

NEW SOCIAL ASYMMETRIES AND THE SYSTEM CRISIS

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Rezumat. *Din punctul de vedere al filosofiei sociale lucrarea abordează înțelegerea de o manieră particulară a presupunerii Forrester privitoare la contrastul între progresul înregistrat în ultimul secol în înțelegerea tehnologiilor și relativa lipsă de progres din domeniul înțelegerii sistemelor sociale, care ar sta în faptul că instituțiile sociale nu sunt recunoscute ca sisteme. Astfel, se identifică structura și locul asimetriilor și al caracteristicilor acestora în societatea de astăzi, marcată de criză.*

Abstract. *From the standpoint of the social philosophy, the paper tends to understand in a particular way Forrester's assumption that the contrast between the advances during the last century in understanding technologies, and the relative lack of progress in understanding social systems would lie in the fact that the social institutions were not recognized as systems as well. The place of asymmetries and their characteristics within the present society marked by crisis are sketched.*

Keywords: social systems, crisis, asymmetry, society

Introduction

The contrast between the understanding of non-social and social systems is generated not only from their de-phasing, but also from the different social positions and interests whose standpoints mark the goals and means of society: the specific rhythm of the understanding of society is itself constituted within the real historical system of power relations. At the same time, the recognition of systemic constitution of society – that meaning not only that every institution is a system whose behaviour could be controlled with the notions of structure, relations, functions and planning, but also the interdependence of states and institutions – is an acquisition without which the realisation of the values of a rational society would be difficult. The discussion about the social asymmetries gives the opportunity to explain their place and characteristics within the present society marked by crisis and to relate them to some theoretical solutions. The main hypothesis is the continuity of social asymmetries within the modern history, as well as their transformation in the present stage of world civilisation.

In the first part there is shown that asymmetries constitute the main feature of the social system and how theory of social complexity deals with the social relations of symmetry and asymmetry. Related to it, chaos theory explains more profoundly the consequences of the action of the human being taking place within

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the existing asymmetrical relations and symmetries which correct them. After the exposition of a soft perspective of system theory on the social system crisis, the second part exposes the theory of system crisis I support and the interpretation of some new social asymmetries which constitute and deepen the present system crisis. Finally there are mentioned some theoretical solutions to the social asymmetries, suggesting that their shortcomings or openness are related just to the specific worldviews they represent and proposing their evaluation from a pragmatic standpoint.

Although the researches on symmetry-asymmetry are more timid concerning the social field – which however, without using the concepts as such, have challenged an explosion of interest, studies from the observation of empirical data to sophisticated measurements and theories – their stake is “anthropological”¹: the understanding of the human being-in-the-world/the-world-of-the-man. But opposing to the idea that the search of symmetry would be rather a permanence of the European archetype of beauty as symmetry², the starting point of the following text is the historical cultural valorisation of both symmetry and asymmetry and the role of social contexts in these processes.

My aim is to show the relevance of *social asymmetries* for the understanding of *social systems*. Social asymmetries have constituted with the human society as such – as cultural complex of a system of systems. They have, thus, an artificial, i.e. cultural character, as the social symmetries as well. From this standpoint, the cultural history of the social asymmetries is linked to the history of the human and social rationality, as the object of the human and social sciences³. This history has transfigured “the violent, asymmetrical phase and exercising itself on the other participant within an interaction”⁴ into dual representation of the human existence – as body / mind, reason / passion, the objective world / the subjective world.

One of the main aspects contributing to the constitution of the social system is the complex (and often unpredictable) reaction of people to their already given society, as well as the *bifurcation function of every reaction*. Within this framework, the *social crises* and the *system crisis* appear as consequences and moments of the social dynamics, as in the present one.

¹MIHĂILESCU V., “La métaphore de la ‘bonne forme’ et le côté asymétrique du monde“, *Noesis* (Romania), XII, 1985, p. 121.

²ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 1078a, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0052&query=loeb%20chap%3D%231333>: „The main species of beauty are orderly arrangement, proportion, and definiteness”.

³HABERMAS J., *Le discours philosophique de la modernité (Douze conférences par Jürgen Habermas)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 283.

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 287.

Social philosophy's purpose is the grasping of universal and the questioning of which would be universalizable, integrating the different philosophical focuses on economics, politics, social composition, culture and ideologies. From this standpoint, the meanings of the notions used here have to be circumscribed.

Social asymmetries are not equivalent to the social contradictions which are their consequences. But the *social asymmetries are the differences in status, social-economical position, role, function and power in the decision making*. Generally people have at the same time different social functions, combining different subordinated or leading positions within the social asymmetries: thusly these ones are felt stronger.

In this way, the discussion on the social asymmetries seems to put us within the joke of the social scientists: that there are two classes of people in the world, those who divide people into two classes and those who do not¹. In fact, if the numerous asymmetries do correspond to numerous divisions of people into two classes – but as we showed the same people could belong to different classes – the power relations/social positions realised in all these asymmetries impose unfortunately a non humoristic view: in all theses there always are two classes, even though there are many subdivisions and nuances.

Consequently, *social asymmetries are the power relations as such and manifested at different aspects and levels of the human life*.

To such notions linked to, deriving from, and leading to system theory or at least its idea, the old, classical philosophy had advanced and questioned calm and, at the same time, revolutionary concepts as freedom, social division, society with its relations, harmony and struggles, responsibility, oppression, right to rebel, possibility, good life, individual, openness to the Other and the like.

The philosophical intuitions and developments have constructed and supplied representations of complexity and human strategy within it, just opening up the way to the scientific researches which “de-construct” the social system at different levels and from different perspectives. What is important at these researches is the ability to give specific solutions to the concrete problems they highlight in a clear manner, but the general theoretical frame was suggested by philosophy.

The problem of social asymmetries has as forerunners a long list containing from Plato to at least Rousseau. He observed that while the means of the modern civilisation have developed, not this was the case with the human

¹MARTIN J.L., “The Authoritarian Personality: 50 Years Later: What Lessons Are There for Political Psychology?”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2001, p. 4.

behaviour (manners)¹ [31].

Today people continue to ask why are there so many social problems and contradictions, and not only asymmetries, if society reached a peak from the standpoint of the level of the understanding of technologies in the last century. Is this because of the fact that the social subsystems – as institutions and social practices – were not yet treated as systems [8], thus formalised in the technical search of their efficiency?

But this treatment is not only a question of technique, but also of social interests linked to the structural power relations. In this way, the essence [24, p. 317, 319] of the social system appears to be just the complex of these structural relations, which are not transcendental but result from the actions of the human beings.

Let us to mention that if symmetry is the invariance irrespective of the transformation of the system, the social asymmetry is – for the permanent movement and evolution of the man and of the society – both the variance and the opposition within the functioning of society.

There are, again, structural asymmetries – linked to the relationships within the hierarchies, since society has constituted as social hierarchy, or better, as superposition of different social hierarchies issued from the domination – submission relations (or different power relations); from this point of view, the social order itself exist only at the first level of appearance, since it is thrown about, or even aside, by the social tensions; there are also asymmetries linked to the historical conjunctures, from both technical and social standpoints.

Thus, there are, for example, asymmetries generated by the rapid development of science and technique, as well as created by the fact that in the present society, just because of the tendency to surpass the post-war welfare state, the rich become richer and the poor poorer.

Asymmetry means, in this way, diversity and relativity, but also social polarisation, at the level of the relations of a social system with its environment, and within the system itself.

The social hierarchy supposing asymmetry, the social values and institutions themselves are asymmetric: the real justice is asymmetric, even though there are principles, belonging to the state of law – as the juridical equality – which tend to impose symmetry within some specific institutions.

¹ROUSSEAU J.J., *Discours qui a remporté le prix de l'Académie de Dijon en l'année 1750; sur cette question, imposée par la même Académie: Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs*, in J.J.Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome I, Paris, Firmin Didot frères, libraires, imprimeurs de l'Institut de France, 1866.

1. A soft first part

1.1. Asymmetry as main feature of the social system

Opposite to the natural and technical systems, in society almost everything is *asymmetry*. Or, to put it more strictly, symmetry is always only one moment of the movements inside and of the social systems.

Certainly, the ground of social asymmetries is the natural fact that people are not identical from a biological standpoint. But social asymmetries do not derive from this, since they are *cultural (social) phenomena*: they result from the social interactions without which people cannot live and which, at their turn, create norms and institutions – established, accepted, and understood actions, functioning as criteria and frame of the social practice in a society.

This interdependence, and feed-back, between the social relations, institutions and norms construct the cultural/social architecture of the human society and have an obvious historical character. Just within the social practice the natural starting points or aspects of people are formed in a social/cultural manner and are supported or even destroyed. People succeed differentiating each other and emphasising strong or soft asymmetries just from the social relations.

These ones could generate bad behaviours, wickedness, cultural primitiveness, which are rejected with good reason by civilised people, but even though there is always the responsibility of the individual to learn, choose and surpass himself/herself, the particular social context where people live in and its complex influences constitute the main cause of such an asymmetric enculturation.

In this process, people socialise from their specific social position. The gender and age differences, the differences in social status, education, economical status, the political one and the cultural one, the differences in ethnical origin and race, in the belonging to majorities or minorities within the nation-states, or in the pertaining to large or small communities (local, religious, cultural), all of these emphasise unequal positions, i.e. forces which relation each others, and constitute major criteria of social asymmetries. So that the theory which deduce from the “natural” differences the social asymmetries is at least questionable.

The impression of symmetry constituting the social systems could infer from the situation that people, and all of them, react, so answer to the environment, within which lies the reactions of the others. Thus all the human behaviours are answers to the environment, by expressing first and foremost existential needs, thus configuring a symmetrical pattern of human action. But, in this pattern neither the answers nor the environment of each of them are on the same position. With natural basis – as the gender, age or language – or not, the

human relations are cultural constructions implying many traditions, values, ideas, knowledge, sentiments, legal fictions, actions crossing and mixing: thus there are not only “objective” needs that would generate human institutions and functions, but all these ones are translated and also transfigured by and through the human conscience and its ideal products.

But as asymmetry, the social symmetry is also a social/cultural construction: many institutions and norms tend to order the asymmetrical relations just to support efficient actions and social climate. The equal rights and duties within a community, as well as the relations and policies to observe and realise them could allow the transformation of asymmetric individual “starting points” into human development.

Such symmetry aiming social institutions tend to soft the *non-equilibrium* as main characteristic of the relations as such. Equilibrium – so the “organic” cooperation of people and the constitution of institutions which stabilise the cooperation - is therefore an artificial, cultural order within the social asymmetric relations. As asymmetry and symmetry, non-equilibrium and equilibrium contain reciprocally each other, but while the formers are “fractals” composing symmetry and, respective, equilibrium, the inverse situation could hardly be conceived. In other words, if the symmetrical social relations, and the corresponding social equilibrium, allow us to mention the stationary character of the social institutions –taking place also through habits, traditions, rituals, clichés and inertia –, the social systems in their totality are *open*¹.

Thus the stationary aspects do manifest *within* the dynamics of the social systems, which suppose rather (or foremost) asymmetry.

In this way, there is more than an obvious intertwining of symmetry and asymmetry, equilibrium and non-equilibrium, static and dynamic of the social relations, so that some ones could suppose some kind of union of approximately equal tendencies.

In my opinion, there rather is an inclusion of symmetry/equilibrium/static into the asymmetric/non-equilibrate/dynamic social system as a *whole*: because with all the institutions, the relations still are asymmetrical. Even though different institutions and relations are and generate equilibrium for a more or less while. Therefore, the analogy between a social institution and, on the other hand, the wholeness of the social system is inconsistent: for although the individual, the

¹DRĂGĂNESCU M., *The Depths of Existence*, (1979), <http://www.racai.ro/books/doe/toc.html>, especially Chapter 9. Intro-open systems (last accessed 3-IX-2007); and FORRESTER J.W., *Designing the Future*, 1998, p. 7, <http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/Designjf.pdf> (last accessed 12-IV-2008).

social institution and the society as a whole are “non-trivial machines”¹, in fact the social institution as organisation of a fragmented realm supposes rather symmetry and a certain predictability, while society as a whole is a system characterised rather by asymmetry. (Thus at the level of the understanding of the social systems, one has to mention that even if both symmetry and asymmetry could multiply infinitely inside the systems, symmetry means simplification - even toward a dogmatic view where the complexity of the social system is disintegrated - whilst the assumption of the principle of asymmetry leads to the conscience of complexity. And this conscience is *sine qua non* for an efficient and human control of the consequences of actions.)

Finally here, if everywhere in society we find asymmetries, they are not however of the same type. They characterise different social relations, and the importance to not treat asymmetries in the same manner – even though within the frame of the system theory – will appear in the second part of this paper.

1.2. Theory of social complexity

From the system theory coined at the mid 50s of the last century, the theory of general complexity warns that any system is complex, i.e. society is a *system of systems*, and the understanding of society is not efficient by reducing it to some ideological schemes.

The theory of general complexity emphasises the relationships of mutual implication between all the parts/domains/standpoints and, on the other hand, society as a whole, as well as the inseparable relations between disorganised complexity and organised complexity.

What fits the social system to the theory of complexity is the *autopoietic* – self-productive – character of the social system, even in a more complex manner than the living systems².

There is about the knowledge of conduct oneself/groups/society as a whole in a rational manner for act and do the things be and produce a good life³.

The connection and clash of different human systems and social organisations make the *autopoiesis* a complex intertwining of nets and facts.

¹ MORIN E., *Introduction à la pensée complexe*(1990), Paris, ESF éditeur, 1992, p. 109.

²ZELNY M., “What is autopoiesis?”, in *Autopoiesis. A Theory of Living Organisations*, Series Volume 3, Edited by Milan Zeleny, North Holland, New York, Oxford, 1981, p. 4.

³SINGER B.J., *Rights and Social Practices: The Question of Universality*, The International Annual of Practical Philosophy and Methodology, Volume 1, Praxiologies and the Philosophy of Economics, edited by J. Lee Auspitz, Wojciech W. Gasparski, Marek K. Milicki, Klemens Szaniawski, New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.), Transaction Publishers, 1992, p. 187.

While the thinking of social symmetry tends rather to eliminate the internal contradictions of the system, asymmetry means, at its turn, not only the assumption of the contradictions, but also their articulation, cohesion, harmony, the possible, but temporary, common purposes of opposite social categories/policies.

The conscience of asymmetry means to no more put in an adversative relation the short term and the long term perspectives in the human and social behaviours, and to better control the resistance of the social system – as well as each part of it – to policy changes.

And while the principle of symmetry is posed rather by closed societies than the open ones, we have to not forget that the social systems themselves constitute by organising their own shutting: it is about their tendency toward autonomy, whether of individuals or institutions, levels, domains, and social systems as wholes. Or, in this respect, they are open-shut systems.

1.3. Man as butterfly

Chaos theory puts on light the infinite multi-mediation of human behaviours, acts, and facts as cultural objects, as well as the responsibility involved inwards all of them: because every human reaction, objectified materially and spiritually, has consequences, and because it is about the complex interconnection between all the reactions and all the consequences, every human reaction and fact has a bifurcation role for the course of events.

The event, the series – as human reactions within asymmetry – have nevertheless divergent consequences: growing asymmetry, but also imposing order, so social symmetry.

Regularity as condition of possibility of the coherent human reactions does not stop however the structural asymmetries, but it makes them usual, if not tolerable. In the mass of events which create history¹ [33], there is no symmetry, if it is not by chance, i.e. the encapsulation within institutions: only in this way, the happening could generate some order². At the level of discourse analysis, Foucault has stated that “the event is opposing to the creation, series – to the unity, regularity – to originality, the condition of possibility – to the significance”³. In this manner, history is a *longue durée* of events.

¹SMITH R. D., „Social Structures and Chaos Theory”, în *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1998, p. 19, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/11.html> (last accessed 12-II-2004)

²FOUCAULT M., *L'ordre du discours*, Leçon inaugural au Collège de France, le 2 December 1970, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 56-61.

³*Ibidem*, p. 56.

Man can give sense to his/her existence by using the concept of determinism, but he does not find in this existence the sense he gives to it: he himself is who put this sense inward¹.

Thus if there is the butterfly effect, every human being – and every behaviour and fact – is a “butterfly” on whose behaviour and facts the entire social system depends, in its near and farther realms. The consequences of the action of the human being take place within the existing asymmetrical relations and symmetries which correct them.

But the purposes of the individual are circumscribed by his/her *direct* conditions and environment. From this standpoint, the freedom of choice is limited. However, the problem is that the social systems are open, moreover they are changing.

1.4. System theory perspective on the social system crisis

The system crises occur when the stimuli toward the break-up of the closing and social continuity become more and stronger than those of the stability. Therefore when asymmetries exceed the social symmetry made by the existing institutions. A long interval, even though the situations change, the structure of the system remains unchanged. But the stabilising dynamics goes towards a destabilising one. The transformation as such arrives when the structure of the system change, even though there is an inertia of some components of the system.

The historical character of the social systems is connected with their openness. That means they are difficultly isolable from their environment. The consequence of this state is the higher capacity of the social systems to self-stabilise, so a strong continuity within their evolution.

But the situations of the openness of the social systems as well as their continuity generate more asymmetries and more motives to compensate them. And compensations constitute, at their turn, a ground for social continuity as well as openness. Thus although the social asymmetries rise, the most of people do not revolt in the manner to change things².

The present stage of capitalism marks a turning point in the human history. New asymmetrical phenomena emerge, by putting on the stake the existence of the human being itself, or of its humanness.

¹MERLEAU-PONTY M., “L’homme et l’adversité” (conference, 1951), in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Second way 1951-1961*, Paris, Éditions Verdier, 2000, p. 365.

²de LA BOÉTIE É., *Discours sur la servitude volontaire* (1548), Genève, Librairie Droz, 1987; DOGAN M., „Déficit de confiance dans les démocraties avancées. Une analyse comparative”, in *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, vol. 6, nr. 2, 1992, p. 545.

2. A hard content

2.1. The social system crisis

Even though the *social system crisis* is an uncomfortable item for the present mainstream thinkers, it is the core of the preoccupations of the system dynamics. Indeed it was the underground aim of the researches about the changes developed rather in the inter-war and post-war modern society. These researches were not the result of a neutral scientific curiosity, but had as foundation the shaking of the usual mainstream model of the values, social relations, institutions and respectable mentalities and behaviour. The problems of the changes, the interdependence of the factors and the consequences of the complex social processes were the very objectives of the development of the pattern of social system analyses.

The intellectual origin of this pattern is within not as much as the coexistence of the old models of social balance and social conflict, but rather as the conscience of the deep antagonisms between these ones. This origin was fortified by the stringent questions of the exhaustion of the first era of the triumphant capitalism. It was the era of the free market – from, obviously approximately and only for the western world, the bourgeois revolutions to the French-Prussian war - where the new structural relations of the new socio-economic system have demonstrated their superiority toward the feudal relations by developing the productive forces. The exhaustion has manifested through the agglomeration of the social problems and thus the emphasis of strong social asymmetries which menaced the social peace.

From different standpoints, Marx and the liberal economists and sociologists have focused just on these asymmetries. Thus irrespective of the worldviews behind, the social researches emphasised the importance of the social asymmetries. But obviously the perspectives were different¹: even though the importance of the social asymmetries as constitutive to the social system was an assumption shared by all the thinkers, those belonging to the mainstream considered them as eternal – for generated by the human nature -, while those who contested the status quo have demonstrated them, and the human nature too, as historical.

For all the thinkers, it was necessary to put order within the representation of society and history and, at the same time, to grasp their complexity. For this reason, they got nearer to the idea of social system. But while some ones dealt

¹Depending on the explicit or implicit purposes, as not only Marx underlined, but also the latter researches in system dynamics put it, although within the mental schema of the mainstream ideology; see [13, p. 14-15].

rather with separating the different generative lines – especially by developing the cultural theories (about institutions, mentalities, history of ideas) –, the social theory interested about the inquiry of asymmetries tended to connect the causes, by concomitantly emphasising the basic technical and economical structures.

By mentioning all these researches within the pattern of Popper, there were permanent comings and goings between the real phenomena (*The first world*) of asymmetries – experienced or not by the social philosophers and scientists, but certainly experienced by other people, since there were evidences –, and, on the other hand, (*The second world*) the perceptions and ideas about these asymmetries as well as the feelings relating to them.

Thus likewise were the relations with *The third world* of materialised products of the second one¹. All these connexions show the complex relations, interdependence and intertwining between the causes of the social asymmetries. But to capture them means just to go beyond the intuitive solutions², to use even twentieth order or higher differential equations³.

In the background of different paths to solve the problems of the complex determination of the social asymmetries we can find the opposite models of the social relations: the one where *conflict* is governing – as generated just by the social asymmetries and never ending – and the one of the social *consensus* – in spite of the asymmetries without which, claims the theory, society could not exist.

Certainly, these are abstract excessive forms: in fact, the conflict and the consensus coexist.

But it depends on which degree one is more powerful than the other, the level they are on and the conscience they involve.

Historically, the idea of system crisis was, at its turn, transposed into the model of *the decline and fall*⁴ of a certain empire or state.

Letting alone here this type of representation in the ancient times – by integrating itself or not within the pattern of *l'éternel retour*⁵ – the raising of modernity was the space able to the constitution of this theory which tends to put

¹POPPER K.R., *Objective Knowledge, An Evolutionary Approach*, London, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 73-74, 106, 117

²FORRESTER J.W., *Learning Through System Dynamics as Preparation for the 21st Century*, 1994, p. 5, <http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/D-4434-3.pdf> e <http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/D-4224-4.pdf> (last accessed 15-III-2008)

³FORRESTER J.W., *System Dynamics and the Lessons of 35 Years*, 1991, p. 14-15, <http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/D-4224-4.pdf> (last accessed 15-III-2008)

⁴GIBBON E., *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776, 1781, 1788, 1789)*, edited by J. B. Bury, London, Methuen, 1909-1914.

⁵ELIADE M., *Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétition*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949.

together the old comparison with the waves, the observation of the randomness¹, and the modern grasping of the political determinism.

But this theory was created *after* the processes described by it have taken place. (This aspect where the time factor is essential leads to the grasping of two phenomena of the difficulty of the knowledge of society: one is generated by the distance in space and time between the social causes and the effects²; the other is, on the contrary, the result of the concomitancy of the external world within which people are involved and the conscience of the everyday swim in the external world.) After the happening of the history of social asymmetries it's easier to speak about them. But when people have to think about the present?

The creator of the theory of social system crisis was Marx. He certainly benefited from the theory of the decline and fall, as well as of the conscience of revolution, generated by the epoch he lived in.

But from this moment of revolutions the theoretical result could be rather the spirit of the rising stage of the modern system, as being just the belief of the liberal thinkers of the time. One could have the illusion that the destructive social asymmetries would have been destroyed (just by the revolutions) and that modernity would have last forever as the “finally discovered” organisation of the freedoms.

In fact, Marx was contemporary with the processes of the rising and extinction of the first stage of capitalism, after the victories of the bourgeois revolutions. He could have been shocked because of the explosion of the social asymmetries (the *social problem*³) in the 60', if he would not have begun to create his theory earlier, five years before the 1848 moment.

Starting from a passionate revolt concerning the condition of the poor as well as the rationalist manner to treat history⁴, Marx was motivated to have in view the discipline of a consistent thinking of the complex social determinism. Indeed, he questioned the dominant suppositions of the eternity and rightness of the social asymmetries. By going to the root of things, the real life of the real people, he has constructed a new architecture of new paradigms:

¹KOLAKOWSKI L., “Fabula mundi e il naso di Cleopatra”, in Leszek Kolakowski, *Elogio di incoerenza* (1989), seconda edizione, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1990, p. 213.

²FORRESTER J.W., *Learning Through System Dynamics as Preparation for the 21st Century*, 1994, p. 12, <http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/D-4434-3.pdf> e [forre learn21](http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers/D-4434-3.pdf) (last accessed 15-III-2008).

³It was known as *la question sociale* in the newspapers and works of the time.

⁴POPPER K.R., *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1945, volume II, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 210-212; BAZAC A., „The analysis of Popper on Marx's method. Some nonconformist remarks”, in *Romanian review of political science and international relations*, 2, 2005, p. 13-23.

- The needs of the human beings as starting point of their development as humans (so of the development of the human reactions and “instruments” as language, thinking, culture, production);
- The low level of the productive means¹ as basis of the entire history of the constraint and incentives of the labour force; in this frame, Marx explained that the exploitation and class domination as such were necessary – not from the standpoint of some divine commandments or abstract *post hoc ergo propter hoc* theories – but as historical solutions found on the ground of rarity by people fighting for a sure life and constituting the power relations;
- The ideological² viewpoint of people about the social phenomena, relations and institutions, habits and cultural manifestations; the social conflict - manifested on different levels, as reactions of people belonging to opposite social classes - is framing, together with the social consensus, the existence of the society;
- As the forms of the human civilisation are historical – and not eternal -, the class opposition does the same, as well as the different social oppositions; thus the “ideal” of the historical materialism is not at all the continuous struggle which would destroy the necessary social equilibrium for the decent life, but, on the contrary, the class struggle – which is the at least the background of the different forms of social fights against discrimination – is just a process converging with the objective trends and which pushes toward a more human and decent life for all, that meaning for the labour force also;
- The objective trends consist in the development of the productive means so that the human needs be more and more satisfied;
- What has to be always attacked, from a scientific, and not only from a Marxist position, is the complex of illusions, prejudices and suppositions given birth by the institutionalised devices of the social domination; the scientific attack on this complex is which is so hated by the supporters of the domination: it could be took over in some specific points for prevent the aggravation of the phenomena of conscience of the domination as such, but it is rejected just because it

¹BAZAC A., „Sartre and the adventures of the concept of rarity”, in *Eszmélet* (Hungary), 77, II, 2008, pp. 184-203.

²Analysing at the beginning the *false conscience*, Marx has constituted the notion of *ideology* as ideas about the society constituted from the viewpoint of the social position people are in; or the fact that people reflect the society and have ideas about the social phenomena from the standpoint of the different social positions they occupy; they could think the society from the social position they have or from the social position of other social categories. When they take over the ideas of the different and opposite social positions, or rather when the working, exploited and dominated people take over the social suppositions of the dominant classes, they have that false conscience.

emphasises the system of relationships inwards the ideological phenomena and the economical, political and social facts;

- If the social reactions against the inhumane conditions of living and against the domination are the result of these inhumane conditions of living and domination, and if these reactions accompany the entire history of the mankind as factor of the social change, these reactions as such cannot transform the social organisation/the mode of production before the counterproductive consequences of the existing relations of production were accumulated: “No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”¹.

- There are, in this way, two complementary and intertwining paths to understand the social mechanism: the development of productive forces which creates the objective basis for the possibility of more human conditions for the many, the world labour force; and the constitution of the social conscience (the intellectual tools) of the resistance to oppression as phenomena with bifurcation function; stressing on the objective conditions of the liberation of the labour force - the humankind as a whole - from oppression, neither the importance of the social critique in theory and practice is annulled, nor the practical critique would appear as reaction of adventurism;

- As capitalism is the mode of production based on the political freedom of the labour force – and no more on its slavery or serfdom – strongly related to the modern industrial revolutions, “the bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation”².

- But just this “prehistory” is the problem for the modern and present social theorists; as happened in the pre capitalist systems, and as Marx grasped by analysing the first epoch of capitalism, the final stage of a social system is the

¹MARX K., *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Preface*, 1859, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

²*Ibidem*.

witness of the rise of the new objective trends of a new system (“the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism”, the new productive means and the new labour force), as well as the new elements of the social conscience; in a way and for a while, the last stage of the old system is at the same time the first of the new one, or it gives birth to this; the problem now is the *de-phasing between the objective and the subjective aspects*; this de-phasing is the origin of so many antagonisms between the inertia of the old ideologies – clichés, slogans, *mots d’ordre* – supporting the interests of the old class interests and, on the other hand, the new forces and their new worldviews;

- From this standpoint, the consistent social analysis is like a detective achievement: to discover the interests behind the ideological veil, to follow their evolution as well as their transfiguration into argumentations and values, to emphasise the intertwining of different processes and levels and the logic of the events; in this process, one has to understand the difference between levels of interests and problems, irrespective of the ardent representation of ones of them in different moments and places: for example, the ethnical discrimination, is generally solved before the restrictive allocation and distribution of resources be solved, on world level;

- An essential aspect of Marx’s theory is the world character of the capitalist system (the first one which has this character); thus it is not about the decline and fall of a certain state or empire, but about the historical obsolescence of some relations of production which have extracted their power to lasting and develop just from their world spreading.

Therefore, every social system had till now an ascendant and a descendant phase. The latter does not mean system crisis, even though it contains particular crises in different areas. System crisis occurs when the consequences of the stimulator character of the productive relations become weaker than the brake these ones represent. This fact does not at all lead to the rapid breakdown of the obsolete social order: this one lasts decades and centuries, but with all the innovations – scientific, technical, concerning cultural styles, in management, forms of constraint and incentives of the labour force, policies and prospective views -, the stimulator character of the productive relations does not increase.

The irrationality of restrictive ownership and allocation of resources in the present world capitalism is not an “ideological” thesis, but a conclusion of the analysis of facts. For this reason, there are so different messages which try to change, correct and preserve the status quo, from those who consider that globalisation would be the cause of the present problems to those who want to humanise it, to correct it with a planetary “welfare state” or to prevent the deepening of the problems by different type of revolutions.

My theory highlights the entering of capitalism in its system crisis with the development of the IT techniques and, generally, productive forces. This does not neglect at all the complex interdependences between the world political order and the economical evolution of different parts of the world, nor the cultural involvements, nor the cyclical imbalances on global scale or the demographic flows, as all these were underscored by the World System Theory representatives, but simply focus on the relations between the development of technique and the type of labour (and of the labour force), suggesting that all the interdependences of the above-mentioned factors could break and veil the arrow of asymmetries generated by the modern form (the capitalist relations of production) of the rarity based economy, but cannot stop this arrow.

In other words, only with the development of technique in the present industrial revolution – based on IT and bio-microelectronics and the entire present scientific and technical revolution – the social and existential tensions generated by the relations between this technique and the situation of the potential labour force worldwide¹ emphasise the extinction of the structural capitalist relations and highlight the specific system crisis epoch we live in.

That means that:

A. Neither the First World War nor the October Revolution did signify the presence or coming of the system crisis, but the exhaustion of the monopolist stage of capitalism, so the crisis of this stage. In any case, capitalism did no longer situate in its ascendant phase – where the capitalist relations did demonstrate their superiority towards the feudalist ones by supporting the spring of the *first industrial revolution*. This situation was evident within the pessimistic and reactionary trends of the mainstream ideology after the 1848 revolutions. The First World War and its consequences emphasised the entering of capitalism in its descendant phases, but not in its system crisis.

B. The capitalist system crisis began to manifest according as the new productive means – developed in the form of the second industrial revolution [Note] – began to annul the basis of the history: rarity and the necessity of the labour force to hard work. These productive means began not only to liberate people from the necessity to hard work, but also to become them rich in spare time. The coexistence of the inertial power relations in economy and, on the other hand, this spare time of the many, as well as the coexistence of different levels of development (of productive means) in different parts of the world, generates profound antagonisms and asymmetries which are just the manifestation of the system crisis. The above-mentioned coexistence means that: 1. many people do

¹AMIN S., *World Poverty, Pauperization & Capital Accumulation*, Monthly Review, October 2003, <http://www.monthlyreview.org/1003amin.htm> (last accessed 15-III-2008).

not have employments, 2. many people work in hard conditions, 3. many people work in an infernal rhythm, 4. many people fill up their spare time with cheap entertainment and non rationalist worldviews. The self-fulfilling and creativity did not yet substituted the labour and the “specialisations” of the human beings, which, as H. G. Wells showed long ago, still give a tragic picture about humanity.

C. The system crisis is not annulled by the ascendant phase of the IT revolution, or by the ascendant phase of the present Kondratieff cycle. The coexistence of these opposing tendencies generates more complicated bifurcations following the decisions made in economy and society, but does not stop the system crisis.

2.2. New social asymmetries

Not all the present social asymmetries are new. In many cases, we could observe rather the problem of degrees of asymmetry, the accents made in the present context. The social polarisation, war and discrimination, as well as the attitudes towards these facts, are not new at all. They appear as underscored marks of the present society because of their weight, consequences and conscience. Indeed, within the frame of the new technologies,

- the fact that there are people who spend their time in a very uncreative or under-creative manner,
- the fact that instead of the purpose of the creativeness of everyone and all, the allocation and distribution of resources is so unequal that the consequences at the level of the individual as well as of communities and world lead to the rising of problems,
- the fact of the distance between the democratic values and slogans professed and, on the other hand, the national and world policies which should solve the social problems, as well as the behaviour of many members of the political class, rises,

All these appear as rather irrational from the standpoint of the purpose of social continuity and very disconcerting.

On the other hand, the new asymmetries are known. To mention only few, they are related to the problems of environment (for example the behaviours of different states, the contradictions inward the policies of production and consume), of the asymmetrical demography of different regions of the world (and here migration and policies aiming control it), of war and peace (the asymmetrical forces, the opposing policies, the consequences of the formation and practice of war on the military personnel), development and polarisation (Core – Periphery asymmetry as well as inward Core and inward Periphery, worldwide), of

democracy and justice (let's note only the coexistence of the weak conception of democracy and justice linked to the powerful and, on the other hand, the democratic slogans assumed, the rising of legitimate and illegitimate violence). In some there are strong asymmetries between the global interests and the national/regional interests, manifested rather in the economical competition, although there are common worldviews of most of the decision makers.

A recent analysis of these asymmetries concerning the recent explosion in the agricultural prices shows the necessity to connect different kinds of interests in a coherent unitary vision: the aim to substitute oil by biofuel production led to the limitation of lands for agricultural purposes and the rising of grains and food prices¹.

3. Soft conclusions

One response to the multilateral changes of bivalent senses (positive and negative) in the present society is certainly the scientific systemic approach. The present general worry about social asymmetries is generated by the level of the aggravation of different types of social contradictions. These ones press for taking into account the consequences and interdependences not considered before²: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve..."³. Does it?

The advancement of system approach of the social development and policies could surpass the old, "normal" strategy of social institutions to plan their existence and activity in function of their specific goals.

Within the frame of system dynamics one can grasp the necessary correlations and policies to control them. It is a generous path to solve social problems inside specific areas. But doing this is not enough. The fragmented solutions of autonomous institutions have to be integrated.

The commandment to think globally requires constructing finer instruments to overwhelm different and many subsystems of asymmetrical relations and compensative institutions. At the same time, more determinate

¹BERTHELOT J., Classification of the causes of the recent explosion in agricultural prices, 27 April 2008, http://www.forumtiersmonde.net/fren/index.php?view=article&catid=63%3Afmaforumcaracasoct2008contributions&id=170%3Asummary-of-critical-analysis-of-the-causes-of-the-explosion-in-world-agricultural-prices&option=com_content&Itemid=138 (last accessed 13-V-2008).

²CLUB OF ROME, *From Global Warning to Global Policy, The Future Belongs to All*, Final Statement, 28-29 March 2008, <http://www.clubofrome.org/news/news.php?id=84> (last accessed 12-V-2008).

³MARX K., *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Preface*, 1859, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.

intentions to consider world public interests are needed¹. Facing these challenging goals, one could better apply the pragmatic sense of actions: by evaluating the real outputs of these actions², concluding thus in which frame they are really rational.

Au fond, the core of the present social asymmetries is the complex of maintaining of the *status quo* and the contrary pressures. While most of social philosophy tended to advocate the legitimacy of the *status quo*, the means to maintain it, as well as the means to soft the social contradictions, it insisted at the same time on the necessity to create such a politics which has or is to be the common solving of common problems (Aristotle). From this standpoint, either symmetry or asymmetry were put at the centre of epistemological operations concerning the social systems: to centre different values, activities, institutions, principles in the process of understanding the society, to make hierarchies, to distinct and to identify. In this respect, social symmetry and asymmetry have an *ideological side*, i.e. reflect, consciously or not, different social positions and lead to different perspectives on approaching society. For example, the mainstream in the social, economic, cultural, political doctrines was and is rather an aim of social symmetry. But this one could lead to simplification, exclusion, reduction and abstraction³, which seem to be obsolete to the present state of the social analysis. Finally here, there is a tendency of *non-communication* between different ideological perspectives⁴, whether based on symmetry or asymmetry, even though promoted at a great extend by the mainstream theories.

Beyond the discussion concerning different paradigms of the analysis of society (i.e. insisting on social symmetries⁵ or, on the contrary, on social asymmetries, and treating themselves rather in an absolute or rather in a relative manner), one ought to emphasise the historical character of the social systems⁶, so of the movement and change toward specific symmetry and asymmetry.

¹Universal Declaration of Interdependence, 2002, http://collegium-international.csregistry.org/tiki-list_file_gallery.php?galleryId=1 (last accessed 15-III-2008)

²TONDL L., „System Evaluation of Rational Actions”, *The International Annual of Practical Philosophy and Methodology*, Volume 1, Praxiologies and the Philosophy of Economics, edited by J. Lee Auspitz, Wojciech W. Gasparski, Marek K. Milicki, Klemens Szaniawski, New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.), Transaction Publishers, 1992, p. 648.

³MORIN E., *Introduction à la pensée complexe*(1990), Paris, ESF éditeur, 1992, p. 19.

⁴BOUDON R., *Petite sociologie de non communication*, in “Hermès”, 4, Le nouvel espace public, 1989.

⁵See only the ancient theory basing on the analogy between the *organic* relations of the different parts of the human body (Plato, Menenius Agrippa) and on the other hand, the social relations issued from the social division. Or, later, functionalism. But see also the entire tradition of the man as machine.

⁶CASTELLS M., *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (I - *The Rise of the Network Society*, II - *The Power of Identity*, III - *The End of Millenium*, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell Publishers, 1996-1998.

In this process of change, the *macro* level of organisation, the *medio* and the *micro* ones – every one having many sub-levels - intertwine and include each other reciprocally and successively. There are different dynamics of the components of these levels. At the same time, the different social divisions at macro, medio and micro level could oppose or compose, strengthening or lowering the social asymmetry.

The individual chooses inward his/her environment. In a simplified manner, one could state that in the pre-modern societies and present closed communities the horizon of choices is linked only to the dominant values professed there.

For this reason and as it happened in course of time, those who broke the borders of this determinism were few.

Obviously, during the crises of this type of communities many people were forced to the courage to move off the old familiar cultural and organisational dwelling: every meeting with other cultures and every influence of other cultures generated an enlargement of the human environment, although the choices and possibilities had/have unhappy consequences.

Thus from a general standpoint – and not from the one of people's real acquisition of freedom and decent and creative life, the rise of modernity and the present globalisation are the most important large scale stimuli for the innovation of individuals concerning their own life.

It is about societies becoming *open*, but certainly we live in a phase of world transition: this explains not only the big human movements but also the theories that celebrate the ideal of close communities and cultures.

In this respect, it appears once more that these theories are ideological curtains that encircle the individuals. They are closely connected to the institutional and cultural procedures of the social reproduction¹: of the social division, of the legitimate constraints of the labour force, of the privileges of the empowered.²

¹BOURDIEU P., *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*, Paris, Minuit, 1989, and BOURDIEU P. and PASSERON J.-C., *La reproduction*, Paris, Minuit, 1970, 1989.

²See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford Press, 1956; but, in a rapid historical view: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859); *Consideration on Representative Government* (1861); Gaetano Mosca, *Elements of political science* (1896) (in Italian); JWF Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights* (1821) (in German); Marx: *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) (in German), *The Class Struggle in France, 1848 to 1850* (1848-1850) (in German), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) (in German); Vilfredo Pareto, *Traité de Sociologie Générale* (1916, 1917) (in Italian); Roberto Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1911, 1912) (in German); Max Weber, *Economy and society*

The profound asymmetrical relations which frame the individual - and which are opposing or conjugating – are counterbalanced by soft or even symmetrical inter-human relationships, rather at the micro level: love, friendship and solidarity.

Often these ones function as reparation or compensation for the medio and macro level asymmetry people live in, being considered as main means to fortify the social capital¹.

The compensation does not annul, however, the feelings of alienation towards the social organisation.

Philosophy has insisted on the need and requirement of reciprocity (the Golden Rule of reversibility of positions and actions of the humans) for the recognition of the self by the other and for the recognition of the other by the self as *sine qua non* for the human ontology².

By the intertwining of the functions of the individual, as well as the intertwining of the functions of the institutions, the different factors that influence them, and inter-influence and compose themselves, the social asymmetry rises.

People could get used to this state of things.

Because of the temporary exhausting of the alternatives, it seems that the old *post hoc ergo propter hoc* proves true.

The alternatives to this situation are not the fulfilling prophecies, but the collective debated on the sources and consequences of the social asymmetries.

Note

Because my aim is to explain the evolution of the modern social system, the criterion of the modern industrial revolutions is not the transition from one type of energy to another, nor from one type of machines to another, but the relations between the machines and the labour force working with them and, on a second level, relationship between capital and the labour force.

(1921 – postum) (in German); the critiques of Stalinism: L Trotsky, *The Revolution betrayed* (1936 (in Russian)), Bruno Rizzi, *Bureaucratisation of the World* (1939) (in French), Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (1957) (in Serbo-Croatian), Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative* (1977) (in German), Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura. The Soviet Ruling Class* (1970) (in Russian).

¹PUTNAM R.D., FEDSTEIN L.M., *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2003.

²MERLEAU-PONTY M., *Le Visible et l'Invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964 ; RICOEUR P., *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, p. 193-202.

In the first industrial revolution, the labour force became simple, only helping the machine which did the main tasks of the work.

In the IT revolution from the 70' of the 20th century onwards, but rather from the 90', the labour force re-becomes complex because it knows and control the entire system of the work, as well as the moments before and after the work.

As about the second aspect, the relationship between capital and the labour force, before the IT revolution this relationship was *national*: the British capital, for example, has exported commodities made by the British workers, and has exported capital generated by the profits made from the sales of its national commodities worldwide, and especially in the dependent/colonies from where it took cheap raw materials.

While the second industrial revolution is at the same time the one of the trans-nationalisation of production: a trans-national capital produces with the labour force of the entire world.