

Introduction to George's paper Labour, Instrumental Action and the Ways of Human Existence: Towards an "Ecological" Reconstruction of Historical Materialism

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the main ideas in this great lecture first delivered at a conference in New York in the middle of the 1990's. In this paper Márkus used some key ideas of the late historian Marx to critique both the technicist reading of his own early Labour theory of value of the works of *Das Kapital* to the *Grundrisse* and those of Habermas including also his later shift to a communicative paradigm of language that Márkus maintains remained too rationalistic and not sufficiently social and historical. In the later sections of this paper, I will discuss the main ideas of Márkus's late unfinished papers and writings towards a modern theory of high culture, including the pragmatics of the disciplines of science, literature and philosophy. In doing so, I will elaborate and assess the main areas of the theory. They are: 1) Base and Superstructure. 2) Ideology. 3) Later Foucault. 4) Conclusion. Finally, I will assess the living contemporary political and cultural significance Márkus's later lecture and related incomplete theory of autonomous High Culture.

Introduction to George's paper *Labour, Instrumental Action and the Ways of Human Existence: Towards an "Ecological" Reconstruction of Historical Materialism* Journal of Philosophy (Magyar Filozófiai Szemle) translated into Hungarian from English published in Hungarian Journal of Philosophy (Magyar Filozófiai Szemle) by Erdélyi Ágnes. Its Hungarian title: Márkus György: Munka, instrumentális cselekvés és az emberi létfenntartás módjai. Kísérlet a történelmi materializmus. „ökológiai” rekonstrukciójára.

Keywords: György Márkus, Karl Marx, Jürgen Habermas, Critical Theory, Foucault, M.

1. In this Introduction I want to firstly explain my initial acquaintance with this late great paper initial written in the mid 1990's for a Conference in New York. Later I want to explain and elaborate some of its key ideas. I first found a PDF of this paper that had no footnotes. It was not until earlier this year that Erdélyi Ágnes had published a Hungarian version of the paper who had been a student of George in the 1960's. Ágnes provided me with Footnotes of the Hungarian version. Knowing George's work practices, I know that there would be an English hand-written version in his *Nachlass*

papers which were in my possession. I quickly located this list version and began to transcribe it into a Word document. I was then able to make a list of its content and its additions which are found both in the written version in brackets mainly on the back pages of the thirty-five page first version. This Introduction is based on this version. In some respects, this version is clear because in the first version tries to explain as clearly as he can his main intentions.

2. This version was a paper to a New York conference of experts on the works of Habermas and Marx. Even at that time Habermas was the most famous interpreter of the works of Karl Marx, within the Western Marxist tradition first created by György Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* published in 1923.

My main aim of this paper is to examine Márkus's reconstruction of historical materialism employing the works of Marx and Habermas, and more specifically the late works of the historian Marx and his so-called anthropological writings of the post 1863 manuscripts in critique both the earlier Marx of *Das Kapital* and those of Habermas's works including his later move to the so-called paradigm of communicative action. While George empathizes with Marx and Habermas's version of the Labour theory of value as a way of explaining human labour power as the key engine of historical progress in the West Europe. Despite this shared belief, he still critiques these thinkers with a technicist understanding of the instrumental labour theory of Marx. George's main contention is that this Marxian theory of value is inadequate in regard to most of the non-capitalist traditional societies and those of earlier societies like hunters and gathers. According to George, these theories may explain the main engine of historical evolutionary progress through the labour theory of Marx. However, in respect to the rest of the pre-capitalist world and non-capitalist worldwide societies, the labour theory fails to understand the key organisational systems of productions. For both Marx and Habermas, the direction and criterion for technical progress is considered to be the same for the whole of human history. Both regard this logic as a pre-set character of the human way of life and projected valid going forward. They both exclude the possibility of a restricting-limited role of a future, more emancipated society. In Marx, it is merely explicit, but the deep structures of socialist society mean the continuation of capitalist technology. Marx and Habermas's shared technicist reductionism that is also highly problematic for philosophical-anthropocentric grounds too.

On this point I can rely on various pre-capitalist societies. From the late Medieval period guilds of personal skills. Marx points to *Gemeineweisse*, the community and the pre-capitalist civilisations and a decisive and determining element in the system of productive forces.

Though some of the concrete formulations are the views of Marx the historian that the evolution of tools does not constitute a decisive element of technological progress until the dawn of capitalism. Most agricultural historians today almost universally reject the older view of systems of agriculture through its main instruments. Since almost the whole history of civilisation is a history of agriculture, it is understandable that the instrument centred notion of technology leads to a complete inability to understand the basic cool presence in man's material livelihood to the old pre-capitalist development. The equation of technological development with the evolution of tools is perhaps even less inadequate to understand the practical revolution in this realm. It is ironic that the man who revolutionised modern archeology Gorden Childe was an orthodox Marxist enough to name 'Neolithic' tools and suggest that its essence is connected to Neolithic tools. This view is completely untenable.

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Moving on to the problem of productivity as an immanent measure and standard of technological development, there is no way to arrive operationally at any global index of productivity in substantive non-monetarized economies. I would like to make two remarks.

Firstly, it is empirically false that the major progressive revolutions in man's material livelihood were accomplished by the growth of the productivity of labour. Pre-capitalist economies involve a notion of efficiency that can be cashed out in terms of capitalist labour productivity. Generally, productivity appears as a self-evident inherent measure of technical development only as long as one presupposes that labour is the only scarce resource of production. Marx naturally interprets his own labour theory in his later writings in this way and Habermas seems to accept this presupposition. In respect to pre-capitalist, the workday was more "porous" and labour power and labour time did not constitute a really scarce resource.

In these societies labour was geared to nature processes. a) Work would be in critical periods strenuous but the workday often relatively short. b) There are generally rigid ecological and social constraints which hinder productive labour time.

The last remark concerns the "inherent logic" of technological development. In any time, technology can be defined as a system of holes directed towards the most economically defined means to realise specific ends. The ways of various material livelihoods form a systematic metabolism with nature as an ecosystem. Efficiency as a constitutive principle does not confer upon its evolution a unitary logic, but a relative and symbolic one. But these considerations are insufficient, though true, because efficiency is the unambiguous principle as long as one takes both the means and the ends realised as given, but in general the means, or more exactly the means socially perceived as resources to be economised are not independent from the ends themselves, and the way of their social determination. This is illustrated by the *ponto* bridge.

All this means that that while the notion of efficiency can be regarded as valid for the general definition of technology in the sense it remained a "merely formal" mention, because the question of efficiency, in regard to what and to what degree, is answered historically. Labour is undoubtedly a which belongs to one species as such, but not only the ways of its special institutionalisation, but its character as technology and with its central objectives of its evolutionary change in history.

With this I have arrived at the last, politico-philosophical element of criticism. I have argued earlier that both Marx and Habermas understand man's practical relation to nature in terms of this progressing mastery over it. The natural environment appears as with them as essentially passive substratum as fundamental, whose Faustian potentialities are progressively realised in the course of historical evolution through technology, inventions and acquisitions. In this respect,

it is characteristic that both treat the relationship between nature and human activity to terms of the philosophical dichotomy of matter and form. Marx explicitly uses the concept in an Aristotlean sense, and their Kantian version that lay behind Habermas. They both accept and take into account human finitude: our domination of nature.

In this respect, George offers an alternative paradigm based on community human livelihood as a way of better capturing the main organisational systems of labour production and understanding a more accurate theorisation of man's relation to nature though limited: nature is always an unconquered sphere which imposes constraints on human activities and aspirations.

Now I would like to make it clear that my dispute with this view concerns not its most essential feature: the treatment of the practical relation between man and nature in the dual terms of control and dependence, just Marx and Habermas share the great tradition of modern Enlightenment which excludes the relation of communication, partnership or sympathy between man and nature. I will argue for this standpoint in the following. This criticism touches only upon the fact that their views of control and dependency are related to each other merely external, that nature is a passive material of our activity reacts technically upon a natural organism due to its independent causal processes as a constraint.

The metaphor of limit does not sufficiently express the fact that nature is a constraint on our activity. What is a constraining factor depends upon the character of the activity itself. Scarcity may be the main form as they act within the mode of human livelihood. On the other hand, the natural spontaneously or human-intentional reproducibility varies widely. With Habermas the "rigidity" results in unintended or uncontrolled causal effects. On the other hand, the activities through which now realises his metabolism with nature cannot be regarded as an exercise of mastery over it, man acts as much on nature, as passive material, or reacts to it as one of uncontrollable force and constraint. The material livelihood of man is not merely labour as conceived as an intended form and also a way of dealing with its constraints.

All the negative remarks amount to a positive proposal: to replace the concept of "labour" or "instrumental action". By a human ecosystem I mean activities of subsistence and their relevant environmental variables, or interaction whose character specifies which type of resources is especially critical and thereby co-determines the direction of technical evolution to a given type of society. Due to the various ecological and agricultural characteristics, each of these systems posit different resources as the critical delimiting-constraining one also deconstructs the different directions of its agrotechnical development depending on the various conditions. Euroasia, Greek landscape, the Medieval period of Western Europe, all provide different conditions and face different ecological constraints and challenges.

This overview should have been threefold. First, to put some flesh on the idea of an alternative place of "reduced" development as they actually take place in history. Second, introduce the concept of irreversible change-one of the central notions of ecology. Thirdly, I cannot hide one additional reason was dissatisfaction with the main periodisation of technical development, which was offered by Habermas from the invention of horse drawn agriculture from a world historical perspective nothing of importance occurs. The upshot is that all pre-capitalist high civilisations had an essentially identical "technological basis, the way of material livelihood. This most alienating historical periodisation offered by Habermas. What disappears is the problem most vital to the tradition of Marx and Weber of the question about the orient and occidental.

I would like to say something about the contemporary relevance of my theme: the practical consequences and the first is the ecological characterisation of industrial societies. With capitalism comes is an ecological standpoint, the radicalness that overshadows the introduction of agriculture. It completely changes the subjective attitude to nature and the principle of his material livelihood of an ecosystem. Capitalism creates one which is in principle unstable, it cannot be reproduced in the long run without unchanged conditions.

A few words of explanation. All pre-capitalist societies are epi-hybridal requiring the empirical factors used up in the global activities of production reproduced by the same activities. On the one hand, all human ecosystems were principally “fragile”. By this means, the system is unable to subsist without human intervention. They are contra-natural. Any system of agriculture reverses the natural process of ecological succession towards an equilibrium in which nature is a so-called “prisoner”, that is not of equilibrium, not a mature ecosystem.

This counter natural man created and sustained ecosystem makes them susceptible to breakdown. Capitalism solves the problem of ecological fragility by creating an ecosystem which rejects practically the principle of ecological fragility. At least since the steam machine we live in an ecosystem which in the long run cannot be reproduced if our productive activities remain the same. Capitalism creates a working ecosystem which is based on disequilibrium- it not only fails to reproduce the natural resources used up, but socially created conditions which make changes in our proactive activities both possible and necessary.

This new principle of human practical interaction with nature could only come into existence only because of a profound socio-economic change which in the form of commodification made all the factors of production equally mobilizable. The emergence of the factory means pushing to its limit an important evolutionary trend in socio-cultural progress regarding the viewpoint of human ecology. The tendency towards a decreasing geographical area of production as a new metabolism with nature. The state had to intervene from the very beginning and the population from the destructive effects of a completely unstable market fluctuations. However, on the whole, the decoupling of technics and ecology holds true at the level of the basic units of production whose activity constitutes, a complete emancipation of activities of livelihood from local ecological restraints. The factory is a production system is completely insulated from the surrounding environments. But this is only one side of the story. Through a complete divorce of production from day to day practices of production reproduction of individuals (consumption and family life, etc). A better argument for the growing separation between the technical and social activities -a historical trend-correctly recognised by Marx and Habermas-capitalism actually weakens the role of ecological factors-at least on the local scale in the determination of the direction of technology, that is divorcing technical *senso stricto* social it makes it simultaneously increases the role of purely social factors in determining the character of the evolution of technology.

Now looking at the actual historical accomplishment of capitalist society, one has to admit that it was immensely successful just in an ecological sense. The other aspects of the demographic revolution accompanying this great transformation in human livelihood are undoubtedly positive. This industrial ecosystem was also successful in overcoming its own self-created disequilibria. Any discussion of an early crisis has to acknowledge that only the name

is new. In the last decade of the 19th century number of works have directly correctly diagnosed and falsely predicted the breakdown tendencies of running into “natural limits” in modern civilisation. As far as I can say, the flaws in the realities of their own times emphasis the prediction of collapse turned out to be radically wrong: the joint strategy of technical progress and economic growth effectively counteracted and avoided the foreseen breakdown.

After this new ecology there emerged a number of phenomena, a series of strains which put under question this whole principle of “substitution” through technical progress which provide practical motivations for the idea of an alternative technology. I now simply narrate such areas of strain caused by purely technical factors facing modern societies.

1) The increasing global explanatory character of both technological and economic progress has now realised a point where possible breakdown effect have put under question of life of humanity. Merely to believe that progress pf “science” and technology” with some counter measures in the future to arrest and reverse the “planetary” process (changes in the climate) is not enough to in the face of the dangers of the situation. Now the achievement of capitalism pointed out by Marx have now reached a level where it may endanger our life on Earth, as the house of humanity, the whole habitat of the species. I don't believe in an environmental ethics in the strict sense, we have an obligation only to follow human beings because any conception of a norm ultimately involves relations of a reciprocity: it is only such actions which can and make explicit the socially relevant meaning of the compassion towards all living beings as a universal human trait.

Two things are clear in this respect: on the one hand, it is equally clear that as long as the technology of effectivity is just as good and as the modern technology has accomplished in capitalist form, there will be enormous difficulty of the motif of economic efficiency understood as maximisation of relatively short-term profit. The capitalist organisation of an economic unit does not bear the long-term ecological costs of its own activity: neither the local, nor the future prospects are shaped out of the communities with which it has due to the mortality of capital-there are no purely economic ties at all.

Technological decisions are taken by the agents who reap imputed benefits: deterioration in the most general, therefore non-monopolisable (therefore not commodified conditions of labour (and life).

The decreased localisation as the ecological tendency of modern industry development, has, therefore, a further social consequence. There emerges not only a strain between the economic advantages of the primary unit of production deriving from the development or against the harmful effects of a given locality. Modern industries are high-risk industries. On the one hand, they generally produce for not localised needs and their benefits are in themselves non-questionable and dispersed. The community participate in them only marginal. This phenomenon becomes a problem which in the long run and may threaten social integration- creates structurally irrational social conflict between one local community against another.

A more global strategy of “substitution” promotes a greater, absolute rate of industrial growth. Therefore, there is an ecological pressure on some anthropological limits on the acceptable tempo of technological change. This means not only a change in labour technology but also involves a change in the whole human material milieu, increasingly in situations where they live in man-made environments completely different from the ones they have been socialised to. In this respect, industrial society again has created a paradox-it has seriously lengthened human life and driven the age limits of

older men physically and socially; on the one hand, it has created conditions against the infirmities of an old age present in earlier societies.

The general de-anthropomorphizing-objectifying tendency of technical development. Today we can formulate this problem in prose -they do not demand practical action to be seen as they are around us. This demands active and practical change through social pressure. We should love nature and it should be practically convincingly. However, both prove impossible objectives because they detract from the way to deal with the real problem effectively. There is no “loving” technology, instead the upsurge of an anti-rational, fundamentalist ideologies and de-Enlightenment. Instead of solving real problems, this prepares the atmosphere for their suppression through anti-individualist methods of oppression of freedom, among its freedoms is rational thought.

Not all states in nature are objectively equivalent. A feature which Marx has seen as the essence of scientifically based industrial technology and endorsed in the meantime has reached a seeming limit both physiologically and psychologically cards. The twin tendencies of modern science about the whole epoch of bourgeois civilisation became questionable as an essentially destructive one. The question of technique as the main practical bearer of an objectifying tendency really becomes a question of the possibility to a new attitude towards nature as part of nature as a mere organism.

One of the answers to this strain-both in the field of everyday ideologies and of theory has been to connect the possibility of a new technology with a revocation of that double edged process of secularisation. The new technology is sought under the auspices of limiting a relation of harmony and sympathy between man and nature, establishing a lost unity between our aims and those of nature. In the end, we cannot give an answer to this question. I would merely like to state my own unshakeable opposition to all these attempts. The idea of human emancipation at least as a problem is deeply rooted in the just indicated double tendency modernity-destruction of the cosmic conception of nature as a depository of objective meanings and the insight that man is the sole source and creator of all values and harmonise the twin basis in which a regular idea of the free life as created by ourselves, in correspondence with our needs, as life of human autonomy rests and is indebted to the tradition of Enlightenment.

The belief that any technology can open and alleviate for us the weight of our autonomy rests and is indebted to the traditions of the Enlightenment. The belief that any technology can open and alleviate for us this weight of autonomy is a mere allusion to the project of reconciliation with nature. I can only repeat the old argument of the Enlightenment: one cannot achieve a fraternal relation with nature. Attitudes of marginality and nature is a totality of all those objective laws to whom our aims and lives and well beings, is of no concern. We cannot reconcile our aims with those of nature because it has none. I know that this view is considered to be outdated, misguided and misinformed metaphysics that has nothing to do with those branches of ecology -as such for a population in a given environment-if this epoch is destroyed some of them will leave, while others will win in some sense, however, equilibrium regarded as the aim of nature renders organic evolution itself be regarded as anti-natural.

The last most general and vague point of criticism concerns the overall conception-combination of man’s practical relation to nature in Marx and Habermas. They both essentially understand this relation as that of a historically progressing mastery. The natural environment appears with a fundamental passive substratum, “stuff”, where utilitarian potentialities

are progressively realised in the course of historical evolution through technical inventions and requisitions. In this respect, it is characteristic that both treat the relationship between nature and human activity ultimately in terms of the traditional philosophical dichotomy between material and form. Marx very explicitly in an Aristotelean manner, Habermas in a more Kantian sense. Naturally they both simultaneously take into account and posit the fact of human finitude. I do not consider the metaphor of domination, power, “mastery” over nature as misleading, anthropological (domination involves asymmetrical relations between wills) and ideological ones. I emphatically agree with the underlying idea of Marx/Habermas that man’s practical relation to nature should be treated the twin categories of control and dependence. As far as man is treated as the subject of action is directed and can be consistent only to be conceived either as an object of use or another subject.

In this paper I cannot deal in detail with the “idea of reconciliation” or “convivial harmony” with nature as a as the possible principle of a new alternative technology. At this point, I only want to state that all these ideas presuppose the possibility to establish a material practice of communicative relation with nature as a partner and another subject as a partner and another subject essentially resurrecting the idea of nature as a cosmos in the sense of repository or objective meanings and ends. These ideas are in my opinion not only theoretically illegitimate, but also in their essence, traditionally conservative in practice.

I would here like to only to underline the distinction between the “criminal” and “scientific” images of nature lies in the fact that the later by necessity reduces nature to an “inert” matter with a random organisation. The idea of cosmos has never had a practical relevance to provide a proscriptive force to the concept of nature for the regulation of interhuman, moral and social relations to define ways of allocating social power and functions, or not being in conformity with the order of nature, and man from the dead weight of the past. The “natural” forms of organisation, behaviour and thinking does not presuppose that human beings can give new meaning and norms to their conduct and life because they are the only source of meaning and values in the universe: in this sense the very project of a critical theory is deeply embedded in the economic view of nature and in the tradition of the Enlightenment.

The dispute with Marx and Habermas concerns not the fundamental point of regarding nature as a mere object as far as the human activities are concerned, but the subordination problem of how the dual role of nature as the object might be transformed into the main contemporary problem.

George shares Marx and Habermas’s endorsement of the historical achievements of the tradition of the Enlightenment and contemporary science but he offers a richer new paradigm of human livelihood which incorporates the insights of the late historian Marx of his anthropological writings to provide a richer, practical and community orientation to this paradigm. Despite the overall ecological concerns in this paper, George does not see himself as a supporter of “environmental ethics”. In keeping with his Enlightenment credentials his view is that nature is indifferent to ethics, only human subjects have the capacity to make judgements about the fate of the human world and its future. George is well known as a Marxist humanist and he primarily interests in his late post-Budapest papers and lectures in the question of cultural autonomy and especially what he called the pragmatics of the sphere of High culture, especially those of art, science and philosophy. He saw the permanent interaction of the traditions of Enlightenment and Romanticism as an ongoing

confrontation as constitutive of modern cultural history and its dynamic. Therefore, it is understandable that aspects of the Romantic critique of modern industrial capitalism that compels him to make clear is remaining commitment to the Enlightenment side of this ongoing debate.

Márkus maintained that the Marxian paradigm of production had the conceptual capacity to provide a successful articulation of autonomous cultural relations concentrated in the value spheres. His envisaged theory of modern autonomous culture locates this approach in the history of Marxism from which it directly emerged. Márkus distinguishes three ways of conceptualizing culture in Marx that are often combined. These are:¹ 1: Base and Superstructure.² 2: The Notion of Ideology. 3: Cultural Production. Having elaborated the relative strengths and weaknesses in these three possible approaches anchored in Marx, I show why³ Márkus favoured the third as the best option. 4: The option favoured by him is now analyzed by carefully reconstructing his critiques of the “author” and the “subject” employing as an example the works of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The substance of this critique is to demonstrate the historical weaknesses in their accounts of the “death of the subject.” 5: To take into account the work of the later Foucault that predates Márkus’s paper ‘Creating the Creator’, we follow Foucault’s later theory of ‘governmentality’ and consider the persistent failures to fully historicize even the last phase of his work. 6: Conclusion. The general framework, direction and features of Márkus’s own theory of culture are brought into view.

Base and Superstructure

Stressing the necessary dependence of all political, legal and religious practices upon the economic structure and processes of society, this metaphor proposes both constraining and motivating roles of economic forms in respect to the transformation in the superstructural domain. It has an especially polemic intention. Marx wanted to overturn the prevalent view that these superstructural elements were the expression of general interests, of universal value divorced from the economy, allegedly concerned merely with private interest.⁴ While the idea of the conditioning of the superstructure by the base was initially a relatively novel insight, it has now lost its critical power as modern culture has been understood in more historical terms, this metaphor typically becomes “reductionist” because its domination by “material” (economic and social factors) that seem to undercut the possibility of an *active* interaction between the superstructure and the material base. Márkus makes the point that what represents a genuine critical and practical insight today rests upon how this relation is now understood.⁵ The notion of the superstructure is not sufficiently differentiated to explain how these various cultural institutions and practices actually interact across the whole range of instances. The famous metaphor seems to conceive only a single dichotomy between expressing and suppressing definite interests. In order to articulate the idea of the relative autonomy of culture, a theory of culture needs to be able to indicate not only *from what*, but also *to do what* so that its autonomy must give a form of practice: in other words, to explain the exact character of the active interaction between superstructure and the material base. The base/superstructure dichotomy lacks precisely this capacity: the *sui generis* cultural practices and institutions cannot be clearly understood in their detailed interaction.

Ideology

The concept of ideology found throughout in Marx's oeuvre, but more frequently in his earlier works, derives from his polemical desire to reduce ideas that have been ascribed with a transcendent power to well defined, particular, conscious and unconscious social interests. The Marxian concept of ideology provides an effective method of de-masking the social origins of various superstructural ideas that are actually determined by material interests. Marx goes even further by revealing the ultimate methodological premises of the most significant works of high culture and science as conditioned by such un-reflexive pre-judgements, which remain in the contradictions and fractures of these key works. This becomes a key element of a critique of society whose dominant culture systematically precludes the understanding of alternative social possibilities being created.⁶

The Later Foucault

This desire to provide theoretical space for more practical and political initiative is expressed in the last phase of Foucault's work. We only have an unfinished and unpublished fragment of Márkus's work to use.⁷ However, the internal evidence of his critique of the early Foucault like the numeral (1) indicates that his fragment *Creating the Creator: The Author 1* was written in the early 1980s.⁸ Márkus's would have certainly also discussed the later Foucault had these works been available to him. In his self-criticism towards the end of his life recorded in various interviews, Foucault suggested that the work of the *Discipline and Punish* period gave too much priority to disciplinary power.⁹ He had failed to theorize the way in which the subject constituted itself through certain practices and "games of truth". His forward strategy was to shift to a more comprehensive theoretical model of various of self-relation that he designated "Governmentality". Here government was understood in the broadest possible sense: as the totality of strategies and practices through which individuals regulate their conduct in regard to themselves and others.

Foucault's new focus, this idea of "Governmentality" as a strategic field of power relations characterized by their mobility, transformability and reversibility, allows his analysis to concentrate on the elements of the subject both theoretically and practically defined by the relationship of self to self, of relations both of oppression but also resistance:

Quite simply, this means that in the type of analysis I have been trying to advance for some time you can see that power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of the self to self-constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics.¹⁰

This model had several implications. Firstly, Foucault now wanted to prioritize the self-relation over other relations like that of strategic relations to others, technics of government and includes a notion of domination defined as relations wherein power as asymmetrically fixed. Foucault nominates the former as "the care of the self". With this priority to the self-relation, he wanted to underscore that an ethics of the self is an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task:

'here is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself'.¹

In this new interpretation of power relations in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* "resistance" is underscored: resistance as the inverse of all dispersed, de-centred power. The key to this conception of the relationality of power is that neither power nor resistance can be a fundamental substance. The template of modern power relations became the model of post 68 politics of social movements. For Foucault, this is an explosion of local, dispersed resistances to the totalizing aspirations of the whole range of institutional authorities in the bureaucracy, universities, schools, hospitals and prisons. Foucault's ideas gave expression to this new configuration of resistances. However, here his reinterpretation is provided with an extra theoretical ballast in the form of Nietzsche's idea of the "will to power", as a ubiquitous, anonymous power in general. While Nietzsche chose to anchor the "will to power" in a naturalistic *Lebensphilosophie* in the shape of life itself, Foucault prefers to view it as traversing the social body. Foucault is clearly reluctant to resort to a full-blown metaphysics. He refuses to provide even a general alternative theory of power. He stressed that his ideas on power arose from specific situations and the inadequacy of existing models to explain the historical phenomena before him: madness, prisons, sexuality and truth. Thus, here Foucault wants to maintain his ideas on power on merely the historical level.

This understanding of resistance seems to speak to Foucault's biography and his experience in Paris during these post-68 socio-political struggles. However, appealing to Nietzsche's view of power, despite Foucault's own historicizing tendencies, they are now injected with trans-historical significance. This means that even his late works, Foucault was not willing to fully historicize his vision of social power. This is especially clear in Foucault's view of all social life as a domain of omniscient power, social life as a force field of asymmetrical power relations, the binary battlefield dominated by purely strategic considerations. For Foucault, this dispersion of anonymous power presupposed a generalized resistance as the mere other of power. The result of this invariable flux of domination and resistance is that it loses all historical and sociological specificity.

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Quite simply, this means that in the type of analysis I have been trying to advance for some time you can see that power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of the self to self-constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics.¹²

This model had several implications. Firstly, Foucault now wanted to prioritize the self-relation over other relations like that of strategic relations to others, technics of government and includes a notion of domination defined as relations wherein power as asymmetrically fixed. Foucault nominates the former as "the care of the self". With this priority to the self-relation, he wanted to underscore that an ethics of the self is an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task:

*'Foucault, History of Sexuality Vol. 1, 252. In this new interpretation of power relations in Foucault's **The History of Sexuality** "resistance" is underscored: resistance as the inverse of all dispersed, de-centred power. The key to this conception of the relationality of power is that neither power nor resistance can be a fundamental substance. The template of modern power relations became the model of post 68 politics of social movements. For Foucault, this is an explosion of local, dispersed resistances to the totalizing aspirations of the whole range of institutional authorities in the bureaucracy, universities, schools, hospitals and prisons. Foucault's ideas gave expression to this new configuration of resistances. However, here his reinterpretation is provided with an extra theoretical ballast in the form of Nietzsche's idea of the "will to power", as a ubiquitous, anonymous power in general. While Nietzsche chose to anchor the "will to power" in a naturalistic **Lebensphilosophie** in the shape of life itself, Foucault prefers to view it as traversing the social body. Foucault is clearly reluctant to resort to a full-blown metaphysics. He refuses to provide even a general alternative theory of power. He stressed that his ideas on power arose from specific situations and the inadequacy of existing models to explain the historical phenomena before him: madness, prisons, sexuality and truth. Thus, here Foucault wants to maintain his ideas on power on merely the historical level.*

This understanding of resistance seems to speak to Foucault's biography and his experience in Paris during these post-68 socio-political struggles. However, appealing to Nietzsche's view of power, despite Foucault's own historicizing tendencies, they are now injected with trans-historical significance. This means that even his late works, Foucault was not willing to fully historicize his vision of social power. This is especially clear in Foucault's view of all social life as a domain of omniscient power, social life as a force field of asymmetrical power relations, the binary battlefield dominated by purely strategic considerations. For Foucault, this dispersion of anonymous power presupposed a generalized resistance as the mere other of power. The result of this invariable flux of domination and resistance is that it loses all historical and sociological specificity.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to elaborate the main ideas of György (George) Márkus György Labour, Instrumental Action and the Ways of Human Existence: Towards an "Ecological" Reconstruction of Historical Materialism and the associated ideas associated with Márkus's unfinished theory culture. He clearly felt that the Marxist tradition had hitherto failed to give a plausible account of cultural autonomy, and this was vital to a contemporary self-critical democratic society. All his efforts were directed towards a general framework of a theory of cultural pragmatics focused on the institutions and relations that would facilitate and enhance this vital self-reflection by individuals and citizens. His reflections on the autonomy of culture were focused especially on the circle of authors, texts and reader across the full spectrum of high cultural activities in the sciences, arts and philosophy. As we have seen, Márkus's strategy here is to radically historicize all social and historical institutions and their underpinning cultural pragmatics. This means that he demands very close empirical and historical investigation around the changing forms and configurations of texts, authors and publics in all value spheres. Barthes and Foucault serve Márkus as key thinkers who are moving in a more historicizing direction.

However, Márkus focuses on the historical simplifications and errors scattered through both analyses. For example, he seizes on Foucault's apparent ignorance of the crucial role played by patronage in the transition to modern social and economic conditions. Likewise, Barthes misinterpretations of Austin of "performative utterances" fails to recognize the decisive part played by social struggles and history in our understanding of language and its evolution. But for Márkus Foucault's lack of detailed social and historical specificity points to a residual reliance on trans-historical ideas or "essences" about the general character of power. Against this, Márkus argues that to really understand the autonomy of modern culture we must remain resolutely focused on the microscopical analyze of real social and historical interactions and the way they change over time. This means that a critical theory must work in harness with these other more specialized historical and social disciplines. Barthes and Foucault went part of the way in this direction, but both fell short. Only this partnership will illuminate the complex two-way interactions between social and economic determinations and the active role of culture, its institutions and genres. Agnes Heller makes it clear that the "death or end of the subject" is not a new trope or assertion. She noted that a couple of generations ago scientific behaviourism rejected the subject as not sufficiently scientific. Today the problem has inverted to the point where the individual subject has now allegedly created the havoc of science and technology.²⁴ Just these changing historical perspectives reveal the essential historicity of such philosophical visions and tropes. With the historical death of the cultural institution of the "school" as the bearer of philosophy in modern times, it should be no surprise that recent claims of the end of subject and the author are even more closely linked to the names of particular individual philosophers and their personal visions of the modern world.

What is most distinctive in Márkus's general theory of autonomous culture is that philosophy can no longer be conceived as positive knowledge. Connecting evaluation with

facts is not a simple matter of inference but of cogent narrative, which renders the present and the future meaningful, as long as we adhere to certain chosen values and courses of action. For Márkus contemporary critical theory continues to have a major diagnostic function: it can analyze and reconstruct the tradition of the present and also illuminate the normative and factual preconditions of reigning practices and privileges. However, the resulting social diagnosis must forego the presumption to understand the totality. What remains are attempts at "totalization", partial and provision attempts to a "whole" that can only be constructed within a given culture and remain reliant on the standpoint of existing individuals, their causes, potentials and chosen values. While this understanding of the diagnostic function allows critical distance from certain taken-for-granted practical and cognitive assumptions, it remains very much constrained. Márkus sought quite consciously to deflate the traditional totalizing aspirations of previous generations of philosophy. However, he again and again underscores the importance of history and empirical knowledge towards a comprehensive understanding of cultural dynamics. To follow his lead may be especially arduous for the philosophical tradition and its generalization but it is still a live option, a road that remains open. A decade after Márkus death in 2016 and in a climate of everyday political debate about climate change, his ideas on ecology and the option of a richer and more empathic alternative paradigm of community and social human livelihood seems a still live and attractive option compared to the instrumental and technicist understandings that have dominated not only the reason of contemporary industrial capitalism but also some of the key contemporary philosophical thinkers like Habermas.

Footnotes

- ¹. Márkus, “Marxism and Theories of Culture,” 92–4
- ². Ibid., 93.
- ³. Ibid., 94.
- ⁴. Ibid., 94–5.
- ⁵. Ibid., 96.
- ⁶. Márkus, G. ‘Marxism and Theories of Culture’ *Thesis Eleven* No 25, 1990, pp.92-94
- ⁷. Ibid., 99.
- ⁸. These ideas come from a fragment found on George Márkus’s old computer that was recovered after he had died in Oct 2016. This included a finished paper entitled “Creating The Creator 1: The Author”. This paper is only 7 pages long and appears to be complete with footnotes. From internal evidence I suspect this paper was written in the early 1980s. Why this apparently completed finished paper was not published at the time is impossible to say for sure. The numeral 1 in the title could suggest that it is part of a bigger project like his theory of culture that was also not completed by the time of his death. It was George’s practice to often hold onto papers and wait for professional contacts to ask him if he had anything to publish. In any case, it certainly deserves to see the light of day and be published in the future.
- ⁹. Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison*. Allen Lane, London, 1977
- ¹⁰. Irwin, W. *The Death and Resurrection of the Author*. Westport Press, Conn, Greenwood Press, 2003
- ¹¹. Foucault, M. “What is the Author: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology Ethics Edited by Paul Rabinow, Ithaca, NY, Connell, 1979
- ¹². Foucault, M, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1, An Introduction* Pantheon Books, New York. 1978, p252.