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Introduction to Information Ethics from a Marxian Perspective

October's 1917 Russian revolution was about the effective universal achievement of justice and freedom, despite the ulterior distortions that left it wanting. And while the revolution fell short, its failings should not detract from the principals of its underlying struggle for effective universal justice and freedom. Is not this struggle ultimately an ethical struggle? If so, how do the ethical foundations of its theory apply to contemporary information cultures in the digital age?

Lenin once wrote in a personal notebook that it was impossible to understand Marx's Capital completely without first possessing a deep understanding of Hegel's Logic. It was his contention that, for the most part, the communists of his time did not understand Marx. Whether or not Lenin was correct in his assessment, the great strategist of the Russian revolution was seriously concerned about theory, and mainly Marxian theory. Marx, himself, despite the claims of many interpretations of his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, was obviously not against theory, only against theories detached from history, especially those that, masked as scientific ones, legitimated class exploitation ideologically.

In 1917, exactly a hundred years ago, the spread and applicability of Marxism in the world was incontestable, even if a rigorous understanding of Marx's thoughts were insufficient. A great amount of his work remained unpublished at the time and what was published was not always correctly understood and diffused.

We do not argue that this lack of theory is the only, nor the main reason, for the distortions of the Russian revolution and of the collapse of Soviet Union. The reactions of imperialism, mainly through its Nazi flank, and, after the Great Second War, the Cold War, were surely more decisive in the matter than any theory. However, the default neglect of Marxian theory based on history disserves its epistemological and socio-historical rationality and power, especially in contemporary times when proto fascist forms of political actors and discourse are re-emerging everywhere.

Information science, ethics and Marxism should become keywords that are increasingly associated. With Information Science as a strategic field for modern ethics and Marxian praxis, ethics and the Marxian tradition could protect against information science's tendency towards a servile and technocratic kind of knowledge. The last increases worldviews that grow in the wake of a scenario where the digital, with its means of intermediation, represent exponentially an increasingly cruel and rhizomatic market control of all spheres of life, from macro-economy to individual tastes.

The papers of this IRIE issue deal with Information Ethics from a Marxian perspective, but some of them do so only in an implicit or indirect way. Marxist intellectual tradition, indeed, with few exceptions, does not talk directly about ethical issues. At the same time, ethics is at the core of this tradition, Marxism being a radical criticism of human reification, exploitation, and alienation. It is a cross-generation call for new concrete historical forms of freedom, justice, rationality, and human self-determination. Explicitly or not, all the papers in this issue push these questions, particularly in relation to informational problems, from Marx's foundational problems to modern challenges, from the formal subsuming of labour to capital, to the new algorithmic capitalism based on surveillance techno-politics.

This dossier does not intend to offer exhaustive answers to the discourse around such discussions but rather aims to publicize good reflection around Information Ethics in a bid to develop serious dialog with the Marxian theoretical tradition. The articles selected bring a rich and fresh contribution to the Marxian perspective in front of the difficulties and contemporary issues of Information and its implicit and explicit Ethics.

The first article of this dossier, written by Wilhelm Peekhaus, examines the capitalist model of academic publishing using Marx's concepts of 'primitive accumulation' and 'alienation.' Primitive accumulation offers a theoretical framework to explain contemporary erosions of the knowledge commons that result from various enclosing strategies employed by capitalist academic journal publishers. The article also unveils some alienating

elements experienced by modern producers of academic publications. Finally, it proposes an alternative for capitalist control over the scientific publishing field, based on open-access projects.

Rodrigo Moreno discusses the contradiction between information and knowledge based on the notion of general intellect developed by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. The author shows how the privatization of the social production of knowledge is a contemporary process of capitalism genesis, becoming more acute in our time, precisely when knowledge becomes the main factor in the production of wealth with information its path. He warns that contemporaneity, contrary to what postulates visions such as that of Andre Gorz, should be characterized not as the realization of Marx's most optimistic bets on but as the development of opposing tendencies.

Figueiredo and Bolaño relate the passage in course from the political economy of the cultural industry to that of the new media with the intensification of the colonization of the world of life by the system (Habermas) and with the changing from the disciplinary society to the control society (Deleuze). This process involves a refinement of the articulation among the economical function of advertising, the political function of propaganda and the cultural function of programming, with the substitution of the latter for interactivity. The ethical debate remains implicit here, as in many authors of the Marxian tradition. Nevertheless, it is the leitmotiv of the paper, looking towards free communication and democracy against the veiled but highly efficient actions of capital in the Information field: surveillance of the market and of the state over the individual.

Bianca Rhian denounces in her paper the relationship between the development of information technologies and their flows with the needs of increased reproduction of capital in the face of the global fall in the rate of profits that began in the 1970s. She also demonstrates the economic, ideological and cultural function of the informationally legitimizing element of neoliberal politics, which presents itself worldwide as a universal spell, while in serious theory and concrete practice it reveals itself as a sectarian imposition of the capital, which generates above all the sharpening of exploitation and inequality. Bianca Rhian also criticizes the positivist perspective of the axiological, and therefore political, neutrality of science.

In an original and risky exposition, Carla Viola proposes a reflection on class struggle, having as one of the conceptual components of her viewpoint Gilbert Simondon's concept of individuation. Is it possible to find in the concept of individuation sculpted by Gilbert Simondon one direct relationship with Marx and Marxism in general? Furthermore, for Viola, critical information literacy is not only the path to overcoming class struggle but also to achieving a global information society.

Tomas Aquinas defined truth as the correspondence between things and understanding. Castro Alves paints the horror of the slave nautical traffic. In his essay *On the Concept of History*, Walter Benjamin reminds us: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule." This 'emergency situation' was Fascism. Albert Camus defended his romance *La Peste* against the accusation of Roland Barthes that it was "dehors de l'histoire", pointing out that it was not only about the recent historical phenomenon of Fascism, but also about the permanent risk of its rebirth. Agnes Heller associates faith with prejudice and alienation. Thus the contribution by Marco Schneider and Ricardo Pimenta explores the Thomist concept of truth, Benjamin's concept of history, Camus' allegory of the plague, Agnes Heller's notion of faith and Castro Alves' powerful denouncement of slave traffic, in order to criticize the phenomenon of post-truth understood as a rebirth of fascist information practices

In his article, Ivan Capeller presents an original study on the Golem's legend, based on an innovative reading of Walter Benjamin, perhaps the most heterodox of Marxists, and perhaps one among those who best understood Marx's work. Expanding on Benjamin's relationship between myth and allegory, Capeller commends epistemologically Benjamin's original reading of "allegory" (Walter Benjamin, in his seminal work *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*), not only as an important object of study, but also heuristically, for the understanding of the broader relationship between knowledge and language. Capeller shows a fine dialectic domain in his criticism of the usual readings of the relationship between Benjamin, vulgar Marxism and theology. By "fine dialectics" we refer here to the insight in Capeller's analysis of the contradictory elements of Benjamin's readings that either infer a simple association between dialectical materialism and theology, or that briefly ignores it. For Benjamin and Capeller, it is a question of understanding, through irony, the problematic character of this connection. It is problematic in the very concrete terms of the political history of culture of his time and of the

cultural history of the politics of his time, both referring to the statute of philosophical legitimacy of dialectical materialism itself in the face of its popular proto-theological "materialist" versions. Yes, Benjamin's theological heritage is unquestionable, but not as the positivist theological heritage shared by social democracy, liberalism and vulgar Marxism, namely the conception of history as a linear progress. On the contrary, it is true in its disruptive, revolutionary element. What Benjamin retains from theology is essentially messianism as a revolutionary trans-historian potency, made relevant in each epoch as a material power of rupture of usual categories of time, space and action, articulated by the uses of time and space in the spheres of work, property regimes, and narratives.

Gustavo Saldanha touches on very important aspects for a contemporary Marxian reading of language and its ethical implications for the power and agency that it carries within itself. Saldanha establishes an original and erudite dialog between the marxist linguist Mikhail Bakhtin – for whom the linguistic sign is an arena of the class struggle, anticipating Bourdieu's notion that class struggle is always, also, a struggle of classifications – and other philosophies of language. In a kind of language ontogenesis, the author seeks to expose nature in dialogue with the concept of trivium in the light of post-truth times when information, driven by algorithm "intelligence", produces logic, grammar, and rhetoric forms.

According to Sylvia Moretzsohn, whose critical theory of journalism is a reference to Brazil, ethical themes infuse and guides Marx's entire work, dating all the way back to his more youthful writings such as "Reflections of a Young Person on the Choice of a Profession" of 1835 (Marx was 16 or 17 years old). In this article, in constant dialogue with Marxian theory, the author unveils the authoritarian specificity of the capitalist constitution of the communications system in Brazil during the Military Business Dictatorship. In an original inflection, Moretzsohn also explores the notion of "culture of silence," based on Paulo Freire's reflections on the sermons of Father Antônio Vieira (seventeenth century), which are matricial in the constitution of Brazilian culture. The author also picks up some ideas from Álvaro Vieira Pinto, a Brazilian theoretician who produced fundamental contributions to a universal philosophy of technique, little studied even in Brazil.

Michael Eldred says in his article there is a critique of capitalist market economy that consists in claiming not only that capitalist social relations are uncaring and alienating, nor only exploitative of the working class, but that the process of capitalist economy as a whole is a way of living, today globalized, that has gotten out of hand. For him there is a possible hermeneutic alternative to face capitalism as a "gainful game". Considering it by one philosophical view that allows social actors to fight through it in pursuit of free and fair social interplay, Eldred suggests that this kind of Marxist rereading is needed for an increasingly invasive and attractive cyber world. Once the political and ideological preferences of each author are here preserved, his article contributes greatly to the confrontation of looks and to the dialogue, or even the dialectic present between Marxian perspectives.

We believe that there is something still extremely relevant to say inspired by Marx's thought. We may perceive that its untimeliness is a proof that its theoretical and critical applications are still resonant today in a world that speaks increasingly of openness and access in the same way that markets and strategies of control of the means of information and knowledge production stand behind the rhetorical "varnish" of the hyper-connected global village. Its actuality, moreover, is not exclusive a Marxian's territory. It provides compelling and fundamental critical support for new conceptual and epistemological "flights" even as they become more distant from original Marxian thinking, despite having Marxian as a starting point.

It is not a question here of discussing what "Marxism" is, but only of exploring how much of the critical fortune inspired by Karl Marx's thought may be useful for discussing contemporary ethical-informational issues.

We hope we have flagged some sensitive points.