

Classes and Transclasses

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Abstract: Insofar as they designate individuals who, alone or in groups, cross social barriers and move from one class to another, transclasses have a problematic status that disrupts established political categories and questions their validity. Indeed, transclass trajectories, whether from the working-class world to the bourgeoisie or, conversely, from the bourgeoisie to the working-class world, presuppose the existence of social classes, on the one hand, and the possibility of changing them, on the other. The transclass phenomenon thus seems paradoxically both to affirm and deny the existence of classes. It presupposes the transition from a given social condition to another that serves as a reference for measuring the trajectory and thinking about the transition from one state to another. Whether the transition is in one direction or the other, it takes root in a class of origin and leads to a class of arrival. What is usually called social ascent or downgrading necessarily implies, then, the affirmation of class as a condition of possibility. This paper is an attempt to discuss

Keywords: classes, transclasses, social classes, individuals, working-class

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At the same time, the existence of transclasses reveals that these supposed classes of origin and arrival do not constitute impervious and immutable orders and are not reducible to an impassable caste system. Although these social classes rest on a hierarchy and share the world as dominant and dominated, they are not based on a principle of hereditary distribution of trades and functions and on a strict endogamy aiming to preserve their purity. Their boundaries and spheres of extension are not as rigidly defined as the orders under the *Ancien régime*, or castes in India, so that one may question the reality and relevance of a division of

society on this basis. Isn't passing through class [*passe-classe*] the sign that classes can be dispensed with, that their limits are poorly defined because of the social fluidity and the bridges [*passerelles*] that transform them into sieves [*passoires*]? There is then a strong temptation to use the existence of transclasses as a counterexample to invalidate the division of society into classes, to proclaim the obsolescence of their struggle and its pointlessness. The concept of transclass, then, disrupts the concept of class; it invites us to put it back to work, to test its consistency and its necessity.

But in turn, doesn't the simultaneous movement of affirmation and negation of class that transclass envelops make it a contradictory concept, a kind of square circle, necessarily vicious or at least vitiated by its tensions? For, in the last analysis, do enriched and acculturated workers becomes bourgeois really leave their class of origin? Do ruined *rentiers* who are forced to sell their labor power in order to live cease to be bourgeois in the working-class world? Under these conditions, what does "being transclass" mean, and what is the status of this category? One may wonder if it is not a new class, that of declassed and surclassed.

All these questions constitute invitations to return to the analysis of class from the standpoint of transclass in order to clarify the relationships between the two concepts, to measure their efficacy and respective limits. Rather than succumb to the simplistic temptation of opposing the notions of class and transclass in a movement of reciprocal negation that would imply their mutual exclusion, it will be a matter of thinking about their dialectic and coming up with lessons from their confrontation. The objective will therefore be to examine what new thinking about transclasses brings to the conception of social classes today and to highlight the changes to which it leads.

1. A Class of Transclasses?

With this in mind, it is first necessary to return to the definition of the concept of transclass and specify its status in order to determine, if necessary, whether it constitutes a new class, outside of class. More than any other, because of the rarity and singularity of trajectories passing through class, the definition of transclass revives the quarrel of universals and clashes with the alternative of realism and nominalism. Strictly speaking, "transclass" does not exist, any more than bourgeois or proletarian, even less because of its statistical improbability and anomalous character. There are only singular individuals who are qualified as such and gathered in their plurality under one and the same denomination.

This general name does not, however, amount to a being of reason, to a pure *flatus vocis*.¹ It is not intended to designate types of beings by wrongly lending them an essence and an existence in and by itself. Although universal notions always have a form of abstraction and are now getting a bad press, they are not systematically reduced to empty generalizations of meaning and real content. Indeed, everything depends on their mode of formation and the process of their generation. Thus, Spinoza takes care to distinguish fictional universal notions from rational universal notions. The former notions are forged by the imagination, which generalizes from particular empirical cases, or from signs and words. The second notions are born from reason, which is based on common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things.² In this case, a universal notion, although it does not express the essence of singular things,³ refers to something real in them, namely, their common properties.

On this basis, it becomes possible to make an adjustment and prevent a possible misunderstanding. The term “transclass” characterizes the social trajectory of individuals who change social class; it does not express an essence or a type. We must therefore be wary of grammatical shortcuts by letting ourselves get caught up in words. The unavoidable use of the article defined in the singular or plural must not mislead us and imply that one or several transclasses refer in a substantive form to a substantial being or essential qualities. Being transclass *is not an identity, it is a process of passing from one class to another*. Far from assigning an identity to individuals, this process implies on the contrary its deconstruction, indeed, its challenging in favor of a logic of permanent mutation.⁴ The transclass process of transition requires a work of de-identification in relation to the original class, taking a distance with respect to its codes and ways of being and a redefinition of oneself that does not necessarily consist in an identification with the habitus of the class of arrival. Transclass is more characterized by a dialectic of the in-between following the cohabitation in it of different social worlds, which are even divergent to the point that sometimes class struggle can be experienced in it.

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1 *Translator's note: Flatus vocis* was a term used by the French Medieval philosopher Roscelin of Compiègne to characterize his nominalist view that universals do not refer to a corresponding objective reality but instead are mere names, words, or sounds.

2 See E2p40s2.

3 See E2p37.

4 For the details, see Jaquet 2014, p. 95f.

But the care to avoid essentialization must not lead to falling back onto the egotic peculiarity and passing from Charybdis to Scylla. If there is no transclass type, there are indeed, on the other hand, specific characteristics that can be the object of a universal common notion. What is common to all transclasses, what makes it possible to designate them as such by referring to a real foundation, *is this process of passage with its procession of obstacles and of modifications in return*. In other words, if there is no transclass essence, there is a *common transitional structure: that of passing through class*. Whatever the various modalities experienced, this structure of passage always involves a multifactorial causality, a node of interlinked determinations at the crossroads of history, great and small. At the very least, it implies, *first of all*, the modification of a place within the initial class, and the variation of the different economic, cultural, and social capitals that characterize it, and, *secondly*, a transformation of oneself according to the adjustments required by a situation of in-between, and, *thirdly*, a repositioning in relation to both the class of origin and the class of arrival. In short, if there is no transclass identity card, there is nonetheless a mapping of the passage based on a structure of displacement and reconfiguration of the self with its share of obstacles, fluctuations, and mutations.

Because of its processual nature and the complex network of economic, political, familial, and idiosyncratic causes that make it possible, this traversal of classes has no uniform and rectilinear course. It gives rise to multiple configurations, depending on historical, geographical, sexual, gender, ethnic, religious factors..., which come into play in the passage, and a variety of postures depending on the nature of the relations with the classes of origin and arrival as well as the political positioning of each. Thus, transclasses can just as easily sever ties with their initial social milieu and aim for perfect integration into their new milieu, becoming pillars of the interests of the class of arrival. They can, on the contrary, claim fidelity or belonging to their class of origin, out of a desire not to betray, and reject the values and injunctions of the milieu of arrival, departing from its practices and norms of life. They can also, through this passage, forge ways of being hybrid by deconstructing and reconstructing themselves in a singular way, at a distance from both the class of origin and the class of arrival. A single transclass individual, moreover, can in turn adopt these different postures and change them in the course of history, experiencing phases of rupture and integration, rejection and return to origins, hybridization and miscegenation. Depending on the possibilities opened up by the collective and singular history of each, transclasses can thus experience the whole range of the figures in between and practice a culture of the gap in variable geometry.

Therefore, if they can form a social group and recognize themselves because of the problems common to passing through class and a situation of being in-between, it is not obvious that they can

constitute a new class based on a common interest and positioning – far from it. To insure this, it is necessary to revisit the definition of class and clarify its meaning in order to determine the conditions required to constitute and form part of it. From this point of view, it is important first to emphasize the equivocity of the term and distinguish its current sense from its conceptual usage in the context of Marxist theory.

The Equivocity of the Notion of Class

In the general and ordinary sense of the term, class covers all divisions into specific categories on the basis of distinctive criteria, whether in the taxonomy of the mineralogical, botanical or zoological sciences, in mathematics, linguistics, demographics, or politics. If it is irrelevant to trace here the whole history of the notion, it must be remembered that the word is derived from the Latin *classis*, which in Roman history designated the divisions of citizens into five categories. This division into classes was carried out on the basis of a census, which made it possible to evaluate their fortune and goods and divide them into different groups according to their respective wealth. The term, therefore, has a social and political origin. By extension, the term class will be applied to the navy, then with conscription to all soldiers who have to do their drills and are called into duty the same year and in parallel also with groups of children who study at the same time.

By taking the notion in this broad and general sense, it is possible to consider that transclasses form a class that has as a distinctive common characteristic the experience of passing through class. On this basis, it would therefore not be absurd to speak of a *class of transclasses* as designating a sociological category that regroups individuals having for a common feature the problematic of class passage and to wonder, for example, about its forms, its scope, and membership criteria. But this would above all be a descriptive use of the term, analogous to the classification principles in effect in other heuristic fields. Taken in this sense, the notion of social class has no real significance and remains very far from the political meaning of the concept as elaborated by Marx and his heirs. It is by no means an explanatory principle of the dynamics at work in history and is deprived of efficacy. The real question, therefore, is above all whether or not transclasses meet the conditions required in order to be a class, in the specific political sense of the term and no longer in the general sense.

Class takes on its full meaning and breadth when it is no longer thought of in a static way as a simple operator of distinction but in a dialectical way as an operating principle, an engine of all history. Far from defining it as an administrative status resulting from a censitary civil partition or as a simple social category, Marx highlights the mode

of constitution of class through struggle. That is why the fundamental concept in his eyes is not that of class but of class struggles. Class does not exist in isolation as a given in itself and is not the expression of an intrinsic nature. It falls under what Spinoza would call “extrinsic denominations” expressing relations and actions.⁵ Class always constitutes itself vis-à-vis or, more precisely, in opposition to another class, because of incompatible interests. Therefore, it first objectively refers to an economic role, to a place in the production process. The capitalist possesses the means of production and buys the labor power of the proletarians, who have no other means of living except to sell it and subject themselves to the arbitrary conditions of another. In short, one possesses, the other is possessed, because she or he is dispossessed. This is the origin of class struggle that cuts across all history and divides society into exploiters and exploited.

But for Marx it is less position than opposition that defines class. For a class that does not know itself as a class is not yet really one. It is in itself vis-à-vis capital, but it is not for itself. If objective contradiction of the interests of individuals presides over their becoming a class, it is not enough to constitute it as such. This is what *The Poverty of Philosophy* argues:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have pointed out only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.⁶

The proletariat may well be dominated and share a common condition, but it is not homogeneous and unified. It appears at the outset more as a mass than as a class. Just like the bourgeoisie, which seeks to eliminate its competitors on the market in order to increase its capital, the proletariat is traversed by rivalries concerning access to employment and the amount of wages. However, this mass is already a class vis-à-vis capital, because there is indeed a real antagonism between interests, whether or not it is perceived by those concerned. The absence of class consciousness should not be confused with the absence of class. Nevertheless, for the class to be conceived as a class for itself, it is necessary that proletarians, just like the bourgeois, break with their

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⁵ *Metaphysical Thoughts*, Part II, chapter 2; see Spinoza 1985, p. 318.

⁶ Marx 1976d, p. 211.

internal rivalries, displace them to form a common front against those who really threaten their existence. The mass coalesces to assert its interests; and it is through this struggle that it constitutes itself by uniting, first as a group, as an association, then as a class conscious of itself in the face of another class.

This struggle is not limited to the antagonism of economic interests, the opposition between capital/salary, wealth/poverty, and the place of each in the production process. It becomes a political struggle between the dominant and the dominated, which takes shape according to hegemonic or subordinate positions within the state apparatus and doubles as an ideological confrontation, so true is it that “the ideas of the ruling class are ... the ruling ideas.”⁷ It is the relation of assumed antagonism that allows the passage from mass to class, from its existence in itself to its constitution for itself. In other words, class, in its complete sense, does not precede the struggle but proceeds from it, because it is the result of the conscious exercise of the balance of power. It is therefore less anterior than interior to the struggle to be waged. Although the complete analysis of this concept envisaged in *Capital* did not see the light of day, class acquires efficacy in Marx only through the transformation of an objective common social situation into a political position of struggle defending interests in a conscious and assumed way. It therefore obeys a process of complex dialectical constitution and cannot be reduced to a simple operator of distinction or a mechanical principle of classification according to taxes, wealth, way of life, and culture.

This double process of constitution of and by class testifies to the passage from a descriptive notion of class to an operational concept endowed with historical efficacy. Because for Marx in class it is not so much a census that makes sense, as it did for the Romans, as it is consciousness that brings up domination and its necessary abolition. Through the dialectical movement from class in itself as unknown to class for itself, knowingly perceived, occurs the transformation of a position into a conscious and organized opposition.

Transclasses: Group or Class?

It now becomes possible to return to the status of transclasses in light of this analysis of the constitutive process of class and reformulate the question more precisely. Can transclasses cross the threshold of the social group sharing an experience of passing through class according to various lived modalities to become a class in itself and for itself, like other middle strata who have historically known this kind

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⁷ Marx and Engels 1976b, p. 59.

of transformation? This basically amounts to asking whether there is a struggle of transclasses and whether they can pass from class in the broad sense to class in the Marxian sense.

If certain transclasses can fight to have the difficulties of passing through class recognized, it is not strictly speaking a class struggle. There cannot be a class of transclasses in the political sense of the term, because the conditions required to constitute one are not fulfilled. Transclasses, in fact, cannot be considered either as a class in itself, or as a class for itself, which knows itself as such. They cannot define themselves as a class in itself opposed to another on the basis of common objective material conditions, a style of life and similar practices, so variable is their economic and cultural situation. On the one hand, class transition takes place in both directions, from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie and from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat; and it cannot be based on similar interests. On the other hand, even when it is “ascendant,” the nature of their trajectory is very different, depending on whether it relies more on intellectual capital, such as studies and diplomas, or on physical capital, such as sports performance or physical beauty. Without generalizing in a caricatural way, a transclass through class, in other words through school, most of the time comes from an intellectual elite, whereas a transclass through sport or play mainly joins a financial elite.

Moreover, no class consciousness that would arise from the struggle to assert common interests against another class can emerge among transclasses as a whole. Between two transclasses like the businessman, Bernard Tapie, who fights to win and crush his rivals in the logic of the self-made man, and the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who, from the height of his chair at the College de France, weighs the misery of the world, it is difficult to conceive of a common class consciousness! What specific common interests could transclasses defend against capital or the proletariat? Either their path leads them to integrate the ruling class and dispose of the means of production, or it keeps them, despite their increased capital, in the camp of wage earners who have no other resources to live on than selling their labor power.

The class consciousness of a transclass will thus be a function of its position in the struggle between the dominant class and the dominated class. Transclasses can be part of an enlightened fraction that continues to fight alongside the dominated class, or, on the contrary, integrate the circles of power in the service of the interests of the dominant class. In this respect, they know the fate of other independent social categories which are drawn in their turn into the history of class struggle. Certain unclassifiable social groups, such as artisans and merchants, can be caught up in this class movement if they come to proletarianize or become bourgeois. *It is therefore not so much income, culture, or a network of relations that define class*

position as enrollment in the dominant/dominated conflict. If the place in the struggle is decisive, it is a question of transclass people, like the intermediate middle classes, who can alternately put themselves at the service of capital or wage labor, depending on the economic and political role they play and the interests that they defend. *Transclasses are therefore neither a class nor outside class*, because they do not escape the movements of history and are called to take sides. Support of capital or support of proletarians – that is the whole question. Therefore, paradoxically, if the social class of the transclass, in the categorical sense, undeniably changes due to the significant modification of one's income, culture, and network of relations; one's political class, on the other hand, does not necessarily change.

2. What Transclass does to Class

Does this mean, then, that individuals who cross social barriers remain simple marginal cases who do not lend themselves to consequences, since they are divided into the different classes according to their place in the struggle and seem to be reabsorbed into them? It is now important to measure the scope of the transclass phenomenon, its theoretical and practical impact on the conception of the class.

Class Put Back into Its Place

First of all, it is clear that by introducing movement into class, transclass moves the former's lines and requires them to be rethought in light of this disruption. Transclass therefore invites us to put class in its place, to adjust it regarding what makes it squeak. If transclass does not suppress class, it contributes to undoing it, or at least to experiencing that it does not entirely form us. The transclass passage, whatever its forms and the extent of mutations caused, reveals a form of plasticity of beings and the impossibility of assigning them a given place and condition in an absolute and definitive way. It prevents us from considering the division into classes as an immutable state, an impermeable order, an impassable barrier. Although the existence of transclasses does not fundamentally change the established order and can even serve to reinforce it, by operating as a safety valve, it frees the imagination by opening up the possibility of individual or collective change. It thus shows that social reproduction is not inevitable and prevents the transformation of social determinism into destiny.

In this regard, the existence of transclasses can serve as a safeguard against the essentialization and naturalization of class, because it reveals that human beings can extricate themselves from

their class membership and are not defined by it. If they share common lifestyles, types of interests, behaviors, and similar representations by virtue of their social class, these are not essential properties. Therefore, individuals are in no way reducible to their class and cannot be assigned to it by nature. Those who are called bourgeois are so only in relation to proletarians and not by virtue of an intrinsic quality. One is bourgeois only insofar as one becomes aware of common interests with others and opposes the proletarians whom one exploits. The qualifier “bourgeois” applies to a modality of existence in relation to its opposite. The individual must, then, carefully be distinguished from the bourgeois. From this point of view, Marx thus takes great care not to reduce the whole person to the capitalist, and he makes it clear that “the economic character of the capitalist becomes firmly fixed to a man only if his money constantly functions as capital.”⁸ It is indeed a question of not confusing ways of being and acting, whether short-term or long-term, with a perennial nature.

This reminder is highly salutary, not only for proletarians whose class hatred can lead them to reduce human beings entirely to their position as exploitative capitalists, but also for the bourgeois in the grip of the class morgue. The blind arrogance of the powerful often leads them to confuse their class position with natural hegemony. The existence of transclasses constitutes a precious antidote to this effect, because it disrupts established positions and reintroduces a movement capable of disrupting social identities and dissipating an ever-renewed confusion. The immobility of social relations resulting from the division of labor and the establishment of a political order based on class distinction tends to blur the difference between the singular individual and the class individual and tends to reduce the first to the second because of a conditioning that operates historically. This is what Marx already observed in *The German Ideology*:

Nevertheless in the course of historical development and precisely because of the inevitable fact within the division of labor that social relations come to a standstill, a difference arises. establishes between the life of each individual according as it is personal, and according as it is subordinate to any branch of work and to the conditions of this work. It is not that the rentier or the capitalist cease to be persons, but their personality is entirely conditioned and determined by well-defined class relations, and the difference appears only in the difference to another class and does not reveals itself to themselves only when they go bankrupt.⁹

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8 Marx 1976a, p. 711.

9 Marx and Engels 1976b, p. 78.

Of course, there are no pure individuals who define themselves entirely on the basis of themselves, because human beings at birth fit into already preestablished conditions of existence and are assigned to a class that determines their place in life and dictates their personal development. But this subjection to a class is the result of a reversible historical process and not an iron law that is impossible to modify. The personality of individuals, however, is so shaped by their place in a class, by their position in the organization of work and relations of production, as it ends up making their personhood forgotten under the social label. If we are not born naturally capitalist or *rentier*, if we become one through conditioning, we nevertheless end up convincing ourselves of being one for all eternity. This is why Marx specifies that this difference established between the person and the social personality is not immediately perceptible; it only appears through a process of confrontation with another class. It is indeed the contrast between the economic and social conditions of life of human beings, which brings out the difference between the individual and the class individual. The confrontation of classes shows that not all people are situated in the same way and do not have the same social personality.

This confrontation, however, is not necessarily sufficient to bring about the distinction between personal being and social being, because it can lead to a naturalization of social personality and to the illusion that it is only an emanation of the essence of individuals and their qualities, especially in members of the ruling class. Marx is thus ironic about this confusion between the existence of the individual and the existence of the bourgeois behind which the dominant hide when their interests are threatened:

When the narrow-minded bourgeois says to the communists: by abolishing property, i.e., my existence as a capitalist, as a landed proprietor, as a factory-owner, and your existence as workers, you abolish my individuality and your own; by making it impossible for me to exploit you, the workers, to take in my profit, interest, or rent, you make it impossible for me to exist as an individual. – When, therefore, the bourgeois tells the communists: by abolishing my existence *as a bourgeois*, you abolish my existence *as an individual*; when thus he identifies himself as a bourgeois with himself as an individual, one must, at least, recognise his frankness and shamelessness. For the bourgeois it is actually the case, he believes himself to be an individual only insofar as he is a bourgeois.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Marx and Engels 1976b, p. 229.

The abolition of the distinction between individual being and bourgeois takes place here in favor of a reduction of one's own to property, of me to mine.

It is easier for a proletarian than for a bourgeois to perceive this difference between their being and their class, because their conditions of existence seem to be more the result of chance, over which they have no control. Proletarians are more inclined to divorce themselves as exploited workers and not identify with their subordinate position than capitalists who willingly embrace their condition to the point of becoming one with it. This is what Marx argues in *The German Ideology*:

And the contradiction between the individuality of the separate proletarian and labour, the condition of life forced upon him, becomes evident to him, for he is sacrificed from youth onwards and, within his own class, has no chance of arriving at the conditions which would place him in the other class.¹¹

This affirmation deserves to be tempered, however, because it is not certain that proletarians always have a lucidity such that the difference between their individual personalities and their personalities as workers does not escape them. This is, in fact, without counting on the incorporation of domination and the interiorization of meritocratic ideology, which transform a mode of social being into ontological determination and assign to each a place for all eternity in proportion to one's personal qualities. This reservation in no way invalidates the observation that awareness of the distinction between the class individual and the personal individual is much more widespread among proletarians than among capitalists or *rentiers* who have every interest in blinding themselves and who only admit it when they can no longer do otherwise.

This is why Marx is right to emphasize that the difference "appears only when they go bankrupt."¹² They are indeed forced in this case to face the facts and to feel with their bodies the difference between the personality of the *rentier* or the capitalist they no longer are and the person they continue to be, although deprived of their social advantages. In short, it is when they lose their status and experience a downgrading that they acquire class consciousness. From then on, *it is the transclass experience, as a brutal passage from one social state to another, which reveals the class individual negatively*. It is therefore a foundational experience for class consciousness. Far from making classes invisible, on the contrary, the transclass figure makes them visible and allows them to be contemplated from a distance as though

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¹¹ Marx 1976b, p. 79.

¹² Marx 1976b, p. 78.

through a magnifying mirror. It reveals how they are made and unmade by internalizing economic and social norms, moral rules and mental representations, cultural practices and consumption patterns. From this point of view, the focus on transclasses provides a privileged observatory of the manufacture of classes, since through the vicissitudes of adaptation and the difficult learning of codes are revealed the art and the way of shaping bodies and minds and of perpetuating the division between dominant and dominated. The figure of transclass updates the artifacts that feed the distinction and give it the fraudulent evidence of a true nature. This deconstruction is thus a test of truth that can free oneself from the shackles of class and its procession of symbolic violence, by opening up the possibility of a reconfiguration of the self.

Does this mean that the proliferation of transclass trajectories fundamentally calls into question the existence of classes and tends to abolish them? Far from it, because the mass production of transclasses is not a panacea. Transclasses may multiply, but nothing can change as long as the totality of the means of production and state apparatuses remain concentrated in the hands of a small number of individuals. In this regard, it matters little whether they are long-time heirs or transclasses who have just reached the pinnacle of power, since the opposition between dominant and dominated remains. But if non-reproduction does not abolish reproduction, it leads to a revision of its status and to measuring the adjustments required by the eruption of the figure of transclass within the thought of class.

Questioning the Theoretical Primacy of Reproduction

From this perspective, it is necessary, first of all, to rule out simplistic attempts at recovery or evasion aimed at making transclasses exceptions that invalidate or confirm the rule of social reproduction and the existence of class struggle. The social reproduction that leads the children of workers and the bourgeoisie to experience a trajectory similar to that of their parents does not need to be confirmed, since it remains a rule that continues to apply in the vast majority of countries, despite spatio-temporal statistical variations. We must move beyond the alternative between the invalidation and the confirmation of the rule, which leads either to overestimating or underestimating the existence of transclasses. In the first case, transclasses are brandished as glorious figures of class negation, as heroes freeing themselves from social determinisms all by themselves, proving to the lazy and the weak-willed that “where there is a will, there is a way.” In the second case, transclasses are considered as anomalies, quite negligible with regard to massive social reproduction.

To those who, conversely, would be inclined to pass over this contrariety in silence, it must be remembered that if the existence of transclasses does not invalidate the existence of classes, it is opposed to the reduction of the movement of history to a frontal struggle between two homogeneous camps entrenched behind their barriers; and it invites us to think about the transition from one class to another, without pushing it back to the margins. It is therefore a question of breaking with a logic of exceptionality, undermined by the cognitive biases which tend to increase or reduce its scope, in order to think about the nature of the contrariety and to measure the adjustments required by the introduction of the figure of transclass within the thought of class. Whether it is based on the analysis of the reproduction of economic forces and social relations of production, whether it is coupled with a study of political and ideological reproduction through state apparatuses, or whether it is enriched by a doctrine of cultural and symbolic domination, the theory of reproduction must necessarily be completed and revitalized by an interrogation of what opposes it. In fact, the privileged or exclusive focus on reproduction involves a form of abstraction and is akin to a *coup de force* because reproduction is separated from its opposite and places it in a second, even secondary, position.

Certainly, it is not a question of bringing about a reversal of perspective and postulating that non-reproduction is primary, because this posture would only lead to the same in reverse. Affirming the primacy of the same over the other, or of the other over the same, changes nothing in the matter. It is necessary to grasp both the same and the other. This is why it is necessary to apprehend reproduction and non-reproduction together and to redefine their relations and their respective status by ceasing to consider one as the norm and the other as its transgression. It is therefore a question of thinking simultaneously about opposites, without ranking them and immediately assimilating the frequency of cases of reproduction to a rule and the rarity of non-reproduction to exceptionality. It is a dialectic of opposition that must be conceived within societies. Thus, reproduction can be considered as a non-reproduction that is prevented as non-reproduction can be considered as a reproduction that has failed. But, whatever the frame of reference, it is always a question of identifying the dynamic at work in the constitution of social trajectories and of considering class relations as the result of a combination of opposing forces of conservation and change, which bind up the social machine or give it a new movement.

Reproduction is not an identical repetition; it is always accompanied by non-reproduction. Far from constituting its limit or its margin, *non-reproduction is in reality immanent in reproduction*. It does not maintain with it a relationship of pure exteriority, because most of the time it is the product of internal contradictions in social classes. *Class is worked on by a transclass dialectic*. This is what Marx saw, although he did not theorize it as such:

If all the members of the modern bourgeoisie have the same interests inasmuch as they form a class as against another class, they have opposite, antagonistic interests inasmuch as they stand face to face with one another. This opposition of interests results from the economic conditions of their bourgeois life. From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character; that in the selfsame relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is produced also; that in the selfsame relations in which there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression; that these relations produce bourgeois wealth, i.e., the wealth of the bourgeois class, only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual members of this class and by producing an ever-growing proletariat.¹³

The focus on class antagonism and its historical variations tends to make us forget the complexity and duplicity of the relations of production which play a decisive role in the making of transclasses. *Extra-class struggle should not, however, obscure the intra-class struggle within the bourgeoisie.* The antagonism is twofold, it is both inter- and intra-class: class against class, bourgeois against proletarians, but also bourgeois against bourgeois and proletarians against proletarians. The bourgeoisie have both common class interests that unite them and individual interests that divide them. This inter-individual struggle results from the exacerbated competition for the accumulation of wealth. The bourgeoisie can increase their capital only by concentrating more wealth in their hands in order to obtain a monopoly. It must therefore eliminate rivals, force them to sell and push them into bankruptcy to be in a hegemonic position. The bourgeoisie is a class based on an economic dynamic and not a stable, politically instituted order. Therefore, it is often crossed by internal struggles and subject to reversals of fortune. Although it knows how to unite to defend common interests, it is not perfectly homogeneous, due to its composition and the different or even divergent financial strategies of its members. Between the small number of newly arrived *nouveaux riches* and the vast majority of long-time heirs, the struggles are sometimes bitter. And among the heirs, those who are active in the market often have nothing but contempt for *rentiers* who do not make their capital grow. The agonistic relations within the bourgeoisie are, however, less related to its constitution than to its preservation. Because what determines belonging to a class is not so much the means of achieving it as that of remaining there by transforming an acquired knowledge into a lasting position, into social status. But to be able to immobilize, you must, paradoxically, know how

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¹³ Marx 1976d, p. 176,

to be mobile. It is not enough to inherit and manage one's fortune, it is necessary to be active, to have an entrepreneurial spirit and to innovate in order to constantly conquer new markets.

Therefore, a risk of ejection threatens heirs when they are not able to ensure succession and be active on the market.¹⁴ Even if they have acquired a sense of business, they do not necessarily have a taste for it and may be content to live on their income and squander their fortune. Their maintenance is not guaranteed, because they will be the privileged target of the *nouveaux riches* who seek to be recognized as bourgeois in their own right and constantly eliminate others in order to make a place for themselves.¹⁵ Economic competition feeds on a logic of symbolic distinction because it is not only a question of being rich or extremely rich but of being the richest forever. The victory podium loses its value if a great number attain it and if all are tied. There always has to be a winner. Anyone who withdraws from competition, lives off rent, or is no longer performing in the market is destined to be eliminated. There is, therefore, a transclass becoming that haunts former winners as soon as they cease to prove themselves. *In short, the more class petrifies and tends to transform itself into position, the more it feeds the transclass dynamic of ejection.*

The production of wealth is therefore only the reverse of the production of poverty, to which it is always necessarily correlated. It is not only a question of reducing the exploited to poverty, by stripping them of surplus value, but also the exploiters, by ruining heirs. The bourgeois class is driven by both a tendency to reproduce its interests and the non-reproduction of the interests of a part of its members who will become proletarianized. This transclass flow within the bourgeoisie is certainly not a hemorrhage, because overall the ruling class remains stable. Although marginal, it is nevertheless symptomatic of the duplicitous movement of the class which can only enrich itself by impoverishing. Far from being a detail and confining itself to an internal process of eliminating the defeated, it reveals that the bourgeois class is in reality an immense enterprise for manufacturing transclasses.

The Production of Transclasses as the Production of Classes

The production of transclasses is indeed an operation inherent in the bourgeois class and is done on a large scale, because the more proletarianization spreads, the more profits increase. Non-reproduction, then, is in line with a logic of reproduction taken to the extreme. It is,

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14 On this point, see Balibar and Wallerstein 1997, p. 160.

15 Balibar and Wallerstein 1997, p. 161.

so to speak, orchestrated by the capitalist system itself, which feeds on an ever-more-massive proletarianization. The preservation of class interests therefore involves the production of transclasses to multiply the number of proletarians and to regulate the flow of the neo-bourgeois. Within the very process of reproduction, it is thus possible to bring to light *a fivefold manufacture of transclasses, by proletarianization or by embourgeoisement*.

The first, as we have seen, concerns the production of transclasses internal to the bourgeois classes through individual struggles and the downgrading of eliminated competitors. The second is the result of antagonism toward the competitors of foreign countries in the name of nationalism, which leads to downgrading within the international bourgeois classes. It is no longer oriented towards the enemy from the inside but from outside. Marx had already emphasized this:

However much the individual bourgeois fights against the others, as a *class* the bourgeois have a common interest, and this community of interest which is directed against the proletariat inside the country, is directed against the bourgeois of other nations outside the country. This is what the bourgeois calls his nationality.¹⁶

Despite the globalization of the economy, of its relocations and permanent relocations, international capitalism is not entirely supranational. It is also traversed by opposing currents, the defense of national interests and national jewels. This second manufacture of transclasses is not a simple variant of the first and does not amount to a renewal of interindividual antagonism within the bourgeoisie and its displacement from the national to the international level. It reveals the complexity of struggles and power relations by revealing an additional determination to take them into account, that of nationality and its unifying imaginary sometimes imbued with xenophobia. It goes, so to speak, against the first manufacture of transclasses, because it helps to silence or attenuate the inter-individual internal struggles in favor of a common united front against the foreign bourgeoisie.

These first two constructions of transclasses by downgrading within the national and international bourgeoisie do not, however, reach the extent of the third, which concerns the middle classes. Although this movement is reversible, the bourgeoisie historically tends towards the impoverishment of the middle classes and their elimination, according to its interests. This was already highlighted in the *Communist Manifesto*:

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16 Marx 1975, p. 281. See also Marx and Engels 1976c, p. 493.

The lower strata of the middle class – the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants – all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.¹⁷

Exacerbated competition, demand for technological and financial innovations in order to multiply profits precipitate the middle layers unable to follow into the proletariat by swelling its ranks. The proletarianization of those who formerly had no need to sell their labor power to live is thus nothing other than a manufacture of transclasses by liquidation of the middle classes in decline.

These middle classes, however, constitute a transclass adjustment variable that makes it possible to regulate profits and ensure them as well as possible. Certainly, to maximize profits, it is a question of producing new proletarians in all classes of the population and abroad, but it is also a question of finding outlets for the products produced and encouraging their consumption. a clientele wealthy enough to buy them. And even before selling them, it is necessary to produce them and train competent and dedicated workers to supervise the production process and retrain the workers. This is why the production of transclasses within the middle class does not obey a unilateral process of downgrading. It can take the form of the creation of a petty bourgeoisie, intermediary between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. While affirming that competition tends to make the middle classes disappear, Marx also observes the emergence of a petty bourgeoisie in the developed countries:

In countries where modern civilisation has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois has been formed, fluctuating between proletariat and bourgeoisie and ever renewing itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society. The individual members of this class, however, are constantly being hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition.¹⁸

Whereas the first three constructions of transclasses are the result of proletarianization, the fourth takes the form of what is commonly called

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¹⁷ Marx and Engels 1976c, pp. 491-92.

¹⁸ Marx and Engels 1976c, p. 509.

social ascent or more precisely the passage from the working class to the petty bourgeoisie. Nizan's hero, Antoine Bloyé, son of a worker and a cleaning lady, who has become a petty bourgeois who has risen from the ranks, is the perfect illustration of this. It is the pure product of the industrial revolution which, in the second half of the 19th century, demanded managers and new human resources. It is no coincidence that in 1858 parliament passed a law on vocational education and that schools of arts and crafts flourished at that time. The young Antoine, first in his division at school, is caught up in this movement of manufacturing a petty bourgeois class at the service of shareholders and bosses:

Higher destinies are reserved for the sons of the great bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie of the liberal professions – destinies embellished by the passwords of the humanities. But what tremendous reserves exist among the gifted sons of workers, what an inexhaustible source of faithful subordinates! They are needed; they are enticed with promises of a great future of equal opportunity, the dawn of democracy. Each worker's son has in his satchel the diploma of an overseer of men, the passport of a bourgeois.¹⁹

At the heart of this manufacture is the upgrading of the sons of workers lulled by the myth of equal opportunity and meritocratic discourse. It gives access to “the passport of a bourgeois,” because it does not open the doors of the big bourgeoisie. It leaves the transclass applicant on the threshold like a watchdog or a servant who does not take the elevator but the service stairs.

It is necessary to take another step to reach the ultimate level of the manufacture of transclass: the passage to the ruling class by the constitution and the fructification of a capital that dispenses with having to sell one's labor power in order to live. If the majority of the bourgeoisie become so by inheritance and are formed by reproduction linked to the transmission of capital from parents to children, a small fringe also becomes so by non-reproduction, according to multiple transclass paths. The bourgeoisie of acquisition, unlike that of inheritance, can result from the accumulation of capital, through hard work, effort, or else from trafficking, swindling, fraud of all kinds. It can come to crown skills, performances, or capacities that are socially recognized and economically valued, as is the case of transclasses who monetize their course of academic success, their intellectual prestige, their artistic creativity, or even their physical beauty and their sports skills ... The bourgeoisie of acquisition can also come from affective encounters, alliances, such as marriage or other forms of cooptation by relations and elective affinities.

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¹⁹ Nizan 1973, p. 58.

This manufacture of transclasses by the embourgeoisement of migrants from the proletariat or the middle classes is not only a rare phenomenon, but precarious both for the neo-bourgeois and for their descendants. Second-generation transclasses are not upper-level heirs. The position acquired by parents is not necessarily retained by children and remains fragile, because it is based on newly incorporated dispositions and does not have the assurance of ancestral know-how and expertise. It is therefore more exposed to attacks and destabilization attempts, because it does not have the legitimacy and stability of that of a son or daughter of a family, who is part of a lineage of long-time heirs, who relies on financial skills, business acumen, proven ability in this area and who also benefits from a solid network of relationships.

Finally, if transclasses do not constitute a class in the political sense of the term, they are not, then, outside class or classless. Whether they are formed by expulsion or by propulsion, they are not excluded but included in the system of class formation. They come to complicate it by introducing opposition in the class without annihilating it. They reveal its processual nature and can serve as a safeguard against its essentialization. Classes are worked on by a transclass dynamic both in terms of their formation and their preservation. They are thus in constant redefinition and are characterized by a process of perpetual downgrading and reclassification. As a result, the concept of class cannot be fully intelligible without that of transclass, because one must think about *both the contradiction of class interests and the internal opposition of classes* in order to understand the movements of history. The production of transclasses is therefore not so much on the margins as at the heart of the system of economic and political reproduction of classes. This is why we must break with the figure of transclass as an exception in order to recapture the way in which a society generates its own deviations and oppositions while remaining fundamentally identical to itself. Social relations are thus marked by a dialectic of reproduction and non-reproduction in which classes are perpetuated through a transclass flow. Whether transclasses are formed by the ruin of the middle classes and heirs forced to proletarianize themselves or by the acquisition of a position within the petty or the big bourgeoisie, they are most of the time the result of a movement that maintains immobility in the guise of change. Therefore, passing through class does not introduce a revolutionary change but a conservative one; it renews reproduction by non-reproduction. In short, according to the formula consecrated by *The Leopard*, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."²⁰

Translated by Ted Stolze

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²⁰ *Translator's Note*: Jaquet quotes a line from Giuseppe Di Lampedusa's 1958 novel, *Il Gattopardo*; see Di Lampedusa 2007, p. 28.

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