

MODES OF PRODUCTION AS TRAJECTORIES OF POWER

classes, exploitation, consciousness, revolt, guarantees, ideology and cybernetic mode

Author: H.G.H.

Table of Contents

1. General principle
2. Definition of classes
3. Those who build and those who control
4. Human capacities successively exploited
5. The plunder mode of production
6. The agricultural mode
7. The industrial mode
8. The cybernetic mode
9. Accumulation of modes and return of earlier forms
10. The material and spiritual dimensions of the human being
11. From lived experience to collective consciousness
12. Cohesion and disaggregation of classes
13. Accumulation of the dominated and revolt
14. Communication and unification through lived experience
15. Ideology as false consciousness
16. The cybernetic information circuit
17. Cybernetic steering through catastrophes
18. Revolt, guarantees and recomposition of classes
19. Return of guarantees in new forms
20. Reification and compression of the human being
21. The terminal contradiction of the cybernetic mode
22. General motor of history
23. General conclusion

1. General principle

A class relation is always a relation between human beings. Land, weapons, machines, money, institutions, platforms, networks, algorithms or data are never classes. They are means through which some human beings can organize, control or exploit the activity of other human beings.

The history of societies divided into classes is therefore understood as a lasting tension between those who build the means of social life and those who possess the power to control them, direct them and appropriate part of their results. This contradiction does not mean that human groups remain identical over time. On the contrary, they are recomposed. But it provides a principle of continuity for understanding historical transformations.

History cannot be reduced to economics alone. Production provides the material plane of the class relation, while consciousness, meaning, memory and the representation of this relation constitute its human spiritual plane. The two dimensions transform one another.

2. Definition of classes

The dominated class is defined first by what it lives. It shares conditions of dependence, constraint, exposure to power, work, risk or limited autonomy. This common experience can exist even before individuals know that they form a class.

The ruling class is defined first by what it exploits. The central question is therefore not only what it owns, but which human capacity it succeeds in organizing, controlling and transforming into advantage, surplus and power.

This definition is relational. A person originating from a dominated group can join a ruling class if that person takes part in organizing the exploitation of other human beings. Conversely, a former member of a ruling group can lose the means that sustained that position and enter a dominated condition. Social origin is not necessarily a condition of membership.

3. Those who build and those who control

The fundamental principle is that it is essentially the exploited who build. They reproduce human beings, cultivate, construct, manufacture, transport, design, invent, organize, maintain, transmit and feed social and information circuits. Concrete society is produced by their activity.

The ruling class is therefore not defined by building. It is defined by its capacity to control these constructions and the means of production, organization or circulation, and then to direct and appropriate part of what is produced.

The fundamental historical contradiction thus opposes the construction of the means to their control. Those who make the system function are also those whose activity is indispensable to its reproduction. This dependence of the dominant on the dominated constitutes the material basis of the latter's potential collective power.

4. Human capacities successively exploited

Four major historical centers of human exploitation can be distinguished: gestation and reproduction, bodily force, productive intelligence, and then passions and social cognition. These forms do not mechanically replace one another. New forms are added to earlier ones, reorganize them and can reactivate them in new forms.

Historical succession must therefore be understood as a shift in the center of gravity of exploitation. A society can continue to exploit bodily force while making productive intelligence the principal source of accumulation. Likewise, the cybernetic mode can continue to exploit gestation, force and intelligence while assigning a central role to passions, attention and behavior.

5. The plunder mode of production

The plunder mode of production gives a central place to the exploitation of reproductive capacity. Women can be treated by the dominant group as a resource enabling demographic continuity, reproduction of the group and the production of future fighters.

What is exploited must be strictly distinguished from what is accumulated. Wealth seized through plunder, territories, animals, metals or captives are objects of appropriation and accumulation. They are not necessarily the human capacity that structures the internal class relation.

6. The agricultural mode

In the agricultural mode, exploitation is concentrated more heavily on bodily force. Land, water, storage, debt, personal obligations or mechanisms of coercion provide the supports that allow some human beings to exploit the physical labor of other human beings.

Land is a means of mediation in the class relation. What matters is the human organization that allows some people to decide access to indispensable resources and to take part of the product of other people's labor.

The growth of this form of production also produces an accumulation of people subjected to similar conditions. Once these experiences can be shared and recognized, they can become the basis of a common consciousness and of revolts.

7. The industrial mode

In the industrial mode, exploitation no longer concerns bodily force alone. It also mobilizes skill, know-how, learning, coordination and productive intelligence. The machine does not replace this human intelligence: it provides a framework that makes it possible to organize it, discipline it and increase its productivity.

The concentration of workers in cities, workshops and factories produces a major political consequence. Large numbers of individuals now live comparable experiences in nearby places, with common rhythms and similar working conditions. This proximity facilitates mutual recognition.

Printing, the press, workers' organizations, transport and collective institutions further increase the capacity for communication. Individual experience can then be transformed more rapidly into collective consciousness and organized capacity for action.

8. The cybernetic mode

In the cybernetic mode, passions, attention, desires, behavior, relations and social cognition become directly exploitable capacities. Human activity produces information, and this information can be used to predict, classify, direct or modify behavior.

Exploitation is therefore no longer necessarily limited to formal working time. Ordinary interactions, choices, movements, reactions, preferences or relationships can contribute to producing value and informational power.

The cybernetic mode is also distinguished by its capacity to coordinate dispersed activities at a distance. Material production, finance, logistics, consumption, communication and measurement can belong to the same chain without sharing the same territory or the same time.

9. Accumulation of modes and return of earlier forms

Modes of production do not disappear when a new center of exploitation becomes dominant. Earlier structures persist and are often integrated into the new organization. Historical transition is therefore an accumulation of layers rather than a complete substitution.

The cybernetic mode is particularly important in this respect because it can simultaneously reintegrate gestation, force, intelligence and passions into a single apparatus of measurement, coordination and exploitation.

This capacity for reintegration opens the possibility of a return of earlier forms of exploitation through new mediations: contract, market, technology, platform, intermediation or a new legal form.

10. The material and spiritual dimensions of the human being

There are two dimensions: one material and one human spiritual. The material dimension concerns production, reproduction, work, infrastructures, techniques, appropriation, surplus and accumulation.

The human spiritual dimension refers to nothing supernatural. It concerns consciousness, meaning, memory, values, imagination, identity, representation of self and group, mutual recognition and the capacity to form a collective project.

A class exists objectively within the relation of production, but it becomes a historical force only when its material experience is transformed into collective consciousness. The material provides the condition. The human spiritual dimension makes it possible to interpret it, share it and act upon it.

11. From lived experience to collective consciousness

Being exploited does not automatically mean knowing that one is exploited. And knowing individually that one is subjected to domination does not yet mean recognizing that others live the same situation. Collective consciousness is built in stages.

Lived experience must first be capable of being named, compared and recognized. When people understand that their difficulties are not merely individual but arise from a common relation, they can begin to perceive themselves as belonging to the same condition.

This awareness can then become organization. Only at this stage does a mass of dominated people become a historical force capable of collective action.

12. Cohesion and disaggregation of classes

Cohesion is never guaranteed. It can grow or break down among the dominated as well as among the dominant. The dominated can be divided by status, identities, territories, professions, strategies or interpretations of their situation. These divisions reduce their capacity for common action.

The ruling class can also disaggregate. Rivalries, conflicts of interest, struggles between fractions, defections or realignments can reduce its capacity to defend collectively the relation of exploitation that sustains it.

A historical transition becomes particularly likely when the cohesion of the dominated increases while that of the dominant decreases. Conversely, domination can remain durable when the dominated are very numerous but deeply fragmented.

13. Accumulation of the dominated and revolt

Domination tends to produce its own limit because it accumulates the number of those who live a common condition. The more a mode of production expands, the more it can increase the number of people subjected to the same structural relation.

Numbers, however, are not enough. Revolt also requires sufficiently intense experience, sufficient communication, collective consciousness and a capacity for organization. Repression and fragmentation can delay or prevent this passage.

When numbers, common lived experience, consciousness and organization converge, a critical mass can be reached. Revolt then becomes an endogenous product of domination rather than a simple external shock.

14. Communication and unification through lived experience

Unification through shared lived experience is present in all modes. Women exploited reproductively, slaves, peasants, serfs or workers can all recognize a common condition. What changes through history is the power of the means of communication.

In earlier forms, exchange can remain weak, local and discontinuous. With urbanization, transport, the press and collective organizations, the capacity to share an experience increases. In the cybernetic mode, exchange can become global, rapid and dense.

The cybernetic mode therefore presents a specific contradiction. Exploitation is geographically, temporally, legally and culturally dispersed, yet experiences can nevertheless be compared on a very large scale. The same network that materially fragments the exploited can contribute to their spiritual unification.

15. Ideology as false consciousness

Ideology is defined as a false class consciousness constructed to corrupt class consciousness and render it ineffective. It does not designate all human ideas, values or representations. More precisely, it designates representations that conceal, distort, naturalize or legitimize the real relation of exploitation.

Ideology functions as a binding agent. It attempts to make domination bearable, normal, inevitable or just. It thereby limits the transformation of lived experience into collective consciousness.

Ideology can also act among the dominant by providing them with a representation that justifies their own position. It then contributes to their cohesion while weakening the ability of the dominated to recognize the unity of their condition.

16. The cybernetic information circuit

In the cybernetic mode, ideology is no longer disseminated only by relatively separate institutions. It can be managed through an information circuit combining a material infrastructure and an abstract structure.

The material dimension includes networks, servers, terminals, platforms, media and technical devices. The abstract dimension includes data, categories, models, narratives, signs, rankings and recommendations.

The circuit observes behavior, transforms experience into information, selects representations and redistributes them. The reactions produced in turn become new information. Ideology can thus become adaptive, measured and adjusted.

17. Cybernetic steering through catastrophes

Catastrophes are particularly powerful steering events because they rapidly modify behavior, expectations and passions. Fear can increase the demand for protection, alter thresholds of acceptance and facilitate certain forms of control.

A catastrophe can be created intentionally, amplified, or simply exploited after it appears. Whatever its origin, a catastrophe can nevertheless provide a means of steering the cybernetic system.

Reactions are observed, measured and interpreted. Narratives, devices and rules can then be adjusted and reinjected, producing new behavior and new information.

18. Revolt, guarantees and recomposition of classes

A revolt does not necessarily lead to the complete replacement of the ruling class. Several outcomes are possible: victory, repression, compromise or recomposition.

In the event of partial failure, a fraction of the rebels can be integrated into the new order while a fraction of the former ruling class retains or converts its resources. A new ruling class can then result from a partial fusion between former dominant groups and actors originating from the revolt.

The reverse movement also exists. Some members of the ruling group can join the rebels for reasons of interest, consciousness, rivalry, fear or anticipation. Class boundaries are therefore traversable, even if the relation of exploitation remains.

19. Return of guarantees in new forms

Revolts can produce lasting guarantees. Marriage, filiation, certain statuses, certain property or use rights, and later wage and social protections can, for example, be understood as possible forms of institutional limitation of exploitation resulting from historical relations of force.

These guarantees fulfill a double function. They genuinely protect the dominated while also helping to stabilize the system. A less brutal domination can be more durable than unlimited domination. A strong ideology is generally associated with it.

The following cycle can circumvent these guarantees. A capacity that was once protected can become exploitable again through a contract, market mediation, technical innovation or a new legal qualification.

Surrogacy, for example, can be studied as a reconfiguration of gestational capacity. This does not assert that all its forms are identical to earlier forms of exploitation; it raises the question of the return of a human capacity into the field of exploitation through a change of mediation.

20. Reification and compression of the human being

The limiting tendency of the cybernetic mode is the decomposition of the human being into separately measurable and exploitable functions. Gestation, body, force, intelligence, attention, desire, memory, identity, imagination, relationships and behavior can be treated as distinct dimensions that can be evaluated, contractualized or steered.

This fragmentation produces a compression of the human being. The subject experiences itself as a totality, while the system tends to treat it as an assemblage of functions and data. The contradiction therefore no longer concerns only a specific activity but the very unity of the person, treated as a set of detachable parts.

21. The terminal contradiction of the cybernetic mode

A cybernetic ruling class is called terminal when it is capable of simultaneously coordinating the forms of exploitation inherited from earlier modes. Gestation, the body, force, intelligence and passions can then be integrated into the same information system.

The theoretical limit of this dynamic is total reification: the whole human being becomes the potential field of exploitation. But this totalization also produces its own contradiction. The more generalized exploitation becomes, the more possible it becomes to recognize its unity behind the diversity of its occurrences.

Fragmentation can then produce its opposite. Individuals subjected to different forms of capture can understand that these forms belong to the same process of decomposition of the human being. Potential revolt no longer concerns only a particular guarantee but the refusal of this generalized reification.

22. General motor of history

The general motor of history is the struggle between those who define and control the means and those who build them. This struggle runs through the different modes of production even when the actors, techniques and institutions change.

Domination produces an accumulation of the dominated. Accumulation produces a potential for consciousness. Communication transforms isolated experiences into shared experience. Collective consciousness can produce organization, then revolt. Revolt produces guarantees, recompositions or new forms of exploitation.

History thus appears as a series of cycles in which exploitation creates the conditions of its own contestation, while new structures of power learn to absorb, divert or reorganize the gains of earlier cycles.

23. General conclusion

Modes of production are described as historical trajectories of power founded on the exploitation of human capacities. Gestation and reproduction, the body and bodily force, productive intelligence, then passions and social cognition constitute the principal successive centers of this exploitation.

Earlier forms do not disappear. They remain present, transform themselves and can be reactivated. The cybernetic mode is distinguished by its capacity to coordinate this accumulation and to integrate the material and spiritual dimensions of the human being into circuits of information, measurement and orientation.

In every mode, the exploited build the social world while the dominant define, control and appropriate part of the product of this construction. Common lived experience can become collective consciousness. Consciousness can become organization. Organization can become revolt. Revolt can become abolition of classes.

The deepest contradiction of the cybernetic mode appears when the human being is treated as a sum of exploitable material or spiritual functions while continuing to experience itself as a totality. The more this compression increases, the more the need to reconquer the unity of the human being can grow. This tension constitutes the potential historical limit of cybernetic reification.