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***Critica structuralistă a conceptului marxist de
alienare***

**The Structuralist Critique of the Marxist Concept of
Alienation**

Abstract: Any debate on alienation almost inevitably involves reference to Karl Marx's theories. Inherited from Hegel and Feuerbach, the concept of alienation reached a true philosophical elevation in Marx's writings, being constantly reworked from his early philosophical and political writings to his mature works. One of the weaknesses—if not the greatest weakness—of the concept of alienation is undoubtedly its almost necessary reliance on the (at least implicit) determination of a human essence from which individuals are presumed to have become estranged. The essentialism underlying the concept of alienation, challenged by the structuralist movement in France, led to its progressive abandonment within the conceptual framework of political and social philosophy starting in the 1960s and 1970s. The aim of this article is to highlight what a non-essentialist concept of alienation might look like. Our research is based on the model of (epistemological) rupture between an ideological perspective (that of the actors) and a scientific perspective (that of the social critic), a position particularly strong in France, where it was notably supported by Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu.

Keywords: Alienation, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, structuralist turn, epistemological rupture.

1. Introduction

Any debate on alienation almost inevitably involves reference to Karl Marx's theories. Inherited from Hegel and Feuerbach, the concept of alienation reached a true philosophical elevation in Marx's writings, being constantly reworked from his early philosophical and

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political writings to his mature works. In his early works, Marx approached the concept from a critical perspective, which prevented him from completely freeing himself from Hegelian-Feuerbachian influence. However, as his theories and economic discoveries expanded, Marx no longer attributed the same importance to these influences. Although they remain present in some of his analyses, he introduced new themes that allowed him both to broaden and deepen his examination of alienation.

One of the weaknesses—if not the greatest weakness—of the concept of alienation is undoubtedly its almost necessary reliance on the (at least implicit) determination of a human essence from which individuals are presumed to have become estranged². Alienation is most often conceived as a gap between concrete society and an abstract humanity, presumed to be natural, as well as between the empirical self and a supposed "true self", hidden deep within and seeking only to fulfill itself. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx discusses the four forms that alienation takes³: (1) the loss of the object, which refers to both the loss of the product of labor and the tools and raw materials necessary for production; (2) internal alienation in the process of wage labor, reducing the worker to a mere quantifiable labor force, exchangeable on the market; (3) the alienation of man from his *species-being*; and (4) the alienation between individuals in a society, which arises from their competition and from social relations experienced in terms of the relationship between means and ends.

Among the four forms or aspects of alienation identified by Marx, the supposed estrangement of man from his *species-being* is undoubtedly the most problematic: it is at least debatable whether a materialist philosophy can accept a "transcendent" determination of human existence—a kind of real humanity buried somewhere, functioning as an idealist normative horizon. Regarding Marx

² This applies equally to the two major currents that can be distinguished in the history of the concept of alienation, namely the one that could be called the "Hegelian-Marxist" current and the one that evolves from Kierkegaard to Heidegger.

³ Karl Marx, *Manuscrise economico-filosofice din 1844*, Editura Politică, București, 1987, pp. 66–69.

himself, this aspect must, of course, be nuanced. For Marx, *species-being* primarily means that man is a natural being of (vital) needs, who finds the objects of his fulfillment—and thus part of his "being"—outside himself. In this sense, Marx defined the essence of man in the *Theses on Feuerbach* as the totality of social relations⁴. Thus, Louis Althusser is not entirely wrong when he considers Marx's concept of alienation to still be an "ideological" concept⁵ and, descriptively, as corresponding to the explanatory concept of the social division of labor⁶.

The essentialism underlying the concept of alienation, challenged by the structuralist movement in France, led to the progressive abandonment of this concept within the conceptual framework of political and social philosophy starting in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, as a symptom of something "wrong" in society, the word *alienation* always seems to refer to a real phenomenon. Despite all the flaws of the concept of alienation, we argue that simply abandoning it does not resolve its problems. If a phenomenon of alienation truly exists, we must be able to explain it in non-essentialist or non-idealized terms. The mere observation that all phenomena commonly described as "alienating" cannot simply be reduced to the social division of labor, in our view, justifies maintaining both the problem of alienation and its conceptual framework.

The hypothesis formulated here is that while the social division of labor evidently explains much of the malaise experienced by individuals in capitalist societies, it does not fully exhaust the problem posed by the concept of alienation. Therefore, we propose that such phenomena exist beyond the social division of labor and

⁴ Karl Marx, „Teze despre Feuerbach”, in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Opere*, vol. 3, Editura Politică, București, 1958 (cf. the sixth thesis which states: “Feuerbach reabsorbs the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is not some abstract entity residing in the unique individual; in its effective reality, it is the totality of social relations”, p. 576). This shows that Marx, at the time he wrote the “Theses on Feuerbach,” had completely de-substantialized the problem of the human “essence”.

⁵ Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Editions La Decouverte, Paris, 2005, pp. 158–159.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, Editions du Seuil, collection Points/Essais, Paris, 1997, pp. 123–126.

that we need a concept of alienation capable of explaining them. Following the structuralist "turn" in social and political philosophy, such a concept can no longer attempt to grasp this phenomenon without acknowledging and accounting for the impossibility of determining or "measuring" alienation in relation to an ideal and supposedly natural human essence.

Thus, the aim of this article is to outline what a non-essentialist concept of alienation might be. Our research is based on the model of (epistemological) rupture between an ideological perspective (that of the actors) and a scientific perspective (that of the social critic), a position particularly strong in France, where it was notably supported by Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu—without, however, falling into essentialism.

2. Louis Althusser: Epistemological Rupture and the Critique of the Concept of Alienation

In the 1960s, the interpretation of the theory of alienation found in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* became a major point of contention in the debate over Marx's work. During this period, the distinction between two supposed versions of Marx—the *young Marx* and the *mature Marx*—was formulated. This arbitrary and artificial opposition was upheld both by those who favored the young Marx of his early philosophical writings (such as many existentialists) and by those (including Louis Althusser and nearly all Soviet Marxists) who argued that the only true Marx was the one found in *Capital*.

Those who embrace the first thesis view the theory of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* as the central element of Marxist critique of society. In contrast, those who adopt the second position often exhibit an outright aversion to the concept of alienation, initially attempting to minimize its significance and, when that proved impossible, dismissing it as a "youthful mistake, a residue of Hegelianism"⁷, that Marx progressively abandoned. The first group concludes that the theory of alienation in

⁷ Adam Schaff, *L'alienazione come fenomeno sociale*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1979, p. 27.

the *Manuscripts* was written by a young thinker in the early stages of his intellectual development. Meanwhile, the second group refused to acknowledge the significance of the theory of alienation in Marx's work, even when the publication of previously unknown texts made it clear that he never ceased to engage with this theme throughout his life. Over time, the concept of alienation evolved, yet it retained its importance during the key stages of Marx's intellectual development⁸.

Although Althusser sought to demonstrate that the concept of alienation should be eliminated from Marxist theory, we argue that this critique unfolded alongside the development of a scientific conception of Marxism, contributing to its revitalization both scientifically and philosophically. The "crisis of Marxism", which Althusser also discussed, highlighted the significant shortcomings of Marxism in addressing a series of unprecedented social processes in the contemporary world⁹.

On the one hand, Althusser was the last representative of a Marxism with significant visibility within academic studies. As such, Althusserian materialism represented the last form of an important Marxism, a Marxism regarded as a legitimate theoretical current within the French intellectual world. After Althusser, Marxism experienced a significant decline in academia, often becoming reduced to a form of pure Marxist sociology.

On the other hand, Althusser faced strong opposition even within Marxism itself. However, the publication of his work *Pour Marx* in 1965 had a considerable impact, facilitating the widespread dissemination of the idea of an epistemological break¹⁰ within Marxist theory. This break marked a rupture with any idea of continuity in Marx's work and, in Althusser's terms, the distinction between Marx's early works, his works during the period of rupture,

⁸ The problem of the famous French Marxist, Althusser, in relation to the debate on alienation in Marx was purely textual, since all Althusserians ignore or wish to ignore the existence of *Grundrisse*, in which alienation appears as the foundation of the capitalist mode of production, the origin of fetishism.

⁹ Nicolas Tertulian, „Teleologie și cauzalitate în ontologia socialului”, preface, *Ontologia existenței sociale*, Georg Lukács, ed. cit., p. 9.

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, Editura Politică, București, 1970, p. 70.

his works during his period of maturation, and his works from the period of maturity. *Capital* clearly stands as the culmination of his mature work, the most successful elaboration of a Marxism understood as a materialist science.

According to Althusser, this science has nothing to do with humanism or class ideology; it is a theory-practice¹¹, a Marxist science. It is not the result of a long intellectual and revolutionary journey but rather the product of a discovery: "the discovery of a radically new reality"¹². Consequently, Marxism should not be seen as a mere reversal of Hegelianism, but rather understood from its radically new foundations. However, Marxism should not be considered a mere heir to Feuerbachian anthropology either. According to Althusser, authentic Marxism is not based in any way on a particular conception of human essence.

True to his fundamental epistemological options, Althusser seeks to distance himself from empiricism, understood as a mechanistic theory of reflection. In this context, Althusserian Marxist science, taking into account the ruptures upon which it builds its legitimacy, considers the concept of alienation to be ineffective—a vestige of a retrograde ideological conceptuality, situated beyond authentic Marxism. But before presenting this critical analysis of the concept of alienation, we must better understand the nature of the discovery on which the epistemological break is based and its theoretical implications for Marxist theory.

Theses on Feuerbach and *The German Ideology* represent the works from the period of rupture. In Althusser's view, these are the texts in which Marx first expresses a historical break with the "previous philosophical consciousness"¹³. Through the total break with the old idealist or empiricist philosophies", Marx lays the foundations for a new problematic, a new systematic way of posing

¹¹ Theory is considered by Althusser as an instance, a structural level of total social praxis, being nothing other than theoretical practice, distinct from economic, political, or ideological practice. In this way, the French philosopher avoids pushing the autonomy of theory—resulting from his anti-empiricism—to the point of a complete rupture from practice.

¹² Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005, p. 78.

¹³ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, ed. cit., p. 74.

questions to the world, with new principles and a new method"¹⁴. From an Althusserian perspective, not only did Marx achieve a "total theoretical revolution" in relation to his previous philosophy, but with *The German Ideology*, he also enacted a complete break with his youthful mistakes, making a radical leap from ideology to science. Moreover, in Althusser's view, "the young Marx was never truly Hegelian"¹⁵, and the *1844 Manuscripts* were merely an attempt to overturn Hegelian idealism through Feuerbach's "pseudo-materialism".

As such, the works of rupture allow Marx to distance himself from an abstract and essentialist anthropology, particularly that of Feuerbach, without paying tribute to German idealism or the conception of the self-generation of the subject. This genealogical issue fuels many contradictory interpretations within the Marxist tradition, but for Althusser and his theoretical-practical perspective, the matter is clear: Marxist science is not the offspring of idealism, but is instead grounded in a real discovery.

The French theorist severely criticizes any idea of a "continuous figure", according to which Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx would be situated within a historical continuity. This historical representation would be the matrix for a perspective in which the three philosophers appear within a history distorted by the shadows of idealism. Althusser rejects this idea, and with it, the theme of overturning or putting Hegelian philosophy back on its feet: "In essence, this logic is involved in the famous theme of the 'overturning', the 'putting on its feet' of Hegelian philosophy (or dialectics), because ultimately it is just about an overturning, a correction of what was upside down, but it is clear that overturning an object entirely does not change its nature or its content, by virtue of a simple rotation! The man stands on his head, but when he finally walks on his feet, he is the same man! And such an overturned philosophy cannot be considered anything other than an inverted philosophy, just through a theoretical metaphor: its structure, its problems, the meaning of those problems continue to be obsessed by

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

the same problematic. Most often, this logic appears in the works of the young Marx"¹⁶.

Althusser seeks not only to eliminate any trace of so-called Hegelianism in the work of the young Marx, but also to isolate scientific Marxism from Hegelian and Feuerbachian influences. Any manner of interpreting Marxist work in terms of overturning or putting it on its feet represents, for Althusser, not a way of changing the object, but a twisting of Marxism to fit into a philosophical framework that has already been surpassed. In other words, it means failing to take into account the great objective discoveries upon which scientific Marxism is based—discoveries that are nothing other than "the organized working class", "developed capitalism", and "a class struggle that follows its own laws, thus surpassing philosophy and philosophers". For Althusser, these discoveries provide the material foundation for Marxism, showing that it is rooted in real, observable processes in society, rather than in speculative or idealist philosophy. In this sense, scientific Marxism is a break from the abstract and theoretical speculations of Hegel and Feuerbach, and instead focuses on the concrete realities of class struggle and historical materialism¹⁷. In other words, these discoveries are not pure concepts; they take shape in empirical and social reality, being considered concrete objects of materialist science.

To better understand the genesis of Marx's thinking, as well as the significance of the discoveries that underpin scientific Marxism, Althusser believes we should abandon the Hegelian logic of overcoming. No, Marxism does not represent the dialectical overcoming of Hegelian idealism – which, according to Althusser, would only be "a hollow anticipation of its end in the illusion of the immanence of truth"¹⁸.

For Althusser, Marxism is not about transcending or correcting Hegelian thought but about a radical break from idealism. He rejects any notion of "overcoming" Hegel or Feuerbach and instead emphasizes that Marx's contributions were grounded in real, objective phenomena of class struggle and material conditions, which

¹⁶ Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, ed. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 79-80.

were not speculative or theoretical but empirical and scientific. This understanding of Marxism as a scientific, materialist theory is central to Althusser's critique of both the Hegelian and Feuerbachian influences on Marxist thought.

In contrast, scientific Marxism involves "adopting a logic of effective experience and real emergence"¹⁹, supporting the appearance of a real discovery that can impose its own materialist and scientific logic in theory-practice. Theory is the sole repository of truth, rationality, in its various expressions (religious, artistic, philosophical, moral), while ideology is, by definition, the realm of non-truth, pseudo-rationality, "necessarily a mistaken discourse"²⁰.

For Althusser, this distinction is essential in understanding Marxism. Scientific Marxism is not merely a critique of existing ideologies or systems; it is a method of uncovering the true material conditions that shape society. Ideology, in Althusser's view, distorts reality, masking the true social relations and perpetuating systems of oppression. In contrast, Marxism aims to reveal those objective realities, not through abstract ideals but through the concrete, material conditions of life. This scientific approach transcends mere philosophical debate, positioning theory as a guide for both understanding and transforming the world.

Althusser considers the Hegelian logic of overcoming as a "historical comfort"²¹ that undermines the true meaning of Marx's discovery: "In Marx, the terms and their relationship simultaneously change both in nature and meaning"²². Althusser offers a significant example to substantiate the qualitative difference between Hegelian philosophy and Marxist science. He explains that the Hegelian contradiction "simply exists", as it is merely a self-determination of the Spirit, "an empty phrase" within an abstract historicism. In this view, contradictions are idealist and abstract, existing at the level of thought rather than being grounded in material reality²³.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

²⁰ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, ed. cit., p. 288.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 23.

²³ The concept of overdetermination is used by Louis Althusser to indicate multiple historical causality. Althusser opposed this perception of causality to the Hegelian

To better understand the Althusserian distinction between the Hegelian and Marxist contradictions, it is important to grasp the meaning of "effective overdetermination". On the one hand, the Hegelian complexity is nothing more than a "cumulative interiorization", a return into itself in the realm of abstraction. In Hegel's dialectic, the contradictions are resolved idealistically, in a manner that reflects an abstract, internal principle of self-development of the Spirit. In contrast, the Marxist complexity involves the *externalization* of opposites. Marxist contradictions are not resolved in an idealist manner, nor according to a "unique internal principle", but rather they refer to real objects, objects whose externality is scientifically grounded. Marx's analysis focuses on concrete, material realities, not abstract or idealized concepts. These objects are taken from the ground up, from a positive and active reality. As Althusser puts it, this reality is exemplified by the harsh conditions faced by the oppressed worker, such as "cold, hunger, and night"²⁴, which Marx describes.

This approach to the Hegelian contradiction, as an "echo of the self", and the "effective overdetermination"²⁵ of the Marxist contradiction allows us to address one of the major reasons that lead Althusser to reject the concept of alienation, considering it outside of scientific Marxism. Alienation-externalization would always refer to an abstract moment within the context of an abstract development, governed by an internal principle. Althusser contrasts this with the radical exteriority of the objects on which scientific Marxism bases its legitimacy: the organized class, developed capitalism, and class struggle.

Thus, we can assert that Althusser's approach supports both a new epistemology of Marxism and the understanding of Marxism as a materialist science with new demands. From an epistemological perspective, this means denying that Marx's early intuition constitutes the source of rigorous Marxist science, as it manifested in

notion of simple contradiction. He argued that revolutions occur in the presence of a combination of factors a "unity of rupture" (Gordon Marshall, John Scott (ed.), *Dicționar de sociologie*, Editura ALL, București, 2014).

²⁴ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, ed. cit., p. 30.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

Capital. There is, therefore, an "epistemological cut", a historical rupture that influences the discovery of new objects in a "concrete" present²⁶. This epistemological interpretation naturally leads us to a more demanding understanding of Marxism, as a materialist science that surpasses bourgeois philosophy and ideology²⁷.

According to Althusser, it would be absurd to consider the proletariat as a collective subject, as history is a "process without a Subject or an End". Any attempt to conceive of a collective subject, whether in the manner of Lukács or Engels as a "combination of individual wills" ²⁸, leads to confusion and failure. For Althusser, figures like Sartre and Engels regress beyond the Marxist critique of philosophy because they base their Marxism on a certain conception of the subject, whether historical, individual, or collective. In the end, this conception of the subject is nothing more than a reflection of bourgeois philosophy, rather than a solid foundation that allows for the establishment of Marxist science based on the rigorous study of its objects. As Althusser puts it, "instead of the ideological myth of philosophy of origins and its organic concepts, Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the complex structure of any concrete subject, a structure that controls the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice that produces its knowledge"²⁹.

Althusser argues that a historical subject does not represent those concrete objects that are presented to us through the scientifically grounded recognition of data. However, the question arises: what is the proletariat, if not a historical subject, potentially capable of overthrowing capitalism and leading to the emergence of a classless society? Althusser radically opposes any form of original essence, whether it is a grand historical subject or the generic and abstract concept of Man. He also opposes the notion of "always-already-given" concrete material objects of a concrete present on which Marxist science bases its approach.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

²⁷ Ideology, Althusser argues, is nothing more than a symptom, a signal of certain realities, a "recognition" of them, but not a true knowledge of them.

²⁸ Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, ed. cit., p. 120.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

However, this science is not empirical science; it is grounded in the Spinozist conception of non-empirical truth, according to which the criteria of truth are immanent to practice, meaning that it does not need to be empirically justified based on its application to external criteria of truth³⁰. In this sense, Althusser's view of Marxist science departs from empirical verification or validation. It does not rely on the direct application of truth to the material world but is instead rooted in the understanding that truth is inherently tied to the structure of social practice and the objective conditions of the world. "Process without a Subject or End" implies accepting the fact that Marxist science is not a philosophy of the subject. It must stand on its own, independent of any idealized or abstract conception of the subject, whether individual or collective. Marxist science is not concerned with an ultimate human essence or a metaphysical understanding of history. It rejects the foundation of its practical engagement in any specific conception of Man or human nature.

Works of rupture, insofar as they rid themselves of the Feuerbachian legacy, also free themselves from a particular conception of Man that aligns with his essence. The *1844 Manuscripts*, because they attempt to overcome Hegel with the help of Feuerbach, remain far from surpassing Hegelian philosophy, remaining mired in an anthropology that upholds a certain positive and abstract conception of Man—Man as pure abstraction. Like Hegelian conceptuality, Feuerbachian anthropology is thus undermined, and this double rupture led to the later Marx's suppression of all philosophical categories derived from his earlier philosophical consciousness. As such, the categories that no longer have anything to say "are silent or are made silent"³¹. Alienation is one of these categories.

³⁰ Genuine sciences "do not need verification through external practices to declare the knowledge they produce as 'true,' that is, as knowledge" (Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, ed. cit., p. 120).

³¹ Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, ed. cit., p. 205.

3. Pierre Bourdieu - the Critique of Alienation as a Mere Product of Social and Economic Structures

A series of authors consider Pierre Bourdieu to be a Marxist. The arguments supporting this idea are based on the following assumptions: (1) He "attempted an original synthesis of sociology, Marxism understood as a critique of domination and the theory of ideologies, and the Bachelardian epistemology understood by the philosophical generation of the 1955-1965 period"³²; (2) His sociology is a "distinguished variant of vulgar Marxism"³³; (3) His Marxism is "distinguished," while his sociology "is merely a development of historical materialism"³⁴; (4) He represents a "neomarxism of the 1960s" or a post-Marxism³⁵.

However, we would like to challenge this proximity. Indeed, while Bourdieu frequently approves of Marx's remarks and seems very close to him, he nonetheless opposes a crucial part of his theoretical system, particularly his analysis of the economic sphere and social classes.

In the Marxist sense of the term, the alienation of the salaried proletariat results from the dispossession they suffer over the product of their labor. This perspective, initiated by Karl Marx and largely developed by the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács, materialized into a model of objective alienation that, in its classic sense, designates the loss of autonomy affecting workers in capitalist and bureaucratic systems. However, this collective conception of alienation was strongly contested in the second half of the 20th century. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu questioned this description of alienation as a pure product of social and economic structures.

In Marx, the notion of alienation has two characteristics: a person is alienated when they are deprived of their humanity, when

³² Philippe Raynaud, « Le sociologue contre le droit », *Esprit*, 3, mars 1980, p. 83.

³³ Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut, *La Pensée 68. Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 259.

³⁴ Alain Caillé, *Don, intérêt et désintéressement, Bourdieu, Mauss, Platon et quelques autres*, Paris, La Découverte/Mauss, 1994, p.106.

³⁵ Philippe Corcuff, *Bourdieu autrement, fragilités d'un sociologue de combat*, Paris, Textuel, 2003, p. 17.

they are estranged from themselves; the awareness that leads to the establishment of communism will allow for the contestation of alienation. Bourdieu shares Marx's first idea, but he will never associate communism and the emancipation of actors.

The notion of alienation, opposed to that of emancipation, is used by Bourdieu on numerous occasions: for someone to become aware of alienation, they no longer have to be totally alienated³⁶; those in dominance experience the alienated body; people are alienated when they are dispossessed in favor of a spokesperson, yet necessary to escape alienation; Flaubert's discourse is alienated because he could not speak the truth about the social world³⁷.

Bourdieu never suggests that communism will allow us to eliminate alienation, to be emancipated, or to return to authenticity. When he defends the idea of a communist society, it is because it represents a utopian project that allows us to understand the arbitrary nature of social constructs, to think about new political and social alternatives, and to question the obvious.

There is probably no more radical way to pose the question of politics than by bringing to this field the question posed by Marx and Engels when, starting from an analysis of the concentration of artistic production capacity in the hands of a few individuals and the corresponding (or even consequent) dispossession of the masses, they envision a (communist) society in which there are no painters, but at most people who, among other things, paint³⁸. In this society, thanks to the development of productive forces, the general reduction of working time (correlated with an overall decrease and an equal distribution) allows "each person to have enough free time to participate in the general affairs of society—both theoretically and practically" ³⁹. "There are no politicians, but at most people who, among other things, engage in politics": in this domain, as in others,

³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, Jean-Paul Rivet & Claude Seibel, *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton, 1963, p. 310.

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, « Une classe objet », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n° 17/18, 1977, pp. 101-102.

³⁸ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, „Ideologia germană”, în Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Opere*, vol. 3, Editura Politică, București, 1958.

³⁹ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Manifestul Partidului Comunist*, Editura Vicovia, 2014.

utopia finds its scientific (and undoubtedly political) justification in dismantling the supposed certainties it challenges, compelling us to bring to light the assumptions underlying the established order⁴⁰.

Pierre Bourdieu's critique of alienation is deeply rooted in his analysis of the structures of social and economic systems, though it differs from the traditional Marxist notion of alienation. For Bourdieu, alienation is not merely a psychological or individual condition but rather a social and structural phenomenon shaped by the dynamics of power, class, and culture.

4. Conclusions

The major interest in the concept of alienation arose as a response to one of the most profound critiques of this notion. Specifically, in the postwar period, alienation inevitably became the key concept in all theories of late capitalist society. Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of alienation experienced a brief but intense prominence within the broader framework of critical philosophy, Marxism, and sociology (both French and beyond).

The recent metamorphoses of the concept of alienation in contemporary critical theory have been shaped by the "structuralist turn," initiated by Althusser in political and social philosophy. As a result, the concept of alienation was called into question due to its implicit presupposition of a human essence from which individuals become estranged—an idea criticized as being linked to an essentialism incompatible with any materialist philosophical perspective.

Bourdieu's critique of alienation differs from traditional Marxist perspectives in that it does not focus solely on economic exploitation or the estrangement of the worker from their labor. Instead, he sees alienation as a product of the complex interplay between social, cultural, and economic structures that shape individuals' perceptions, actions, and social positions. For Bourdieu, alienation is a form of misrecognition—where individuals fail to understand the forces shaping their lives and their own complicity in

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (1979), Paris, Minuit, 1982, p. 463.

maintaining the social order. In this sense, Bourdieu's theory provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of alienation, one that highlights the structural dimensions of power, culture, and society while acknowledging the role of individual agency in perpetuating or challenging these structures.

The critique of alienation as a mere product of social and economic structures begins with the idea that this perspective can be reductive and insufficient to fully explain the human experience of estrangement. Although Marxist theories and other structural approaches place a strong emphasis on economic and social factors that generate alienation (such as labor in capitalism, production relations, and social stratification), there are arguments suggesting that alienation cannot be reduced exclusively to these aspects.

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