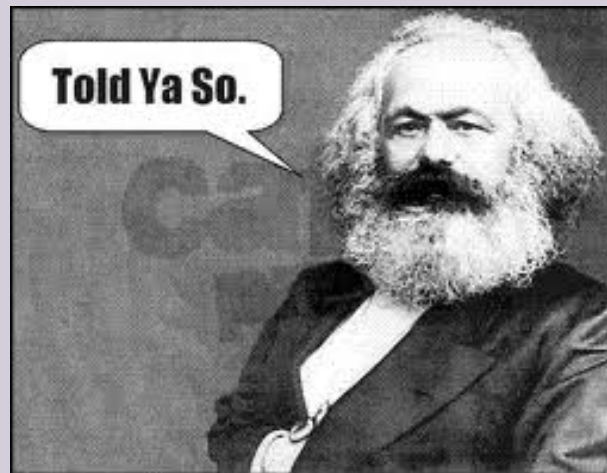


The Network's Blindspot: Exclusion, Exploitation and Marx's Process-Relational Ontology.



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- The 'network metaphor' impoverishes our understanding of power. Its binary logic of inclusion/exclusion leaves it blind to relations of exploitation.

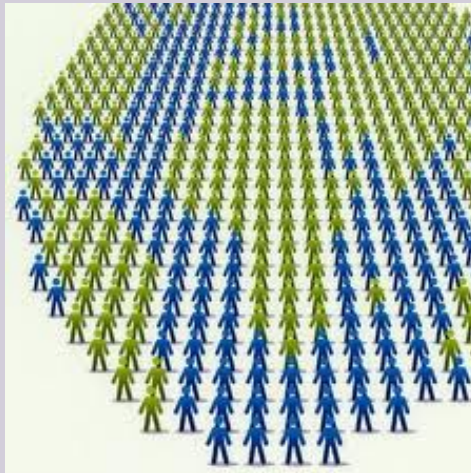


INCLUSION EXCLUSION

The Network Metaphor and 'Exclusion': A Homology

- “New forms of connection produce new forms of disconnection” (Thrift 2002: 41)
- The network “works on a binary logic: inclusion/exclusion” (Castells, 2000, 15)
- “There is a fundamental form of exercising power that is common to all networks: exclusion from the network...there is one form of exclusion – thus, of power – that is pervasive in a world of networks: to include everything valuable in the global while excluding the devalued local” (Castells 2009: 50)

- The network metaphor is a horizontal, spatial metaphor. The “world is flat” because it is increasingly networked.



- Likewise social exclusion is based on a horizontal, spatial metaphor where people are more ‘in’ or ‘out’ of mainstream society than ‘up’ or ‘down’ the class or income ladder.

Problems with 'Exclusion' as a Critical Concept

- “Exclusion, unlike exploitation, profit[s] no one, so that no one can be deemed responsible for it unless out of negligence or error...” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005: 354)
- ‘Exclusion’ defines the excluded as those who lack something, or possess negative characteristics. It is a “topic of sentiment” rather than “a topic of denunciation”
- Reintegration becomes the primary focus. But reintegration into what?

- “The theme of exclusion” posits a basic assumption: that the world is made up of an inside/outside binary.
- But isn't the network the form *par excellence* for understanding the world as shared and common?



- “Exploitation...(defines) a pattern of ongoing interactions structured by a set of social relations, relations which mutually bind the exploiter and the exploited together.” (Wright, 2000, 11)
- Thus exploitation presupposes the existence of a **shared world**.

Marx: Network Theorist?

- A common “process-relational ontology” is shared by both network theorists and Marx.
- From this common ontology, it becomes possible to reconstruct the distinctive path Marx took in conceptualizing ‘process’ and ‘relations’, and in turn, understand how this leads us, not into an inclusion/exclusion binary trap, but rather to a critique of exploitation *writ large*.

Process-Relational Ontology

- Process precedes Substance - social reality is composed not of static things, but of activity, of change, of flows.



- Relations *between* entities are ontologically more important than the entities in and of themselves.
(Heraclitus)

How is Marx a process-relational thinker?

- “Marx’s quest [...] is never for why something starts to change (as if it were not already changing) but for the various forms this change assumes and why it may *appear* to have stopped. Likewise, it is never for how a relation gets established (as if there were no relation there before), but again for the different forms it takes and why aspects of an already existing relation may *appear* to be independent.” (Ollman, 2003, 14)

Materializing Process through 'Production' (Anne Fairchild Pomeroy, 2004)

- Production in general involves three analytically distinct but unified moments:

- 1) appropriation
- 2) productive activity
- 3) objectification

“He acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature” (Marx, 1990: 283).

- Exclusion emerges out of a *lack*.



- Exploitation emerges out of an *excess*.



What kind of a relational thinker was Marx?

- **Internal relations:** To say that all relations are internal is to imply that everything has some relation, however distant, to everything else and that these relations are *necessary*.
- **External relations** serve to link up *relata* (nodes), but each *relatum* (or node), is understood to be a separate self-subsistent entity, which doesn't need the relation to exist.

- A theory of internal relations means for Marx that interaction is *inneraction* - it is “inner connections” that he claims to study.
- This means that, for Marx, relationality is always already there. It doesn't require network technology to be brought into existence. It is an a priori *condition of possibility* for such technology.

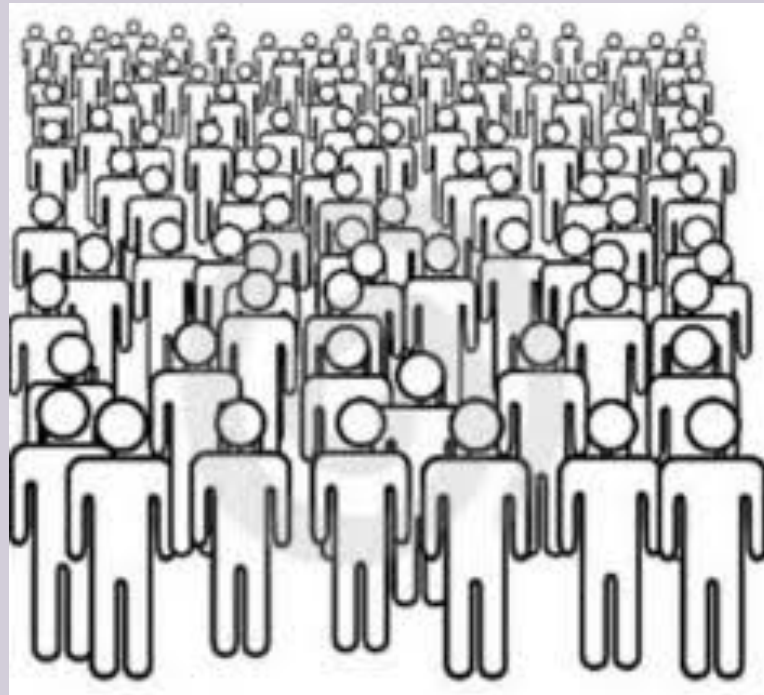
Exploitation: a *necessarily* relational concept

- the *existence* of a certain class in society is dependent on the *existence* of another class.



- *exploiters* and the *exploited* need each other in order to retain their identity.

- The *intensification* and *extensification* of exploitation under informational capitalism



- “moments are (still) the elements of profit”



Exploitation in the ‘Social Factory’

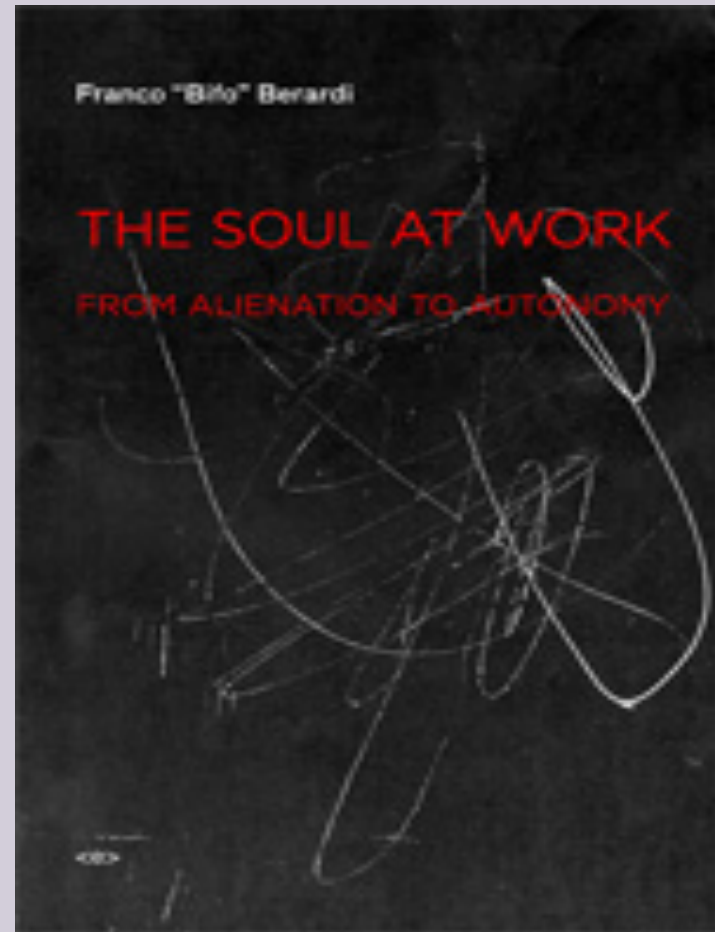
- Life-time and production-time fully coincide



- Dallas Smythe:
- the “**audience commodity**”
- ‘Web 2.0’ and the “prosumer commodity” (Manzerolle, 2010)

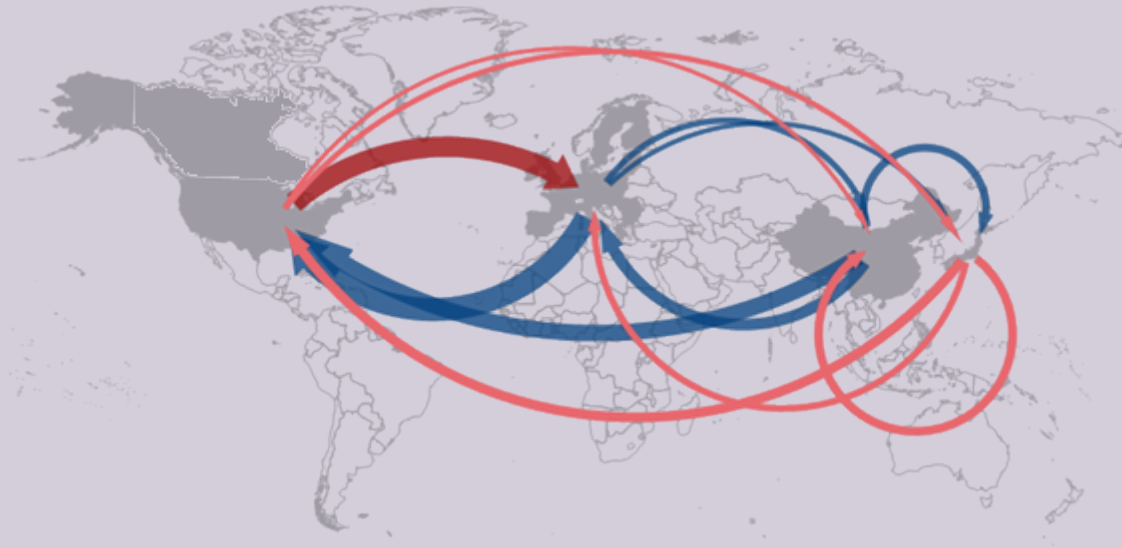
Capitalism is said to “invade our lives” by producing “subjectivity and economic value at the same time” (Lazzarato, 1996).

Production “not only creates an object for the subject but also a subject for the object” (Marx, 1973, 92).



- Production for Marx is *both* a particular activity under the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1990) and a general processive activity of human ‘species-being’ (Marx, 1973, 1988).
- the exploitation of so-called “producers” or “prosumers” (Fuchs, 2010, 2011),
- “double exploitation” (Murdock, 2011)
- exploitation of sociability - “exploitation 2.0” (Andrejevic, 2009)

The 'Extensification' of Exploitation



- In contemporary global capitalism “[...] the most abhorrent human practices are not simply ‘still’ present in some distant land...but become instead *constituent moments* of contemporary capitalist relations. Thus, for example, modern slavery...*trickles up* in the global production chain by allowing cheaper food and cheaper generic conditions of reproduction, thus lowering the value of labour power, say, for skilled Indian programmers connected by instant communications to their America clients” (De Angelis, 2007, 72-73).

- ‘Real Subsumption’ and ‘Formal Subsumption’ not only coexist but they are co-implicated.



- The “**global worker**” (Marx) : “all those whose labour is indispensable to produce the final product” (Mandell, 1990, 945); whose individual jobs have become part of the “*co-operative totality*” (ibid., 946).

Conclusion: Networks and Exploitation

