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RETURN TO STRUCTURAL CRITICISM: IS THE SYNTHESIS OF CRITICISM AND CRISIS POSSIBLE AGAIN IN "LATE" CAPITALISM?

ABSTRACT

Retrospection and transformation of the phenomena of criticism and crisis in social theory in recent decades have led to the weakening and even "illegitimate" renunciation of the said doublet. The paper presents an analysis of the renewal of discourse on criticism/crisis and its effects with special consideration of the possibilities of structural criticism. We included several authors of recent analyses as well as the viewpoints that have led to reconsideration of historical and analytical dynamics of two categories, structure and conjuncture, as a form of analysis of current structural processes in terms of structural analysis and criticism. The paper comprises three parts. The first part is a reflection on the reason criticism and crisis have been subjected to different processes of derogation despite their original connection. In the second part, we show the effects of different ways that crisis has manifested itself in capitalism and explain its dispersive and "non-punctual" modalities. The third part raises the question of chances of reuniting the crisis and "immanent criticism" based on structural criticism, and we further articulate its connections with immanent criticism. Structural criticism is viewed as a connection between immanent criticism and transcendent orientation that is focused on the reconnection between crisis and criticism, the elements related to capitalism.

KEYWORDS

criticism, crisis,
structure, conjuncture,
capitalism,
neoliberalism

"Crisis by Crisis"

Although the discourse on crisis is an integral part of Western reflexivity, it seems that the criticism/crisis duo has been exposed to various re-examinations in recent decades.¹ It is not an exaggeration to say that some serious question

1 With the notions criticism and crisis we allude to Reinhart Koselleck, but our reasoning is different from his trajectory.



marks have been put to both the criticism and the crisis, thus causing them both to fade into irrelevance.

Alain Badiou, for example, explicitly opposed to the continuation of the crisis figure (Badiou 2009: 34): his referential point, the revolution of 1968, was not chosen from the perspective of a crisis, but due to “political decisions”. There is a “crisis of negativity” and the same “crisis” brings the “crisis” as such to its knees. Badiou certainly does not think that Karl Marx is a “dead dog”, but he pushes aside the pillars of reflexivity according to which the capitalism is immanently prone to crisis. Or, Jean Baudrillard hyperbolically bade farewell to crisis as a reflexive framework for interpretation: it is fueled by the “mimicry” of criticism, its supreme methodological pattern is “imbalance between cause and effect” (Baudrillard 1990: 38). The postulates of crisis theory are no longer valid: the figure of crisis should give way to “*anomie*” that stands a real chance to spread through all the pores of capitalism. Various risk theorists have tried to moderate the concept of crisis (Brunkhorst 2021) and make it a meta-narrative from the perspective of risk (Milenković, Lošonc 2020). In accordance with them even a “technocratic” understanding of the crisis should no longer be licensed; the only pattern is the routinized “risk management” that pervades existing society. “Dedramatization” of crisis that remains without “ecstasy” leads to the omnipotence of government of capitalism that allocates the opportunities for society.

This weariness could be the result of the inflationary use of the category of crisis. Namely, *on the one hand*, there is “excessive” use of the crisis, and *on the other hand*, there is uncertainty regarding the “relevance” of the crisis (Lošonc, Josifidis 2021). It seems that as a constitutive part of the capitalism, the crisis was conceived in theory out of the need for *social control* as much as for *understanding*.² In the shade of everyday life of “late” capitalism, the “crisis” is a word that could lose its historical power to call for change.

The criticism has not been treated any better though. In the past, its “practical” side was aimed at overcoming the sterility of self-closed theoretical reflection. It provided an image of freedom; it was designed as a “reflexive instance”, which, with its vigilance, prevented degradation in power practicing. In the time of classical German idealism, criticism “merged with philosophy” (Jaeggi, Wesche 2009: 11) and later it inspired the social sciences which, by taking over the energy of criticism, converted its practical interest into categories of “structures”.

What is the relationship between criticism and the transcendence of the existing world? Richard Rorty argued that there is a *divergence* between *criticism* and the *alternative* which is postulated in line with the existing world: “the best way to expose or demystify an existing practice would seem to be by suggesting an alternative practice, rather than criticizing the current one” (Rorty 1994: 227, quoted by Jaeggi, Wesche 2009: 6). This would mean that criticism is only a poor substitute for an effective social alternative. That is, the multiplication of criticism arises in a situation where the alternative has

2 On control as the organic part of capitalism: van Pijl 2022; Bauman 1987: 10.

lost its authority. Rorty suggests an “alternative” as a “*direct*” solution *without* the “mediation” of criticism. This is completely opposite to the maxims of the former Yugoslav praxis-philosophy (Petrović 1972) which pleaded for *convergence* between “permanent” criticism of the existing state and transcendence. The postulate of “unrelenting Criticism of All that Exists” is suggested within socialism because it was assumed that socialism is the most “suitable” ground for criticism. Consequently, “criticism” *merges* with the “alternative” and feeds on its meanings.

We can even discuss the tendencies that reject *both* criticism *and* the alternative. For Niklas Luhmann there was a primordial “sin” that paved the way for social sciences in the XIX century. It is a “normative hubris” that drives away “analytical reason” and confronts existing constellations of society with normatively stuffed concepts and, as conservative Odo Marquard says, it constantly strives to fill its reservoir with the “lack of meaning”. Only the subordination of the “crisis/criticism” duo can ensure the “*authority*” of social sciences again (Blühdorn 1999: 185).

Furthermore, the tendency of regression of criticism is manifested in the fact that criticism, which once used to be “unitary”, was by some theorists split into two: “social criticism” and “criticism by art”, as Chiapello and Boltanski claim. At the same time, criticism guided by artistic imagination, which boasts of being more radical than the social one, does not aim at the “transformation of totality”, but at finding the impoverished “authenticity” (Boltanski, Honneth, Celikates 2014: 561). The critical momentum *vis-à-vis* the totality of social relations made the last twitch in the mentioned year, after which it lost its unitary identity. This can even be interpreted as a kind of *deformation* of criticism: a debilitated criticism without “transformative power” ends in “passive revolution” *à la* Gramsci (Demirović 2008: 18) as well as in constant demands for “deficient authenticity”, but this does not affect at all the structure of society (Ritsert 2019: 45–89). Instead of the “negativity” of criticism dissolving existing relationships, it has adapted too well to the existing world and lost its sharpness.

We need to ask again about the possible meanings of the transformation of criticism. *Is it a “crisis of criticism” or its insufficiency due to “dedramatization” of the crisis itself?* If the bitterness of criticism is diluted by the absence of “totality” as a cognitive and existential horizon of the subject – diluted by not marginal but borderline, and not peripheral but local – then this diversion of criticism (“criticism of everything that exists”) leads to the relativization of criticism itself. Namely, it is difficult to have criticism without the critical condition contained in the awareness of complex dimensions of the crisis, of the possibilities that arise in relation to the crisis. When vaguely expressed, the criticism, no matter how lethal, becomes dissolved in “weak stabs” across a large, endless body with “atrophied” society that lacks tension.

It should be briefly pointed out that the tradition of the “crisis/criticism” duo is not only related to the proponents of radical criticism. Jürgen Habermas believed that there was a “dialectical” connection between criticism and

crisis, which could be supported by “contradictory rationalizations” of modernity (Cordero 2014: 1–19). Still, we should not forget that the fundamental articulation was made by Reinhart Koselleck who showed the “genesis of modernity” with conservative admixtures (Koselleck 2006: 207) based on the confrontation between the rising citizens and the absolutist state. In fact, there is a certain “circularity” between criticism and the crisis in the midst of that struggle where moral demands stand against the absolutist state and where criticism has become “political” but with a “philosophical touch”. But the criticism practiced by the citizens triggers “uncontrolled processes”. The crisis draws its strength from the world that has been “diagnosed” with crisis, and at the same time, as Koselleck constantly points out, it aims at making its own diagnosis “resolute”, that is a “decision”. The crisis should be understood as a “process”, the “state” which *tends to* become a “decision”.

Some authors are referring to the “sterility” of criticism by all those faithful to Enlightenment norms and this tendency is leading to “melancholy” concerning the relevant issues (Brown 1999: 19). Who is the addressee of the criticism? Is the one giving criticism superior to the possible addressee? Can there be a misunderstanding between the subject of criticism and the addressee? What is the subject of criticism: given forms of life, “inauthenticity”, the inadequacy of the existing system for its own principles and the principles of freedom and equality, or inadequacy of normativity that draws strength from nature?³ Does the criticism tolerated in capitalism have a certain “market value”, that is, a mercantile expression on the “market of eccentricity”?⁴ Why frequent criticism does not cause a crisis? How can criticism become a “practical force” that *causes* a crisis?

Those questions have been asked often. So, in recent decades, *melancholy* has been thematized several times as a medium of expression of all those who are disappointed with the balance of modern criticism. When the criticism has been defeated too many times, melancholy *overcomes* the subject of criticism. Moreover, the anticipation of failure and fruitless criticism can also stimulate the rise of “melancholic science”⁵ that emerges on the “ruins” of criticism (Rose 1978). It represents a reflection that has the memory but only of failures, and the same experience is pre-built into its projections.

However, the situation is ambiguous since melancholy cannot be equated with *demobilization*. Despite the present situation, the “virtue of criticism” as well as the “passion for criticism” (Walzer 2002; Demirović 2008: 19) continue to exist, accompanied with the evaluative practice of current tendencies.

3 Henning claims that there is „[...] a naturalistic dimension with an Aristotelian trend which interprets the equal access to an all-round development of human capabilities as a criterion for a good society [...] as naturalistic criticism” (Henning: 266).

4 Horkheimer paraphrased, Horkheimer 2002: 42, 59; Celikates 1999.

5 Something different: Freyenhagen 2014: 867-893. See Dean who emphasizes the „compromise of the left melancholic“ and who „leaves an invincible, reified figure of the Master, one that is itself split between its authoritative and its obscene enactments”, 2012: 161. 169.

It can be argued that there is an *existential* risk of criticism, not in the sense of necessary “fallibility” of the criticism, but in the sense that the “passion for criticism” involves the “whole personality of the critic” who gives “personal existential dimensions” at other’s disposal (Horkheimer 2002). As a result, Max Horkheimer, described the critical intentions of the discussed theory as “existential judgment”, as opposed to “categorical” and “hypothetical” judgments of other theories (Habermas develops criticism into a “lawyer discourse”; criticism “*defends*” those subjects who are “ready” for emancipation) (Horkheimer 2002: 42, 99).

In that sense, *melancholy is an expression of existentialist conditioning of the critic himself*. The mentioned “existential risk” can be understood as “melancholic betting” (*Le Pari Mélancolique*),⁶ in the footsteps of Blaise Pascal’s or as engagement, but without teleological certainty.

Criticism as shrewd involvement that fights benightedness repeats itself and acquires the rank of “habitus”, and it creates a crisis. Such criticism can escalate into a crisis that always implies uncertainty in terms of “unexpected” outcome. Thus, Koselleck’s crisis implies that the appropriate decision “has not yet” been made (“not yet”, this is the key temporal aspect of a crisis for him), and Derrida suggests that the act of “naming” a given situation crisis is already a certain “normalization”, i.e. problematical stabilization of “*indecisive*” situation (Derrida 2002: see for example 69–71; Lošonc: 2020). “Betting” is making a criticism appropriate when the crisis induced by criticism is woven into uncertainty: betting exists because there is no historical-philosophical guarantee of the outcome of criticism.

We just have to mention deep distrust of the original Enlightenment in the phenomenon of melancholy and that it maximally polarizes the potentials of the mind and melancholy. Consequently, it took a long time to move from the “criticism of melancholy” to the “melancholy of criticism” of today’s time (Böhme 1988: 256–274). As we have seen, “melancholy of criticism” and “melancholic betting” are now both being affirmed because of the “fallibilism” of criticism and because of the uncertainty of the direction of criticism.

Nevertheless, discursive conditions of criticism/crisis have changed in the meantime and we must take that into account if we wish to understand the existing context. Namely, the 2007 crisis changed the perspective: commentators brought the crisis to the scene once again; it became a horizon of discursiveness. Thus, the conditions for melancholy changed.

We call this a “*post-melancholic*” state of criticism that transforms into a crisis.

This still does not mean that the smooth unity of crisis and criticism has been created. Some theorists even strongly argue that criticism should be freed from the ballast of “figure of crisis” (Azmanova 2014). Thus, the critique should continue on its own, without the crisis as its crutch. In other words, the scope of criticism should follow the path of well-calibrated “pragmatism” instead of

6 Bensaïd 1997; Antentas 2016: 51–106.

the “metaphysical” heights of the crisis. Therefore, criticism without the “tutoring” of the crisis is possible, crisis is *not* “horizon” of criticism. Others note precisely the opposite: the crisis has erupted with far-reaching consequences, but it has not been accompanied by serious criticism that has worn off.

Having summarized these briefly presented opinions, we have to conclude that there is still a „weak“ connection between crisis and criticism.

Crisis: Modifications of the Modalities of Expression

In the meanwhile, the crisis has returned within the framework of interpretations (Brunkhorst 2011). We should not forget that it always has certain “*requests*” from us. Hannah Arendt, in whose work crisis has a special meaning, argues that the crisis could even be “*disastrous*”. She believes that the crisis is never harmless; every crisis “destroys” at least one part of “our common world” (Arendt 1961: 186). Overcoming the crisis causes irreversible “scarring”.

Are Arendt’s warnings coming true in the present crisis? There are a number of different narratives about the 2007 crisis (Roitman 2014). It is often analyzed in the light of the financialization that destroys the “real” economy, encourages rentiership, and creates hyperoligarchic structures. Some believe that the manifestation of “excessive” financialization is a diversion of capitalism that has lost its liberal roots and has become “neoliberal” through transubstantiation. Consequently, the financialization is also a crisis of “neoliberalism” which tends to adapt society to the patterns of the expanded market. There are also those who view society as a “moral reality” emphasizing moral degradation, especially “hypertrophied envy” (conservatives treat it as the supreme manifestation of degradation). Others believe that we can still rely on the orthodox-Marxist theory of crisis, which, predicting the space of objective possibilities, projects average fall of profit rate (Roberts 2017: 319–338). It is also claimed that the mentioned crisis is only a stage of furrowed capitalism which, due to internal compulsions, develops capital-intensive technology, i.e. automation which implies a smaller volume of value creation (Rasmussen, Routhier 2019). Of course, this thinking tests some interpretations of criticism by political economy that discovers the *immanent* causes of the crisis.

This most certainly does not exhaust the list. Heterogeneous interpretations must indicate the scope of the crisis, which cannot be underestimated, as empirical data show and regressive economic tendencies illustrate. Then, why are there such claims that we can count on something that is not a “real crisis” but “almost a crisis”, and that we are facing a ““crisis of the crisis of capitalism” (for all terms Azmanova 2020), or that we are experiencing a “crisis of crisis” (Derrida 2002), “crisis by crisis” (Bensaïd 1997)? Why are there a number of commentators who are not sure that the crisis has been revitalized? Why is it especially emphasized that this is just a “crisis *in* capitalism” and not a “crisis of capitalism”?

How can we explain the arisen uncertainty about the relation between crisis and criticism?

The question of “circularity” of crisis and criticism should be raised again (Ritsert 2009). Traditional explanation of crisis refers to it as a thematic framework that offers a completed narration. The temporality of crisis implies that the genesis of crisis can be located in time and finalized in a distinctly limited time instance. For example, the economic metaphor of “cyclical” represents a story by which, in the 19th century, there were certain periods of time when a crisis would break out and end a certain “cycle”, thus creating the conditions for the development of a new “cycle” (Mandel 1975: 108). “Reality” itself is “cyclical”. Articulation of “long waves” enables the presentation of the critical rhythm of capitalism and a coherent narrative about its determinations. Insight into repeated crisis sequences is where criticism can draw its practical meaning.

If we analyze the manifestations of the mentioned crisis in 2007, we have to think about the changes that influenced it. The same chain of “events” reinforced already existing components in crises. At the same time, the meaning and experience of the crisis are transformed, which warns us not to approach the phenomenon guided by the old “prejudices”. The crisis in capitalism is changing the dynamics of capital, thus changing also its own apparent modalities or forms of manifestation. The crisis is visible in different ways. It is a special form of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1976: 81), but it is possible for a crisis to change its forms in the course of destruction. *Not to “reify” the phenomenon of crisis*: it means to rethink the dynamics of its “historicity” (Honneth 2007).

Every crisis has both „diachronic“ and „synchronic“ elements (Lošonc 2019) just as it has the elements of the previous crisis and those of prospective future. It is not a coincidence that one of the significant interpretations of 2007 crisis is that it was a consequence of the crisis in the 1970s that had not been overcome (Mavroudeas, Papadatos 2012; Plender 2020). Thus, in the still existing crisis, there are various condensed elements: the neoliberal outcomes of the crisis of the 1970s, the oligarchic components of social structure, the reorganization of intersubjective and intrasubjective relations influenced by the capital. Even the current crisis only conditionally corresponds to the patterns of coherent narrative. Its manifestations are scattered in time, the consequences emerge to the surface in a wide time span; they correspond to the model of “metastasis”,⁷ that is, the model of wide distribution of consequences and spreading of symptoms in time.

The crisis of 2007 which has not yet ceased to condition the existence of late capitalism, cannot be integrated into the rank of standard “great crises” (Aglietta), because it summarizes a far greater number of elements than its predecessors. Earlier major crises did not confront environmental issues, which

⁷ It would be interesting to treat the term „polycrisis“ Tooze (2022), Morin, Kern (1999), Homer-Dixon et al. (2015).

does not mean that they did not exist latently, but those issues were just not relevant enough for the social actors of that time. Now, no crisis can be isolated from the said issues: as the discourse of the “apocalypse”, a “meta-crisis”, or as in Baudrillard’s style, a “virtual catastrophe” postulates it. In fact, the significance of the criticism-crisis *circulating flow* can be clearly demonstrated with ecological processes: this is also the basis of the question of whether intensified unfavorable ecological processes accelerate the “transcendent” criticism that will turn into a crisis, or a “resistance” that tends to become “revolution” (Malm 2014: 28–44). It is no coincidence that different critical discourses (as anthropocene) concerning the crisis of “metabolism” between nature and society arise precisely in the context of the crisis in question (Povinelli 2017: 293).

Other forms of crisis manifestations are also summarized in the mentioned crisis, which only symbolically relates to one chronological date. Has not the relationship between the logic of democratic and the logic of capitalism been maximally sharpened in recent decades? A “depoliticized public” that does not fit its category is a “form” of the current crisis “*par excellence*” (Streeck 2015, Jackson 2014).

The present flows of crisis also bring to the surface epistemological problems for criticism which aim is to use “veridictions” to relate to the truth: advanced “relativization” and “crisis of facticity” (van Dyk 2017: 347) spoil the chances for criticism to be “true” (Arendt treats the truth as “coercion”, Arendt 2013: 44–92). But ideologically, any coercion is difficult to transfer to the people of late capitalism.

Therefore, how is criticism possible in the constellation of “post-truth”? How is it possible to develop the performative power of criticism when the category of truth is exposed to drastic “relativization”?

Finally, the unfinished Covid-19 is viewed as a new “stage” but part of the same “chain” of different crises (Milenković, Lošonc 2021). It evokes all determinations that we have mentioned so far, *but in a new context*: the eruption of zoonosis that evokes the “ontological independence of nature” (Malm 2014) in contrast to society, the reorganization of existing relations through new forms of “horizontal” and “vertical inequalities”.⁸ The crisis has become “normalized”.⁹ It is no longer an “exception” that dramatizes the experience of social reality. This is proved by the fact that the current situation is typically understood only as “interval” by various authors¹⁰, that we have been put in between two crises: the 2008 crisis is still ongoing, and new forms of crisis are already vibrating on the horizon.¹¹ Even Gramsci’s famous point about the crisis loses its relevance here (he separates “organic” and “revolutionary” crisis) as an intermediate between the old one that has not “died” yet, and the new one that has “not yet been born” (Lošonc, Josifidis 2021).

8 Covid-19: the impacts of the pandemic on inequality, <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14879>, accessed, 9/15/2020

9 We use the “normalization” term as Foucault, see: Link, Hall 2004.

10 Badiou uses the term “intervally”, but we use it with a different meaning.

11 Financial Times 2020.

Structural Criticism of Capitalism Redivivus

There is debate about the importance of *subjectivity* in a crisis. Some authors even claim that the crisis is an eminently “subjective phenomenon” (Thom 1976: 34, quoted by Lošonc 2019). But what is the relationship between “structural determinations” and the mentioned subjectivity?

Frédéric Lordon, who promoted the “structuralism of passion”, made a diagnosis that we can accept: the “escalation of speech on crisis” is evident but it is without any “results” (Lordon 2013: 115). Fruitless repetition of the discourse on crisis and lamenting over our vulnerability to the crisis actually conceals our “helplessness”. Lordon suggests being cautious with (performative) statements about the crisis, and he even proposes certain orientation criteria. As we shall see soon, he intends to view the crisis by thematizing the relationship between theory and practice and by giving importance to “*naming*” a situation “*as crisis*”.

”The crisis is manifested after it has happened”, claims Lordon, that is, it can be recognized “only *post festum*” (Lordon 2013, Milenković, Lošonc 2021; Lošonc 2020). Although the criticism made “preparations” for the crisis, it can be *reconnected* with criticism only if the “collective body” is started with the tautological motto “enough is enough”. Lordon uses the well-known psychoanalytic term “*passage à l’acte*”, (Lordon, *ibid.* 117) which here means an “affective tendency” towards acting. He reinforces the claim: “critical dynamics” is launched only by shaping “collective power” (*potentia*) that is ready for “transformative action”. The final result is the crisis as a “social event”, if the “collective body” realizes the said potential; crisis theory reaches its full meaning based on “collective action”.

This argumentation is valuable as well as an important warning about meaningless frequent linguistic acts of “*naming*” some situations the crises. Criticism warrants that the crisis cannot be left to “neutrality”. *Criticism-crisis-criticism that gravitates towards the transformation of the existing situation: here Lordon also encounters our opinion regarding the “circularity of the relationship between criticism and crisis”.*

However, regardless of the relevance of Lordon’s observations, we would like, at least briefly, to make things clearer. The phenomenon of crisis brings us back to the analysis of the relationship between *structure and agency* (Callinicos 2014: 38–102, Heras, 2017).¹² *The structural criticism of capitalism rises based on the identification and application of this problem* (Fuchs, Marisol, 2008). It attributes certain power to structures, more precisely it adds *the power of the determination* to structure or “core-structure” (*Kernstruktur*; Marx), that is, to the complex relationship of related aspects used as *explanans*¹³ in terms of manifestations of social tendencies. Based on that, the structure of capitalism as a place of domination can be criticized as well. In doing so, various relevant

12 In our problematization, tensions between structure and actors are considered somewhat one-sidedly with a focus on the structure of capitalism. One proposition instead of structure and agency is offered by Fairclough (1992), Flatchart (2016).

13 For the term, Haslanger 2015.

terms appear: “causal power of social structures” (D. Elder-Vass, 2010), “structural explanation” (S. Haslanger), “structurally constituted forms of power” (D. Gädeke, 2019: 21), “structural constraints” (S. Haslanger).

We are interested in the figure of “structural domination”, which refers to the configuration of power, that is, on *the determinations that define “division”, and the “appearance of social subjects”*. It is no coincidence that feminism is also interested in the structural aspects of power (Einspahr 2010: 1–9, the criticism, Flatchart 2017).

The ambition of *structural criticism* is reflected in the structural domination in capitalism that renews itself during the crisis.¹⁴ In other words, regardless of the built-in heterogeneity, or the “varieties of capitalism”, “ideal avarage” (Marx) of capitalism is applied as an epistemological principle that becomes the material of criticism.

The mentioned logic of the enduring structurality of capitalism argues that “late capitalism” is determined by the same structure as any earlier form of capitalism – despite the unstoppable dynamics of capitalism. In the epistemological sense, the “structural criticism” of capitalism implies “*abstraction*” and certain “*despecification*”. Abstraction refers to the recognition of “structural determinations” and “structural constraints” of capitalism – independently of empirical specificities and uneven tendencies within the capitalist structure. Despecification means that the unitary determinations of capitalism are identified regardless of the geographical unit in which the object is treated. This does not mean that it delegitimizes historically and contingently formed “conjunctures”: it is indisputable that at the level of “second-order” there are differences in terms of governance, neoliberal authoritarianism, forms of precarity, etc. The structure is not “univocal”, but contains an “intersection” of different trajectories. In analysis, it is always necessary to relate the structure of a concrete form of capitalism and the mentioned trajectories. However, the dynamics of capital conditions such complex determinations, “*non-contingent*” “form-determinations” that *explain* the ways of behavior of social actors, their motivated performance within the given social relations, the existing configuration of power (Jessop 2016: 893–907). “Varieties of capitalism”, the relationship of the periphery to the center (to use the vocabulary of the world-system) are necessary part of the explanation, but they are *preceded* by “structural determinations” as *explanans*.

The figure of “structure as limit” (Balibar 1993) does not only imply the fact that they question the intentions of social actors but their manifestations bear *the meaning and significance* only in structural determinations. The figure of “structure” raises doubt about it being permanent with an “excess” of “cohesion”, or a formal “coexistence” of different elements. It was accused of being too tense in its set of synchronized relationships thus disabling the conceptualization of historical change. However, the structure we have in mind is not a functional

14 Structural criticism is used with different meanings and by various theorists (Bidet, itd.). The text that follows will show our interpretation.

“closure” or essentialized “frame”; we conceptualize the situation in capitalism as a manifestation of “determinism without reductionism” (Jessop 2016).

The structural criticism opens two fronts: negatively, it protests against the traditional articulation that promotes the “capitalist class” which, from above, directs capitalism based on self-determination, but does not accept the “fetishization” of the structure based on which “*motivational aspects, the subjectivity*” of the capitalists do not play any role, that is, it denies the thesis that only “structures dominate”.¹⁵ On the contrary, structures are always “mediated” by motives and intentions. Structures and its “coercive laws” act “*on people*” but “through them” (Schlaudt 2022: 3). The existence of “anonymous domination” in capitalism does not imply that it is a process without subjects: the stabilization of structure in capitalism is preceded by the emergence of classes, a constitutive “class mediated” *Gewalt* that configures power relations. Furthermore, we refer to Marx’s well-known claim about the “execution” of the law of capital, but with the additional clarification that the mentioned “execution” cannot take effect without subjectivity. Determinations that mark the modalities of capital are *meta-intentional*, they occur “behind the back” of actors and cannot be initiated without certain teleological motives (such as profit), “mediating entities” within social practice. Laws of capitalism “override the motives” (Schlaudt 2022: 64).

Structural criticism does not mean that only structures are criticized, but agents as well in the context of certain structural determinations, that is, agents are “exposed to criticism” regarding their “position” in the structure (Lohoff 2013). Therefore, this type of criticism we have in mind is based on the *non-“dualistic”* understanding of the relationship between the structure and action (Bierwirth 2015: 5–32; Demirović 2010: 153–176). This is why all orientations that treat “structure” and “agency” as *two* “ontological entities” should be refuted (Callinicos, for example, oscillates between structure and agency, Grollios: 2013)¹⁶. The structure is as category different from agency, but its relationship could not be described as “ontological dualism”. We believe that their relationship is “dialectical determination” that cannot be incorporated in the logic of “cause and effect”, and they represent “specific internal structure, that between determinant and determined phenomena” [...] “they are *both* determinant and determined” for all terms (Carchedi 2011: 17).

However, the criticism/crisis duo can only be reconnected if we treat their relationship from *power-theoretic* perspective of capital/capitalism. The structure as a place of “non-chaotically” manifested “regularities” (Jessop 2016) cannot be reified as a complex of formalized and internal relations. Therefore,

15 Vrousalis: “It is a fallacy of composition to infer, from the latter statement, that cathedral structure supports cathedral walls. Rather, cathedral structure confers on buttresses a power of support over walls. By the same token, capitalist structure... confers on capitalists a power of dominion over workers. Impersonal domination therefore entails that capitalist structures themselves do not dominate” (Vrousalis 2017).

16 Demirović (2010): we do not only agree with the statement that the ‘system’ is equal to the structure.

there is a clear distinction between “system” and “structure” (Bidet 1999) which must be insisted on if structural criticism is to be reached. The power that can be attributed to the representatives of capital *cannot* be deduced from the “intersubjective” relations of capitalists and wage workers, as much as it must relate to the “class structure”. Therefore, the structure is not a neutral medium of different “synchronous moments” or just a “superior” instance to the existing agencies, *but it contains “traces”, “forms of previous struggles”,* loops of social conflicts, responding to/overcoming the crisis. In a word, the structure was created due to a certain dynamic of “subjectivity” or the conflicting subjectivity that is hidden and manifested through the structure. The structural criticism that mobilizes during and over the crisis constantly tends to show that the reality of capitalism “hides” this subjectivity and shows itself as “positivity” (Jaeggi, Wesche 2009).

In any case, the “power of capital” is always in disposition *in crisis*: the question arises as to whether the same power will be reorganized or transformed; for all cases, we have already had examples in the history of capitalism (Gerstenberger 2007). Then, does the restoration of capital enable the „reproduction” of “capitalism”, which is a naturally more complex concept than capital itself?

We start from the point that power-theoretic perspective of capitalism is based on the “triad” (Mau 2019: 271). *First*: “economic power of capital”¹⁷ which implies that capital, organizing the process of production and directing the use of labor force, reproduces itself as a specific social relationship; *secondly* “ideology”, and *thirdly* “violence” (Vrousalis, 2019 a, b, Özselçuk, Madra 2007). *If we focus here only on “economic power”, it must be said: the mentioned form of power can be derived from structural determinations as well as from the modalities of socialization in capitalism.* Therefore, “economic power” is not “episodic”, that is, not “purely interactional power” (Gädeke 2019: 1–23), nor determined by “opportunistic” motives; it is not “dyadic”¹⁸ and it is neither “intersubjective” or “arbitrary”, as in the case of neorepublicanism which sees the phenomenon of „arbitrary interference” (ibid.) as a freedom inhibitor regarding subjects.

“Economic power” is not “dyadic” – that is, it cannot be reduced to “intersubjective relation” because the most important relations are mediated by “things” (*Sache*) in the perspective of capital; the capitalist can be the “executor” of the corresponding laws only in such a way as to direct the use of certain things that serve as capital, or as an instance of „structural domination” (Vrousalis, 2015: 123, 2019a; Einspahr, 2010). Finally, the existence of structural determinations, as well as the fact that the power we have in mind is not “episodic” means that the structure is reproduced and incorporated in the “logic of reproduction” (Bidet 1999: 21–29). As for feminism, which points to the conceptualization of “reproduction” (Aruzza 2015), it follows the “*mutual implication*” between structure and reproduction.

17 The notion “economic power of capital” is also used by Mau (ibid.).

18 On triadic structure of power, Vrousalis 2019 a, b.

The fact that structural criticism is open to historical-contingent moments and that it treats them as *explanans* only together with structural determinations can be proven by the following representative examples. *The first example:* neoliberalism has become an academic discipline (Plehwe, Slobodian, Mirowski 2020). However, widespread criticism of neoliberalism (rent-based life, etc.) (Miliou, Sotiropoulos 2009: 167–184), or at least most of the criticism directed at neoliberalism *does not* tackle the structure. This criticism is valuable in terms of covering certain empirical tendencies, but it is critically centered on the phenomenon of excessive marketization, which is placing different spheres of human life under its hegemony by conforming them to market norms. Yet, the criticism that centers the market on a problematic instance of the “totalizing coordination” of human life is valuable but insufficient. By transferring contradictions into the zone of market expansion, *the contours of structural determinations* are still not visible. “Market discipline”, “violence of market” (Gerstenberger 2022) introduction of “economization in politics” (Morgan, 2003) – are of course important because they shed light on modern dynamics, but they do not represent *explanans* but *explanandum*. Neoliberalism is not the ultimate cause of structuring capitalist reality. In other words, the criticism of neoliberalism does not refer to the “economic power” of capital as a structural definition. Without accepting the aforementioned “triadic” structure of power in capitalism, we cannot understand the rise of neoliberalism as a “mutant” of liberalism, which can only be a certain sequence.

The second example: the gender configuration of power, “gender-biased” aspects of power, elements of the patriarchal system in capitalism, the “feminization of labor” are systematically treated through feminism. However, does the same configuration, or “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1991) amongst different forms of subjects arise from the very structural determinations of capitalism, or is it just added to capitalism, which would mean that it is an “external” phenomenon of capitalism? This dilemma is part of a challenging question: do certain (gender, and other) differences immanently belong to the field of capitalism, or does capitalism just “interpret” or “translate” the differences in question by bringing them into its structures? Are the differences only recurrences of the tradition of *transhistorical* “gender-ideology” or capitalism develops those differences from its own internal structure?

The mentioned “material” of feminism does not originate from capitalism, but it is a fact that capitalism “articulates”¹⁹ the same material, that it connects some elements of the mentioned problem (“gender-exploitation”) or transforms them. Gender-biased differentiation, “antropological differences” (Balibar 1993), have *certain* “independent” (Mau 2019; MacNally 2017) and “external” reality in relation to the historical dynamics of capitalism, but it cannot be said that capitalism is a certain form of “neutral container” which just receives the mentioned differences. Gender-dimensions represent the “external/internal”

19 Articulation presents „non-necessary connections“, „translation“ of something that is not intrinsic, Mezzadra 2010: 121–137.

dialectical reality of capitalism in the division of labor, in the processes of social reproduction. As it is claimed in feminist debates on the relationship between the “logical” and “historical”: gender-based explanation cannot be derived “directly” from “economic power of capital” without certain “mediations”, but this does not mean that in the class power perspective of capitalism it is only “pure contingency” (Aruzza 2015; Aruzza 2017: 85–101). Namely, this perspective shows the tendency of capital to “exploit” the system of differences, including “gender-distinctions”, and it also shows that indirectly, gender differences manifested in the division of labor in the household structure can be useful material for the expansion of capital.

The mentioned examples are divergent because neoliberalism was developed differently compared to feminism. *However, the results still converge in the selected perspective.* We can understand both phenomena only if we accept structural determinations of capitalism. Typically, feminism could be characterized by the following: “sexism and racism do not in-and-of themselves act as the main organizing principle for the worldwide production and distribution of goods . . . key issues of sexuality, race (tend – A. L. et al.) to revolve around a hub of profit” (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 15 – quoted by Carchedi 2011: 15). The same determinations are associated with a series of “non-necessary connections”, “necessary contingencies”, that is, with the dynamics of conjectural aspects and with the waving of contingencies. This introduces an original openness into the field of manifestation of the same determinations that we can call “underdetermined causality” (Balibar 1993: 1–16).

The crisis is a set of phenomena that implies a set of structural and “conjunctive” determinations” and “dialectic” of “logical” and “historical” moments. The immanence of crisis in capitalism enables us to think of it as a contingent phenomenon, and there are historical moments in every crisis (“remnants” of past crises, the “experiences of previous struggles”, etc). This way, conditions are created for answering Lordon’s question above, which, through the category of affectivity, emphasizes the problem of the relationship between structural and conjectural dimensions (“structuralism of passion”): in any case, structural criticism always relates to “conjectural flows”. It is characterized by the fact that it aims at consistently respecting the structure that explains the possibilities, the forms of movement for social actors.

If we look at the different forms of resistance in the last decade (2010-2020), it can be said that the mentioned performative act (“it is enough!”) has been pronounced several times. Heterogeneous forms of resistance, the search for alternative forms of community, opposition to the policy of “austerity”, “transversal” forms of “disruptions” in action marked the last decade which empirical richness of contentions is impressive (Bailey 2015: 5–32; Dinerstein 2012: 521–540). At the same time, these resistances are resistances to the “normalization of the crisis” by enabling the creation of a link between structural determinations and the experience of injustice, inequality, and other phenomena – they suggest the strength of resistance. The structural criticism that could give meaning to these forms of resistance *opposes* the “normalization of the

crisis”: it starts from something else, namely, the fact that “normality” has the “character of crisis” (Engster 2016), that “normality” is *mediated* by crisis tendencies. This is, after all, the real meaning of the term “immanence of the crisis”, which is not affected at all by the sharpening of the dichotomy between “essence” and “empirical state”.²⁰ The crisis is the “attitude” of capitalist normality towards itself.

Consequently, we believe that we are in the middle of a prolonged crisis that is not just “almost a crisis”. Criticism is always intervention in the world flow: without a crisis, it loses its objective reference – just as a crisis without criticism faces the danger of becoming only an element of the functional connection of the world. The conditions for linking the crisis and criticism have been re-created – although, of course, these are only latent conditions. At the same time, the structural criticism is not a secured “teleology of history” in the sense that it can guarantee an alternative outcome, that is, the transcendence of the existing. It is known that the crisis is determined by various possibilities, such as the restorative ones.

Many theorists agree on the relevance of “immanent criticism” (Pepperell 2010). It is even appropriate to classify “different forms” of immanent criticism (Lindner 2011). Immanent criticism aims at evaluating the existing practice but it does not create the foundations of its normativity based on “external resources” relating to capitalism: it does not rely on original, eternal nature or authentic human essence that would light up behind the “reified”, alienated intersubjective relationships. Proponents of immanent criticism want to find justification for their attitude towards transformations, mutations of the existing social practice. Such a criticism cannot be accused of being an expression of mere subjectivity of the theorists: the criticism constructed on the grounds of theory brings to light the interpreted meanings which *in potentia* “already” exist in the “class and other social struggles” (Creydt, 2018). Here, the existing reality is not measured by “external” standards; this modality of criticism could even be claimed to follow the logic of “objective criticism” and evoke Hegel by the following: “it presents itself as a critical enactment of the tensions, moments of crisis or deficits on the side of the objects (social relations) [...] the things here criticize themselves” (Jaeggi 2017: 212). In that case, immanent criticism becomes “social criticism” by “things themselves”: it is a constructive companion that leads to the articulation of objective tendencies in those social movements that arose due to the crisis eruption in 2007. At the same time, the producers of immanent criticism know that there are certain contrafactual presuppositions (Ritsert 2009) that is, normative articulations of valid relations in the existing “social relations” – consequently the normative effects of immanent criticism necessarily face the same.

Of course, structural criticism accepts the tasks of immanent criticism. It does not also want the operationalization of external measures by which the

20 This indication has critical impact on Đinđić who emphasizes the criticism of Marx (1987: 36).

existing social relations are measured, but it wants “practical objectivity”, “practical truth” (Sartre, 1981: 277). Therefore, immanent criticism is its ally. At the same time, to the extent that this criticism affects the structural dimensions of capitalism, its objective is not to lose the connection with *transcendence*. Consequently, structural criticism must reconsider in this paper the already mentioned complex relationship between criticism and the transcendence of capitalism. Obviously, there is no “one-way street” between criticism and transcendence – Rorty, whom we have already mentioned, *undermined* exactly this relationship. As a matter of fact, structural criticism does not apriori offer conditions for emancipation. If it wants to have practical orientation force, it primarily resists the “functionalization” of the crisis, which reduces-neutralizes it to a sequence of events without any potential for alternatives.

Therefore, structural criticism intends to recreate, even “resurrect” the category of “*possibilities*” that become exhausted in a situation with no alternative. The proponent of this modality of criticism must of course know that the crisis is not only „openness to transcendence“, but also a possibility for „demobilization of resistance“. The crisis could destroy the „alternative fantasy“ (Cohen, 1988: 244), and decrease the chances for „alternative to capitalism“ (Wright, Hahnel, 2014). This is its primordial ambivalence. This way, there are few criticisms/crises that can be found in this ambivalence. The structural criticism that seeks to reunite the criticism as a “social practice” that thematizes the experience of subjects and the crisis that reports on the “immanent tendencies” of capitalist “normalcy” must reflect this ambivalence. In fact, it is this structural criticism that is the only guarantee that the “positivity” of capitalism is seen in its “false reality”, or, in other words, “fetishistic form of objectivity”.

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Povratak strukturalnoj kritici: da li je sinteza kritike i krize ponovo moguća u „kasnom“ kapitalizmu?

Apstrakt

Preispitivanje i transformacija fenomena kritike i krize u društvenoj teoriji su poslednjih decenija doveli do slabljenja pa i do delegitimacijskog osporavanja navedenog dubleta. U radu se razmatraju mogućnosti obnove diskursa o kritici/krizi s mogućim delatnim učincima, uz poseban osvrt na mogućnosti strukturalne kritike. Različiti autori recentnih analiza se uzimaju u obzir, te se razmatraju stanovišta koja vode do ponovnog razmatranja istorijskog i analitičkog dinamizma kategorija strukture i konjunktura kao razrade aktuelnih strukturalnih procesa u terminima strukturalne analize i kritike. Rad se sastoji iz tri dela. U prvom delu razmatramo zbog čega su kritika i kriza koje su izvorno spojene podvrgnute različitim procesima derogiranja. U drugom delu pokazujemo efekte promene načina ispoljavanja krize u kapitalizmu, tačnije osvetljavamo njenu disperzivne i ne-punktualne modalitete. U trećem delu postavljamo pitanje o šansama ponovnog spajanja krize i kritike na osnovu navigacije strukturalne kritike, nadalje artikulišemo njene veze sa „immanentnom kritikom“. Strukturalna kritika se analizira kao spoj između imanentne kritike i transcendentnog usmerenja koji radi na reconections between crisis and critique as the elements of relationship to capitalism.

Ključne reči: kritika, kriza, struktura, konjunktura, kapitalizam