitarian ethics and mass transforming politics. A considerable portion of the lefts' social thought worldwide, including the Last Left, has caused a radical narrowing of the Marxian concept of criticism, to the point of ignoring the scientific and political gears of the notion (the critical I and the critical II) completely. In so doing, criticism has reduced to a moral criticism of any domination, loaded with irrationality, scepticism and reactive outrage.

4. The transformative engine: activation mode, progression mode and overcoming mode

Social transformation for Marx involves a claim for structural turning of the relationships of appropriation existing in given space and time. Such an alteration is oriented to the creation of a new type of social organisation for the same space-time arrangement that enables the expansion of a material process of social match. Marx's claim for socio-structural change makes a temporary solution for three problems that interrelate inherently in a social process: the question of how to activate the break from the existing social order, the question of how to progress towards building a new one, and finally the question of what new social order would be desirable and likely to be built. The first problem concerns what I call *activation mode*; the second, the *progression mode*; and the third one, *overcoming mode*. They are three abstract and meta-historical modes that make the transformative engine of Marx's theoretical practice. Each of these modes gets materialised from a specific socio-historical theory, in an intellectual process of dialectic regeneration between the abstract and the concrete. The inability to differentiate both levels of the transformative engine explains many of the serious mistakes of interpretation made by the Last Left.

Here, I will just introduce each of these modes. *The activation mode* is a *relational* record of wills, abilities and effective possibilities of moving forward over the positions and the projects of those actors that are intended to be moved or mitigated. The Marxian activation mode focuses on the clarification of the *action and social interaction modality* that comes and that should come on stage in a more auspicious

²³ Marx, *Zur Kritik*, op. cit.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 61.

scenario. In schematic terms, the *theory of class struggle* is the socio-historical theory belonging to the activation mode of the Marxian transformative engine.

The *progression mode*, on the other hand, is a *shifting* record of the effective and combined possibilities of structural destruction of the existing and of creation of new social structures. If the activation mode asks itself about the way of winning a battle, the progression mode asks itself about the ways of winning a war from a sequence of battles. If the activation mode refers to an action and interaction modality, the progression mode addresses a *change modality*. If the ruling time of the activation mode is immediate future, the progression mode is resolved between immediate time, near time and remote time, centred in *near time*. The socio-historical theory that goes along with the Marxian progression mode is the *theory of revolution*. For Marx, this is the conceptualisation of a specific change modality instead of the expression of any way of possible socio-structural change. If the progression mode is still fully valid nowadays, the theory of revolution as a way of socio-structural change has fallen into complete obsolescence.

The key theoretical mistake of the Last Left in this point is again related to the inability of distinguishing between both levels of abstraction. From the beginnings of the 80s, within the framework of the last declaration of crisis of Marxism, it has been argued that the invalidity of the theory of revolution condemned Marx's transformative engine to obsolescence. The reconstruction of the German sociologist's theoretical practice, in the terms of this work, lays bare the deficiencies in such an interpretation. It would be more plausible to point out that, for Marx, the interaction between the scientific engine and the transformative engine is the one that builds and updates the sociological framework and the possible strategy for change of mass political action. In this way, against the Last Left, I will say that the setup of the three-engine dynamics of the Marxian theoretical practice would be in charge of discarding the Marxian theory of revolution today by its own means.

Finally, the *overcoming mode* is an ideal construct regulated by the activation mode and the progression mode, and their regulator at the same time. If the activation mode and the progression mode comply with tactical and strategic principles, respectively, then for Marx the overcoming mode is a modality of ideal regulation that acts as a *final horizon of expectations* of the transformative engine. I have already pointed out that, for Marx, the activation mode materialises in *class struggle*; and the progression mode, from a *theory of revolution*. I only need to add that the overcoming mode materialises from a *socialist* or *communist* societal ideal. For Marx, the ruling time of the overcoming mode is neither immediate future (activation mode) nor near time (progression mode), but a future time that is defined in the tension between near time and *remote* or long-term time, without a pre-determined epicentre.

The different future temporalities that are chained to the interior of Marx's transformative engine, are interlinked with the general social temporality of the scientific engine of his theoretical practice at the same time. If immediate, near and remote times can be conceptualised by the German sociologist in realistic terms, this is because they subsist in a total temporality that integrates the past, present and the

future. In this way, it can be proved that Marx's transformative engine cannot work if deprived of the shifting principle of the scientific engine.

For the author, this is about – in this point García Linera is right – *shaping* the socio-evolutionary process of humankind from a certain space-time arrangement.²⁵ For Marx, the outbreak of, and possibilities for creation of the new in history are conceived, in all the cases, as an emergency *in* and *from* the existing social reality. Basically, this means that there is no way of transforming society without addressing the way in which the logics of social reproduction or of social continuity are displayed in a diachronic record. The dialectic movement between Marx's three engines allows us to observe that the societal ideal is not enacted from a strike of self-determination but that it is both nurtured and limited by the *output* that the scientific and critical engines cast.

Observed from the transformative kernel, joint activity of these three engines is expressed paradigmatically in Marx's well-known appeal to '*real* movement, which *voids* and *overcomes* the current state of affairs'.²⁶ In this reference, 'the real' represents the rational-scientific moment of appropriation, nullity is a mode of expression of the criticism and overcoming is the ruling logics of the transformative engine. It is very important to take this notion of overcoming, or transcendence of what is given seriously, as this is the most accurate concept that the German sociologist offers to account for the shifting substrate from which the transformative engine gets activated. Going back to the move from abstract to concrete, it is observed that class struggle, the revolutionary programme and the communist/socialist horizon of expectations are the key political-concrete components of Marx's social theory and, therefore, concrete components are inevitably subject to some level of obsolescence.

In this point, the relevant part of differentiating between an abstract level of forms and a concrete level of specific theories is that it allows to observe to what extent and in what way Marx's sociological device is affected in its theoretical movement of constant destruction and creation of elements.

5. Conclusion

Even though no concept exists outside its society, and any concept is potentially subject to changes, the three described modes that make up the abstract and metahistorical level of Marx's transformative engine remain fully valid and appropriate nowadays, in order to update a left modern intellectual project. This does not apply to the three specific theories that make the concrete moment of the transformative engine. I am referring to the theory of class struggle, the theory of proletarian political revolution and to the theory of socialist and/or communist modes of production. This is not the space to give details about what is dead and what is alive about each one of these

²⁵ Álvaro García Linera, *¿Qué es una revolución? De la revolución de 1917 a la revolución de nuestro tiempo* (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2017).

²⁶ Italics are mine. Marx and Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, op. cit., p. 37.

latter constructs. For this case, it is enough to point out that currently all of them suffer significant levels of inadequacy.

To summarise, I believe that we should not lose sight of the fact that the vector of Marx's theory, as any classical theory, goes from the rational-scientific to the political, or from the rational-scientific to the transformative. For our author, the activation mode, the progression mode and the overcoming mode are defined by their subordination to the rational-scientific kernel of his theory, as well as from their communication with its critical kernel. The Marxian idea of social transformation is alive in that it is conceived of as a process of turning and of structural transition that is projected, derived and imagined from a socio-evolutionary principle or from a theory of movement of the real. Subjection of the transformative engine to the scientific engine is the antidote that Marx's social theory offers against utopias and against any attempt to reproduce the practical solutions offered by the author to change the world over a century ago.

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Notes on Contributor

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