

Framing Peer Production's Relation to Capitalism with Marxism: Complement or Alternative?

This article examines the relation between peer production and capitalism on a systemic and theoretical level. It helps us to contextualize peer production historically and structurally as well to gain perspectives on the conditions surrounding peer producers' perceptions and valorisations of their projects in relation to capitalism. The performative function of Marxism is here of some interest. The theoretical perspective is that of *critical political* economy.¹

Tiziana Terranova holds that peer production investigates the possibility of creating a commons-based economy with its mode of production, but not necessarily antagonistically in relation to capital. She stresses that the *evolutionary* idea is central to what she calls the P2P principles, which are often put up against Marxism's *antagonistic* interpretation of social production.

The evolutionist motif is preferred to antagonism and is used to sustain the possibility of thinking of the economy as an ecological system, that would allow for, at least at first, the coexistence of different forms of productive organization and social cooperation valorization that can coexist side by side, at least until the day when the success of p2p will render other forms of economic organization obsolete (Terranova 2010, p157).

The further aim of the article is to investigate how this P2P idea of evolution differs and can be merged with a Marxist analysis of capital's contradictions, without forgetting the difference between the actual peer producers and peer production's theorists. It will be shown how Marxism and closely related theories can strengthen our understanding of peer production's growth within a crisis-prone capitalism. But it is also suggested that the P2P principles' downplaying of antagonism in relation to capitalism holds some strategic value. Struggles against the normalisation processes of the market give capital energy and pulse. Massimo De Angelis names it "the claustrophobic dialectic that needs to be overcome". Exoduses, lines of flights, emergences,

¹ This article elaborates on arguments first put forward in my dissertation *Frihetens rike: wikipedianer om sin praktik, sitt produktionssätt och kapitalismen* [Realm of Freedom: Wikipedians on Their Practice, Mode of Production and Capitalism] (2015) Hägersten: Tankekraft förlag. An English book version (Palgrave Macmillan) is forthcoming.

and ruptures with norms and values, are moments of creative acts that are taken back to the measure of capital under capitalism (De Angelis 2007, p3). Thus, *not* all struggles against capitalism have progressive results.

Peer production projects (PPPs) like Wikipedia are a variety of the autonomist Marxists' idea of an *exodus* from capitalist society (Virno 1996a). In a study of Wikipedia several of my informants understood the encyclopaedia as an oasis of trustworthy and ad-free information and knowledge (even if the main ideological position was to stress Wikipedia's potential to improve life within capitalism) (Lund 2015a). This notion of a safe haven and identity with the outside of capitalism can be understood in several ways: straight forwardly, of course, as an oasis in a capitalist desert of biased information, but Marxist theory points to the potential realism of other interpretations and strategies for peer production that are not as easy for capital to co-opt. Marxist interpretations of the relation between capitalism's inside and outside, theories of coexisting historical modes of production, analyses of cognitive capitalism, and Marxist crisis theory will be drawn on to make the point.

Inside and outside

Zygmunt Bauman holds that it is mandatory, obsessed, continuous, unstoppable and always incomplete modernization, with its unquenchable thirst for creative destruction, which distinguishes capitalist modernity from all other historical forms of human coexistence (Bauman 2000, p28). Karl Polanyi completes the argument, claiming that the economy prior to capitalism was embedded in social and cultural life. The pre-capitalist societies were organized by different principles for reciprocal and re-distributional economising (Polanyi 2001, pp49, 57):

[T]he orderly production and distribution of goods was secured through a great variety of individual motives disciplined by general principles of behavior. Among these motives gain was not prominent. Custom and law, magic and religion cooperated in inducing the individual to comply with rules of behavior which, eventually, ensured his functioning in the economic system (Polanyi 2001, p57).

Polanyi's insights correlate with the ideas of the critical Soviet scholar Evgeny Pashukanis, who criticized and historicized the *legal form*. Pashukanis engaged with the sociological roots of the legal form to demonstrate "the relative and historically limited nature of the fundamental juridical concepts" (Pashukanis cited fr. Head 2008, p170). The regulation of society could under certain conditions assume a legal character, but the legal form was not a trans-historical phenomenon.

There is no denying that there is a collective life among animals too which is also regulated in one way or another. But it would not occur to us to assert that the relations of bees and ants are regulated by *law*. Turning to primitive peoples, we do see the seeds of law in them, but the greater part of their relations are regulated extra-legally, by religious observances for instance (Pashukanis 1983, p79)

Even in capitalist society many services like the postal and rail services, as well as the military, to name a few, could not in their entirety be related to “the sphere of *legal* regulation”. Timetables regulated in a different manner than the laws concerning the liability of the railways (Pashukanis 1983, p79).

The social anthropologist David Graeber sees the extra-legal regulations from another angle as a *communist baseline* that has existed in most societies. People tend to return to a “rough-and-ready communism” when different sorts of catastrophes occur. Hierarchies and markets are then perceived as a luxury phenomenon that no one can afford. Social discourse and communication is in itself built on communism. Lies, insults and other verbal aggressions gain much of their strength from the fact that people normally do not use them. Different forms of politeness, as when we are being asked for a light or if we have a cigarette to spare, and the obligation-side of the communist formula – *from each according to his ability* – is so minimal that we follow it without thinking about it, are complemented by an understanding of the second part of the formula, *to each according to his needs*, where it is evident that people with acute or spectacular needs (as if someone is drowning) also have a right to be saved if someone has the opportunity to help out. To summarize: communism is the foundation of all sociality, communism makes society possible. The communist principle is the rule as long as people do not look upon each other as enemies, the need is sufficiently big, and the cost reasonable. To share with each other is central in hard times as well as in festive times (Graeber 2011, p96–99).

Markets and the legal form were according to Polanyi and Pashukanis social and historical constructions deviating from past history. The transition from isolated markets to a market economy, from regulated to self-regulated markets, is a central transformation in history. The dissociation of the economy from social life to a special sphere where it is assigned a characteristic economic motive, is described as a “singular departure” by Polanyi (Polanyi 2001, p74). This separate market economy then has to include all industrial elements, at the same time as work and land are fictive commodities that are not produced by man to be commodities and are nothing other than the people that society consists of and the natural milieu it exists within (Polanyi 2001, pp74–75).²

²Polanyi states about work/labour: “Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized” (Polanyi 2001, p75).

The people that society consists of and the natural milieus are the *substance* of society, which within capitalism are subordinated under the *formal* market economy and its abstract laws. Capitalism is characterized by having a substantial and informal outside in relation to the formal market economy. Market capitalism cannot survive without its substantial outside. Fleischer describes Polanyi's view on economy as "man's exchanges with his natural and social life milieu forms a substantial economy" and some of them "follows a logic that is 'economic'" (Fleischer 2012, p19).³

Theoretically this perspective opens up our understanding of capitalism and the alternatives to it. Is it enough for this substantial and informal outside to be an outside, or do tendencies exist within it to challenge the power of the formal economy with the aim of once again *embedding* the exchange process within social and cultural life? Projects like Wikipedia with its voluntary participants driven by a whole range of motives other than economic gain, within a project that is regulated by rules of thumb, netiquette, principles of reciprocity, and combinations of networked and hierarchical organisation, contribute to new forms of social and cultural embeddedness of economic productivity, mainly outside of the legal form.

The outside to capital can also be portrayed as alternative social practices in the form of struggles based in alternative forms of valorisation. De Angelis speaks of *value practices* and claims that individuals are "singular agents" that bear both capitalist value practices *and* alternative value practices. Social interactions in the market turn dominant meanings of the capitalist value system into a *programme* which constitutes part of disciplinary processes, and create norms for social cooperation. These value practices enter into conflict with other value practices and *value struggles* emerge and constitute an "ongoing tension in the social body" (De Angelis 2007, pp29–30). In this context, and when analysing peer production, Marx's notion of *concrete labour* as the true non-capital (and thus outside to capital) could be interpreted as meaning that the alternative value practices (not exchange value!) of concrete labour – especially in the case of peer production's social cooperation – are the most potent ones of all alternative value processes.

Marxism and theories akin to it, with their historical and broad perspective, offer a way to move beyond neo-classical economic theory and capitalism for the peer producers. Marxism potentially empowers an already organized and active outside to capital, and is – in the hands of Polanyi, Pashukanis and Graeber – compatible with the evolutionary P2P idea of coexisting and organized value practices.

³ Author's translation from Swedish.

Peer production: *socially useful* or *socially necessary*?

There is a difference between *socially useful* productive activities and *socially necessary* productive activities. The first alternative suggests an activity that is useful for society, but not deemed to be so useful as to be considered necessary, which the second alternative is. It is not the input of labour per se that creates value; value is a social relation and is decided socially amongst people. The value theory of Karl Marx is therefore not a theory of labour but a theory of the “modern socialization of necessity” (Fleischer 2012, p22).⁴ In capitalism all socially necessary products have a value and are sold as commodities in exchange for money. De Angelis contends in line with this that when value systems harden into value programs these latter *impose* patterns of behaviour regarded as being necessary (De Angelis 2007, p28).

Marxism provides peer producers with a provocative question: should peer production be useful or necessary? Should peer production complement and vitalize capitalism (useful), or form an alternative germ of a commons-based economy (socially necessary)? What speaks in favour of projects like Wikipedia striving to be seen as socially (or as commonly) necessary, even if they do not sell a commodity and want information to be free? Such a stand would lead to a value struggle with capital. A commons-based value programme would create a new “space” for the socialization of necessity in between both the state and the market. Especially autonomist Marxists introduce the commons as a new political ground, but some of them are using a flawed version of the value theory – as will be argued further on – which clouds their understanding of the issue at hand. The last question opens up for a critical political economic discussion of peer production’s relations to capitalism. The question puts a finger on how capitalism and commons-based peer production co-operate, potentially can co-operate, but also clash with each other. Sylvère Lotringer comments interestingly on the multi-faceted social subject of the *multitude*:

Capitalism itself is revolutionary because it keeps fomenting inequality and provoking unrest. It also keeps providing its own kind of “communism” both as a vaccine, preventing further escalation, and an incentive to go beyond its own limitations. The multitude responds to both and can go either way, absorbing the shocks or multiplying the fractures that will occur in unpredictable ways (Lotringer 2004, p18)

The multitude is an individualization of the universal and generic, the *people* and the *state*, and to a certain extent defies any clear distinction, or wants to blur it, between the private and the public, and therefore – as I interpret Virno – both opens up for the commons-based peer production *and* a deepening commodification (Virno 2011, p28, 30–31). The communist

⁴ Author’s translation from Swedish.

potential that is (re)produced and exploited by capital today is the radical individualism that is inscribed in the communist motto: *from each according to his ability, to each according to his need*, with more horizontal, flexible and creative and immaterial modes of producing within post-Fordist capitalism.⁵ This potential is part of processes that function as a vaccine against the transcendence of capitalism (that would involve a real emancipation with accentuated horizontal, flexible and free forms of creativity), which in the case of peer production translates into a self-understanding as merely socially useful. But the communist potential in today's creative labour can also be part of contemporary processes that strengthen the incentive and potential to go beyond capitalism, with "creative industries" becoming dependent on so-called *digeratis*, or people's virtuosic performances in the presence of other people, as Virno puts it, which in the case of peer production translates into a self-confident understanding as a socially necessary and more fully emancipatory mode of production outside of capital.

If they want to succeed in imposing a value programme, PPPs could either continue to collect money through donations and use wage labour, or go forward with expanding the voluntary and unpaid, but socially or commonly necessary activities to new sectors in society. The problem with the second alternative is that the peer producers cannot secure their livelihood as such under capitalism, and it risks functioning as a useful complement to capitalism. The prospect is not so much that the human and generic urge to create will inundate capitalism with a new and more effective mode of production, at least not without being complemented by political struggles for basic income. Pragmatically the first alternative seems to be a necessary precondition for the second alternative: *capitalism of communism* (or commons) paves the way for communism or commonwealth.

For structural reasons, the seeds of communism will not grow in the same way within peer production as in Richard Florida's creative industries (one is outside, the other inside to capital). First, peer production is more horizontal, social and just between peers than capital's production is; second, it is an organized outside with a proper telos of its own; third, it is a mode of production that only partly and indirectly forms part of the value production, and implicitly carries anti-capitalist sentiments (or dreams of transcending capitalism for a commons-based future society). But in practice, today, many PPPs' ambition seems to be to function only as a socially useful complement to capital. The attitude can be exemplified by the allowance, in practice, in Wikipedia of incorrect commercial uses of the commons-based peer production's products (e.g. not implementing the legal restrictions of the copy left license in relation to commercial actors and their derivative works). This form of peer producing provides another kind of vaccine for capitalism:

⁵ Immaterial understood as non-tangible.

an accommodative communist outside that it can use as needed. This approach is vitalizing capitalism.

The crucial question for peer production to succeed in becoming socially necessary is instead if it can become a resilient and increasingly independent social power. Combining voluntary work with wage work within commons-based peer production makes it easier for peer producers to secure their livelihood at the same time as it fosters the point of view of the project as socially necessary. A socially necessary peer production will in turn experience both more obligations and rights, resulting in that the *virus character* of the copy left license will more likely be acted upon. Wage labour could thus, *behind the backs* of the contemporary peer producers, be an ally in the struggle against capital.

Marxism's historical and broad perspective on insides and outsides to capital (or insides and outsides to the commons) makes it possible to develop an analysis of the evolving relations between these insides and outsides, the synergies and conflicts, and the different actors. The concept of being socially necessary comes from Marxian theory of value, but it helps us to theorize, express, and gain a broader perspective on alternative processes of self-valorisation within peer production.

Marxism's detailed analysis of capital's logic, its counter-acting tendencies, and social and political consequences and struggles, further refines our understanding of peer production's role within the political economy.

Re-negotiations and struggles around value production's inside/outside

Capital is a process where economic growth has become an end in itself, and where value, understood as a social relation, expresses this growth within the accumulation of capital. People make themselves, their actions and their products exchangeable in these processes (Fleischer 2012, p22, 25–26). Roswitha Scholz points to the paradox within Marxism that “individuals of capitalist enterprise” are integrated in a social network at the same time as they are engaged in non-social production where the socialization is mediated by the market. “[P]eople appear asocial and society appears to be constituted by things, which are mediated by the abstract quantity of value” (Scholz 2014, pp126–27). The result is alienation, but this alienation looks different in the reproductive sphere which is dissociated from the value production (Scholz 2014, p127). Fleischer uses the *value dissociation theory* developed by Scholz to theorize how capital strategically adapts and transforms the value-producing system's inside and outside.

Value's growth as a historical process is undistinguishable from the parallel evolution of norms regarding what is *not* exchangeable. A capitalist society is accordingly a society where this demarcation line between an inside and outside is under constant renegotiation. Some activities are "dissociated" from value (Fleischer 2012, p25–26).

Scholz contends that value and value dissociation stand in a dialectical relation to each other. "Rather, both simultaneously emerge out of each other", but value production occurs on the micro level within the macro field of the value dissociation processes. The patriarchal gender system is active within the dissociation processes and is thus central to capitalist value production (Scholz 2014, pp128–29).

Liberal economic doctrine's idealizes a constant expansion of the market logic; neo-classic theory ultimately sees the outside to capitalism as an externality and market failure (without value). The outside is caused by the market rather than already existing. Fleischer contends instead, based in the Marxist tradition of *Wertkritik*, that capitalism can never be total in its character (Fleischer 2012, p25; Lehdonvirta & Castronova 2014, p143).

Capitalism's inner logic is contradictory; capitalism's outsides are therefore important for capitalism. Outsides of varying strength, origin, and function in relation to capitalism can for example be used for an expansion of the capital relation. Rosa Luxemburg stressed that capitalism needed a non-capitalist production to exist and develop, but that not every such outside could serve its purposes.

Capitalism needs non-capitalist social strata as a market for its surplus value, as a source of supply for its means of production and as a reservoir of labour power for its wage system. For all these purposes, forms of production based upon a natural economy are of no use to capital (Luxemburg 1951, p368).

The natural economies that Luxemburg spoke of were self-sufficient and focused on the internal needs of the society, and thus did not produce surpluses of any kind. The problem with them from capital's point of view was the lack of demand of external products and that they were not poised to work in ways that made it possible to acquire them in any reasonable scale. "A natural economy thus confronts the requirements of capitalism at every turn with rigid barriers. Capitalism must therefore always and everywhere fight a battle of annihilation against every historical form of natural economy." (Luxemburg 1951, pp368–69)

Capital's need to transform and shape its outside according to its needs leads to different forms of violence and sometimes (when capital needs an outside to be an inside) to a continuously and ongoing form of what Marx called *primitive accumulation*. De Angelis and others claims that the primitive accumulation has a contemporary and ongoing role where the dissociation of people from the means of production can take many forms

(De Angelis 2008, pp28–31). In recent times David Harvey has pointed out that capital needs new realms of accumulation to ride out its own crises, and Christian Marazzi holds that banks' lending of money to the world economy's periphery during expansive cycles is increasingly cut down (compared to the debt levels of the centre) when the cycle spirals downwards (Marazzi 2008, pp72–73; Fuchs 2014, p166). De Angelis maintains that Luxemburg's perspective can be merged with a *world system* perspective where value is moved from the periphery by primitive accumulation to the centre of the system, but in contrast to Harvey he does not understand the dissociation of people from the means of production as a tool for capital accumulation, but as a tool to preserve the capital relation (De Angelis 2008, p28–31).

During the twentieth century the outside to capital gradually became politically empowered. State regulations grew in importance after the great depression of the 1930s, the fundamental role of ecology was articulated by the environmental movement in the 1960s, and feminism has had a focus on unpaid reproductive work and its importance for capitalism. Bio-politics and the connected bio-economy are today given more importance in academia than yesterday. Contemporary Marxism is informed by the experiences of these social struggles. But, neo-liberal restoration has as a response tried and succeeded in creating new demarcation lines between the substantial and formal economy. Markets, with their conflict-ridden and crises-prone developments, have expanded, earlier outsides have been manipulated, and renegotiations and struggles have been initiated with social movements and activism around questions of value or non-value, but also exchange value or use value.

Luxemburg's notion of natural economies outside of capital is however a more dynamic perspective than neoclassical theory, and makes it possible to see peer production as a "natural economy", although it does not address the question of political agency emanating from the outside. The question of a potential politics of the outside will be addressed below, but Marxism provides us with a wider understanding of the potential for different political agencies to emerge from the outside of capital. It is time to take some steps closer to the agency of the peer producer.

Different outsides: capitalist value production and the social worker's alternative valorisations

The leading segments of world economy have since 1970s become increasingly dependent on new information and communication technology (ICT) and a kind of labour organization emphasizing flexibility, decentralized responsibility in work teams, and just-in-time production.

Postmodernism and poststructuralism have advanced in academia since 1980s with an increased interest in the importance of language and culture in the social sciences and humanities. The Frankfurt School's cultural industry has morphed into something quite different, today often requiring the active communicative participation of people. Autonomist Marxists, influenced by Marx's writings about a *general intellect* and Michel Foucault's thoughts of the growing importance of bio-politics, describe today's situation in terms of social life being value-producing and productive in itself, within what Paolo Virno has called *communism of capital* (Virno 2004, p110; Virno 2007; Virno 1996b). The argument assumes that the demarcation line between the substantial and formal economy – between value production and social life – is drawn afterwards in the cases when social life is appropriated by capital. Negri assumes in line with this argument that there is no outside to capital when society's *real subsumption* under capital occurs (Hardt & Negri 2009; Negri 2008, p29). The outside of capital is not only ambiguous and unclear in some autonomist Marxists' perspective, but often directly absent. This assumption portrays the outside in the same dependent way as neo-classical theory, but it is flawed.

Fleischer makes a critique of Hardt and Negri's assumption of an essential change in the logic of valorisation between Fordist and post-Fordist capitalism. Turning the labour force into a commodity no longer plays a decisive role when all social activities can be counted as immaterial labour. The concept of immaterial labour is based on the assumption that value today is impossible to calculate due to the fact that its sum is the general intellect that is a totally qualitative entity. Therefore the exploitation of surplus value no longer occurs in production but afterwards, and capital take on a parasitic role (Fleischer 2014a; Fleischer 2014b). This theory implies that value once was possible to calculate, but *Wertkritik* assumes that value is a social relation *between* the commodities and no historical actor has ever been able to measure how much value exists in a commodity, even if value has always been a quantitative relation upheld by the market. The market actors do not care about the amount of labour time being put into the commodity; they care for prices, but in that process they help to "measure" what Marx called abstract labour. Fleischer contends that it becomes harder to claim that capitalism has mutated under post-Fordism with this theoretical point of view (Fleischer 2014a).

On the other hand, if value is a social relation, and it is not work that constitutes the value, but the social construction (valorisation) in the market between people, this valorisation could take new forms outside of the market. Autonomist Marxist De Angelis does claim the existence of an outside to capital's valorisations.⁶ The outside does not have to be, but can

⁶ Autonomist Marxist collective and magazine *Endnotes* stresses, in opposition to Hardt and Negri, that the labour process that capital claims as its own equals capital's immediate production process (Endnotes 2013, p100).

be, a fixed place, and does not necessary have a fixed identity, but the values of the outside are grounded in material practices “for the reproduction of life and its needs”. The alternative value practices include the emergence of discourse, needs and practices of objectivation that are limited in space and time (due to a lack of resources), and phenomena that are unable to “mature into the cyclical time of norm creation” but nevertheless are active social forces (De Angelis 2007, p32). Therefore it is important how peer production is looked upon by outsiders (readers and donors of money in the case of Wikipedia) as well as insiders. If peer producers increasingly identify with being socially necessary, the telos of their value practices would contribute to an alternative value programme and the development of proper value struggles emanating from peer production.

The interesting thing about autonomist Marxism is that the tradition turns the understanding of the capital relation upside down. It is no longer *capital* that is the main actor, but rather the working class. Desire, play, and *class composition* explain the historical changes of the working class. Class composition includes the given structure of the labour force as it is formed by productive forces, social relations, and the stabilized levels of needs and desires. The working class is understood as a dynamic subject – the *social worker* – and an antagonistic force (Negri 1988, p209). When workers let capital dominate them they function just as *labour power*, but when the workers “at a certain level” of the dialectical relationship to capital become politically aware and radicalize, they become an independent polarity within capitalist development as the *working class* (Negri 1988, p206).

This political understanding of class is typical of how autonomist Marxism understands capital’s dynamic. Class composition is the central concept to understand the *cycle of struggles* theory that assumes that the working class acts as the motor of history under capitalism (Negri 1988, pp209–10). It results in a systemic crisis for capital when workers act as a working class, and it has to restructure its mode of production. In this politicising process the question of who is measuring whom between work and capital is activated (Negri 1988, pp212–14, 218). Two different ways of perceiving time and life confront each other as being against commodity, and the conflict deepens in ever more rigid forms (Negri 1988, p220).

The cycle of struggle theory gains strength from last decade’s developments in cognitive capitalism. Capitalist production’s dependency on the general intellect amounts to a radical change which indirectly strengthens peer production. Capital’s dependency signals a third step in the history of the division of labour that transcends industrial capitalism’s division of labour, and according to Vercellone enables a direct transition to communism (Vercellone 2007, p15). The qualitative change in capital’s organic composition due to the *general intellect of the social brain* turns the subordination of living labour under dead labour (constant capital) upside down. Vercellone calls this “the tendential fall of the capital’s control of the

division of labour” (Vercellone 2007, p18). When intellectual and scientific work becomes the dominating productive force, knowledge re-socializes everything, which eventually becomes an unsupportable problem for capital. The cognitive social worker is still dependent on the wage but has an autonomy in the immediate labour process that resembles that of the craftsman under an earlier period of labour’s formal rather than real subsumption under capital. As a consequence capitalism can be expected to become more brutalized and extra-economic in its modus operandi in the future (Vercellone 2007, pp20–22, 31–32).

The political readings of class within the cycle of struggles theory fits well with peer producers that are only indirectly connected (in their role as peer producers) to the class system of capitalism. A crucial difference is that the political-awareness processes within peer production stem from productive activities outside of capitalism, rather than from within capitalism’s class relations. The increasing independency and strength in the hands of the social worker, that holds privileged positions within cognitive capitalism, have consequences for PPPs. It seems plausible that the cognitive type of social worker is drawn to PPPs. Vercellone’s argument thus implies an increasingly strengthened position for peer production in relation to a capital that becomes more and more dependent on more independent social workers as well as on free software, free knowledge and open data for its production. In *Commonwealth* Hardt and Negri argues that it is the capitalists themselves, seeing to their own interests, that initiate the transformation of society through the founding and opening up for the commons’ potential (Hardt & Negri 2009, px).

Fleischer’s critique against understanding unpaid non-commodified activities as value producing is important in yet another way. The activities thus do not strengthen capitalism on a systemic level with the production of new surplus value. This could eventually be a problem for capital. Unpaid activities on Facebook for example generate profit in a similar way as land rent (land is an outside to capital that is turned into an inside when it is used to attract profit from other capitals extraction of surplus value). Peer production is in this context a more active, self-organized and independent variety that does not extract surplus value, is not interested in attracting profits (only voluntary donations), and could possibly outcompete capitalist value production. On a systemic level peer production does not heighten conflicts through attracting profits from other more labour intensive sectors and regions of the capitalist world system, but rather adds another problem for capital: forcing it to find new niches where it could survive if it is outcompeted.

These niches are increasingly found within the activities connected to the general intellect. Maurizio Lazzarato understands the contradictions of capital in a socio-cultural and psychological way and stresses the crisis aspect of capital rather than the active struggle against capital. He connects

Guattari's theme of subjectivity's crisis to neo-liberalism's success in the field of political economy but *failure* in constructing functional identities. Capital's project is to combine the political economy with the subjective economy by articulations of economic, technological and social flows within the production of subjectivities. The *entrepreneur* of neo-liberalism suffers from the burden of deconstructing society. It results in increased social heteronomy when every individual becomes a business. The outside to the market that capital needs diminishes (Lazzarato 2014, pp8–9). In this process peer production's safe haven without ads and commercialism could be seen as more and more attractive to people, especially if they can offer some kind of livelihood within capitalism.

Marxism helps us to see the contours of a new political, potentially anti-capitalist subject without a direct connection to the class divisions of capitalism, but with knowledge and skills that capital is increasingly dependent on. Could this new social phenomenon generate a new cycle of struggles? Still, the political awareness of the peer producer has to be placed in an even broader context. The emergent forms of more organized and independent outsides in the form of PPPs point to the potential for several simultaneously existing and competing modes of production within historical social formations.

The outside's modes of production and historical materialism

New emerging and anticipatory modes of production can exist outside and in parallel with a hegemonic mode of production. History has shown us that the outside's modes of production can expand at the expense of the hegemonic mode of production. Mihailo Markovic stresses that the bourgeois revolution that overthrew the aristocracy from political power did so after a long period of capitalism's expansion and growth within the economic sector (Markovic 1991, p542). De Angelis, with his more processual perspective, characterizes today's struggles between different value systems or programs as "the simultaneous presence" of "capitalism and communism, enclosures and commons" and "capital's measure and measures emerging from horizontal relational processes" (De Angelis 2007, p225).

Peer production understood as an emerging mode of production raises many questions regarding the coexistence with capitalism. Outcompeting capitalism is just one option. The new economic phenomenon could also fade away before acquiring strength. There exists a dynamic coexistence of modes of productions *before*, *under* and *after* historical transition processes between different hegemonic modes of production. Raymond Williams saw emerging, dominant and residual cultural systems coexisting in such a

dynamic and historical interplay (Williams 1977, p121–127). These cultural systems or modes of production are in different stages of their development and therefore have different forms of influence and power over the totality. Fredric Jameson holds that no historical society has existed in the form of a pure mode of production. Old and residual modes of production have been relegated to dependent positions within the new hegemonic mode of production, together with “anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system but have not yet generated an autonomous space of their own” (Jameson 1989, p80).

Louis Althusser understands Marx’s concept *social formation* as a superior concept in relation to the concept of mode of production. Every social formation is a concrete historical society based on a hegemonic mode of production, which means that there always exist at least two modes of production in a social formation. The modes of production that are not hegemonic are dominated and have their origin in earlier social formations or within emerging social formations (Althusser 2014, pp17–18). Althusser held that you had to understand the relation between the dominating and dominated mode of production, which were always antagonistic, if you were to understand the relation between productive forces and social relations of production (Althusser 2014, p20). Often it is a question of contradictions “between the productive forces of *the whole set of modes of production* in that social formation, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relations of production of *the mode of production currently dominant*” (Althusser 2014, p20).

It is unclear why Althusser maintains that the productive forces of all the modes of production are active, whereas only the social relations of the dominant mode of production are active. Perhaps Maurice Dobb’s comment that residual modes of production only exist in the form of remnants that are unspecified explains the position (Heller, H., 2011, pp24–26; Hilton, R. H., 1985, “Introduction”, pp1–3). This perspective, said without forgetting that it is the social relations of the hegemonic mode of production that dominates the distribution of societal wealth, seems too unilateral and one-sided. It seems more rewarding to stress, as Jameson does, the synchronous interplay between different modes of production in an open and dialectical way within a historical moment or social formation (Jameson 1989, p81). This interplay does not necessarily have to be antagonistic, even if it often will be so. The P2P principles that Terranova speaks of can inform Marxism in important ways, but they are not totally new to the Marxist tradition. Perry Anderson stressed that the transition from feudalism to capitalism included both symbiotic and conflictual processes on different social levels (Anderson 2013, pp39–40); Richard Barbrook describes the reconfiguration of capitalism during the new millennium’s first decade with the same concepts of symbiosis and conflict. Some of the things that once cost money are available today for free and vice versa (Barbrook 2005). Cyber-Communism

is driven by pragmatic people in a slow historical “process of *superseding* capitalism”, where the gift economy acts as a base for the interactive participation in the digital production. Cyber-communism is the mode of production that fits the new advanced productive forces best. “The dialectical process of superseding capitalism is marked by the evolving syntheses of gift and commodity within the Net. During this transition, neither the disclosure nor the enclosure of collective labour can be assumed.” Sometimes people will look for monetary rewards, but equally often will they chose the freedom in “autonomous labour” (Barbrook 2000, p33).

Marxist tradition is open to the existence of conflicts as well as tactical alliances between conservative ideologies of older residual modes of production and new emerging ones. Challenges against a dominating historical bloc could come from both traditional and emerging segments of society according to Gramsci (Raber 2010, p147). This intersectional and hybrid perspective on different modes of production – residual, emergent and hegemonic – seems appropriate to understand and stimulate the political power of peer production and the political awareness of its peer producers.

Historical materialism also gives us some guidance through this period of transition. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx made two assertions: first, no social order ends without all its productive forces having been developed. Second, a higher form of social relations of production never emerges before the material conditions for them are in place or in the process of formation (Marx 1859).⁷

Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the tasks itself arises only when the material conditions of its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation (Marx 1859).

Marx here describes necessary conditions, not sufficient conditions. The social revolution will not occur automatically but is built on personal and collective choices and actions interwoven with developments of the productive forces. It is implied that the final social revolution is preceded by gradual and hybrid developments: revolution and evolution. In this context something has to be said about Marxist crisis theory, and after that it will be time to discuss peer production as an anti-capitalist project.

⁷ “At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.”

Marxian Crisis Theory: Its Inside and Outside

Marxism contains both a tradition of technological and *social determinism*. Ernest Mandel interpreted in the 1970s the central role of science not as a break with earlier phases of capitalism but as a sign of a totally industrialized economy (Mandel 1982, pp46, 49–50, 59,106–7; Dyer-Witheford 1999, pp43–44). Dead labour, constant capital's share of total capital, and the *organic composition* of capital increased, which according to the theory of value results in a depressed rate of profit and capital's final crisis. Mandel comparted with this crisis theory even if Marx identified many counter-acting factors in relation to the *law of the falling rate of profit*. Andrew Kliman has nevertheless convincingly argued that the regular crises of capitalism will not necessarily result in a final crisis. It is not only profit that decides the rate of profit but also the amount of capital value being advanced, which in turn depends on how much capital value was destroyed in the last crisis. The peak of the rate of profit that follows a crisis is likely higher than the prior peak, and more frequent crises leave less time for the law to work (Kliman 2012, p25).

There is thus no predetermined end to capitalism but many recurrent crises. Capital's expansion outside of the factory walls, understood as the expansion of the capital relation, also counteracts an increase in the organic composition, a possibility that Mandel dismissed, claiming that the service sector was unproductive because it did not transform a commodity's material form (Dyer-Witheford 1999, p45). The commodification of social life, affects and communication are today the outsides, together with the recurrent crises, that inhibit capital's final crisis.

This Marxian framework generates questions regarding how an organized outside to value production can coexist and increasingly influence a capitalism recurrently in crisis with a need to commodify the digital sphere that is increasingly mediating contemporary social life. Clashes seem inevitable, especially if peer producers should self-valorise themselves and their project as socially necessary, but the forms of conflicts remain an open question and the radicalization could be tempered by the fact that digital goods do not cease to exist freely even if they become commodities in another context. On the other hand, if capital's manipulations endanger the emerging mode of production with its accentuated freedoms, alternative value processes of popular donations, and productive effectiveness, this speaks in favour of peer producers' self-understanding as being socially necessary and growing value struggles.

Strategies for an anti-capitalist peer production

Deleuze and Guattari developed a strategy that they called *lines of flight*. The strategy was created for more diffuse kinds of conflicts than the cycle of struggles theory. The actors within this strategy do not primarily wish to defeat capitalism but just leave it a go somewhere else and do something else: “a process not so much of overthrow as defection” (Dyer-Witheford 2009, p64). Deleuze and Guattari saw the unconscious social *Other*, full of will, desire and vitality, as an entrance and an exit for subject’s *becomings* which originated in the socio-cultural field of semiotic and physical objects (Day & Lau 2010, pp105–06, 109). Deleuze criticised the control society as a social order where becomings were regulated through a control of the variety of social activities, situations and cultural forms (Deleuze 1998, pp197, 202). Deleuze and Guattari instead favoured becoming that went *transversal*, rather than moved within normative identities and knowledge regimes. It was this transversal becoming that they called lines of flight (Day 2010, p109).

This theory lends, when taken together with peer productions organized outside to capital, some concreteness to the theories of an exodus to capital’s outside with the potential to radicalize peer producers politically and stimulate a new cycle of struggles. Peer production holds high levels of transversal freedom, and being active within a peer production project could increasingly be seen as a line of flight from *compulsory forms of creativity* (Nepper Larsen 2014). In the author’s study on the Swedish language version of Wikipedia the ideological formation *capitalism of communism* attributed strength and a higher productiveness to Wikipedia compared with capitalism, and raised the issue of outcompeting capitalism. But it was the weakest and most latent of three ideological formations that were identified (Lund 2015a).

The exodus or line of flight to capital’s organized outside in the form of peer production can gain further strength if it does not take on a fully anti-capitalist approach. The question of wage labour is strategically important if peer production is to outcompete capital. Wages within commons-based peer production constitute an interface between an emergent and the hegemonic mode of production. Non-commercial PPPs offer a livelihood under capitalism, without contributing to value production, when they employ people. This could be a way to increase the resilience of peer production. Elinor Ostrom stressed that participants become more motivated to seek common solutions that function over time if they depend on the commons for their livelihood (Ostrom 2009, p60, 74–75). This also fosters attitudes about the project being socially necessary within the peer producing community. Given peer production’s growing importance in more and more sectors, peer production and peer producers will get more and more involved in society as a necessary part of it – following both obligations and rights –

which will create a better base for politicization of peer producer's attitudes. Internal conflicts between paid and unpaid peers could perhaps, understood optimistically, also result in future demands for different forms of basic incomes for the voluntary commoners.

Peer production as an employer turns the inside of capital – value and money – into an instrument for strengthening an outside of use-value production without exchange value. But the strategy to use wage labour within peer production has its clear limits. Wage labour within peer production is parasitic and dependent on capital's value production, and it is therefore negatively affected by its crises. Kleiner's venture communes could perhaps function supportively in the downturns (Kleiner 2010), together with the creation of an economic buffer without direct connection to capital's financial system.

A hybrid strategy alternating between copy left licenses and the peer production licenses (PPL) that Bauwens and Kostakis suggest to prevent the Linux commons from becoming a “company commons” (Bauwens & Kostakis 2014, p356–357) could temper the volatility and strengthen the resilience of peer production. But Bauwens' and Kostakis' proclaimed paradox that a communist sharing license without restrictions on sharing results in an accentuated capitalist practice (Bauwens & Kostakis 2014, p357) is only partly true. The copy left license does have *restrictions* and demands that also commercial actors start to share their commercial products for free if copy left material is central to their derivate products. This virus character of the copy left license can potentially be used as an offensive tool for a *commonification* of capitalism.

Having said this, it is true that the copy left license is seldom implemented fully in practice in relation to capital, and my own study on Swedish Wikipedia suggests that the hegemonic ideological position vis-à-vis the license is ‘open source’ rather than ‘free software’ in character (Lund 2015a). A free-software approach is crucial for opening up commercial products using the licensed material. The reason for not totally letting go of the copy left license is the risk that the strategy proposed by Bauwens and Kostakis (peer production getting paid for its products by commercial actors whereas giving them for free to peers in associated co-operatives) fails to expand the counter-economy, at the same time as the virus character of the copy left license cannot be used (Bauwens & Kostakis 2014, p358). This calls for a mixed approach and strategy. The virus character already holds a progressive anti-capitalist potential, and in the medium term venture communes and the PPL license could prove themselves. In the long run new PPPs could adapt different structuring licenses in their efforts to influence capitalism.

The financial model of Wikipedia, for example, with many small and popular donations, also helps the project growing in strength in relative independence within capitalism. This also strengthens the project's material

influence on people's lives and their perceptions of it. And there is a twist to the donations: the financial model *requires* some kind of non-commerciality for the donations to keep coming (Lund & Venäläinen Forthcoming). The PPPs can never exclusively rely on wage labour; there always has to be voluntary and unpaid production going on. The challenge for peer production projects is thus to keep attracting voluntary newcomers at the same time as they employ the right numbers of people for the strategically best functions. Critical theory could do some practical work identifying which alliances with capital serve the ends of peer production (Lund 2015a).

Peer production, finally, cannot effect the social revolution alone. Jakob Rigi points out that peer production can be understood as commons-based communistic islands, rather than Hardt and Negri's ubiquitously present "common", and it does not exist everywhere in society and will require a social revolution to become generalized. Alliances have to be struck between anti-capitalist activists, hackers and peer producers (Rigi 2013, pp404, 412–14). Alliances could also be struck with the remnants of the welfare state (around open access and open data), rent-seeking co-operatives, and even corporate companies at some stage.

Concluding remarks

Marxism frames and identifies peer production's potential as an anti-capitalist social power. Peer production is not the ideal outside for capital; it is organized according to internal productive goals, and the self-valorisation will strengthen the more involved it becomes in society's economy. The attractiveness of its transversal freedoms at a time when neo-liberalism is deconstructing the subjective identities; the virus effect of the copy left license;⁸ capital's support to the commons; popular donors' support to a non-commercial project; the increasing strength of the social worker, capital's recurrent crises, all this taken together results in a very volatile (and possible violent) mix. A successful peer production has to show, with each new crisis, that it is more stable, effective, and socially resilient than capitalism.

Marxism's view on the inside and outside to capitalism and simultaneously existing modes of production shows an understanding of gradual and evolving processes, but Marxism also identifies conflicts interrupting the gradual evolution (capital's primitive accumulation, value

⁸ A central question is if peer production projects like Wikipedia could develop more collective and institutional responses to a copyright that is individually held by authors of a specific encyclopaedic article. A first analysis of Swedish language version of Wikipedia suggests that this is a minor discussion, if it is discussed at all, within the community (Lund 2015a).

dissociation and recurrent crises). Marxism calls for strategical alliances with both the commons' outside (the state and capital), built on synergies in the gradual evolution, and other outsides to capital and the state in preparation for a social revolution. Marxism functions as a more dynamic speaking partner for the historical actors than do neo-classicism and the P2P perspective.

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