

THE NECESSARY ILLUSION—GIANNOTTI ON FETISHISM*

A ILUSÃO NECESSÁRIA — GIANNOTTI SOBRE O FETICHISMO

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RESUMO: O principal objetivo deste artigo é investigar os significados mais fundamentais que José Arthur Giannotti atribui ao fenômeno do fetichismo em Marx. Sua interpretação, conforme exposta em *Certa herança marxista* e fundamentada no conceito de ilusão necessária em um sentido predominantemente kantiano, parece desafiar um aspecto fundamental das leituras que o marxismo filosófico uspiano, que tem o próprio Giannotti como figura-chave, defende desde a década de 1960. Essas novas leituras ressaltaram a noção de abstração real como o fundamento do fetichismo da mercadoria em um sentido predominantemente hegeliano. O artigo tem como objetivo esclarecer que a interpretação de Giannotti não visa substituir uma perspectiva por outra, mas sim integrar os achados iniciais da crítica da abstração real com as práticas de mensuração ilusórias inerentes ao processo de produção e troca de mercadorias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Marxismo filosófico uspiano; fetichismo; abstração real; ilusão necessária

ABSTRACT: The main aim of this article is to investigate the most fundamental meanings that José Arthur Giannotti attributes to the phenomenon of fetishism in Marx. His interpretation, as expounded in *Certa herança marxista* [*Certain Marxist Heritage*] and grounded in the concept of a necessary illusion in a predominantly Kantian sense, appears to challenge a fundamental aspect of the new readings that Uspian Philosophical Marxism, with Giannotti as a key figure, has advanced since the 1960s. These new readings have underscored the notion of real abstraction as the foundation of commodity fetishism in a predominantly Hegelian sense. The article aims to clarify that Giannotti's interpretation does not aim to replace one perspective with another but rather to integrate the initial insights of the critique of real abstraction with the illusory measurement practices inherent in the process of production and exchange of commodities.

KEYWORDS: Uspian Philosophical Marxism; Fetishism; Real Abstraction; Necessary Illusion

However, the product character of the instrument and the work object is lost when placed as a condition of the subsequent process, returning to the situation of ready-made things. This is obviously **in itself** because it can hardly go unnoticed **for us**, inhabitants of a world accustomed to integrating wealth created outside the capitalist system through the vast operation known as primitive accumulation, which imposes on it at all times the form of value, of product.¹

*This article is based on a speech given in the context of the Conference “Marxist Readings of Hegel,” held at the University of São Paulo in 2023, within the framework of project CAPES-PROBRAL 88887.700839/2022-00 (UFMG/USP/UFRRJ/ZfL Berlin/CAU), dedicated to examining the receptions of Hegel in Brazil. The initial character of the dialogue with the German colleagues is worth noting, partly explaining the introductory nature of this paper.

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¹ GIANNOTTI, J. A. O ardil do trabalho. In: **Exercícios de filosofia**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1980, p. 27.



I

It is usual in Brazil to state that Uspian philosophical Marxism achieved rigor, originality, and theoretical productivity almost beyond compare, although the same observation has yet to cross Brazilian borders. Two seemingly opposite reasons are usually asserted for this local feat. The first one relates to the interdisciplinary nature of this reading from the very beginning, especially in the context of the so-called “Marx Seminar”, formed in the late 1950s by students and lecturers from all humanity areas interested in diagnosing the Brazilian reality. The second reason is the use of French “structural analysis” of philosophical texts, detaching Marxian work from the immediate political purposes and sociological facilitations often accompanying Marxism.

The idea of subordinating *The Capital* to the “same technique of interpreting philosophical texts”², as Giannotti announced in 1960, leads to identifying methodological and logical operations whose horizon of knowledge was precisely to allow a conjunction between philosophy and social sciences and, concerning Brazil, to think about conformations of distinct and simultaneous temporalities. The discernment of two orders of investigation in the Marxian writings provided this: the logical exposition of “schemes of meanings” and the “enlightening analysis that describes how logical schemes (...) acquire historical concreteness”³. This differentiation leads some years later to the key distinction, based on the *Grundrisse*, between the “history of becoming” (*Geschichte des Werdens*) and the categorical, “contemporary history” of capitalism (*Kontemporäre Geschichte*) or “historical genesis and logical genesis”⁴.

Given this connection, it is not surprising that Fernando Henrique Cardoso, author of one of the most critical efforts to understand Brazil’s social-economic underdevelopment within worldwide capitalism—the so-called “dependency theory”—remarks that the incursions into the logic of the Marxian writings, guided by Giannotti, led him to search for elements of “dialectical analysis of real social processes.”⁵ In turn, Roberto Schwarz, perhaps the leading theorist of Brazilian ideological life to date, considers these philosophical

² GIANNOTTI, J. A. Notas para uma análise metodológica de *O Capital*. In: **Revista Brasiliense**, 1960, p. 63.

³ GIANNOTTI. Notas para uma análise metodológica de *O Capital*, p. 71.

⁴ GIANNOTTI. Contra Althusser. In: **Exercícios de filosofia**, p. 94; cf. **Origens da dialética do trabalho**, p. 194; MELO, Crítica e contradição: qual herança marxista? In: **Novos estudos**, 2011.

⁵ CARDOSO, F. H. **Capitalismo e Escravidão no Brasil Meridional**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977, p. 13.

incursions to be the methodological source of what he calls “a new intuition of Brazil.”⁶ In turn, Paulo Eduardo Arantes, despite accusing a certain critical emptying that the structural method entails even in Giannotti, considers that the concept of form adopted by Schwarz’s literary criticism connects with his idea that “social reality, by knowing a process of categorical constitution, already presents itself (...) as formed”⁷.

Since the “structural analysis” was applied within an interdisciplinary arrangement, under the pressure of discussing the Brazilian reality, the logical suspension of historical time, proposed by the structuralist historian of philosophy, had a productive impact on the knowledge of that same historical time. Of course, what interested those social scientists and philosophers was not precisely the history of philosophy or, inversely, the critique of the ideology of philosophy, which would be a traditional way of relating Marxism to philosophy. Instead, the philosophical analysis of the logic of the Marxian text paves the way to understanding the historical reality of which traditional Marxism was generally unaware.

On the other hand, the fruitfulness of *The Capital* studies was due to the “ontological interpretation” with which Giannotti erected a local barrier to the expansion of Althusser’s ideas in the 1960s and 1970s, although the USP Philosophy Department had been strongly determined by that French structuralist tradition at the time. Against Althusser and his companions, against the idea of an “epistemological cut”⁸, Giannotti proposed an original line of argument in which the rigor of Marxian discourse could only be ensured to the extent that it could reproduce the “order of ontological constitution” of capitalist society⁹.

Thus, unlike Althusser, who limited abstraction and universality only to thoughts, Giannotti would demonstrate that Marx starts from the effectiveness of the universal. Thus, the concept of “abstract labor”, which comprises the substance of the objectified value of commodities, is not restricted to the intellectual operation of externally identifying, in individual realities, a common feature but has its basis in the ontological process of a “real abstraction”:

The analysis of particular cases and historical forms of development of a certain mode of production is opposed to the abstract analysis of the essence that mirrors reality in its *Kerngestalt* (nuclear figure). Against Althusser, we maintain that such mirroring only becomes possible because a

⁶ SCHWARZ, R. Um seminário Marx. In: **Novos Estudos Cebrap**, v. 50, 1998, p. 105.

⁷ ARANTES, P. E. **Um departamento francês de ultramar**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1994, p. 288.

⁸ ALTHUSSER, L. **For Marx**. London: Verso, 2005.

⁹ GIANNOTTI. *Contra Althusser*, p. 90.

process of categorial constitution occurs in reality itself, as opposed to the becoming of the phenomenon, a process that configures the essence of a determined mode of production and, therefore, of a form of sociability. The essence is part of each concrete moment without exhausting all its dimensions so that the discourse would only become scientific when it reproduced the order of this ontological constitution. (...) It is to be noted that this is done through an objective process between men, where the individual's conscience does not play any extraordinary role. The subject-object relationship is thus replaced by a real abstraction that occurs at the very core of objectivity.¹⁰

The “ontological interpretation” that Giannotti opposes to Marxist structuralism gives the categories of political economy an objective density whose suitable understanding requires the incorporation of philosophical discourse, particularly of the Hegelian logic. It is not a matter of observance to Hegel but the discernment that Marx's exposition identifies Hegelian-type logical movements at the heart of capitalism's form of sociability, as is the case of “real abstraction”, “value-objectivity”, or “objectivity-subject”¹¹. This insight is eminently critical because it means giving objectivity to the fetishism that merges with these categories, at the same time as it accuses it of its illusory character. In addition, it is remarkable that Giannotti already employed the category of “real abstraction” before the publication of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's investigations into the relationship between modern epistemological forms and the commodity exchange.¹²

However, if I highlight this “ontological” result of Giannotti's methodological concerns of the 1960s, it is because it seems to be at odds with the proposal, made at the end of the 1990s, of thinking about the necessary illusion of fetishism in accordance with the structure of Kant's “transcendental illusion”. Giannotti writes in *Certa herança marxista*:

Just as Kant's transcendental logic arises when inquiring into the relationship between representation and what is represented as a possible object of

¹⁰ GIANNOTTI. *Contra Althusser*, pp. 90, 92.

¹¹ GIANNOTTI. *Origens da dialética do trabalho*, p. 258.

¹² If I am correct, Sohn-Rethel's first systematic use of the notion of real abstraction appears to the public only in 1970, in the book on intellectual and bodily work (SOHN-RETHEL, A. **Geistige und körperliche Arbeit. Zur Theorie gesellschaftlicher Synthesis**. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1970). More relevant than the novelty is the fact that the Brazilian author never limits real abstraction solely to the sphere of circulation, seeing in production only the metabolic relationship between man and nature, as the German author does, and for this reason, rightly criticized by a series of Marx scholars (cf. JAPPE, A. Sohn-Rethel and the Origin of Real Abstraction: A Critique of Production or a Critique of Circulation?. In: **Historical Materialism**, 21(1), 2013). Thus, the notion of real abstraction defended by Sohn-Rethel appears etiolated, separated from the fundamental notion of abstract work, which directly opposes the reading by Giannotti and, later, Ruy Fausto (FAUSTO, R. “Abstração real e contradição: sobre o trabalho abstrato e o valor”. In: **Marx: Lógica e Política**, v. I. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987).

knowledge, the dialectical logic of capitalism arises when inquiring into the relationship between the value rule and the effective value that an object takes on the market. But this rule is, at the same time, what regulates the constitution of the case, the conformation of the object of use, as well as its transformation into value, a form of sociability, which ends up re-positing the rule itself.¹³

The issue that seems inevitable is whether the Hegelian moment of recognition of the objective universal in its skewed form of objectivity-subject, founded on real abstraction, would finally give way to a typically Kantian moment, locating the illusion, ultimately, in the level of subjectivities inserted into the practices that weave capitalist sociability. Would the delusion not be thought of again, in this case, as a subjective representation and not so much, as Giannotti wanted to underline at the beginning of his studies on Marx, as the objectivity of the *Schein*, having its fulcrum in reality?

I will try to show here that this inference is false. By thinking of the necessary illusion of fetishism as a transcendental illusion, Giannotti carries out a kind of categorial genesis of real abstraction based on the social praxis of illusive measurement of value that producers constantly perform, producing and re-positing value as illusory identity. At this junction, the *Schein* is not *only* the necessary appearance of the object, the “objecthood” which cannot present itself other than as endowed with a social property, with the value substance in its natural body. The phantasmagoria is *also* established in the measurement process that producers perform in their permanent social dispute, presupposing at the beginning what should be confirmed at the end, and thus arriving at precisely that result, just like the Kantian dialectical reason.

In the last instance, what I want to argue is that Giannotti’s conception of value as posited-being (*Gesetzsein*), inspired by Hegelian philosophy, is not only not incompatible with the idea of fetishism as a transcendental illusion, but that they even imply one another. The illusion of measure posits the value that, as *Gesetzsein*, again pushes the producers to carry out the same hallucination of autonomous objecthood. In this context, the Hegelian idea of value “as the inner equality of things [*Sachen*] which, in their existence [*Existenz*], are specifically quite different”¹⁴ produces a hermeneutic orientation for understanding value as posited-being, since the object enters “into a system of relations that no longer posits it

¹³ GIANNOTTI, J. A. *Certa herança marxista*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000, p. 107.

¹⁴ HEGEL, G. W. F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, § 101.

immediately to man, but as something common (*Gemeinsames*) that is expressed in individual objects”¹⁵. Moreover, one might suppose that the notion of being-positing has a more general scope in Giannotti’s use of Hegelian dialectics, in line with the importance that the Greater Logic will attribute to it for differentiating dialectics from metaphysical and transcendental discourse in general: “In the different cycles of determination and especially in the progress of the exposition, or, more precisely, in the progress of the concept in the exposition of itself, it is of capital concern always to clearly distinguish what still is in itself or implicitly and what is posited, how determinations are in the concept and how they are as posited or as existing-for-other. This is a distinction that belongs only to the dialectical development and one unknown to metaphysical philosophizing (to which the critical also belongs)”¹⁶.

II

The peculiarity of Giannotti’s reading of fetishism can be better understood when we compare it with a seemingly convergent interpretation, which also takes up the Kantian notion of transcendental illusion. More recently, the Finnish philosopher Vesa Oittinen argued, wrongly in my view, that the Marxian concept of critique of political economy adopts fundamental features of Kantian critique, refusing a methodological absorption of Hegelian dialectics.

Opposing the general examination that the *Neue Lektüre*, especially Hans-Georg Backhaus, makes of the theory of fetishism, according to which it ghostly expresses the real objectivity of the commodity-producing society—that is, the inversion produced by social relations between things and thing relations between human beings—, Oittinen takes up the critique of transcendental illusion at the level of cognitive representation and judgment. “It is Hegelianism sans phrase”, he states, “to claim that the illusion is, in its way, something real.”¹⁷ In contrast to the Hegelianism of the *Neue Lektüre*, Oittinen, however, reinstates a traditional conception of illusion, tracing back to Aristotle, according to which the illusory

¹⁵ GIANNOTTI. *Contra Althusser*, p. 91.

¹⁶ HEGEL, G. W. F. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 95.

¹⁷ OITTINEN, V. *Commodity Fetishism as a Transcendental Illusion?* In: BREDA, S., BOVEIRI, K., WOLF, F. O. (orgs.). *Materialistische Dialektik: bei Marx und über Marx hinaus*. Freie Universität Berlin, 2017, p. 26.

resides solely in judgment and knowledge about objects, but not in the (social) nature of objects themselves.

Oittinen's anti-Hegelian and pro-Kantian view is illustrative here because it allows us to accentuate the uniqueness and strength of Giannotti's reconstruction of Marxian discourse. In fact, from Giannotti's perspective, Oittinen's mistake would be more than just seeking to break with Hegelianism, reproducing once again Althusser's epistemological cut, even if he seeks "a less dramatic version" of it, in his own words. The problem would rather arise from this reading of Kant's transcendental dialectics itself. By confining it to the scope of the judgment, Oittinen again consciously attributes a subjective representational character to the *Schein*. By doing so, he weakens the explanation of its "necessary" character, as if the issue were exclusively at the metaphysical attempt to derive the real from the pure form of reason, lending it an eternal essence, just like the classical political economy regarding the bourgeois society.

Accordingly, Oittinen seems to conceive fetish in strict terms with which Marx and Engels expressed the ideological phenomenon in *German Ideology*: "it really represents something without representing something real."¹⁸ Oittinen ignores the difference between ideology and fetishism because he cannot accept the Hegelian assertion of the *Gesetzsein*. The latter ultimately involves linking representation and presentation of objecthood, *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*.

In addition, Oittinen repeats the famous definition of transcendental illusion as "an inseparable adjunct of human reason" and, therefore, an incessant delusion. Nevertheless, he leaves aside the precious explanation that Kant offers of this permanent hallucination of reason, which gives a special meaning to metaphysics, which is never, in fact, liquidated.

As the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectics" elucidates it, it is indeed the constitutive use of ideas that is illusory as it makes the principle that organizes the whole of knowledge something conditioned, placed in the order of phenomena, whereas the regulative use of ideas satisfies the drive of reason to inquire about the whole, without intending to find in experience what allows us to totalize it.

"This unity of reason", says Kant, "always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and

¹⁸ MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. **The German Ideology**. New York: International Publishers, 1947, p. 52.

contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others”¹⁹. Thus, Kant argues that the ideas of reason are principles of totality that seek an increasingly wider systematic unity for the series of conditions given in experience. The imaginary constitutive use of the ideas thus lies in the fact that reason employs a principle of organization of knowledge, the unconditioned, without which understanding does not advance in unity and extension, as a concept of real objects. Therefore, the illusive drive of reason is rooted in the principle of totalization that considers itself to be part of knowledge, the subjective need for connection passing for the objective need to determine things-in-themselves. What is given at the beginning is found at the end and found at the end because it is presupposed at the beginning.

In the Hegelian language adopted by Giannotti, the transcendental illusion means that the position is presupposed, or, in terms of the fetishist appearance, the value as *Gesetzsein* is presupposed as a stable standard of measurement of each element inserted in the work and exchange processes inside of the mode of capitalist production, and for this reason, it is rediscovered as the end that totalizes the development that is itself conditioned. Let us look at this more closely.

III

Giannotti’s starting point in interpreting fetishism consists of the premise that commodity sociability is constituted by procedures that “measure objects by each other”²⁰. *Measuring* is a social praxis that sets representations, thoughts, and abstractions in motion. However, it is not a matter of thinking here about the representations of producers as if they were social scientists, but what they do with the representations of value when measuring useful different products from useful concrete labor. In the equation of exchange, the agent who measures his product through another product, linen through a coat, abstracts the concreteness of the use value to arrive at an equal that makes comparison possible: “Abstraction occurs as the nerve of a process that seeks to externalize itself through the position of this equal”²¹. However, it is not the producer himself who posits this equal, and ultimately, identity. The practical association of all the producers’ perspectives makes the value present itself

¹⁹ KANT. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B674.

²⁰ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 103.

²¹ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 89.

as something real and identical without being reduced to one perspective or another. In terms of *Trabalho e reflexão* [*Work and Reflection*], “the passage from equivalence to identity provokes the objectification of the obtained identity. It is a matter, in brief, of a process of position.”²² The measure comes to represent a presupposed objectivity, which is re-positing in each measured object²³. Notably, the subject does not posit the value. It is the set of measurement relations that does this.

From this stance of the logical genesis of value, the holders of commodities then carry out a decisive operation to continue the exchange process: they must presuppose the measure before it is actually posited. In measurement operations, “as if” plays a relevant role: “as if all products were being subjected to a presupposed parameter”²⁴. The act of measuring that producers perform takes on the figure of a reflection as the presupposition is confirmed at the end of the series. Hence, Giannotti uses the expression “reflective judgment of value” in the precise meaning that the rule seeks itself in each case and at the end of the proceedings²⁵. In the praxis of exchange, value can only be posited because it is already presupposed. Inversely, to the extent that it is posited, it forces all producers to repeat the same illusory procedure of anticipating the whole so that the whole can be realized again.

However, this praxis of measuring, of establishing equivalences between products of concrete labor, is not induced by a structure of the subject’s rationality. “The presupposed equivalences are necessary illusions caused by the fact that the previous result of production is taken as a starting point, which is reproduced without knowing whether it is being realized at the same level of labor productivity.”²⁶ Thus, the fetishistic illusion is from the beginning the result of the illusory practices of measurement by an abstraction, which, through this

²² GIANNOTTI, J. A. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983, p. 27.

²³ GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 30.

²⁴ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 103. At this point, Figueiredo’s comment is precious for the proposal of this investigation, delving into the intricate nature of the ‘as if’ concept: “Thus, the ‘as if’—which, it should be noted, had already been thematized by Kant in the ‘Appendix to transcendental dialectics’, even before reappearing in third *Critique* as a principle of Reflection ensured by the free exercise of imagination—produces that necessary illusion of totality, without which the system simply cannot restore itself. That is why Giannotti has always insisted that the commodity fetish does not correspond to some kind of unfortunate deformation of individual consciousness. On the contrary, the fetish is explained to the extent that the general equivalent, money, condenses commodity relations to the point of presenting the meaning of individual work as a concrete case of a norm that, by magic, appears as autonomous in relation to production and exchange processes”. (FIGUEIREDO, V. B. *A Reflexão no último livro de Giannotti*. In: *Discurso*, 51 (2), 2021, p. 24).

²⁵ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 78.

²⁶ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 106.

same praxis, has to “freeze into things”.²⁷ At the same time, without this common presupposition supporting equivalences, the system could not be harmonized despite drastic changes caused by technical innovations that can evaporate value by making the use value expire.

Hence, on the one hand, the structural affinity between the transcendental illusion and the fetishistic illusion: the anticipation of the whole that generates the whole. At the source of the fetishistic appearance lies what Giannotti calls the “illusory completeness of value identity, that common which becomes a complete presupposition before being effectively posited as such”²⁸. The metaphysical mistake, identified by Kant, of attributing to the phenomenon its own condition of possibility is repeated here, not, however, in the cognitive representation that each operator has of the process, but in the measurement exercise that needs to recover the starting point of production, which is also the measurement result. On the other hand, the value constituting the object that will be measured by it brings about an approximation with the structure of the Hegelian concept. The universal posits its particularity once the value is constituted as a rule that shapes the cases measured by it. The rule posits its cases.

Therefore, we discover an interpretation scheme that intricately connects the capitalist sociability of measurement with the spectral outcomes of this sociability. In the history of philosophy and social theory, Lukács, in his groundbreaking work *History and Class Consciousness*, was perhaps the first to ponder about fetishism in this dual manner. By associating abstract work with Weberian rationalization, Lukács discerns the objectification of this abstraction (thus drawing closer to the concept of real abstraction) and—even more significantly—the subjective role of rationalizing the work process that enables equivalences. For Lukács, rationalizing equates to reifying: attributing the characteristics of a thing to work, which ultimately asserts itself as an independent product in relation to the worker.²⁹

Giannotti’s exploration of the measurement operations that govern capitalist sociability presents something similar. His analysis of the transcendental illusion in *Certa herança marxista*, while placing a greater emphasis on the subjective operations of agents’ totalization, does not depart from the theme of necessary illusion as previously discussed, particularly in *Trabalho e reflexão*, where Hegelian philosophy serves as a guiding analytical

²⁷ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 106.

²⁸ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 103.

²⁹ LUKÁCS, G. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge-Mass.: The MIT Press, 1972.

inspiration.³⁰ In his first critique of Habermas, Giannotti articulates the concept of an ‘as if’ with the logic of position and presupposition.

Exchangeability is a *sine qua non* of the process of obtaining currency, everything happens as if its convertibility were guaranteed in advance. Hence the class in formation, the progressive sequence of secondary reinforcements, presents itself as an already constituted class, as if it were a given. In this movement of reflection, in which the past becomes a presupposition, the successive is established as if it were present; in place of the succession of primary reinforcers, of dispersed multiplicity, emerges its class, its timeless form. From this point of view, there is nothing more misleading than radically separating, through an original cut, behavior guided by determined ends, technical action linked to work, and communicative behavior, interaction between men mediated by rules.³¹

Against Habermas, Giannotti asserts the reflexive nature of establishing a measurement standard as a presupposed identity, a symbolic operation that cannot be reduced to the technical logic of instrumental action and, for the same reason, cannot be contrasted with the logic of communicative action.³² In our perspective, it is of utmost importance to question

³⁰GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 18.

³¹ GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 20.

³² In another passage, Giannotti is even more incisive in his opposition to Habermas, making it clear that his theoretical project consists of an alternative to the theory of communicative action. “Starting from a phenomenology of the work process, taken in the abstraction that capitalism lends it, we try to highlight how it simultaneously weaves relationships with objects and others. At this level, a technical operation is not opposed to a merely symbolic exchange; Habermas’s attempt to reconstruct historical materialism on the basis of this opposition seems to us entirely doomed to failure, since from the beginning it does not reflect sufficiently on the nature of the sociability of work.” (GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 308). One of the best “Habermasian” replies to Giannotti is made by Rurion Melo when he addresses, in terms of immanent criticism, that the diagnosis of value fibrillation, already anticipated by Marx himself in the *Grundrisse* when he stated that the development of technique and science causes the obsolescence of the determination of value through work, forces Giannotti to assume the participation of politics in the configuration and maintenance of the economy. (cf. MELO, R. *Crítica e contradição: qual herança marxista?* In: *Novos estudos*, 90 jul., 2011). It is worth remembering here the general features of Giannotti’s reading of this passage from the *Grundrisse*. According to him, this excerpt anticipates contemporary capitalism in that it shows how the value creation process imposes itself by appealing to the logic of measuring living labor by dead labor, but without any condition of replacing at the end what is presupposed at the beginning (cf. MARX, K. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin, 1993). This not only throws the reproduction of capital into power games, the need to create monopolies over scientific invention, the occupation of key positions in the flow of financial capital, etc. Not only does the identity of capital change, but also the identity of the subject who can revolutionize the production process. Marx’s text shows how the labor theory of value becomes obsolete and simultaneously imposed. However, because of this, the class struggle is also affected. The theory of value offers the measure of wealth distributed across social classes. Nevertheless, now, every measure is artificial and momentary. Intellectual work, decisive for the current stage of capitalism, cannot be measured in conjunction with dead work. Without this objective measure, there is no factual basis for a political process in which one party measures itself against the other. “Now, if capital itself becomes incapable of completing the design of its illusory identity, the new social individual also loses the standard of its identity, as this depends on it as a reference point for the class struggle.” (GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 224).

this “presupposed identity as a condition for the identification of any object”.³³ Giannotti then proceeds to open a series of lines of reasoning, illustrating how language and social practices, such as play, work, and measurement, are formed from operational schemes that contain “illusions of permanence”.³⁴

By establishing an attribute to different things, the logical form of discourse represents an identity as given or presupposed, which marks a leap concerning linguistic identification practices. Logical schemes depend on and, at the same time, interrupt the operational schemes where the measurement and attribution of quality can work, but in a previous linguistic and practical instance in which the diversity of objects occurs in the process of identification, while the logical scheme presupposes the identity between the diverse as given: “Discourse therefore bases its legitimacy on a practical logos, on an ante-predicative synthesis that ensures the logical form of the multiple to which the predication engages. The discourse, however, prefaces this condition of possibility, admits the path of identification to be resolved, operating as if it were already ready.”³⁵ From this, it follows that language, precisely the propositional form, promotes, based on the operational scheme in which measurement processes are configured without yet aiming at the solution of an external object as measurement, the illusion of permanence. The world is represented as a given landscape, regardless of the cultivation of everyday linguistic practices.

For Giannotti, it is a matter of showing that this illusion of permanence also occurs in most elementary social practices, including non-verbal ones. In the grammar of a simple game of throwing a ball against the wall or at someone else and catching it back, operational schemes are produced where the properties of the ball and bodies are relativized depending

³³ GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 21.

³⁴ In the impressive reconstruction of Giannotti’s trajectory from *Trabalho e reflexão* to *Apresentação do mundo* [*Presentation of the World*], when he directly addresses Wittgenstein philosophy, Luiz Henrique Lopes dos Santos clarifies the contradictory relationship between the logical level and pre-predicative instance: “according to Giannotti’s analysis, in *Trabalho e reflexão*, as an operational scheme characteristic of capitalist sociability, what is now articulated we can call it a verbal language game, through which agents discriminate, in the conceptual register, those same things and those same facts that they discriminated non-conceptually within the scope of the operational scheme. It turns out, however, that the two levels of discrimination appear to be contradictory, the conceptualization of the agents proving to be illusory with respect to the meanings practically constituted at the level of the operational scheme. Furthermore, and this is the fulcrum of the dialectic of capitalist sociability, the conceptual illusions of the agents reveal themselves as necessary illusions for the regular functioning of the operational scheme, creating, therefore, a dialectical circuit between the interdependent levels of practical and conceptual discriminations.” (LOPES DOS SANTOS, L. H. *Sobre o transcendental prático e a dialética da sociabilidade*. In: *Novos estudos*, 90 jul., 2011). Just because of that, so understands Melo’s argument, the politics takes on forms of sociability distanced from the reflexivity of work.

³⁵ GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 37.

on whether the action is individual or interindividual. However, more important is the fact that each action is so implicated in the other that it complements that it only has its meaning on the assumption of the existence of the other, represented and recognized by the other. The game only works because the respective operating scheme creates an illusion of permanence without which it cannot function, as is the elementary case of all discourse. Hence, the family resemblance between the illusion of propositional form and the illusion of measurement processes in the sociability of exchange refers to operational schemes that, by force of themselves, establish a rule without yet objectifying it. Discourse and value, however, do so:

We believe that the operational scheme exemplifies, in a very crude way, the type of object whose plot Marx calls “contemporary history”, this structure of social relations of production constantly fed by reiterated actions of men and which are objectified in figures such as commodities, capital and so on. Indeed, we cannot identify the fetishism of the commodity with the objectivity represented in the scheme, but at this most elementary level at which we are working, it is worth highlighting that both establish a process of synthesis and objectification that subverts the temporality of watches.³⁶

According to Giannotti, the practices of predication and measurement thus establish, based on their operational scheme, imperatives of illusion so that they can function at the price of normalizing and, in doing so, hiding and silencing what is actually at stake, causing dissonances. In the words of Lopes dos Santos, “the idea that agents themselves can commit ‘metaphysical errors’ in their symbolic practices is tempting, treating as things or signified facts what they should present as presuppositions of the meaning of these practices”.³⁷

Far from nullifying the specificities of necessary illusions here, Giannotti pursues the idea of a practical logos, “a kingdom of logical and objective objectivities”³⁸, through which capitalist sociability can be understood as a discourse inscribed in praxis as social objectivities are above all meanings.³⁹ On the other hand, one cannot rule out the possibility of understanding an affinity between the metaphysical illusions of language and the practices of measuring the sociability of exchange as they refer to the objectification of assumptions of

³⁶ GIANNOTTI. *Trabalho e reflexão – ensaios para uma dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 52.

³⁷ LOPES DOS SANTOS, *Sobre o transcendental prático e a dialética da sociabilidade*, p. 18.

³⁸ GIANNOTTI. *Contra Althusser*, p. 95.

³⁹ On the relationship between the practical logos and operational scheme, on the one hand, and the transcendental imagination in Kant, on the other (cf. FIGUEIREDO. *Reflexão no último livro de Giannotti*). Figueiredo not only situates Giannotti’s thinking in the various models of Reflection that Kant’s critique inaugurates but also genealogically reconstructs the frictions and affinities between these models within the scope of the intellectual production of the philosophy department of the University of São Paulo.

the respective operational schemes. In a way, when trying to show how the reflexivity of work and non-verbal practices operates based on language functioning, when identifying analogous structures between the respective operational schemes, Giannotti's approach reveals a structural affinity between logical form and measurement operations in exchange relations. Ultimately, what Giannotti pursues both in his investigation of language and in exchange, is this moment in which identity interrupts the game of the operational scheme and posits the presupposition as posited.

IV

If this consideration that incorporates the subjective and intersubjective contributions of commodity possessors makes sense, the fetishistic illusion is not just the objective appearance of the commodity endowed with value as a natural property. This objective appearance determines the socially articulated anticipation of value as the whole of the process every time. Simultaneously, the value position continuously needs its anticipation as a presupposition. Insofar as this measurement practice, by positing the measure as a real thing, increasingly consolidates into social practice between things and things' relationships between human beings, the game of presupposition and position also becomes hidden and erases from the vision.

In the latter case, fetishism is not just a nominal reference to the Kantian concept of "necessary illusion". The *socially* necessary illusion, to use Adorno's expression⁴⁰, of the fetishistic operation mimics what drives Kantian reason to hallucinate the constitutive totality. Once the human reason in Kant must presuppose the totality of the process in order to know a conditioned phenomenon, and therefore makes this principle of totality a constitutive principle, and not just the principle of the subject when knowing the object, here too the praxis of exchange sets the need for each person to presuppose what will only come into effect in the process. Value is presupposed as a totality, and only in this way can it be posited as a totality. At the same time, it must be presupposed to resume what was previously accomplished by purchasing means of production for a new production cycle.

⁴⁰ ADORNO, Th. W. **Prisms**. Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber. Cambridge-Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997, p. 22.

On the other hand, the substantive difference concerning Kant is striking since the illusion achieves effectiveness, a position, without ceasing to be an illusion. Ultimately, the producers' presupposition gives rise to a social existence, a real abstraction that, in fact, exists. The "fetish is real", writes Giannotti, "because men behave through it and for it". However, an objective form is crucial, without which the "illusory identity would have no social life".⁴¹ This objective form is assumed by money, which lends the thing character to a rule of sociability.

Hence, Giannotti keeps a distance from Kant, as he states in an interview with Vinicius de Figueiredo:

When I talk about necessary illusion, I am very far from Kant's discourse. I see the issue arise when an exchange value is projected onto any exchange value that might appear on the market. As these need to be fueled by an identity—an amount of socially necessary labor; as this identity is *post-festum*, because only the effective exchange will determine the degree to which productivity has been set in motion and that the supply will cover the process, this presupposition of equality is a representation that becomes a general equivalent and is embodied in money, but it sets up an image of the entire process before it is actually carried out. The image is in the process of exchange and not in the imagination.⁴²

This observation makes it clear that Giannotti is far from attributing the illusion simply to the cognitive representation that social actors have of things, as if the error occurs in the judgment about the true source of value, as Oittinen argues. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting two elements that attest to the objectivity of fetishism for the participants in the exchange process: the need to reproduce the value advanced for the acquisition of means of production and labor forces, without which the system collapses, and so the form of money itself, which embodies the presupposition of equality. Thus, by thinking about the necessary illusion according to the structure of the transcendental *Schein*, but without the subject that supports and eventually corrects the error, Giannotti paves the way to think about fetishism being produced through intersubjective relations of measurement, through a social praxis. The fetish of naturalized value in commodity and money is thus related to the necessary illusion of measure.

⁴¹ GIANNOTTI. *Certa herança marxista*, p. 116.

⁴² GIANNOTTI, J. A. Entrevista a Vinicius de Figueiredo. In: *Analytica*, v. 15, 2011, pp. 293-294.

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RECEBIDO EM 16/05/2024

ACEITO EM 09/08/2024