

## Who's Afraid of Marxism? Or Why Marx was Right and Pleșu, Liiceanu and Patapievici Are Not!

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**Abstract.** The paper overviews some of the most important anti-Marxist traditions in the Romanian public sphere and analyses the discourse of three of the most important anti-communist philosophers today: Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Horia-Roman Patapievici. The main argument is that most relevant ideas of the author *The Capital* are misused and misinterpreted, due to a primitive understanding of Marxism. One problem is that Romania lacks academic studies of post-Marxism. The other is that the Romanian intellectuals are most often propagating ready-made Marxist ideas, half-truths without referencing the original context. Returning to the classical work of Terry Eagleton, who suggested that “Marx was right,” the author proposes a return to Marxist concepts, so necessary when it comes to critically understanding present day capitalism.

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In 2014 three leading Romanian intellectuals (Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Horia-Roman Patapievici) published a bestseller entitled: *O idee care ne sucește mințile* (An idea that twists our minds).<sup>1</sup> In this collective volume, signed only with their family names (Pleșu Liiceanu Patapievici – PLP), the three authors make visible one of the most profound biases in our culture, the unreasonable disdain for Marxism. Using an almost mystical promise, they claim that there is an undebatable fact: communism has “twisted” our minds and their book can cure the flaws caused by Marxism, proposing an “un-twisting” that can bring the readers on the right way. Unfortunately, this claim is not confirmed by the book, which can be described as a reversed form of ideological indoctrination, one conducted with the same inflexibility as the indoctrination accused in the premise of their argument. In order to “heal” everybody from the “twisted” Marxist ideology, the three are using upside-down concepts (and fixed ideas) on Marxist theory. In fact, this collective volume, which is nothing but an eclectic compilation of several conferences and press editorials, coagulated around some undigested truisms about a philosophy which is more complex than the accumulated negative misrepresentations used, is nothing but a conceptual twist, a “spin” in pro-capitalist public relations. As one who teaches contemporary critical theories to university students, it always struck me how inaccurate perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Horia-Roman Patapievici, *O idee care ne sucește mințile* (An idea that twists our minds) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014).

about Marxism are circulated, based on truisms that have become commonplaces in our culture over the past quarter of a century – in large part due to the concerted efforts of the authors of the current volume.

The anti-Marxist tradition and the heavy anti-communism of the last 25 years in the public sphere have generated a malignant halo around the ideas of the author of *The Capital*. The collapse of communism and the failure of Marxism in the former socialist countries led, somewhat understandably, to the demonization of Marxism and communism generically. But we must not forget that the Marxist theories are based on a set of concepts that are not by far exhausted. The invalidation of the Soviet Marxism in its praxis are not automatically a confirmation for the fact that the forecasts Marx made about capitalism are incorrect. The primitive simplification is the following: communism was a failure, therefore Marx's philosophy is "bad". Is it, by this logic, true that Heidegger's system of thinking was "bad" only because he was a Nazi sympathizer? Is Cioran's thinking "bad" or is the methodology of Eliade's history of religions "bad" because of their adherence to the fascist ideology?

The book is nothing more than, as one of its authors clearly states, a "vindication," a kind of vendetta against a skeleton, an almost macabre attack staged in a cemetery of political ideas. Yet the central fault of their approach is the utter lack of an updated bibliography, at least referring to studies from the last decade, one which would have been required even for a graduate student applying to a second-class university. The argumentation of the three authors is disqualified from the start. For Marx's conceptual legacy cannot be limited to half quotes from volumes published in the nineteenth century, nor to political practices specific to the twentieth century. We know above all that Marx's theories were distorted even during the life of the German philosopher, and these deformations were criticized by Marx himself. There is a mystification of Marxism anticipated by the creator of the dialectical materialism when he said: "I know one thing about myself, I am not a Marxist". In fact, Marx was aware that there are no "easy to make recipes" allowing us to make "the soup of communism". This was obvious in the political practices of Marxism-Leninism; and, as the Russian theorist Vadim Mezhuev argued in *Marks protiv marksisma*, the application of the ideas of the Communist Manifesto in the Soviet communism was from the beginning based on several deviations from the original tenets of the German thinker.

In addition, given that there is no longer any "clear and present danger" for our societies to return to Stalinist communism, and since even the socialists and communists of today are, in fact, mere capitalists disguised in Armani suits, what is the use of an intellectual approach denoting a complete loss of critical consciousness? This volume is often based on conceptual attacks stemming from a vulgar and primitive form of Marxism, one that even an ideological illiterate would not take into consideration. Meanwhile the studies of post-Marxism have become one of the most advanced academic research areas in Western universities – especially in economics and political and human science – a book uttering aggressive platitudes about the leftist intellectuals denotes an unfortunate provincialism, at least at the level of the academic discourse. In fact, as Liiceanu draws his own portrait at the end of a flamboyant anti-Marxist discourse, we are witnessing a breach of the very intellectual obligation, since any researcher who "becomes the agent of political passions armored with a network of doctrines" is simply betraying his own destiny and his professional obligations. This is

where Liiceanu's lack of lucidity becomes shocking; the author of the famous *Appeal to toadies* (*Apel către lichele*) who claims to be "immune" to political and historical nonsense, he is himself showing signs of infestation with the disease of capitalism.

The apodictic findings of the three authors are, most of the time, based on numerous errors of logic and reasoning. In numerous instances we are presented with the recanting of prejudices and commonplaces about Marxism. But the most deplorable aspect comes from the fact that such influent intellectuals are discrediting ideas without even taking into account the dialectic value of the assumptions. In fact, like all the "smoking room anti-Marxists," our authors are throwing the bathwater out with the baby they should really wash. Because ultimately the role of the intellectuals is not to propagate ruminated ideas, half-truths without filtering them by fair assessments. Unfortunately the PLP triplet is shrouded in an outdated speech and an obsolete argumentation. The readers of such books should be aware of this before any of them take their self-sufficient conclusions for granted.

One of the main mechanisms of the authors, even when they seem to engage in actual readings of the books they refer to, at least in the case of Andrei Pleșu, who is quoting from Althusser or struggling with Emmanuel Terray – the concepts are always distorted. For example in the "battle" with the French Marxist and anthropologist, Andrei Pleșu uses citations which generate parallel arguments and digressive considerations. His associates are even less scientific in their approach, they simply perpetuate a vindictive (and out-of-date) speech without any critical discernment.

One of the most often perpetrated commonplaces, which is underpinning all the argumentative construction of the PLP triplet is the eternal marionette of the association between fascism and communism. The old reasoning is revitalized mechanically, without any new arguments; if we have condemned Nazism, we must condemn communism as well. All three claim, redundantly, the need to accept the idea of the common origins of the two competing ideologies. Nazism and communism are considered "twinning" ways of thinking and the supreme argument is the fact that they both reject liberalism and capitalism, which makes both political systems equally malignant. What gets easily overlooked in these reactionary lines of argument is the fact that the big industrialists of the world, from John Ford in America to the Krupps in Germany provided immeasurable support to Hitler. Another assumption, borrowed from Hannah Arendt, whose theories must be understood contextually, claims that there are elements of direct comparison between Stalinism and Hitlerism, which makes the Gulag-Holocaust equivalence mandatory. This is simply not true. A brief reading of the book published by Robert Gellately (2007) would have brought more nuances to this indiscriminate association. Delivering such enormities as truths, like the presumption that Nazism was using socialism as an umbrella term, does not provide any substance to the fact that Nazism was not an expression of capitalism; while the equivalence of the planned racial extermination and the crimes of class conflict is not even worth taking into consideration, because of its horrible consequences.

Another unprocessed idea arising from incomplete syllogisms is that communism is "criminal," obviously because "communists" like Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and Ceausescu were criminals. Nobody denies today the monstrosity of the Khmer Rouge leaders, or other terrible manifestations of communist totalitarianism. It is strange, though, that our authors do not seem to have heard of the wars waged by

British colonialism or by the Dutch East India Company of the Netherlands, when entire populations were exterminated for the sheer material benefits of capitalists or for the control of spices, as it was with the hecatomb of Banda islands (or Run), made possible only by the need to preserve the monopoly on nutmeg. Even if they are aware of these historical realities, they seem to treat them as unimportant.

In fact, the three self-proclaimed prophets of anti-communism are writing a “red book” for infants, a sort of “Communism for Dummies”; therefore they freely resort to a form of reductionism that border on ridiculous intellectual oversimplifications and distortions by the value judgments they support. The clear indication of a PR discourse is visible in the handling of the lexical manipulations; Communism is always described with pejorative labels, it is depicted either as “lie,” an “illusion” or even a “fiction”. This propaganda mechanism is most tedious in Liiceanu’s discourse, where communism is always described with derogatory labels. Communism is a “lunacy,” a “wagaton,” is either “unnatural” or simply an “experience of mutilation”. One must understand that this is the very essence of any propagandistic language, the pure manifestation of all dominant discourses – when we are not allowed to challenge the ideas of the “good” (in this case capitalism), while only the ideas of the “bad” (of Marxism) need to be refuted and disregarded indiscriminately. Therefore this volume becomes, at a closer look, merely an expression of the “repression of ideas,” which was condemned by Marx himself and which was further explained in the post-Marxist tradition. There is no need to further argue on the hypothesis that any discursive repression of an idea, simply on the principle that we disagree with it, is totally unacceptable. The consequences of such an approach are deeply damaging for a culture of dialogue, especially since all “deconstructive” textual devices used by the PLP trio are based on the presumption that we need to overcome the devastating effects of an oppressive ideology.

To paraphrase Tearry, it is at this point where it becomes obvious that the three “thinkers” act as members of “tribe of the right wing”. As the author who is targeted from the early pages of this volume pointed out, the “tribesmen of the right” label includes all writers, philosophers or politicians who refuse any form of egalitarianism, who are supporting the compulsory acceptance of social hierarchies and the dominating idea that a good society must maintain at all costs the establishment and, by consequence, a liberal economy. As it will become explicit in the following arguments, all these three features are recurrent in *An idea...*

Like any “right winged” tribesman, the PLP team becomes, once more, a loud mouthpiece for the socially privileged and despise those who are temporarily in position of inferiority in terms of class relations. The eternal contempt of the Ancien Régime towards the *sans-culottes* and the poor is blatantly manifest in the imaginary of the three writers. The most mean-spirited in his disgust towards “inferior classes” remains Liiceanu, who proffers a half sovereign aversion towards the workers and claims that “Communism is the projection in history of the resentment of servants”! For the PLP mind frame, the workers, the oppressed, the disenfranchised are nothing more than yokel servants, cheeky and violent, who dare to question their master’s cleverness. All communists “descended from servants,” as Liiceanu proudly labels his imaginary enemies, are nothing more than “human debris,” they created a society of “characterless humans”. The right wing ideologues hate equality with visceral fury,

and Liiceanu expresses bluntly his adherence to this idea – he claims that there is a “natural inequality” between people, thus the whole philosophy of this book, and the entire intellectual approach, is based on the startling dismissal of the fundamental principles of our society, rooted in the French Revolution. For the PLP trio, equality and fraternity are unimportant, there is only the freedom translated as liberalism. Of course, it is relatively easy to scornfully speak about class differences when you own a car worth more than the food of a poor family throughout their existence; it is even more difficult, however, to see the illusion you are trapped in due to the ideology that allows you to establish such distinctions.

This elitist tendency can be seen in the terminology used by PLP in order to describe the everyday life in Romanian socialism and human typologies who supposedly manifested during that period of time. The key presumption, especially obvious in Liiceanu’s redundant attacks, is that life under communism was degrading, that the communist ideology turned all of us (Romanians) into “a bunch of losers”. Liiceanu’s wording describes the lives of millions of his fellowmen as “brutified,” a generalized form of “miserable everyday mediocrity,” “boorishness” “grovelling” caused by a “plague,” a “stench” that verdigrised the pure soul of the poor philosopher, who was forced to serve his apprenticeship at the resort in Păltiniș. And, obviously, the consequences are a society born out of communism which is produced by “touts and wire pullers”. This is not untrue, yet it is only a half truth, because all these facts are presented as if the three intellectuals were not part of both the communist elite and the elite who created the Romanian society after 1989. Being one of the beneficiaries of the communist regime, Liiceanu’s statements are disgustingly two-faced. He attributes to sheer “luck” the fact that he reached a well to do position in a research institute, where he was free to do his own work and travel, and ignores the fact that the meritocracy of the much hated regime allowed him to take shelter in an academy which was, nevertheless, communist.

The entire book swarms with negative myths about the malignant consequences of Marxist theory. Indeed, the mindless application of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” formula produced terrible effects. However, without going into many theoretical details about how this revolutionary principle was wrongly applied, and by resuming Althusser’s classic arguments about the dangers of transforming the communist dictatorship into a clique of unscrupulous individuals, one must underline the inability of the critics to see the similar flaws of capitalism in their single-mindedness designed to gather evidence of the horrific nature of communism. Such practices should be denounced.

Without seeing the palindromic nature of their reasoning, the three legitimate capitalism without any deduction questionings. Sometimes, as it happens with Patapievi, the propaganda speech borders the comical – for him any “normal” society is a liberal society, as if between liberalism and normality there should be a sign of equality, while any Marxist idea is pre-requisitely monstrous and harmful. Although all the three authors manifest as propagandists of liberal capitalism, the most inflexible and dogmatic remains Liiceanu. In his metalanguage borrowed from his mentor, Constantin Noica, he is not simply “cataloguing” the defects of communism; his entire discourse is based on the blind faith that there is a “perfect grace” of the free market capitalism in general. Just as the communist party activists were convinced of the truth

of a doctrine they did not study first hand, but through intermediaries, the PLP triplet manifests the same defect. No wonder that Liiceanu, and also Patapievicu in his lecture, turn indiscriminately into parochial apologists of private property. Here we are faced with some of the most simplistic arguments: one is the incredibly scanty sophism of Liiceanu, claiming his right to own his shaver, through the superfluous repetition of formulas like: “capitalism is the best world that we have”. In a negative mirror (with dreadful accents from Orwell) Liiceanu and Patapievicu recite like devotees: the free market is goood, communism is baaad!

A simple reading of Marx could have cleared any confusions. Marx simply finds the inherent flaws of the capitalist mode of production, based on the bourgeois economic system, which requires the absolute power of private property. In order to get out of the ideological dynamics that capitalism builds around its own truths, we must exit its logic. As Marx did the very thing, he saw the “contradictions and antagonisms of capitalist production,” and we cannot remain indifferent once we see the validity of this reasoning. The main ideas of Marx remain centered around the need to release his contemporaries from the captivity of capitalist exploitation. There is no indication that Marx intended to impose communism on people. Here is what Marx claims: “a communist society which is the only one where the free and original development of individuals ceases to be an empty promise, this development is conditioned precisely by the connection between individuals (...) from the solidarity needed for the free development of all”; in *The German Ideology*, even the communist revolution is considered “a common condition of the free development” of all individuals. Communism, as clearly stated in the *Communist Manifesto*, does not take away the possibility to “acquire social products,” it only prevents the possibility, through the use of private property, to turn another man into a slave. Therefore, Liiceanu was able to use his razor privately in the communist society; stealing other people’s work is the big problem of capitalism. Obviously, carrying the neoliberal ideology horse goggles, problems such as child labour or forced labour are easily mocked. For example Pleșu wonders, with a sadistic innocence, why should we bother about the “Malagasy prisoners or the low wages in Morocco”. Clearly, the ridiculing of the fundamental flaws of capitalism is the central flaw of this type of anti-communist speech.

As Terry Eagleton was wondering “Why Marx was right” in his classic study, a clear answer presents itself only when we look critically at capitalism. Marx properly understood the deep mechanisms of the capitalist modes of production; he described in the most consistent and coherent manner the laws and the dialectics of the Capital. There is no better criticism of capitalism, and especially of the inexorable consequences produced by the process of capitalist accumulation, than the Marxist criticism. Obviously, for the three Romanian authors the capitalist imperative of accumulation does not seem so evil, nor does the terrible brutality of capitalism in its imperialist version seem important enough to be reviewed. These are negligible facts of history. Just as in the historical and political communism we can rightly trace some monstrous defects, the blindness to the monstrosities of capitalism, resulting from a cecity towards exploitation, can be also “twisted”. Capitalism in itself is an idea that twists our minds, as it was indicated by Marx as well as by Adorno. Used as dominant ideology, it infantilizes all of us; and the contemporary ideological technologies of

capitalism, from television to Hollywood cinema, play a similar role to the malignant propaganda indoctrination of Stalinism or the Ceaușescu regime.

This is when the discourse of the book becomes indigestible, with stereotypical formulas such as those used by Liiceanu who describes the crisis of capitalism as a simple “flu”. Concerned to place a diagnosis on the metastasizing diseases of Marxism, he does not see the germs of capitalism which, as Marx described so clearly, were not cured. A fundamental problem that we cannot take to the junkyard of social and political ideas is the ferocious greed of capitalism. In the pursuit for surplus, the natural callousness of capitalists reaches unimaginable heights. Given the fact that the global poverty is at the highest threshold ever, the frenzy for prosperity led recently to new climaxes – a very good example can be found in the story of Jordan Belfort, told by Martin Scorsese in the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*. The reality which generates the ideal of communism, which Marx addresses in *The German Ideology*, is how profoundly “inhuman” the ruling class is when it comes to satisfying its needs. Was Marx wrong when he commented on the terrible conditions of employment children were subjected to in the British mines? His findings are still valid today in many parts of the world. Global statistics provided by UNICEF indicate an appalling reality: in the developing countries 30% of the children between 5 and 14 years old are used for labour, often for the benefit of Western multinationals. Should we not talk about our complicity to exploitation worldwide, or about the immoral wars and brutal forms of militarist capitalism? Using a reductionism, pro-capitalist propaganda does not make true that our belief that the only possible relationship between people is based on capitalist relations, founded on “mercantile” interactions, is an ideological illusion.

As seen in the latest crisis of world capitalism, when the planet was near chaos due to the lack of ethics of the Wall Street bankers, as our own capitalists understood very well when they created pyramidal schemes to accumulate immense fortunes, the foundations of economic liberalism are corrupt. “Investors” such as Bernie Madoff or Lew Ranieri anticipated the catastrophe of the Lehmann Brothers, and everything that followed was generated by the all toxic idea of the multiplication of money without doing any work, by simply making “profitable investments”. Fraudulent business practices, financial scams, boundless greed and lying, these are the features of capitalism that emerged once again in recent history.

This is where one of the essential laws set by the author of *Grundrisse* comes into place – any capitalist development is based on the accumulation of capital, made possible by the labour exploitation of others, by stealing the surplus value from the workers by the owners of the means of production. Driven only by profit and rush towards prosperity, the capitalists have no moral limits and their principles are as lax as those of the communist thugs. It is enough to look into the recent Romanian society, where the struggle for enrichment produced immeasurable malignant consequences. Yet, after all, how could Liiceanu see these things, when he himself is nothing but a model of capitalist success? The publishing house he owns has a turnover of several million Euros and controls much of the marketplace of ideas in Romania. Using his case one can even illustrate, through the laws formulated by Marx, the link between prosperity, exploitation and the imposition of dominant ideas. How does the couple exploitation-ideology work in the case of Liiceanu? He earns surplus value, derived from the work of his employees who create objects (books) in which capital (money)

has been invested. The capitalist (let's say a "simple" book publisher) will pay his employees a few thousand Euros a year and keep the rest of the benefits for himself. Then he uses the cultural and media resources at his command to give lectures about the ugliness of those ideas that expose his exploitative actions. Thus the circle closes, the financial interest of these "teachers of ethics" is ideologically driven and morally defective.

Why should we return to Marx, what does this mean? As Elmar Altvater showed in his *Marx neu Entdecken* (2012), the rediscovery of Marxist theory involves the rediscovery of its conceptual heritage. This is important because, in Kantian terms, as Altvater underlines it, the Marxist theory is a good theory because it manages to explain the functioning of capitalism. Not because it was a successful political ideology. This is not about the political Marxism. For me there are several important distinctions which were pointed out by Louis Robert Heilbroner, who, in his classic study of the positive and negative traits of Marxism (*Marxism: For and Against*, 1980) describes four fundamental premises of the author of *The Capital*. Of these, I consider that two are essential for the present discussions and their recovery today is compulsory: the socio-analysis of capitalism and the dialectic approach to capitalist cultural products.

The first premise indicates, as I previously pointed out, that Marx's major legacy remains that of identifying the internal contradictions of capitalism and the bourgeois modes of production and property. Marx's central idea (and hence the central idea of Marxism) is based on the description of Capital as "social power". Any capitalist mode of production is, par excellence, leading to "objectification" and "alienation," since it is built on the practice of labour exploitation of other human beings. The exposure of the defects of capitalism and the abhorrent behaviours of bourgeois society must be seen as the starting point of any "Marxist ideas." Hence, the analysis of labour relations extensively described in Section III of *Das Kapital*, where Marx points out the exploitation of children and women in capitalist societies, or the crises of capitalism and the economic forecasts from *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. As the Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück from the German cabinet of Angela Merkel said: "some aspects of Marx's thought are not so bad" (quoted by Altvater).

Here is another truth enunciated by Marx almost 200 years ago and manifested in the Romanian society today. An "ugly and rich" capitalist buys beautiful and young women as sex slaves, just as the ruthless and stupid capitalist buys his political power in Parliament, and their behaviours are made desirable and appealing through the media. Once we recognize the grotesque characters from the public stage of capitalism, we can see how Marx, for the umpteenth time, was right. And if we move into the wider sphere, we must notice that the gross domestic product of entire nations is less than the total sales of a single global corporation, then we must realize why it is important to understand the Marxist criticism of capitalism. Given that less than 150 global companies control 40% of the planet's wealth, things are not as rosy as the PLP discourse would want us to believe. As of 2010, these discrepancies reached shocking contrasts globally. For example, the Yahoo group (which does not produce anything "real," only virtual "surfing") earned higher revenues than the GDP of Mongolia; Amazon is more "valuable" than Kenya, and eBay makes more money than



Madagascar. These contradictions become humongous when we are analyzing companies that reach revenues exceeding 60 billion dollars annually, which makes a company such as Apple, Microsoft or Coca-Cola more profitable than entire countries such as Croatia and Ecuador. At the top of the pyramid are global companies like General Motors or General Electric, with an income between 100 and 150 billion dollars; as General Electric surpasses 50 countries in the world relative to GDP. And, once we consider that Walmart had higher incomes than Norway (over 421 billion), the consequences are almost impossible to dismiss. Moreover, the 2008 crisis and the disaster that took place on 29 October 2009 were caused by the same huge conceitedness and blind faith in capitalism, which governs the thinking of the PLP triplet. “Marxology” is not the mere promise of a better society, it is the necessity to change a defective society – in fact, why should we accept the argument put forward by Pleșu, who minimized as infantile the ideal to change the world. Marx cannot be retroactively charged for the emergence of a society that wanted to replace the “old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms”. On the one hand, Marx simply anticipated this budding new society, considering that sooner or later the old system will collapse. However, more importantly, for him communism is not a form of coercion, but a form of “association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (*The Communist Manifesto*). In fact, there is a danger which was identified by Althusser in his classical *Pour Marx* – we risk falling into the trap of theoretical confusion if we equivocate the theoretical positions assumed by Marx and their political consequences. Because, to paraphrase Althusser, how can one be a communist without having understood what Marxism meant! In the same way, how can we understand how the markets work and especially how the capital works, without any references to *Das Kapital*. One cannot be an anti-Marxist without understanding Marxism.

Once again, Marx’s ideas expose the flaws of neoliberalism, which allow the abandonment of social protection under the guise of cancelling the privileges of “the lazy” in our society, which makes the cutting of wages and pensions justified, which disclose the negative consequences of the rejection of egalitarianism by the abolition of health insurance, or the right to health as these are rights belonging only to the rich. Therefore, it is outrageous when a writer like Patapievič claims that capitalism is the best of all worlds that we can have, when intellectuals refuse any form of debate and criticism that may raise the issues of discrimination or any other sins of capitalism. For them, anybody who dares to criticize capitalism and liberalism is a “criminal,” a “morally repugnant” being. This inverted logic is unworthy of a public debate. If we are justified to criticize the moral defects of communism, but we become pariah, creatures deprived of “moral clarity” when we criticize capitalism (especially when adopting a Marxist position) then we are not part of a free minded society. This discourse about a “showcase capitalism” must be refused because we must not believe in the “holiness” of liberalism who does not “kill or persecute anybody,” while simultaneously promoting a classical stereotype about the killer Marxism. We can understand the de-legitimation of Marxism through a rational dialectic, but when the thought control is generated through prefabricated ideas and especially by falsifying arguments, this is culturally unacceptable. Ideas such as alienation, class consciousness and false consciousness, exploitation and even Marx’s fundamental humanism cannot

be thrown aside – mainly because people are seen by Marx as naturally creative and free and not the robotic slaves of the by-products and ideas of capitalism.

The second element of Marxism which I believe to be fundamental, is that Marxist theory remains an essential research tool in communication studies, media studies, and especially in social critical studies. All these fields stem from Marx's dialectical practice, based on the rejection of the Hegelian dialectics, and by assuming the idea that the material world plays a fundamental role in the shaping of the human mind (a theory known as dialectical materialism). In the *Afterword* of the second edition of *The Capital*, 1873, the basic idea put forward by Marx was that all technological contradictions of capitalism are imprinted in its conceptual products (arts, media, cultural). As he pointed out in the letter to Ruge, from *Briefe aus den Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern*, in order to exit the absurdity and paradoxes generated by the false consciousness, one must resort to a "merciless criticism of everything existing," a criticism that has "no fear of the consequences that can be reached". The Marxist dialectics is the pathway to reach the truth by accepting the negation of negation – which means understanding that the flaws of capitalism are simultaneously the worst and the best thing possible for humanity.

Once more, in order to understand the cultural products of capitalism we must start from the premise of the criticism of the capitalist production system; or, as suggested in *The German Ideology* the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the dominant ideas, which means that the class which is the dominant material force of society is also the dominant spiritual force". Thus, the "producers of ideas" not only dominate the "manufacturing of material goods," they control the production of cultural values. The whole field of cultural studies is based on this very dialectic conclusion. The contemporary communication systems can be analyzed only from a critical stand point which sees the material basis of any social construction of meanings. Or, to put it more simply, there is a determination between what we are and the means of production that dominate the society we belong to. As Marx said, "the nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining the mode of production". Thus, as Nancy Fraser showed in *A Future for Marxism* (1998), Marxism today is a theoretical set which includes a number of meta-discourses about society, a common body of critical thinking which is discussing the manifestations of "false consciousness," and which allows a better understanding of culture and social actors in late capitalism (using the formula of Jameson). Since, as indicated by Jameson's classical study (*Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991), we can apply the same type of interpretations that Adorno and Horkheimer used on "old media" in order to understand the dynamics of the "new media" that shape our "cultural industries".

So, why would the idolaters of capitalism want to eliminate at any cost the social critique of Marx, as if the issues raised by him would suddenly disappear if we demonize his philosophy? Because this is the only way by which we end up accepting the clichés of neo-liberalism as if they were absolute truths. How does this process of delivering lies as great discoveries work? We find it in one of Marx's most fundamental ideas – the false consciousness. The illusions through which capitalism is trying to fool us distort reality so as to make us believe that the only truth is that of the exploiters, one which is imposed by control of the media, the cultural and the artistic forms of production

(movies, books, etc.). There is an “ideological superstructure” built continuously by the owners of the modes of production, which operates like a firewall of beliefs and values which hold us in the captivity of dominant ideas. As Engels said, the ideologist seeks fake explanations for the unacceptable false realities around us, and flips the truth upside down. That is it twists and turns it until we believe it.

Once more, the operations of the Humanitas group in Romania, owned by Liiceanu, are a workbook example of how the “capitalist cultural exploitation industries” operate. As it should have been known by the author of the Romanian *Minima moralia*, Adorno and Horkheimer gave us an outstanding example for how Marx’s ideas can be applied in contemporary cultural modes of production. In the “spectacle capitalism” the leaders of the “intellectual right” endlessly propagate and reproduce the myths and false ideas about how exploitation works. By controlling the means of production of ideas, they reach the same level of control as that of the means of industrial production. Capitalism is by its very nature a sordid affair, and if we look around us we can see the effects of exploitation everywhere. What is not that obvious is the fact that a clique of nouveau riche has taken control over our cultural resources, over the natural resources of the land by means of onerous affairs, from the major corporations to the newspapers and television networks. Then they give lessons about the importance of the values of free competition. How can a child, born into a poor family, in a hamlet located in the Carpathians mountains, compete with the children of the fraudulently rich, who are sent to study at Oxford or Cambridge, by their parents who are the beneficiaries of the poverty and ignorance of “the ignorant many”?

This is why exposing that fear from the “Boogieman” of communism is not only infantile, it is also socially harmful. Stigmatizing ideas is a reprehensible fact, yet the denouncing of intellectual “clichés” put forward by the PLP triplet must be made first and foremost in order to preserve an open public dialogue, for a much needed social mental health. What some describe using the generic term “communism” is nothing but a political theory produced by the meeting between Lenin’s and Marx’s ideas (and then with the supplemented bad readings of Stalin or Mao). The superposition of the two levels is, after all, the source of all misunderstanding about Marx’s role in the history of the last century. Last but not least, it is necessary to distinguish between the “communist hypothesis” and the communist praxis, as Alain Badiou proposes (*L’hypothèse Communiste*, La Fabrique 2008). Communism cannot be reduced to some political procedures and we cannot understand it by referring to what Erich Fromm denounced as the Stalinist “fraud,” i.e. the set of principles of a dictator who understood Marxism without understanding Marx. Communism is an “Idea” and ideas are neither good nor bad.