

The Logic of Subsumption: an Elective Affinity Between Hegel and Marx

A Lógica da Subsunção: uma Afinidade Eletiva entre Hegel e Marx

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Abstract: There exists no resolution on exactly how Hegel's Science of Logic informed Marx while he was writing Capital Volume I. Efforts to establish a strict categorial homology between the two works falter against dissimilarities in their respective analytical structures while exorcising the substantive role of human freedom from Hegel's philosophy. As an alternative, I propose a guideline of 'elective affinity' be executed when considering the dialectics of Hegel and Marx. The present work applies such a principle to the category of 'subsumption'. I will demonstrate that the sublation of externality between subject and predicate within the judgment form of the Concept in Hegel's Logic shares conceptual affinity with Marx's theory of the formal and real subsumption of labor under capital. By characterizing my approach as an elective affinity, the present work aims to ground a proximity between the two thinkers less intent on constructing airtight alignments between categorial sequences than in drawing rational comparisons with which to delineate a decisive element of the critique of political economy: how it is that labor can logically be both the result and presupposition of capital.

Keywords: Hegel. Marx. Subsumption.

Resumo: Não existe uma resolução sobre como exatamente a Ciência da Lógica de Hegel informou Marx enquanto ele escrevia o volume I de O Capital. Tentativas de estabelecimento de uma homologia categorial estrita entre os dois trabalhos hesitam nas dissemelhanças de suas respectivas estruturas analíticas enquanto exorcizam o papel substantivo da liberdade humana da filosofia de Hegel. Como alternativa, proponho a diretriz de uma 'afinidade eletiva' quando se considera as dialéticas de Hegel e Marx. O presente trabalho aplica tal princípio à categoria da 'subsunção'. Irei demonstrar que a subsunção da externalidade entre sujeito e predicado dentro da forma do juízo da lógica hegeliana do conceito compartilha uma afinidade conceitual com a teoria marxiana da subsunção formal e real do trabalho sob o capital. Ao caracterizar minha abordagem como

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'afinidade eletiva', o presente trabalho procura fundamentar a proximidade entre esses dois pensadores menos com a intenção de construir um alinhamento rígido entre as sequências categoriais que em estabelecer comparações racionais com as quais delinear o elemento decisivo da crítica da economia política: como o trabalho pode ser logicamente tanto o resultado quanto a pressuposição do capital.

Palavras-Chave: Hegel. Marx. Subsunção.

A HOMOLOGY AND ITS KNOTS

'Let me confess,' said Charlotte, 'that when you call all these curious entities of yours affined, they appear to me to possess not so much an affinity of blood as an affinity of mind and soul. It is in just this way that truly meaningful friendships can arise among human beings: for antithetical qualities make possible a closer and more intimate union.'

- Goethe, *Elective Affinities*

Within the colossal and often cumbersome body of discourse surrounding Marx's relationship to Hegel, there has emerged a line of thinking in recent decades that aims at elucidating the complexity and, despite innumerable commentaries, the irresolution concerning the relation between the critique of political economy and Hegel's systematic philosophy. Here it is argued that the relation between Hegel and Marx can assist in articulating the relations of a given social order, and that together, their use of a dialectical method of exposition holds the key for conceptualizing the essence of social reality constitutive of capitalist society. This renovated inheritance of Hegel and Marx adopts the perspective that Hegel's Science of Logic is structurally homologous with Marx's Capital, Vol. I, a resemblance consisting in a 'systematic dialectic'² whereby each of the respective categorical articulations are arranged to conceptualize an existent concrete whole. As opposed to an 'historical dialectic', for which the sequence of categories corresponds to their appearance in history – a causal succession of linear historical stages – the systematic or 'New Dialectics' emphasizes the logical derivation of one category to the next. Here, the expositional ordering of the categories addresses itself to the comprehension of a totality, one wherein systematically interconnected categories express their moments

² Most notably featured within the work of Christopher J. Arthur, these efforts, in their variety, also can be associated with the works of Patrick Murray, Tony Smith, Roberto Fineschi and Geert Reuten, to name only a select few.

as existing synchronically and mutually presupposing one another as elements within an architectonic whole.

This systematic dialectic is best demonstrated within Hegel's Science of Logic and the Philosophy of Right, the former of which the whole amounts to the totality of reason, while the latter consists as the organism of modern civil society. What these works share with Marx's Capital, Vol. I is their methodological procedure of conceptual retroactive grounding, one through which every partial category is only understood and justified through a subsequent more complex one, rather than by a progressive deduction or simple propositional definition. At each step in the exposition, the whole is presupposed, and in Marx's case, this consists in his presentation of the forms of value, that is, from the category of the commodity through money to capital. In this sense, the dialectic is not an historical, efficient causality, but an exposition of a given whole which reproduces itself under its own logical necessity. For this, and to paraphrase Christopher J. Arthur, an idealist logic influences a materialist science, that is, preserving a logic while inverting its ontological presuppositions. As Arthur writes:

Hegel is the great expert on how an ideality would have to build itself up, moment by moment, into a self-actualising whole. If then, as I believe, capital has in part an ideal reality, then if it can be shown to incarnate Hegel's blueprint it can claim to be self-sustaining [...] Hegel's logic can be drawn on in such a study of capitalism because capital is a very peculiar object, grounded in a process of real abstraction in exchange in much the same way as Hegel's dissolution and reconstruction of reality is predicated on the abstractive power of thought. (Arthur, 2004, p. 8)

This notion of a systematic dialectic, and what is referred to as the 'homology thesis', offers a suitable point of departure for investigating the extent to which Hegel's philosophy is capable of illuminating, and thereby anticipating, the critique of political economy. These prospects hold true irrespective of Hegel's alleged pan-logicism, or what Marx, in his introduction to the Grundrisse manuscripts, described as succumbing to "the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought." (Marx, 1993, p. 101) However, there are those within the systematic dialectic tradition, specifically that of Tony Smith, who adopt a 'non-metaphysical' reading of Hegel, placing greater emphasis on the substantive movement of Hegel's own philosophy, for example, as the historical development of self-conscious

human freedom instantiated through various institutional forms. Here, “[t]he logic of Hegel’s system, that is, the dialectic of universal and individual, leads him to affirm a social order if and only if there is a “true reconciliation” between these two poles of the complex totality that is a social order” (Smith, 2003, p. 190) – a reconciliation remaining unachieved within the contradictions and antagonisms of capitalist society. Such becomes the case that the homology thesis confronts the difficulty of reconciling Hegel’s own logic with that of the substance of his philosophy as the drive for human freedom. Added to this problem are the recognized implicative differences between Marx’s interpretation of Hegel and Hegel himself, namely the extent to which Hegel actually sees empirical reality as merely momentary incarnation of the Idea without accounting for contingency.

There are additional difficulties however within the homology thesis itself. Within the discourse, there is much debate over where exactly the structural and categorial analogy resides between Capital vol. 1 and Hegel’s systematic philosophy. Whether, for example, the logic of capital corresponds more closely to Hegel’s essence-logic or to his logic of the concept remains an open question.³ Efforts are often made to establish a strict and complete one-to-one mapping of each categorial progression, frequently presenting more problems than it actually assists in elucidating Marx’s critique. As Smith has documented, these efforts must contend with numerous dis-analogies. (Smith, 2014) For example, unlike Hegel’s, Marx’s categories are not overcome, but repeat in a “bad infinity”; or that unlike the requirement to instantiate Hegel’s logic of the concept, capital does not reconcile universality, particularity and singularity, but instead relentlessly retains them in tension, contradiction and conflict.

Instead of attempting to solve the problems of a stringent homology by filling in the gaps between the respective conceptual structures under a reign of identity, the following work will exercise what I refer to as an ‘elective affinity’ or ‘loose homology’ between the dialectics of Hegel and Marx. This selective isomorphism does not attempt to grasp the totality of Marx’s categorial determinations as symmetrically mirrored in Hegel’s systematic philosophy, but instead scours Hegel for categorial insight that

³ For a recent survey on this debate, see Moseley, Fred and Smith, Tony (Eds). *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014.

advances the critique of political economy. Among the existing scholarship engaging with the structural homologies between Hegel and Marx, it is the work of Patrick Murray in particular that invokes this precept of elective affinity, albeit without mention. For example, in his essay “How Hegel Helped Marx Overturn Ricardo’s Theory of Profit”, Murray demonstrates the manner in which Marx was capable of overcoming Ricardo’s theory of profit and the labor theory of value through the conceptual resources of Hegel’s Logic. (Murray, 2014), While the essay concerns profit as the necessary appearance of surplus-value, Murray elicits an answer to the problem, posed by Marx, as to why value must assume its particular forms. This is a question never posed by classical political economy and yet, as we learn from Marx, remains fundamental for explaining the mediations between profit and labor. Murray convincingly demonstrates that this problem cannot be adequately answered without Hegel, specifically his logic of essence – wherein essence must appear as something other than itself. For Marx, this logic – through which the mutual dependence of appearance and essence calls into question the limits of formal dualisms – is an optimal conceptual resource for conceiving not only the necessity of surplus-value to appear as profit, but also in necessity of value to assume its particular concrete shapes.

Murray demonstrates that Marx’s method in *Capital* does not merely consist in circumstantial Hegelian echoes, but is in fact ontologically grounded in the Hegelian movement of form that unfolds the inner determinations of the categories. For Marx, this double movement from appearances to their essential determinations and back again allowed him to overcome the limits of classical political economy and to uncover the transformative dynamic of value. Similarly for Hegel, categories cannot sit still. They are necessarily compelled, through the transformation of form, to move beyond a static or narrow empiricism and reveal essential determinations. As Guy Debord once wrote, “[f]or Hegel the point was no longer to interpret the world, but to interpret the transformation of the world.” (Debord, 1983, §76) The merit of Murray’s essay is that it shows that the use Marx makes of Hegel’s concepts does not require a rigidly exact and consummately homologous reflection between their two systems. It should not be forgotten that Marx’s relation to Hegel is oriented by an appropriation, that is, not entirely a smooth continuation, nor simply a materialist break.

It will be in this spirit of adhering to an elective affinity between Hegel and Marx that the following work will proceed. As opposed to utilizing a systematic dialectic for uncovering a categorial homology between Hegel and Marx in accordance with a direct sequencing of concepts, what is to follow shall instead investigate a particular category in Marx's critique of political economy with the understanding that its appearance within Hegel's philosophical system better equips one for grasping the logical significance of Marx's usage. It will be the category of 'subsumption' that will be examined in the following work. While no strict categorial homology exists between Marx and Hegel on the category of subsumption, it will be demonstrated that Hegel's brief formulations nonetheless allow for an understanding of the subsumption of labor under capital insofar as this historical phenomenon operates in accordance with an ideal categorial necessity constitutive of the reproduction of a social totality. I will begin by examining a set of formulations by which Hegel, in his *Science of Logic*, utilizes the category of subsumption for reconciling the universal and particular with that of the self-movement of the Concept. From there, Marx's theory on the subsumption of labor under capital will be brought to bear in accordance with Hegel's categorial insights.

THE SUBSUMPTIVE RELATION OF SUBJECT AND PREDICATE IN HEGEL'S LOGIC

Hegel's *Science of Logic* concerns the determinations of thought, whereby modes of experience are translated into conceptual form. As Terry Pinkard helpfully clarifies:

Hegel is not simply some nineteenth-century German romantic listening to his own incantations of the World Spirit but a philosopher concerned with carefully working out the logical relations between all the different ways in which we experience things and talk about that experience. Nor is he the champion of those who would like to reject the principle of non-contradiction, as he is often supposed to be. To see Hegel in this light, as a kind of transcendental philosopher, is, I would maintain, the proper and most fruitful way to read him. (Pinkard, 1979, p. 435)

Within the *Logic*, the validity of the concepts are acquired through their immanent relations with one another, a progressive necessity which inheres the concepts determination from their own logic and movement, not merely connecting concepts, but constituting their determinateness and meaning. The transition of one concept to the next consists in a determinate negation for which a new concept becomes justified as the result and solution to an impasse within its previous moment. Within the third and final division of the *Logic* – “The Doctrine of the Concept” – Hegel approaches the structure of conceptuality *itself*, whereby now that an account of the logic of concepts of objects has been given, a rationale for the rationale must be untangled. The “Doctrine of Concept” seeks to thereby provide an answer to the following ‘transcendental’ question: what are the logical conditions of the possibility of thought’s having established the categories that is so far has? (Pinkard, 1979) The logic of conceptuality is thereby the truth of the doctrines of Being and Essence insofar as it establishes the structure from which they were established, an effort at fully accounting for a concept’s identity in the other which provides it with its determinateness. That is, thought must categorize itself as categorizing its other.

The exemplar in this dynamic consists in the relation between the categories of universal and particular. It is within the “Judgment” chapter that their immanent relations are unfolded and in which Hegel, as will be shown, adopts the category of subsumption. Within the “Subjectivity” section, this chapter concerns different forms of logical judgment as it has been understood by traditional logic. The three conceptual moments of the universal, particular, and individual are brought into relation with one another through the judgment form containing a subject and predicate, both of which are, in their essence, self-subsistent. The subject and predicate are the determinations of the judgment, however the question for Hegel is how the *relation* of subject and predicate in the judgment is determined.

At first, the understanding grasps this relation of a subject attached to a predicate as an external relation, one wherein the difference between the universal and the particular is strictly separated in an indifferent to one another. Here, the subject can be taken in its relation to the predicate as either an individual or particular over against and the universal, or as an individual over against the particular. As Hegel writes, “From this *subjective* standpoint, then, subject and predicate are considered to be complete, each

on its own account, apart from the other: the subject as an object that would exist even if it did not possess this predicate; the predicate as a universal determination that would exist even if it did not belong to this subject.” (Hegel, 1991, p. 625) However, the subject is more than what it *immediately* is as pronounced by the universality of the predicate. As Hegel writes in his *Encyclopedia Logic*, “[o]ne’s first impression about the Judgment is the independence of the two extremes, the subject and the predicate [...] The copula ‘is’, however, enunciates the predicate of the subject, and so that external subjective subsumption is again put in abeyance, and the Judgment taken as a determination of the object itself.” (Hegel, 1991, §166) Without here examining the intricacies of this disclosure in all of its detail, Hegel demonstrates that through the copula *S is P*, an identity emerges for which the determination of the subject equally applies to the predicate and vice versa. As Hegel writes,

The subject is the specific determinateness, and the predicate is this posited determinateness of the subject; the subject is determined only in its predicate, or, only in the predicate is it a subject; in the predicate it has returned into itself and is therein the universal. Now in so far as the subject is the self-subsistent, this identity has the relationship that the predicate does not possess a self-subsistence of its own, but has its subsistence only in the subject; it inheres in the subject. (Hegel, 1991, p. 628)

For this, “the copula expresses that *the subject is the predicate*”. (Hegel, 1991, p. 628) The predicate is a self-subsisting universality that wields the determination of a subject and as such, particularity has its essence in the universal.

The judgment form presupposes the Concept as its essential ground, a self-identical entity even in its own differentiation. Hence, since the copula “is” derives from the nature of the Concept, the universal and the individual are of its own constituents and cannot be isolated. The impression of an external nature between the universal and particular becomes apparent when judgments are described as the result of an ascription of the predicate to the subject. Here, the understanding grasps universals as externally related to particulars, rather than as mutually determining. Disregarded in this common understanding are the differences of particulars to be of a universal instance, whereby the universal is grasped as specifying itself into

an individual, giving itself external reality through its particularity. For this, “[t]he judgment is an expression of finitude.” (Hegel, 1991, §168)

For Hegel, while the universal and the individual are distinguished, an identity nonetheless remains between them for which they are elements in the constitution of the Concept. As Hegel summarizes within the *Encyclopedia Logic*:

The abstract terms of the judgment, ‘The individual is the Universal’, present the subject (as negatively self-relating) as what is immediately concrete, while the predicate is what is abstract, indeterminate, in short, the universal. But the two elements are connected together by an ‘is’: and thus the predicate (in its universality) must also contain the speciality of the subject, must, in short, have particularity: and so is realised the identity between subject and predicate; which, being thus unaffected by this difference in form, is the content.” (Hegel, 1991, §169)

It first appears as if the subject is the individual, while the predicate is the universal. However, the judgment develops further so that the subject ceases to be merely the immediate individual and the predicate no longer merely an abstract universal. The subject acquires the significance of the particular and universal, while the predicate attains the characteristics of particular and individual. As a result, the subject and predicate self-subsist in their mutually constitutive identity. As Hegel writes,

The predicate which is attached to the subject should, however, also *belong* to it, that is, be in and for itself identical with it. Through this significance of *attachment* [...] the indifferent, outer subsistence of subject and predicate are sublated again: this action *is* good; the *copula* indicates that the predicate belongs to the *being* of the subject and is not merely externally combined with it. (Hegel, 1991, p. 626)

The judgment expresses the self-differentiation of an objective and, in its individuality, a concrete universal, one which contains its particulars within itself through its self-particularization. Here, the meaning of the particular comes to be found within the universal and vice versa. Ultimately, the goal of the movement of the judgment is to posit the self-differentiated identity of the Concept.

It is within this dynamic, unveiling the mutually constitutive relation between subject and predicate, that Hegel employs the category of subsumption. While not a central category within Hegel’s systematic philosophy, a process of subsumption is invoked to express the

determination of one category reflected in the other, in this case, the relation of subject and predicate, and therefore calling into question their external conjunction and developing an essential unity. As Hegel writes,

When in the case of subsumption one thinks of an external connection of subject and predicate and the subject is conceived of as a self-subsistent something, the subsumption refers to the subjective act of judgment above-mentioned in which one starts from the self-subsistence of both subject and predicate. From this standpoint subsumption is only the application of the universal to a particular or an individual, which is placed under the universal in accordance with a vague idea that it is of inferior quality. (Hegel, 1991, p. 629)

Here, the appearance of an external relation of subject and predicate posits subsumption as merely the application of the universal to a particular, an attachment which possesses a “vague idea” that the particular is merely subservient to the universal in relation of one-way determination. However, as it is progressively disclosed by Hegel that the logical relations of subject and predicate cannot be grasped as external to one another, it is the relation of subsumption which allows for the conceptual insight that both subject and predicate consist in an identity of mutually-presupposing poles.⁴

This development of the principle of subsumption consists in the judgment form of inherence as a movement of the predicate replacing the subject as the fundamental component of the relation, one for the subject is determined. The transition to a judgment of subsumption attempts to acquire a predicate that adequately accords with a subject and in doing so, the judgment form concludes the singular to be universal, such that in the words of Jean Hyppolite, the entire “[p]rogression consists rather in the universal’s self-determination, the universal’s becoming for-itself, that is, the Subject.”⁵ The logical significance of the predicate as subsumed by the subject discloses their mutually constitutive relation, one for which the particular is subsumed

⁴ John McTaggart’s 1910 commentary on the *Logic* goes so far as to translate the section “Judgment of Reflection” as “Judgment of Subsumption”: “The only ambiguity in the nomenclature here is [...] Judgment of Inherence and Judgment of Subsumption. are not, it will be seen, translations of the titles given by, Hegel. But he suggests *Urtheil der Inharenz* and *Urtheil der Subsumtion* as alternative names (G. L. iii. 94) and, as these seem more expressive than the original titles, I have thought it better to adopt them.” (McTaggart, 1910, p. 189)

⁵ As Hyppolite continues: “The concept is the universal sense that always remains universal in every particular sense, subsuming itself [...] Its self-determination is the judgment that reproduces at the level of the concept the diremption of essence, the appearance of the particular in the universal, and of the universal in the particular.” (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 176)

into the universal while the universal must necessarily instantiate itself within the particular. Such a dynamic can be derived from the subsumptive relation progressively disclosing the essence of its identity within the Concept. What therefore appears as an external relation, is in fact internal *from the outset*, the external here as a moment within the internal process of the self-reflective Concept, for which particulars emerge as elements of a systematic and self-specifying concrete whole.

The manner in which the category of subsumption is utilized within Hegel's *Logic* functions to demonstrate the self-subsistence of the subject and predicate for which the self-determination of the universal logically generates the particular as its identical instances. Hegel begins with the immediacy that the subject and predicate, or that of the universal and particular, relate to one another externally, and progressively discloses, through the principle of subsumption, their internal relation within the identity of the Concept. The implications of Hegel's logical formulations and the dynamic of subsumption will now be contrasted with Marx's own theory of the formal and real subsumption of the labor process under capital.⁶ It should be noted however that while Marx does not directly appropriate Hegel's use of the category of subsumption, their structural similarities allow for a sharpened comprehension of the intrinsic logic of capital for constituting its own opposite, labor, within the value social relation. As is well known, Marx, in numerous letters from 1857 to the end of his life, described how Hegel, especially his *Science of Logic*, assisted in working through the theoretical problems of value. As such, I will argue that the process by which the externality of the subject and predicate is sublated within the judgment form of the Concept offers insight into Marx's theory of the formal and real subsumption of labor under capital. Let us first however review the basic fundamentals of Marx's theory of subsumption.

⁶The category of 'subsumption' is featured most prominently in Marx's unpublished works, specifically in that of the 1861-63 manuscripts and the unfinished concluding chapter of *Capital*, Vol. I, "Results of the Direct Production Process", written between the summer of 1863 and the summer of 1864 and part of the third draft to *Capital*. Marx's use of the term is less likely to be the result of any technically specific meaning than of the term's general usage within the history of German philosophy. As such, the category generally refers to the ranging of some mass of particulars under a universal, however, within German Idealist philosophy, the term is often used in a more dynamic sense to indicate a process whereby universal and particular are brought into relation.

THE SUBSUMPTIVE RELATION OF CAPITAL AND LABOR IN MARX'S CAPITAL

From the 1861-63 draft of *Capital* onwards, subsumption, for Marx, is the subsumption of the particularities of the labor-process under the abstract universality of the valorization-process of capital. It is within the draft chapter “Results of the Direct Production Process of Production” however – the so-called ‘third draft’ of *Capital* – that the category of subsumption features most prominently.⁷ It is only by first distinguishing the two primary methods by which surplus-value is extracted from the production process however, itself the defining purpose of the capitalist mode of production, that Marx’s concepts of the formal and real subsumption of labor under capital can be properly understood.

Absolute surplus-value refers to a method for increasing the rate of surplus-value, particularly by prolonging the working day in absolute terms. Here, the working day is presupposed as divided into two segments: that of necessary and surplus labor, the first of which consists in the socially-necessary average amount of time the laborer must work to produce the value equal to the means of her subsistence in wages. In contrast, surplus labor refers to the time for which the laborer produces beyond the value she receives in wages. The production of surplus-value consists in the obligation to work more than is necessary for the laborers own reproduction, that is, a compulsion to perform surplus labor and create surplus produce. By extending the working day, the ratio between necessary and surplus labor is adjusted so that while the time of necessary labor may remain the same, surplus labor increases in accordance with the overall extension of the working day. Absolute surplus-value also however constitutes the starting point for the production of *relative* surplus-value. This increase in the rate of surplus-value is occasioned by a change in the relative magnitudes of the components of the working day, i.e. a change in the productivity or intensity of labor. The raising of productivity of labor is accomplished by introducing into the labor process cooperation, division of labor, machinery, etc.⁸, each

⁷ Otherwise, Marx’s published edition of *Capital* Vol. 1 contains only one reference to the distinction between formal and real subsumption. This is located within the English translation of chapter 16 “Absolute and Relative Surplus Value”.

⁸ As Marx writes, “this mode of production aims at bringing the value of the individual commodity down to its minimum, and therefore producing as many commodities as possible

of which expresses an increase in the quantity of commodities produced relative to a decrease in the value of necessary labor. Lowering the value of labor-power through the cheapening of subsistence commodities decreases the necessary labor of a given working day, allowing the capitalist to increase surplus-value because of the increase in the productivity of labor. As such, the value of labor-power stands in an inverse relation to the productivity of labor.

Marx introduces the distinction between formal and real subsumption of labor under capital to explicate the origin and content of the increased productivity of labor, without which no increase in surplus-value is possible. However it is important here to note, in accordance with the logical significance of Marx's categories, that absolute and relative surplus-value possess an interconnection with one another and do not conjointly exclude one another, a mutual presupposition that – as will be seen – extends also to the categories of formal and real subsumption. The modes of absolute and relative surplus-value extraction are conceptually distinctive and yet remain presuppositions of one another. Relative surplus-value is absolute insofar as it compels the absolute prolongation of the working day. Conversely, absolute surplus-value is relative insofar as it anticipates its own finite limits and must seek expression within the productivity of labor. Here, absolute surplus-value is pushed to its utmost limit with the development of relative surplus-value, which is itself only possible by presupposing the working day as given and divided into necessary and surplus labor, i.e. by establishing the conditions for the development of productive power.

For Marx, it is the *formal* subsumption of labor under capital that suffices for the production of absolute surplus-value. This consists in subsuming non-capitalist production processes to the capitalist without necessarily making any changes to the technological configuration of the labor process itself. Here, capitalist production only occurs at the level of a social form, under an economic command within a buyer-seller relation of free exchange, one which nonetheless consists in a relation of exploitation directed towards

in a given labour time, or operating the transformation of the object of labour into a product with the smallest possible quantity of labour in the shortest possible labour time [...] The common, simultaneous use of the conditions of production leads to a fall in their relative value, even though there is an increase in the absolute amount of value they represent." (Marx, 1861-63")

the expansion of value. Within formal subsumption, capital commands a labor process inherited from another mode of production, and as such, consists in an *external* supervision of the labor process by the capitalist, one for which the real concrete labor process remains unaltered despite being directed to the production of surplus-value, although not internally configured for this purpose. Here, the worker and capitalist meet as simple commodity owners, or, as buyers and sellers. The formal relation of buyer and seller, at least ideally, displaces all “other politically or socially fixed relation of domination and subordination” (Marx, 1861-63) and gradually, the objective conditions of one’s labor (raw materials, instruments, etc.) come to belong to the capitalist. It is through this process that the conditions of labor come to confront the laborer as capital. As Marx writes, “[t]he more completely these *conditions of labour* confront him as the property of another, the more completely is *the relation of capital and wage labour* present *formally*, hence the more complete the formal subsumption of labour under capital.” (Marx, 1861-63)

The formal subsumption of labor under capital consists in extinguishing a previous independence of the labor process. Marx’s examples traverse the subsumption of peasants, journeymen, handicraftsmen, apprentices and masters to the direct control of a capitalist. Such a transformation amounts to a different kind of compulsion to perform surplus labor, one which contains the incentive to produce in quantities exceeding the measure of the worker’s “traditional” needs. As Marx continues, “a new *relation of purchase and sale*, and eliminates all patriarchal and political admixtures from the relation of exploitation. To be sure, a relation of *domination and subordination* enters the relation of production itself; this derives from capital’s ownership of the labour it has incorporated and from the nature of the labour process itself.” (Marx, 1861-63) The formal subsumption contains the propensity of the free worker to preserve and internalize the compulsion to sell her labor-power. Formal subsumption is therefore the general foundation of the capitalist mode of production, although – as will be seen – not its full expression. As yet, there is no intrinsic relation between capital and labor but only a limited subordination in which *individual* capitals direct an external labor process to the production of surplus-value. As Marx writes, under the capitalist mode of production, “capital must increase in value and assume social dimensions; hence it must

shed any *individual* character.” (Marx, 1864) Within the formal subsumption of labor under capital, capital is not yet fully dominant in society as a whole. As he continues,

[t]he distinguishing character of the *formal subsumption of labour* under capital can be made most plain by comparison with situations in which capital already exists in particular subordinate functions, but not yet in its ruling function, the function in which it determines the general form of society, as directly buying labour and directly appropriating the production process. (Marx, 1864)

Since formal subsumption rests on the production of absolute surplus-value, and because there are social and finite limits to the extension of the working day which therefore constrains the amount of surplus-value capital can effectively extract from a formally subsumed labor process, capital, in the production of relative surplus-value, distinguishes a new relation to labor characterized by *real* subsumption. Once capital is in an external command of the labor process, the extraction of relative surplus-value inaugurates the transformation of the actual material content of the labor process itself. The real subsumption of labor under capital is characteristic of the modern factory with its constant revolution of production techniques and methods: cooperation, the division of labor within the workshop, and large-scale machinery. “Real subsumption consummates the dominance of capitalist production because not only does production take the form of a process directed towards the augmentation of value, but this goal is inscribed in its concrete actuality and determines its means, methods and development; the entire production process is determined *by, as and for* capital” (Sáenz De Sicilia, 2013). Through this *internalized* capital-labor relation, the real subsumption of labor transforms labor by giving it new shape. Only here does capital create a mode of production adequate to itself. The subsumption of the labor process under the valorization process of capital becomes “real” insofar as capital does not merely rest with the labor process as it is given, but steps beyond the formal possession of that process to transform it in its own image. The purpose of production for use is abolished by the purpose of production for exchange. As Marx states, “neither the individual’s own consumption nor the immediate needs of a given circle of customers remain a barrier to production; now the only barrier is the magnitude of the capital itself.” (Marx, 1861-63) Here, the production of

relative surplus-value renders the productivity of labor into the productive power of capital and that here, “the worker has altogether ceased to be the producer of a commodity”. (Marx, 1861-63) Now, the objective conditions of the labor process “do not appear as subsumed under the worker; rather, he appears as subsumed under them”. (Marx, 1861-63)

Real subsumption emerges as the constitution of the capital-labor relation in its full actualization⁹ for which each pole of the relation mutually presupposes one another within the valorization process. Real subsumption is therefore the internal and mutual determination of capital and labor within the singular identity of valorization. Real subsumption signals the specifically *capitalist* mode of production proper, wherein capital becomes the universal, socially predominant form of the production, seizing industries previously only formally subordinate to capital. Real subsumption therefore can be witnessed as the perfection of subsumption – capital thoroughly penetrates material reality and moves fluidly through this ground of its own being, shaping material adequate to its content, i.e. the production of surplus-value. “Thus *capital* has created *capital*” (Marx, 1864) and becomes the universal social relation.

AN ELECTIVE AFFINITY OF CONCEPT AND VALUE

Having explicated the dynamic of subsumption for constituting the internal relation between capital and labor, the category of subsumption can now be further illuminated through the previous analysis of Hegel’s formulations within the *Science of Logic*. One can recall the principle of subsumption within the “Judgment” section as allowing for the relation of subject and predicate to be progressively disclosed as an *internal*, rather than *external*, relation. The appearance of their relation as external and indifferent to one another nonetheless functions to execute this revelation, one for which, as a result, the particular is subsumed into the universal while the universal must necessarily instantiate itself within the particular. Such a

⁹ Marx compares this significance with formal subsumption when he writes, “[a]s capital’s simple taking hold of the labor process, the formal subsumption of labor under capital can be understood as the transition to the capitalist mode of production: it is “the subsumption under capital of a mode of labour already developed before the emergence of the capital-relation”. (Marx, 1864)

dynamic is derived from the subsumptive relation progressively disclosing the essence of identity within the Concept.

Now, for Marx, if one speculatively identifies capital as a subject and the labor process as a predicate, the dynamic of subsumption reveals the mutually-constitutive class relation under the identity of the valorization process, one which only emerges explicitly within real subsumption, that is, when the externality between capital and labor is broken down. Just as for Hegel, “[t]he predicate expresses the subject in its Concept” (Hegel, 1991, p. 629), the labor process expresses itself as capital through the process of subsumption. For Marx then, the identity of subject and predicate assumes the role of the self-valorization of value.

It is first within formal subsumption that the subject, capital, and the predicate, the labor process, first confront one another. To appropriate Hegel’s aforementioned description, “[o]ne’s first impression about the Judgment is the independence of the two extremes, the subject and the predicate [...] The copula ‘is’, however, enunciates the predicate of the subject, and so that external subjective subsumption is again put in abeyance, and the Judgment taken as a determination of the object itself.” (Hegel, 1991, §166) Here, if one grasps the connecting copula as the exchange between buyer and seller constitutive of the formal subsumption of labor under capital, the transition to a mode of production that is exclusively directed towards the production of exchange value must presuppose the structural capacity of labor to be the source of surplus value. That is, through the principle of exchange, labor becomes labor *for* capital, rather than in its isolated self-subsistence. The self-subsistence of the predicate becomes inextricably fettered to its subject. As Marx writes, “[labour] posits itself objectively, but it posits its objectivity as its own non-being, or as the being of its non-being - the being of capital.” (Marx, 1864) Here, the self-determination of labor as a predicate only emerges through the mediation of its subject, capital, and as such, consists in its negation. As Marx writes, “[t]he mystification inherent in the *capital-relation* also enters the picture. Labour’s power of preserving value appears as capital’s power of self-preservation, labour’s power of creating value appears as capital’s power of self-valorisation, and altogether, in line with the concept, *objectified* labour appears as the employer of living labour.” (Marx, 1864) Labor thereby only possesses meaning insofar as it is the internal appendage of capital. As

reified in value, labor realizes itself in a mode of denial, i.e. *formally* and *really* posited as a mode of existence of capital. The labor process thereby takes on the appearance of the valorization process, just as use value appears as the bearer of exchange-value. Hegel's own formulations demonstrate this dynamic when he writes, "[n]ow in so far as the subject is the self-subsistent, this identity has the relationship that the predicate does not possess a self-subsistence of its own, but has its subsistence only in the subject; it *inheres* in the subject." (Hegel, 1991, p. 628)

Capital is the determination of labor as *other*, a moment that is logically included in the concept of valorization itself and executed by its own self-movement through the principle of formal and real subsumption. Just as "[t]he predicate expresses the subject in its Concept" (Hegel, 1991, p. 629), the labor process expresses capital through the production of surplus value. Labor as such remains the determinate source of the production of surplus value despite the fact that the positive identity of the relation consists in the negation of all concrete labor through exchange. For this, again, Hegel highlights this logical dynamic when he writes, "[t]he relation is universal, for it is the positive identity of the two, of subject and predicate; but it is also *determinate*, for the determinateness of the predicate is that of the subject" (Hegel, 1991, p. 629) Labor, within real subsumption, thereby emerges as the labor *of* and *for* capital, a pole in the relation for which capital posits its own concrete negation and for which remains the only condition of possibility for its self-subsistence as a predicate to the subject of capital.¹⁰ Just as "the individual and the particular are contingent determinations in the subject; it is their absolute possibility" (Hegel, 1991, p. 629), so too is labor is the contingent determination of capital, its absolute possibility exposed through the principle of subsumption. The real subsumption of the labor process under

¹⁰ Hegel, in his *Encyclopedia Logic*, elaborates on this intrinsic logical relation of subject and predicate when he writes the following: "The subject as negative self-relation (§§163, 166) is the stable sub-stratum in which the predicate has its subsistence and where it is ideally present. The predicate, as the phrase is, inheres in the subject. Further, as the subject is in general and immediately concrete, the specific connotation of the predicate is only one of the numerous characters of the subject. Thus the subject is ampler and wider than the predicate. Conversely, the predicate as universal is self-subsistent, and indifferent whether this subject is or not. The predicate outflanks the subject, subsuming it under itself: and hence on its side is wider than the subject. The specific content of the predicate (§19) alone constitutes the identity of the two." (Hegel, 1991, §170) This "specific content" of the predicate construed as the labor process, it can be said, consists, in all of its qualitative determinateness, of living labor, the necessary content for the self-valorization of value, i.e. the Concept.

capital signals the objective autonomy of the self-valorization of value, a “*differenceless identity* [that] really constitutes the true relation of the subject to the predicate.” (Hegel, 1991, p. 629)¹¹

CONCLUSION

It is been the aim of the present work to sketch the structural similarities of Hegel and Marx’s use of the category of subsumption, one which allows for a beneficent comprehension of the intrinsic logic of capital for constituting its own opposite, labor, within the value social relation. Here, the process by which the externality of the subject and predicate is sublated within the judgment form of the Concept echoes Marx’s theory of the formal and real subsumption of labor under capital. Subsumption is a moment within the logical exposition of the relation of capital and labor. Within this exposition, value is a category that presupposes a fully developed concrete whole, one whose moments are entirely constitutive of it and which possess, although does not immediately reveal, a stated logic of determination. Capital, as value-in-process, emerges as self-determining – determined only from the logic of the categories it includes. As with Hegel’s self-positing Concept, implicit in the concept of capital is the impulse to posit its own presuppositions. Subsumption can be considered as a mechanism of *Formbestimmtheit* for which capital incorporates both human and material elements adequate to its own concept. The dialectic of capitalist production is one in which “the form seeks to secure and stabilize itself through subsuming material production and turning it into a bearer of self-valorization.” (Arthur, 2004, p. 105) As Marx writes, “it becomes manifest as an adequate embodiment of the *law of value* which develops fully only on the foundation of capitalist production.” (Marx, 1864) Here, capital, along with Hegel’s Absolute, reproduces all the relevant conditions of its own existence in its own

¹¹ The distinction that nonetheless remains between subject and predicate, can here, speculatively, be described in terms of the prospects for locating class struggle within a categorial exposition. As Hegel writes, “[w]hat the judgment enunciates to start with is that the subject is the predicate; but since the predicate is supposed not to be what the subject is, we are faced with a contradiction which must resolve itself, pass over into a result” (Hegel, 1991, p. 630) The identity of capital and labor nonetheless posits an internal difference, one of real material consequence and conflict insofar as the interests of capital and labor are only synchronized only from a certain point of view, that is, from their mutual reproduction through the class relation. Otherwise, from a sociological perspective, the interests between capital and labor could not be further apart.

movement of categorial determination, a process through which the concrete labor process appears as a predicate to the inner essence of self-valorization.

By characterizing my approach as guided by an elective affinity between Hegel and Marx, I have sought to ground a proximity between the two thinkers less intent on constructing airtight alignments between categorial sequences than in drawing rational comparisons with which to delineate a decisive element of the critique of political economy: how it is that labor can logically be both the result and presupposition of capital. For this, Hegel's *Logic* stands as a critical conceptual resource for illuminating the conditions of a society constituted by capital. Hegel's logic of subject and predicate by no means replicates Marx's theory of real and formal subsumption as an austere homology. Instead, what we have is a conceptual resource for deciphering the riddle of how labor can appear as both the result and presupposition of capital. An elective affinity between Hegel and Marx allows here for a sharpened understanding on the intrinsic logic of capital to constitute labor as its own opposite. In this way, I have sought to hold on to the truth of the capital-fetish, namely that while the essential source of profit remains unpaid labor, the rational kernel of this relation equally entails capital positing its own presuppositions – that is, as both substance and subject.¹²

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¹² The present paper is very much indebted to Fred Moseley and Patrick Murray for the opportunity of responding to the latter's essay, "How Hegel Helped Marx Overturn Ricardo's Theory of Profit", during the April 2015 Historical Materialism Conference in New York.

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