

Modernity and capitalism : Notes on Jacques Bidet's analytical framework

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These notes are devoted to the discussion of the analytical framework built by Jacques Bidet, hinging around the notion of modernity—an ambitious construction leading to the definition of what can be denoted as a “general social theory”. Bidet is actually the author of a treatise entitled *General Theory*.¹ The discussion in the present paper is conducted in relation to the framework I developed with Dominique Lévy. In the relationship with Bidet, common points dominate over differences and led to the publication of a co-authored book, *Altermarxisme*².

I. Modern society as a phase in the development of human societies

The central notion in Bidet's analytical framework is *modern society* understood as a given stage of development of human societies. The entrance into modernity (modern society) is described as the outcome of a lasting and difficult historical process; movements backward are possible, in particular during the early phases. Two such historical contexts are put forward by Bidet, namely the societies of Southern Songs in China (in the 12th and 13th centuries) and Italian communes (in the 13th century). In *L'Etat-monde*, one can find the following particularly telling presentation:

“Broad markets and complex organizations already existed within old empires. Modern features only appear, however, as state institutions manifest the ability to assign to themselves the task of rationally articulating the two aspects, namely commodity forms and the organizational conditions of production.”³

The first sentence defines two basic elements, *markets* and *organisation*. Concerning the former, we are told that these markets are “vast”, meaning that these market economies are rather advanced; concerning the latter, we learn that organization is supported by “complex organizations”, that is, social institutions which have already reached a sufficient degree of sophistication. But the coexistence of the two aspects does not define modernity; only the conditions of modernity are established. The core issue is the relationship between the two elements. This relationship become more and more complex, to the point it can be described as a form of “articulation”, meaning strong and reciprocal links; above all, characters of “rationality” are involved, that is, degrees of economic efficiency follow from this relationship between markets and organizations. Last and not least, the agent at the origin of the articulation implied is the state—thus, previously established—that performs a new historical task.

To the previous definition of modernity, whose field is mainly economic (the articulation of the two aspects of “production”), a new characterization is added, in which the respective fields of economics and politics are jointly considered. The characterization above is, thus, prolonged into the following more general definition:

“But this interconnection does not rely exclusively on economic *understanding* (*entendement*), that is, an alleged order of efficiency, but also on legal-political reason, that is, an order of legitimacy.”⁴

¹ J. Bidet, *Théorie générale*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1999.

² J. Bidet, G. Duménil, *Altermarxisme. Un autre marxisme pour un autre monde*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2007.

³ *L'Etat-monde*, p. 10.

Thus, a new field is opened—juridical and political—of which a central element is the law. One should note that this legitimacy does not necessarily imply democratic forms of government, but we are clearly getting closer to it. It is important to keep in mind the terms used by Bidet, namely “efficiency” concerning market economic relations and state organization, and “legitimacy” inherent in the field of juridical and political relationships.

In the previous extract, some reservations are apparent concerning the order of efficiency proper to modernity, as in the phrase “an alleged order of efficiency”. The definition by Bidet of the “declaration of modernity” and the corresponding concept of “metastructure”, unambiguously establishes this trait. In the introduction to *Théorie générale*:

In Book I, I will deal with the metastructure, meaning by the term the publicly declared form of the modern society, the fiction in which the official relations of contractuality and rational cooperation are given and sanctioned by the state.⁵

One will first note that the metastructural declaration is precisely defined here in reference to the two elements supposedly supportive of efficiency, namely “contractuality” and “efficiency”. The former refers to the “market”; the latter to “organization”. The “fiction”, a specifically strong term, here considered is “sanctioned” by an order of legitimacy of which the modern state is the agent.

Looming behind such statements, one will easily identify the two aspects of the declaration (“the form publicly proclaimed”) of modernity in its vulgar formulations, namely the double claim concerning the democratic character of a political regime (equal rights, notably through the process of formation of the common will within the machinery of assemblies and governments) and the efficiency of an economic system denoted as a “market economy”, actually based on the private ownership of the means of production as in capitalism. Within every day propaganda, we are told that capitalism supports democracy and efficiency and, as such, is the end of history.

One may wonder why this declaration is specifically made within a society in which the state assigns to itself the task of articulation above. The answer must be sought within the commodity relation. Bidet emphasizes the fact that, within a market economy, individuals engaged in exchanges consider themselves as free and equal individuals. This statement arises from Bidet’s identification of a political philosophy within Marx’s discourse related to commodity relations at the beginning of *Capital*. The progress of the forms of social organization, accomplished under the banner of the state, echoes the advance of commodity relations (actually the advance of the private property of the means of production) and conditions this progress.

One can, thus, note the two facets combined in the characterization of the modern stage of development of societies, namely the *self-assigned task of the state* and the *socio-political declaration*, whose joint existence would be grounded in the economic foundations of commodity relations.

II. A phase in which process?

This section abandons the perspective of exegesis proper to the previous section, initiating a much broader discussion but still in relation to Bidet’s analysis.

The definition of a *phase* in the development of human societies implies a reference to a *periodization*, that is, the distinction of sequence periods. A first interrogation must be raised

⁴ L’Etat-monde, p. 10.

⁵ *Théorie Générale*, p.10.

concerning the nature of societies in which the characters of modernity have not yet been established. Bidet only addresses the issue in a negative fashion (considering the traits forbidding the classification of a society among modern societies) though the foundations on which the transition can be accomplished are already there, namely the coexistence of advanced *markets* and *organization*, together with the existence of the state. It seems obvious that earlier phases, in which the three features are not observed, can be identified prior to modernity. Last, “ultimodernity”—whose characteristic feature is the world state—might be described as “post-modernity”, but I will not engage into this discussion. The chain of phases is clearly there in Bidet’s work, even if its analysis remains implicit.

As opposed to a sequence of periods separated by significant, though not fundamentally related, events, any periodization claiming theoretical relevance—what is obviously the case here—hinges around a given *process* allowing for the definition of a “criterion”.⁶

In the study of modernity, it is not easy to define the process whose advance would, thus, be divided into phases. I believe, however, the central notion is *social relations*, approached at a very high level of generality. Involved are ways of living together, coordinating actions, relating to one another though not only as individual but “collectively”. My suggestion is to call this object “sociality”, a theory of societies as such. In the chronology of the transitions from groups and bands to clans and tribes, and to societies in which the various components (markets, organization, and the state) have reached the advanced forms preliminary to the establishment of modern societies, then to modern societies themselves, one can identify the growing degrees of this sociality. (I refer here to the existing interrelations without any form of assessment concerning identities, as opposed to alienation, or solidarities.)

Other more familiar notions are also involved. As the relevance of the application of the concept of *society* increases with the flow of transformations of these human communities, the explanatory power of notions such as *state* or *citizens* also increases (two notions already fully relevant in the analysis of pre-modern societies as in Classical antiquity), up to the modern nation-state that, within Bidet’s framework, cannot be separated from modernity.

Overall, my view is that modernity (the modern society) is a phase in the gradual process of acquisition of the features of sociality.

III. The other periodization: relations of production and classes

The difference between Bidet’s framework and the theory of history put forward by Marx is large. Marx’s theoretical ambition is not to grasp the entire complexity of the overall field of social relations. The criterion used in Marx’s periodization of history is not the progress of such a broadly defined sociality. The approach is based on a general concept of exploitation resulting from the appropriation of a surplus-labor by specific classes. The field of application of this concept is “trans-mode of production”. This appropriation is realized through various “mechanisms” or, equivalently, “channels” as, for example, in the “corvée” in feudalism or surplus-value in capitalism. Reference is made here to the main channels (as other secondary forms of exploitation may exist). A given mode of production is defined by the particular features of each of these mechanisms. A broad fraction of Marx’s work focuses on the analysis these complex collective mechanisms of exploitation in capitalism. Thus, it is important to carefully articulate the two components of Marx’s periodization of history, namely the *overall process of appropriation of surplus labor*, on the one hand, and the

⁶ There is a large difference between the reference to « preindustrial, industrial, and post-industrial societies » and stating : « prior to World War I, between the two wars, and after World War II ».

qualitatively distinct mechanisms of exploitation allowing for the distinction of the various phases, on the other hand.

Note that, with the possible exception of an Asian mode of production, the hierarchies involved in government services are not part of the chain of forms of exploitation. These forms of domination are, obviously, acknowledged, but Marx focus is on the direct process of appropriation of surplus-labor in production.

The mechanisms of appropriation of surplus-labor are so tightly connected to the processes of production that Marx establishes a direct link with what he denotes as “relations of production”. And the bridge is also direct with class patterns and, finally, the state (the state of ruling classes). Last, as is well known, the underlying dynamics are governed by the development of productive forces. A complex device tending to the analysis of *historical dynamics* is thus built, entirely hinging around the process of appropriation of surplus-labor. On this basic, deeply rooted in economic mechanisms, the notion of mode of production can be broadened to the point of encompassing the corresponding political or cultural features. Marx, however, very often uses the notion in its narrow sense, for example, as opposed to income distribution. In the general case, though not necessarily, underlying these mechanisms, one finds markets and organization.

Bidet's Marxist inspiration is manifest in the deep import of economic mechanisms in his work (but, given his framework of analysis, “economics” are always grasped in a broad fashion by Bidet). Consequently, Bidet does not consider himself a “post-Marxist”. (This emphasis on economic mechanisms is obvious in the first definition of modern societies above.)

Various important issues are involved in this discussion. Firstly, abstracting from the relationship of Bidet's basic concepts—such as modernity and the metastructure—to Marx's theory of history, these concepts can be approached within the theoretical framework to which they, in my opinion, belong, namely the theory of sociality. This first approach can, then, be used as a point of departure in the investigation of the relationship between Bidet's and Marx's frameworks. Is Bidet's reference to Marx's “error” appropriate? What is the relevance of the dual pattern infra/superstructure? Does Bidet's “metastructural declaration” belongs to the field of ideologies? And the like. Last, and more incidentally, this investigation suggests an interpretation of the difference between Bidet's framework and the framework I developed with Lévy concerning class patterns.

IV. At the contact between the two theories: A “real fiction”?

At a first still superficial level of analysis, the “tension” between the two views of history is manifest in Bidet's work in a number of reservations vis-à-vis the concept of mode of production and the theory of the succession of these modes. Notably, I disagree with Bidet when he contends that “modernity” (modern societies) was Marx's actual object of analysis.⁷

The two theories shed diverging lights on the progress of human societies, the first one concerning the phases undergone in the formation of these societies as such, and the second on the phases that punctuate their advance as class societies. Obviously, a number of relationships exist, but Bidet himself stresses the distance. Notably, there is no equivalence or chronological coincidence between *modernity* and *capitalism*. (Bidet dates the origin of capitalism to the 18th century not to the Songs). And the relationship between the two notions is not symmetrical. Capitalist modernity is a specific form of modernity, while it seems,

⁷ *L'Etat-monde*, p. 12.

reciprocally, impossible to define a “non-modern” capitalist society, since the acquisition of the social features typical of capitalism (beyond the existence of capital as in Classical antiquity) would be impossible if the state did not ensure the tasks of self-assigned “articulation” proper to modern societies.

As a preliminary to the analysis of the relationship between what I interpret as two distinct theories of history, a new plunge is required into the deep waters of conceptual analysis. I return to the exegesis of Bidet’s writings and recall that Bidet defines, on the one hand, the *metastructure* and, on the other hand, the *structure*. Correlatively, the entire framework is described as “meta/structural”. Class patterns (the structure) is defined in a way that, at a first level of analysis, can be judged accessible to readers familiar with Marx’s analysis. I already mentioned a number of aspects involved in the definition of the metastructure. Simplifying to some extent, one could identify behind the dual pattern of the meta/structure the contributions of each of the protagonists: Bidet/Marx. But Bidet does not stop there. The main focus of his analysis is the *relationship* between the two terms, namely the “meta” and the “structural”.

At first, Bidet ascribes the identification of the meta/structural relationship to Marx:

He [Marx] states that the modern class relation is based on the *reference* to a rational (economic) and a reasonable (juridical-political) relationship that he identifies to the relation of commodity production. But Marx immediately adds that this presupposed relationship is never given, posited, if not turned upside-down in its contrary [*within the structure*]. Modernity is, therefore, never grounded on liberty, as liberalism contends. Capitalism is not based on this rational-reasonable relationship, but on the reference to this relationship.⁸

The notion of “reference”, named twice, echoes the notions of “declaration” or “fiction” (as in the quotation above). At issue here is the relationship between, on the one hand, the principles of liberty-equality and efficiency and, on the other hand, the structure (the configuration of class patterns). “Obviously”, one could say, the latter is not based on the former, since the structure involved is the structure of class relationships. In other words, at the basis of this configuration, one can locate the *declaration* of these principles, not the principles themselves. No Marxist scholar would be disappointed by such statements, locating these principles in the field of ideology. But the issue is not that simple. Following Bidet, the metastructure is neither a “superstructure” nor an “ideology”, though it is a “fiction”. We can return here to the introduction of *Théorie générale*:

The metastructure should not be understood as a superstructure but the general presupposition [*présupposé général*], and in itself antagonist, that only the modern structures posit but that can only realize itself as the inversion of this self-proclaimed matrix, that is, as forms of domination [...].⁹

Bidet himself refers to a metastructural reality, that of the “general presupposition” that “realizes itself”. So, Bidet states that his Volume III will:

... necessarily turn back to the beginning, namely the metastructural proclamation, but under the structural test: What meaning and affectivity should be conferred on the assertion of liberty-equality in a world in which it appears as the very presupposition and condition of domination, of submission and subjugation?¹⁰

Fortunately, the issue is finally solved in a rather straightforward manner. Within modernity, the assertion of liberty-equality stands out as the “very condition of domination” and determines the forms of this domination. Again in *Théorie générale*:

The commodity relation, since it is metastructurally linked to the centric relationship, that is, requires democratic legitimization, defines property according to a rule that weaken possession. Modern property, as being metastructurally determined, can be the object of social criticism. It is only a questionable claim to property. And

⁸ *Altermarxisme*, p. 53.

⁹ *Théorie générale*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Théorie générale*, p. 11.

the same is true of the collective appropriation by the center, which must account for any limitation placed on contractuality among individuals. Under their metastructural forms, modern societies assert liberty-and-equality.¹¹

Within modern societies, the forms of domination are subject to influence, namely the influence inherent in the declaration of the principles of liberty-equality and efficiency. In a straightforward formulation, the assertion of liberty-and-equality and its necessary translation into ensembles of practices impose their constraints on class domination. For example, it should forbid slavery but, in a more subtle fashion, it puts property into perspective (as property must appear compatible with other components of social relations).

The tension between what I denoted earlier as “two theories of history” stands out here, with great clarity, namely between the theory of sociality and the theory of modes of production. The link is established here by Bidet, opening a space for the former through the complex mix of attributes proper to fictiveness and effectiveness in the concept of metastructure.

Thus, when Marx counterpoises *another discourse* to the discourse of modernity, Bidet attempts to provide foundations to the dual pattern in his meta/structural theory. The interest of Bidet’s approach lies in this import: the attempt to re-establish a space for the other theory. The task is, however, difficult since the “declaration” of modernity, as grasped within capitalist production, is a “claim”. This is the Marxist “anchoring”. Bidet cannot free himself from this connection but is simultaneously motivated by another observation, namely that the self-proclaimed characters of modern societies impact the forms of domination in capitalism.

To sum up, a simple reading can be given of the distinct approaches of Bidet and Marx. The latter saw a superstructure or, even worst, an ideology in what Bidet denotes as the “declaration of modernity”. Marx’s theories of history and his analysis of capitalism are both targeted to this demonstration. Moving even one step further, one can contend that the theory of sociality, with its modern stage that encompasses capitalism, was precisely the object of *the refutation to which Marx’s work* was targeted, an outstanding contribution making of Marx the main critic of capitalism, what he will probably remain in the future. And it is also obvious that Marx was conscious of the impact of the declaration of modernity on the forms of domination in capitalism as compared to pre-modern features. Bidet, however, in his ambition to restore in its due space the other theory—in my formulation, another theory set aside by Marx in his surge toward the denunciation of capitalist exploitation—goes even further.

V. Combining the explanatory powers of autonomous theoretical fields

I consider the analysis of the relationship between the two theories as an object of major interest and would approach it in terms of « combination of explanatory powers ». This combination can be called “dialectical” in the sense I gave to the notion in *Le concept de loi économique dans « Le Capital »*¹² (The concept of Economic Law in *Capital*): Two theoretical frameworks are placed in a situation of competition concerning the relevance of their explanatory power vis-à-vis the same fraction of the real world under investigation. This is equivalent to saying that the history of human societies can be understood at the light of either one of the two theories (one *or* the other) and, finally, at the light of the combination of

¹¹ *Théorie générale*, p. 24-25.

¹² G. Duménil, *Le concept de loi économique dans « Le Capital »*, Foreword by Louis Althusser, François Maspero, Paris, 1978.

the two (one *and* the other). I contend, however, that the autonomy of the two fields must be carefully preserved. And the methodological difference with Bidet has important consequences.

To me, the dialectic of explanatory powers is directly evocative of the sequences of “as ... and as ...” in *Capital*, notably in Volume II. There, in the examination of the circuit undergone by capital through its different forms (money-capital, commodity-capital, and productive capital), Marx adopts successively the viewpoints of the theories of commodity and capital: “as commodity ..., as capital ...” No synthesis of the two concepts is produced as their autonomous character is maintained (even if the theory of capital borrows the concept of value from the theory of commodity). This principle dominates the whole process of knowledge in Marx’s analysis: The tools are introduced and their explanatory powers are combined while their internal logics are fully preserved. My contention here is that Marx’s formulations can be prolonged concerning the alternative approaches of human societies, presently at issue: “as process of formation of sociality ..., as a phase in the succession of class societies...”

In *Capital* and in the vast majority of his writings, Marx adopts the viewpoint of the second theory, whose central concept is “mode of production” and, more specifically, “capitalism”.¹³ What Bidet calls the “metastructure” belongs to the theory of sociality, while the “structure” belongs to the theory of the succession of modes of production. In the framework of the “meta/structure”, Bidet grasps two distinct facets of a same component of the real world. Consequently, each of the two theories can make a claim concerning its own explanatory power. Thus, considered from the viewpoint of the first theory, modernity harks back to an ensemble of processes whose reality (actual character) cannot be questioned, “reality” referring here to this portion of the real world to which this theory confers a degree of intelligibility. Considered, however, from the viewpoint of the second theory, the same aspect of reality appears as a “fiction”. Marx stigmatizes it as “ideology”. With the purpose of anchoring it within the theory of the succession of modes of production, Bidet denotes it as “the metastructure”, thus importing the terminology inherent in the field of one of the theories into the field of the second. “Metastructure” is used in the field of sociality to designate a set of aspects of these processes, thus *negatively delineated* as the negation of the specific traits inherent in the “structure” within the other field.

Thus, I conclude concerning the actual “stake” involved in the distinction between the two theories and the periodizations that they, respectively, generate. Two fields are involved. The first field already existed in the minds of social analysts, with a potential ideological import resulting from its political use in the negation of the class features of modern societies. The entrance into modernity is interpreted as implying the dissolution of class patterns, since human beings are born free and equal. Marx, elaborating on earlier analyses (as Marx wrote, he did not invent the concept of classes), straightforwardly locates his analysis in the other field, that he logically organize as a theory of history with unprecedented relevance. But, by the same token, the other field appeared discredited, a consequence of its ideological use. In Bidet’s meta/structural framework, one can see an invitation to the analyst of human societies to walk on his/her two legs, avoiding such deviations. But the risks of contamination are serious. This is the pitfall that must be avoided, the object of my last section, since, up to now, only the complexity inherent in the articulation of concepts and theoretical fields has been considered.

¹³ I will not enter here in the analysis of possible other developments by Marx (probably early writings manifesting broader perspectives).

VI. Two poles, two classes ?

Obviously, the object of the demonstration in the previous section is not the provision of a new definition of the metastructure, rather to give an interpretation of the concept. The entire line of argument hinges around the distinction between two theories of history and the articulation of their explanatory powers. In my opinion, these two theories cannot be merged into a single framework, a “general theory”. Instead, the combination of their explanatory is required. This is, at least, what I believe I learnt from Marx’s approach in *Capital*. This is the root of the main divergence between Bidet’s framework and the framework I built with Lévy. Below I will do my best to make the consequences explicit.

At the intersection between the two theoretical frameworks (Bidet’s and my own), one finds a specific social category, namely what we denote as “managers”, in French “*les cadres*” (somehow “managers” but including government officials). When the encounter occurred with him on these issues, Bidet used to refer to “*les cadres et compétents*”—“compétents” (knowledgeable or skilful persons) being used to refer to a social category, including, for example, professors or journalist, but basically not part of the upper fractions of hierarchies within private or public institutions. Bidet now favors the term “leaders”. Although, within the peripheries of Marxism and in other places, much attention has been placed in the past on these social categories, we believe the importance of the convergence must be emphasized. From this derived the project of writing together *Altermarxisme*. This importance is all the more obvious that the consideration of managers within class patterns meets major resistances within Marxists circles. The roots of these resistances are easy to interpret, since the views of intellectual and activist organizers claiming a Marxist inspiration are strongly determined by their potential status as managers (leaders) within the post-capitalist society that they strive to establish. Concerning the various currents that developed outside of Marxism, notably in the United States, one can mention Galbraith’s technosphere and the whole set of managerial frameworks of analysis in this country. During the recent decades, these analyses have been brushed aside due to the neoliberal revolution thirty years ago.¹⁴

I will not attempt to recall the common points we share with Bidet, both from the views points of theory and politics, rather only focus on the difference I mentioned earlier. Within Bidet’s framework, the society is structured in two large classes. At the top, where “those from above” parade, two poles of a single class are distinguished: the proprietors of capital and managers/leaders. “Below”, I recall, we find the “fundamental class” of workers, clerical or commercial employee, craftsmen, and shopkeepers. Lévy and I believe two upper classes must be distinguished at the top (“above”), namely capitalist classes and the classes of managers. By popular classes (“below”), we mean workers and clerical and commercial workers. (We interpret the social position of craftsmen and shopkeepers as being hybrid, so that their existence does not alter the classification above.)

Simplifying somewhat abusively and focusing on configurations at the top, the divergence with Bidet can be expressed in the phrase: “one class with two poles vs two classes”. To this, one can add that Bidet’s reference to the *compétents* is not the object of any additional disagreement, but an expression of the distance between the two frameworks.

I now straightforwardly state my interpretation of the roots of this divergence: It testifies to the difference between the distinct underlying conceptions of the process of knowledge I introduced earlier. Contrary to what could be considered the more adequate practice, I begin with our own vision (with Lévy). In our opinion, the theory of class structures “belongs” to

¹⁴ Quite erroneously, as we contend (with Lévy). G. Duménil, D. Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2011, Box 5.1.

the theory of history as the succession of modes of production, not the theory of sociality. This is where the concept of class finds its proper location with its tremendous explanatory power vis-à-vis historical dynamics, but also given its intrinsic limitations since the framework does not account for the entire complexity of social hierarchies and dynamics: The mere reference to “classes” does not say everything. These classes divide a “society”. That this society be modern has important implications, and this is the explanatory power of the other theory.

I return here to the definition of classes as previously introduced. Beyond the channel of appropriation of surplus-labor as surplus-value, a new mode of appropriation is developing in capitalism, resulting from the collective position of control vis-à-vis the means of production on the part of managers. A slow historical process of convergence between these tasks and thousand-year-old tasks of social control outside of enterprises occurred, straightforwardly within the field of economics (as in the implementation of policies and regulations), or partly and indirectly (as in education), or in relation to even broader social functions related to government structures (as the police or the army).

Like bourgeois relations of production emerged from feudal societies (within the cities and in the countryside according to complex and diversified processes), managerial social relations developed from within capitalism. In the process of this emergence, the social position of managers can be described as of a “middle class” (between “those above” and “those below”), a merely descriptive “catchall” category deprived of theoretical import. In other studies, we show how neoliberalism did not interrupt the process of “managerialization” inherent in the overall dynamics of capitalism. (The process must be understood in reference to, on the one hand, social and production relations and, on the other hand, in its political aspects within what we denote as “social orders”¹⁵).

Consider now Bidet’s analytical framework. Despite the use of the label « meta/structural », and contrary to our approach above, Bidet, at least partially, seeks the foundations of class patterns within the theory of sociality as introduced earlier. Involved here is the most difficult issue in the debate, the core of the divergence, since, in my opinion, the notion of class is alien to the theory of sociality, unless the concept of class itself is thoroughly altered. By “altering”, I mean here more than a redefinition, namely a more “hierarchical general” definition in Bidet’s framework than the expression of the “appropriation of a surplus” in Marx. Involved is also the disconnection of the strict relationship between the concept of class and the other concepts of the same theory, such as “relations of production” or “mode of production”, when I locate the mark of the “scientific” character of the construction in the tightness of these relationships. The only way out is to draw on the potential “flexibility” of the notions involved, that is, in both instances, to confer on “production” a broad meaning and metamorphose “managers” into “leaders”. Such extensions of basic notions echo the theoretical option giving the edge to social hierarchies over the channels of appropriations of a surplus.

At the origin of Bidet’s theory of modernity (and of the implicit theory of pre-modern societies) lies the identification of two social actors, the masters of the market and organizers. Unquestionably, these positions in society define social hierarchies, and I accept the concept of “class factor” Bidet defined on such grounds. The factor contributes to the establishment of the fact but does not “make” the fact. The determination to use the term “class” in this context is subject to the preliminary clear statement that a thoroughly distinct meaning is conferred on the notion as compared to its use within Marx’s framework. A short circuit is, thus, provoked

¹⁵ G. Duménil, D. Lévy, *Dynamique des modes de production et des ordres sociaux*, *Actuel Marx*, n° 52. Second semestre 2012.

within the meta/structural approach, by breaking the tight separation between the two theoretical fields involved on behalf of the combination of their respective explanatory powers, an encounter within the phenomenon that should not have feedback effects on theoretical frameworks.

We touch here the basic reason explaining Bidet's reference to Marx's "mistake". Following Bidet along the lines I previously suggested, Marx would have made the wrong choice when defining classes in reference to an excessively narrow criterion (namely, the trans-mode of production concept of the appropriation of a surplus-labor and the specification of the channels of this appropriation); instead Marx should have approached classes within the broad theoretical field of which "modernity" is a central category. Still following Bidet, from the origin, organization defines the social position of an upper social category, a class.

One could contend that the break is only partial. Unquestionably, the social position acquired within these hierarchies rests on the formation of the channels governing the formation of incomes, allowing the organizers of sociality to make a living out of the work of producers. The main channel is taxation under distinct historically established forms, also a trans-mode of production process. But these forms do not determine the sequence of phases in the sequence of periods considered, be them those of modes of production or sociality.

Such clarifications and supplements do not threaten the foundations of Marx's theory of history. Within this theory, social classes, whose definition is directly articulated to that of relations of production and modes of production, do not purport to account for all forms of domination, in particular those typical of "leaders" in general or any kind of organizers in charge of the functioning of these societies – in the same manner as all forms of domination, notably gender dominations, although not class dominations are, in no way, less actual dominations.

This framework also allows for the interpretation of Bidet's reference to the social category of "*competents*" (intellectuals, professors, journalists, and the like). These groups find their proper location within the hierarchies I mentioned earlier, though they do not fit within the strict logics of Marx's class analysis. Obviously, this statement does not imply that they are alien to the social hierarchies inherent in sociality or class hierarchies, in which they are actors in their own ways, those of intellectual life.

It must be clearly emphasized that "leaders" do not form a "class" in Marx's sense. Approached within the theoretical field of sociality, Bidet's concept of class refers to the "upper" positioning of a social group, those "from above"; within Bidet's meta/structural approach, the concept is hybrid. I repeat here that I am referring to the combined explanatory powers of the two distinct theories of history. Thus, at issue is not the denial of the location of these social groups within an analysis of social hierarchies grounded in the two theoretical frameworks. For fundamental analytical reasons, however, I consider more appropriate the preservation of Marx's theory of class based on its original principles.

In addition, I have difficulty to understand how Bidet's analytical framework can account for social relations in feudalism, in their variegated components. Despite the growing bourgeois organization within cities and the obvious disciplines in the countryside, I have difficulty to see how the feudal lord and the nobility to which he/she belongs could be classified within one of the two categories of the masters of the market and organizers, though they certainly are leaders.

Finally, I want to stress that the "murder of the father" does not fill me with dread, since I also believe there is a serious problem within Marx analytical framework, a "dark spot", with several of the features of an actual mistake. This dark spot is the one I already pointed to.

Marx very clearly saw the rise of managers within corporations¹⁶ but, I guess for political reasons, he balked at recognizing managers as a new class, accomplishing a new step forward in his own conceptual field. To the contrary, this is precisely what, with Lévy, we decided to do. Hence, *two classes* above. This dual pattern mirrors the coexistence of the two channels governing the appropriation of surplus-labor within contemporary economies.

One may wonder whether such subtle theoretical distinctions have actual practical implications. The political consequences we (with Bidet) draw from our analyses are clearly convergent, namely the requirement of a broad social alliance—in the context of a great historical “juncture”—between managers (from the private and government sectors) and popular classes, as within the social-democracies (in a broad sense) of the post-war years. I have, however, difficulty to understand the meaning of this alliance with capitalists, in a framework in which leaders and “competent” are defined as one “pole” within a single upper class. Pole against pole within a same class?

¹⁶ G. Duménil, *La position de classe des cadres et employés dans Le Capital*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble, 1975 ; G. Duménil, M. Löwy, E. Renault, *Lire Marx*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2009, Troisième partie, II.