

A wannabe speculative approach to the self-interest concept*

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Abstract

Catherine Malabou has developed an approach of Hegelian affiliation characterized by plasticity. In this paper, it will be developed the concept of ‘Self-interest’ in order to study its uses and the logic form associated. It is given plasticity to the corresponding proposition of ‘Self-interest’ by applying a speculative process. Finally, it is considered the way in which this conceptual tools, given by the plasticity approach, along with the speculative work, have become a different perspective about Self-interest, linking it to obedience.

Introduction

The Hegelian influence on Marxian Political Economy has been broadly recognized and studied. The methodology present on Marx's *Capital* is speculative in character and structure. As Pichit Likitkijksomboon underlines on the *Hegelian Dialectic and Marx's Capital*¹, Marx rejects Hegel's philosophy at a crucial point, the status of the Subject, despite the great influence of Hegel on him. This is because, as Likitkijksomboon explains, Hegel postulates an abstract entity called "the Idea" as the dialectic Subject whereas the material world is merely the outward expression of it. The route from the abstract-simple to the concrete-complex begins in Hegel at the stage of thought, but for Marx this is a mystification. Due to this, Marx decides to go beyond Hegel by substituting the kind of Subject to work with: ‘Capital’ for ‘the Idea’.

The French philosopher Catherine Malabou has recently developed the concept of plasticity, of Hegelian affiliation, in order to update the Hegelian thought. In her work *La plasticité au soir de l'écriture. Dialectique, destruction, déconstruction*² she made reference to the role played by certain concepts as critical and hermeneutic emissaries from different periods, determined by a historical tendency. Following Malabou's approach, the aim of this paper is to work dialectically on the central motive for the *homo economicus*' behaviour, the Self-interest, respecting Hegel's view about the Idea as the Subject. It will be the starting point in the way from the abstract-simple to the concrete-complex.

* I would like to thank, first, Gabriela Vicente Quijeiro, by english editing and insistence, also Bruce Philp by patience, Fausto Dopico by freedom and smiling, Iago Santos Castroviejo by comments and coffees.

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1 Likitkijksomboon, P., 1992. The Hegelian dialectic and Marx's capital. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 16(4), pp.405–19.

2 Malabou, C., 2005. *La plasticité au soir de l'écriture: dialectique, destruction, déconstruction*, Scheer. We are employing Malabou, C., 2008

First, the concept of plasticity will be explained, for a complete understanding of the role of this concept in the dialectical work to be made. Secondly, following the historical development of the concept, the self-interest will be defined. After this it will be analysed the logic associated to the concept, in order to complete its meaning and develop a logical structure to work with. Some further concepts will be defined to approach the inquiry to a more concrete-complex part. After developing this theoretical side of the paper the attention will be focused on history, in order to draw up the evolution of the concepts previously defined and to get a final reading in dialectical terms.

Catherine Malabou, the plasticity approach and Self-interest.

1 The plasticity approach and the dialectical work.

Some of the conceptual tools presented by Malabou will be used in this paper. She begins *The future of Hegel*³ by saying that in order to form a concept, first, its role must be delimited and transformed⁴; second, an instance must be taken with the power of giving form to whatever it grasps, and then it has to be developed. Plasticity in this way is the 'instance' that gives form to future and time in Hegel's philosophy. Time and future are mutually involved in a dialogical process governed by plasticity.

Malabou gets close to plasticity by appealing Georges Canguilhem's way to work with concepts (p. 7). In order to develop a concept, it is important to vary both its corresponding extension and its intelligibility. Canguilhem suggests generalizing the concept by incorporating its exceptions. That is to export it outside its original domain using it as a model by giving it the function of a form. In this way, it is important to understand, first, the place of plasticity in Malabou's framework to work after in a similar way with the concept of Self-interest.

Plasticity is defined in its first sense as the act of giving form (p. 8). The term is derived from the Greek *plassein*, which means 'to model', 'to mould'. Then Malabou explains the meaning of plasticity as an adjective, with two meanings: first, to be susceptible of changes of form, or malleable; and on the other hand, to have the power to give form and mould. She highlights the way in which the concept changes its meaning throughout its exportation from its original domain. The native land of plasticity was the field of art, and more precisely the art of sculpture. By extension, plasticity signifies the general aptitude for development, the power to be moulded by one's background and education. This exportation can be also found in the domain of Neuroscience. But she remarks that to work properly with the concept of plasticity it is important to understand that once the configuration is given, it is unable to recover its initial form. (It must not be mixed up with 'polymorphous'.)

In Hegel's philosophy, plasticity designates three different areas of meaning. (Page 9.) The first is the one about 'plastic arts', when he discusses about Greek art. A second field, more complex, is represented by the so-called 'plastic individualities'. They are individualities with, 'exemplary' and 'substantial'

3 Malabou, C., *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

4 Malabou, C. 2005, p. 5

character, according to Hegel. At this point Malabou quotes Hegel by saying that Xenophon, Pericles and Plato, among others, were wonderful, free and self-made and became what they essentially were and wanted to be. There is plasticity in the character not only in artists, but also in statesmen and philosophers. (p. 10.) They give form to the spiritual in its embodiment. These plastic individualities are a middle term between the first field –plastic arts- and the third: Philosophical plasticity. Philosophical plasticity must be understood in two different ways: first, as a philosophical attitude and second, in philosophy itself. In the Preface to *The Science of Logic* (1831) Hegel states: “A plastic discourse demands, too, a plastic sense of receptivity and understanding from the listener”⁵. It is important to pay special attention to the content, the “matter at hand”, Malabou says. And this does not mean polymorphous, but those exemplary figures are led to construct and form what they heard or read in a specific and personal way. Finally Malabou deals with the role played by this middle term of plastic individualities. They acquire their formative principle from the universal –the concept- while at the same time, they accidentally give a particular form to the universal as the activity-of-form.

It is important to understand plasticity at its purest meaning, connected with different modes of temporality. Time and future are mutually involved in a process governed by plasticity. Time, for Hegel, cannot be reduced to an ordered relation between moments.

According to Hegel, ‘only a philosophical exposition, that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition, could achieve the goal of plasticity’⁶. To get plasticity from the concept of self-interest -the subject here proposed- this process must be understood as a process characterized by substance's self-determination. The change in the relation between substance and accidents is interpreted by Hegel as the transition from the predicative proposition to the speculative proposition⁷. This process unfolds a sort of dynamics similar to the one of the plastic individualities. Thus, Catherine Malabou explains what a plastic discourse is by appealing to the ideal philosophers that reached their formative principle from the universal –the concept- while at the same time this gives a particular form on the universal by means of its embodiment. And there is a process where the substance withdraws from itself to enter into the particularity of its content. Throughout this movement of self-negation the substance will posit itself as a subject.

Likitkijsonboon explains how this structure is developed in the Hegelian thought⁸. First he explains its fundamental categories. The aim of Hegel's philosophy is to explain the ‘truth’ of the world or the Object (Nature, human society and human thought) in terms of the so called development of the Subject, that is, ‘the Spirit’. The Spirit is also known as ‘the Idea’, a term that Hegel uses more often to refer to the Subject of his philosophy. There is a structure of explanation that relates these fundamental categories of Spirit and Nature through a process of logical reasoning. Explanation in Hegel is two-folded: one is related with

5 Quoted in Malabou, C., 2005, p. 10

6 Quoted by Malabou, C., 2005, in p.11, p. 167 and p.183. The insistence in this formula by Malabou about the role it is playing in her thought is significant.

7 In Economics the subject of the proposition is thought as a fixed instance and is always the same, the *homo economicus*. From any historical period, the *homo economicus* gives predicates from the outside and is not able to produce them by itself. This provokes fixity on the conception of the economic subject translated in time without temporality. This subject is unable to change from a Hegelian perspective. This is considered the wrong way to explain life.

8 Likitkijsonboon, P., 1992. Pages 405-407

the idea that the essence of the real world is actually the Mind. At this stage the Mind travels from sense-data to abstract thought. This trip is full of contradictions within the Mind through different stages of epistemological experiences to arrive at it, the Idea. In the next section of this paper, 'Self-interest', an appeal to the *The Passion and the Interest*⁹ by Albert O. Hirschman will be made in order to illustrate this first Hegelian trip. There, it can be found the final stage arriving at the Idea of interest as it can be understood a pure Classical Political Economy definition, the one made by Adam Smith. This is the first logical trip from the concrete to the abstract. A second task, which is the one to be done here, goes from 'the Idea' to the real world. Hegel defends that it is the Idea what logically gives rise to the world, from the abstract Idea to Nature and the human mind. There are three stages to carry out this task: one at the sphere of Logic where 'the Idea' -Self-Interest- must be shown as a system of organically related categories, starting a process of deduction from the most abstract-simple category of Self-interest up to the so called Absolute Idea, which is the most concrete-complex idea at this stage of Logic. This dialectical process in the sphere of Logic, also called 'dialectical sublation'¹⁰. Malabou interprets this arrival to the 'Absolute Idea' as 'Absolute Knowledge', saying that this stage implies a metamorphosis in the process where dialectical sublation becomes absolute sublation. At this point 'the Idea' freely releases itself¹¹. This accomplishment of Absolute Knowledge determines the renouncement of the fixity and independence of their positions into a stage of fluidity that can be recognized as liberation of energy. The gap between Subject and Object here sustains and there is a force released from other combinations and other syntheses. Going back to Likitkijomboon, he describes¹² a second stage consisting on the development in the sphere of Nature, where Spirit externalises itself into Nature. And there is a final stage where Spirit returns to itself. The structure unfolded by this paper stops at the liberation of energy that takes place with the accomplishment of that first stage. Thus, the dialectical work to be made on the concept of Self-interest has to do with the stage where the Idea externalizes itself on Nature.

This dialectical process have to be considered under the light of its speculative character, i.e., its plasticity, in order to fulfil a coherent Hegelian analysis. This is made by the means of the substance's self-determination that establishes a connection between the self-interest and its logical negation: employment. This will be made in the conclusion.

2 Self-interest.

There is a difference between the usual way to understand Interest and Self-interest nowadays and the way the term began to be used. There is also a problematic journey about the status of Self-interest and its crystallization as a concept, its understanding role. That journey is brilliantly exposed by Albert O. Hirschman in *The Passions and The Interests*; in this work it is followed this evolution in a way through the analysis of the relationship between interests and passions, its uses and connotations.

The modern form of 'interest' begins with Machiavelli. He did not coin any name to the main character of *The Prince* and simply described the boundaries of

9 Here will be used the spanish edition. The original edition is: Hirschman, A.O., 1997. *The passions and the interests: Political arguments for capitalism before its triumph*, Princeton Univ Pr.

10 As Malabou, C., 2005 in Chapter 11 refers to it

11 Malabou, C., 2005 p. 155-156

12 Likitkijomboon, P., 1992

his intelligent behaviour. Its first domain has something to do with what Machiavelli calls the 'effective truth of things', in contrast to the principles of the moral philosophers that had preceded him. Thus, the original domain of interest was the adequate behaviour that must be followed by the Prince in Politics, according to the real world. But, this term of '*interesse*' becomes popular in the second half of the 16th century. During the 17th and the 18th centuries there was a stimulating story about the evolution of the place for the interest and its meaning, and about the way to get good from evil. Very quickly the term gets an economic connotation: In its journey from Italy to England interest became popular, and it started to be used not only in relation to the '*ragione di stato*', but also in different new fields like religious or social groups. The political context in England helps to find this new location for interest. Thus, in the 17th century Shaftesbury defines "interest" as the desire for some goods that are our supply and our support. Hirschman exposes, quoting Raab, that it was at that moment when interest was applied with a specific economic meaning. The opposition of interest in relation to passions fulfilled at that time contributes to this evolution. The problematic relationship between this new concept, the passions and its translation to the language of governance and political economy occupy a relevant place in Hirschman's work. It is important to stand out the interesting debate about the different theses developed at that time. Hirschman's exposition makes the debate enjoyable. He draws the faces of interests and passions playing their character on stage with expressive manners. The character played by interest and its domain in the 18th century had two positions depending on the effect of material progress on governance and political passions. Montesquieu, Steuart and Millar defend the position called "calm desire of wealth". This is a way of thought in which progress, through the patient and persistent role of interest, drives to a change of the social relationships in which the action of the Prince gets restricted; the fine machinery established by the growth of commerce and the exchange would be considered as a clock. So, the Prince has to behave carefully in his movements as a statistician if he does not want to spoil this new machine of wealth. The second position represented by Steuart and Physiocracy denies this effect of control on the behaviour of the Prince and defends the need for a new political order where the appropriate behaviour from the Prince can be achieved. At that point, the role of interest and its effects had not been defined yet. Its appearance, promotion and connotations deal with the social consideration of the pursuit of wealth and material progress.

Smith changes the way of understanding the relationship between the passions and the interest. According to him, human beings act in order to improve their condition. Within Self-interest's domain there is no place for other passions. And what humankind is looking for in this movement towards improvement should be taken into account. All the moral feelings and self-interest behaviour are related to this goal: greed, ambition, envy, shame; the attempt to be listened, observed or respected. It is vanity, not pleasure, what we are looking for. Taking economic advantage is not an autonomous motive but a way for our main goal, the search for being estimated. In this approach, non-economic motives of behaviour feed the economic ones due to the character of money and wealth as a universal vehicle.

The Webster dictionary [1913] defines Self-interest in an accurate way: "Private interest; the interest or advantage of one's self". It is an interest in which private reflection and advantage respect the others defines its character. The Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48 defines it as: "taking advantage of opportunities without regard for the consequences for others". Here there is more emphasis on intentions: the agent does not care about secondary problems. This is a

form of interest that has been developed throughout the time, and represents different kinds of practice that emerged and flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries. The evolution of the concept of 'interest' leads us to 'Self-interest' in that narrow meaning.

3 Ideological form and its associated logic.

3.1 Self-interest domain and its negation.

This is the starting point of the proper dialectical work to be made. Once 'the Idea' is formed it must be shown as a system of organically related categories, starting a process of deduction from the most abstract-simple category of Self-interest up to the so called Absolute Idea.

Self-interest will be assumed to be a relationship between beliefs about events that lead to a set of actions in the search for advantage on market outcomes. Indeed, it is not only the searching for advantage for one-self but also the way in which individuals think about possible outcomes and their strategic dispositions in markets. Self-interest is not fulfilled until market confirmation. Market outcomes show where Self-interest is but it is not Self-interest. There is virtuality in it, a presence of Self-interest made of potential: there it is but it was not possible because of the circumstances. Despite virtuality only market outcomes confirm where Self-interest is. Thus, there are at least two moments interrelated when Self-interest is at stage, one for beliefs and strategic dispositions and another one for accomplishment (or not) in markets. The strategic dimension of self-interest will be understood as a relationship between the agent and the others (consumers, competitors, etc) that have their own self-interest, –hence, it arises a need for a strategy-, a relationship based on the aim for getting advantage from the market. At this point a logical polarization must to be exposed. At the beginning the economic agent is characterized by the pursuit of its Self-interest. The development of labour markets in 18th and 19th centuries constitutes the domain for those strategic dispositions, a matter to be studied here. Labour and Capital are fields for taking choices where Self-interest is developed in two different ways. For Capital price (or supply) control, institutional control, and so on, there were 'strategic vectors' to be explored. The following step of these 'strategic vectors' develops a coherent structure according to the classical formulation for the *homo economicus*' behaviour. Here it can be found different agents pursuing their own Self-interest (entrepreneurs or firms or any other form of Capital), but when Capital is connected with Labour the logic associated does not hold such a coherent structure. Thus, in it there is a point for contradiction, the most important tension involved by the antagonism present at the 'strategic vector' that is at stage when Capital's Self-interest gets in touch with Labour.

For Labour, resistance is the only form to pursue an interest different from the Capital's. Thus, in some way this means that their Self-interest associated with labour is really a counter-interest, since the moment that the labour contract involves some form of dependence from the beginning. But this form of Self-interest on the basement of reaction against other's Self-interest - of Capital - is quite strange. The logic of dialectics can be used to build a logical structure to work with. Calguilhem's recommendation helps to formulate this differently. To work dialectically with concepts involves exporting the concept 'outside its original

domain¹³. The original domain of Self-interest finds its outside on obedience. Obedience is the logical negation of the pursuit of Self-interest; Self-interest is affirmed on obedience only as the Self-interest of the other who rules. Obedience involves consent to authority (to laws or to bosses) displaying it from all the orders that come from that authority.

3.2 Other related categories.

‘Employ’ will be the term to be used for this form of obedience that is the outside of the self-interested domain. It has its confirmation in salaries. Employees, of course, also look for their own Self-interest, but when, in this kind of relations, Self-interest is expressed purely the only possible behaviour for the employee is to obey as an extension of the employer's will. Thus, in order to export the self-interest outside its domain it is necessary to introduce the figure of the Other. The self-interest of the dispositions developed by the employee in activities is the self-interest of the Other: it is the Other who has a certain attitude, a special attention to the matter at hand. The negation of the self-interest in the worker is its confirmation in the entrepreneur. Thus, the forms of resistance associated with Labour are called to disappear if Self-interest - of Capital - wants to be fulfilled. The fully accomplishment of the logic associated with Self-interest under Capitalism gets its expression with obedience of Labour. Workers will not develop their Self-interest as such. In order to understand the evolution of this relation between Labour and Capital there are some further categories that reveals the form of this relation: salaries and hierarchies.

In addition, the ‘strategic vector’ of Self-interest associated with the development of labour markets draws up two main directions that consist on division of labour and technology development. Capital concentrates its attention here, pushing towards a technological change by means of accumulation since the beginning of capitalism. This means that the market suggests these directions as productive places for Self-interest, that is, to have an advantage over competitors. And these directions are related to the forms of the former categories of wage and hierarchies; these forms have to do with the evolution and change of the dispositions connected with the ‘strategic vector’ of labour markets. A change in the strategy developed towards the direction of labour markets implies a change in the forms of wage and hierarchies in these markets. And there is a privileged place that gets moulded by these two forces in which Self-interest gets and in gives form: The factory.

‘Hierarchy’ can be defined as the structure of authority for coordination. Pyramidal is not the only form of hierarchy. In markets these structures are meant to improve different algorithms of choice for the coming events, either expected or unexpected. There can be different roles for the agents in hierarchy (their scope and responsibilities, their position according to the established labour relations, etc) and their way plan. Accounting, labour management, “firm culture”, wage incentives among others are elements that conform a way for hierarchy in each company.

There is a parallel feature to be underlined: the process of depersonalization that goes along with the development of markets. This process is, in fact, present in the definition of the concept of Self-interest made by Adam Smith “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but

13 Quoted by Malabou at Malabou, C., 2005, p. 7.

from their regard to their own interest¹⁴, that is, where the Self-interest is at its purest, emotions are absent. In the process of dialectical development of the Idea this feature will get form in the different dispositions where the strategies developed by the Self-interest are present.

The development of labour markets.

Coriat¹⁵ follows the evolution of some of the categories previously defined during the 19th and the 20th century underlying the significance of Taylorism and Fordism as new labour relations. He describes the labour relations of the 19th century as the predominance of the profession and specific skills of the workers. These skills were taught within the family and in the most specialized professions, it used to be transmitted from father to son. There was a great resistance to teach strangers one's profession. The defence of workers' interests was made by the power obtained by the profession. In addition, hierarchies for the organization of labour, despite its variety, were dominated by “the putter outer's system”. By this system the putter outers managed the labour force, made the selection and paid the wages; they were provided materials by the entrepreneur that establishes a payment by piece. Thus, the entrepreneur delegates some of the tasks to be done, those that have to do with labour, to a specialized agent. The problem arises when firms get bigger. Due to the nature of the new processes, it was needed more coordination and the constant improvement of the techniques to be used by in the putter outer which became a problem. In that system the objective was production without considering the process and consequently the payment was made by piece. It is important to mention that there were children and women in factories and they were paid a lower wage.

Alfred Chandler's work¹⁶ is another reference to be taken into account in this paper. Chandler explains the progressive acquisition of form by certain industries focusing on management. This depends on the kind of production determined by the progressive improvement in efficiency, which models the dispositions of the space in factories, task design and coordination. In order to start his explanation, he uses some structural changes with some external events that affect the way how things are formed. Those changes can be explained with the introduction of new transports, the increase in demand and the coming of the recession of 1870's. Modern firms come with the possibility of a more complex management that helps productivity to increase.

Chandler follows the evolution of USA firms in the 19th century. First, he highlights the idea of a new 'faster world' in certain industries of distribution such as companies of cereal or cold meat. In the 19th century there was a revolution in distribution due to the introduction of the train as a means of transport. Scale economies related to distribution depended on speed, volume and regularity in

14 Smith, A. 2005. Page 19.

15 Original edition: Coriat, B., 1979. *L'atelier et la chronomètre: essai sur le taylorisme, le fordisme et la production de masse*, C. Bourgois, Paris. We are employing Coriat, B., 1993.

16 Original edition: Chandler, A.D., 1977. *The visible hand: The managerial revolution in American business*, Belknap Press. We are employing Chandler, A. D, (1988

circulation (p. 295). These forms of distribution coordinated production flow from small producers to consumers (p. 297). Chandler explains (p. 338) how this revolution of efficiency was slower in production industries than in distribution ones. In production, it began with liquid and semiliquid transformation industries such as petroleum. Tobacco and corn industries, more mechanized, were developed later followed by metal and metallurgy companies. The growing complexity of these industries required higher levels of organization.

And then came the recession of the 1870's. Due to this situation, the companies started to pay attention to the cost accounts. Chandler focuses on the textile industries which were the most important firms at that moment in the USA. At that time, accounting was not very developed and a lot of improvisation was made. So, the productivity and the machinery output started to be considered from a different perspective. Bosses became aware of the importance of the organization. In the metallurgy and metal industries the processes were slow due to the complexity of the tasks. Chandler stops at this point (p. 362) and analyses how the processes were integrated in this type of industries before they moved apart in the same place: the coordination for the circulation of materials was much more complex than in the former examples. This complexity of the organizational structure and the conflicts derived from the coming change would be key points for plasticity accounts (p. 373). Carnegie is the example of these changes and the pioneer introducing the new managerial techniques in metallurgy. At his staff there were people like Shinn and Bridge: they developed a new accounting system based on the introduction of vouchers to make daily and monthly reports. Costs were an obsession for Carnegie, and he developed the more complete system in the USA. But, the staff management was weak.

The recession of the 70's and the progressive awareness of the new managerial methods were key points at the first meeting of the Society of Mechanical Engineering. Engineers became aware of the need for improvement on management. Frederick Taylor took part in the 1886 meeting, with a paper about the 'vouchers system'¹⁷ Taylor argued that such a system lacked incentives for those who were responsible for them. Others, at the meeting confessed that they had also tried to improve that method and all had had the same problem. At this point, the idea of chronometers came up. And Chandler turns back to Carnegie where the problems of coordination were not solved by this innovation: the inside putter outers, people with power who were some kind of despots according to Chandler, obstructed the implementation. They considered these improvements as a threat to their status, Chandler comments. Some other attempts to improve the system were made, such as the incentive system or payments by cost reductions among others. But all of them were not very successful.

Williamson¹⁸ also deals with this point of the metallurgy industries, Carnegie and his problems, in depth. He discusses the arguments from Katherine Stone making reference to the incidence and showing a possible responsible for the problem: the International Workers of the World. This was the so-called most powerful union in the USA, formed by skilled workers. According to Williamson they were a source for inefficiencies and inflexibility. The acting of IWW was crucial for the approval of vacancies. Carnegie decides to confront the union with the help of blackleg, the Pinkerton Agency, and the Federal and State Governments. Then, there was a strike in 1892. After the Union's defeat Williamson explains how

¹⁷ "Sistema de comprobantes" in the Spanish version of the book.

¹⁸ Williamson, O. E., 1995.

efficiency was increasing in factories, due to the change in the institutional structure. This can be taken as a proof to show the searching of obedience by self-interest and the conformation of complex structures of hierarchy. But why was the incentive system a failure? The new techniques and the organizational changes exposed by Williamson seem to be the causes of the increases in production.

The first conference about Labour Scientific Management LSM by Taylor was in 1895 (Chandler, A., 1988, p. 384). There was a substantial change in the concepts introduced by Taylor regarding the object of attention of labour organization: the worker was no longer the object of control because his body movements became more important, in relation to the design of the tasks in which production would be dismantled. There was a change in the object of attention. (p. 385). This can be considered as the beginning of the depersonalization of the productive process. Furthermore, the putter outer is the target of the battle for a new management system promoted by Taylor.

Other changes proposed by Taylor were the introduction of a new department of management and a central planning. The weak point in his system showed by Chandler was the absence of a detailed authority system. Of course, the LSM was never completely implemented despite its modifications, but its significance as a change in the object of attention. Another important improvement at that time was a more uniform methodology on the accounting system (p. 391). In 1910 there were already detailed discussions about accounting in the engineering magazines.

This Hegelian trip from 'the Idea' to the real world ends arriving at the automobile industry. It had a very complex history with a lot of important characters on stage, not only that coming from LSM and its conceptual revolution, but also that of the new technologies that was being developed at that time. In addition can be found, on the one hand, an accumulative process of organizational innovations that had been taking place at the metal industries at certain point. On the other hand, it happened something unusual, a transcendental mutation: the assembly line triggered a qualitative change in labour relations. Thus, A great increase in productivities was developed due to the coming of Fordism. There is substantial controversy in the features to be highlighted within Fordism. Chandler underlines the accumulative character (p. 391). At this point, he select some points in the process that lead to Fordism, like that of its accumulative character, the new materials to be employed, the work made by the management team, and the vast seller network developed to attend the demand. Standardization and speed in the flux of materials are other point to be object of appreciation under the view of Chandler. Another perspective is that like the developed by Coriat¹⁹. He underlines the loss of control by workers in the process of labour, the fight of capitalists against professions and skilled workers, and the imposition of only one mode of temporality that comes from bosses and goes towards workers through the assembly line. However, Coriat, stresses the importance of the change. Both, Chandler and Coriat, agree with the idea that Fordism is the culmination of a process that involves labour and management. This culmination is translated into new forms inside and outside the factory. There some changes in salaries that deserve special attention. The first changes that came up were outstanding: the 5\$-day trait, the double of former average salary (p. 55), and the hours per day reduction from 9-hours per day for six days a week to 8-hour per day five days a week. Ford, who never attended the Unions, conceded in this way to workers one of the most frequent claims made by those organizations. The high increase in the intensity of labour forced Ford to

19 Coriat, B., 1993. Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

double the wage, but the conditions he established gave shape to another kind of labour relationships: the automobile industry was one of the most affected by “fire and wire” and the turn over, contracts were daily signed and in order to fulfil 15000 jobs, 53000 workers per year were required (p. 56). To end with this instability Ford set some conditions like the 5\$-day trait that have to do with personal habits of the workers, their punctuality and attendance, and so on. Ford’s reflections about the meanings of these changes, their relation to the performance of the labour forces (Ford wanted his workers to be a sane labour force) (p. 60) and their counter-role as consumers, were an advance for new times²⁰. The changes he introduced were quickly adopted in all automobile industries.

The importance of Fordism in all production processes is a question of hermeneutics. It can be asserted that the assembly line entails several limitations but Fordism with its new perspective of labour relationships affected the whole society, in the way to understand the product and the elements that Taylorism had introduced.

At this point, it is necessary to go back to Chandler. He witnesses the coming up of a new kind of firm with the so-called ‘managerial revolution’ (that is, a metamorphosis in hierarchies). There is a final stage for a firm in order to become a modern managerial firm. The merging process that used to take place at the beginning of the 20th century opened the door to this kind of managerial innovations (Chandler, A., 1988, p. 567). By means of this process, the new firms would get very skilful managers. Propriety got dispersed, with owners coming from very different sectors and representatives from high finances. Management had to be centralized and full time executives took control over high direction. These executives with high standards redefined their own tasks and centralization to refine the statistical controls and the way in which the middle executives and department performances were examined. These levels of management would fight for investments and assignation of resources and priorities. All the improvements introduced by the merging process helped to improve the systems of control over the resources of the firm and generated a new kind of information. The spread of these innovations was slowly implemented at the beginning but with the World War II the US government imposed certain kind of practice to control production in specific key sectors. This implementation changed the modern firm. Hence, another process of depersonalization took place. Manager became a profession to be learnt at lots of universities with specific degrees on the subject. Managers were employed by one firm on a day and could be in another company the day after.

Conclusion.

Likitkijsonboon explains how in the logical trip from ‘the Idea’ to Nature the process to follow must be from the most abstract categories to the most concrete ones. The coming of the ‘Absolute Knowledge’ takes place at the end of this way, characterized, according to C. Malabou, by liberation of energy, due to a new relation between subject and object, where the gap between Subject and Object disappears and a kind of force breaks away becoming free from other combinations and syntheses. This seems to be the case in the reading/approach proposed in this paper about the development of labour relations by means of the pursuit of self-interest. With the coming of Taylorism and Fordism some relevant changes took place in terms of hierarchies, wages, incentives, and factory design. In management

20 To illustrate this point Coriat brings up the discussion between Ford and Gramsci. (Page 60)

there was a similar change, both in task design and wages. The productivity explosion produced a very different culture around commodities and the beginning of the age of mass consumption.

However, a plastic reading requires further research to be done in order to clarify some doubts that can come up. For instance, the introduction of the Hegelian speculative process may trigger some questions. At this point, it is required to read carefully Malabou's concept of plasticity. It is important to identify some key concepts: within the Self-interest concept what is the subject, the substance and the accidents?

Catherine Malabou²¹ explains what a dialectical process is from the point of view of the implications of plasticity. This process of plasticity consists on substance's self-determination. The substance's self-determination takes place when “the universal (the substance) and particular (the accidents as something independent) give form to each other through a kind of dynamics like the one involved in the plastic individualities”. The concept of plastic individualities can lead us to Plato, who introduced in philosophy the term of ‘dialectic’. Plato, creates concepts and shapes a way to philosophize that changes philosophy itself: that is philosophy's self-determination. In fact, Philosophy changed itself by means of the relation between philosophy's substance with the particular (the accidents as something independent, i.e. Plato). In the same way Self-interest's self-determination can be understood by its relation with its substance and its accidents. It could be considered as accidents the actions of interest made by Alva Edison, Tesla, Taylor or Ford.

But what is the self-interest's substance? Could it be money or surplus? Some problems arise with Hegelian hermeneutics: Bernard Bourgeois, quoted by Malabou²² clarifies: “the identity that belongs to the subject affirms itself in its difference whereas the identity at the level of substance can only be affirmed in the negation of difference which is also implicit in that identity”. Self-interest and money are the key concepts to be considered. Self-interest as Subject of this process can be thought through its differences. It is necessary to think about different ways to develop Self-interest strategies, for example that from the modes for price control, strategies of wage incentives, technology implementation, watching of competitors, etc. Self-interest also arises as Subject when all these strategies in the search for the advantage in markets are stated together, despite their differences. However, Self-interest emerges as substance when the differences are sublated in a common background, that is, as money in form of profit. Exemplary nature comes from the individualities of Taylor and Ford who were always in search of Self-interest, sometimes with right directions but with no profitable confirmation. The gap between Substance and Subject has to do with negativity within Self-interest, i.e., “negativity that shows itself as virtuality”, (p. 54) that is, the event that could have been carried out.

The final station of this trip comes with the consideration of plasticity as substance's self-determination, that is, the surplus as Subject of a process that begins with the searching for advantage and Self-interest. Here, Self-interest is at the stage of the accomplishment of the Absolute Knowledge with the fulfilment of obedience by labour forces.

21 Malabou, C., p. 11 and 12

22 Ibid., p. 11

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