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## **‘Activity Theory’ meets austerity – or does it? The challenge of relevance in a world of violent contradiction and crisis.<sup>1</sup>**

**Peter E Jones and Chik Collins**

### **Introduction: ‘Soviet Marxism’ and Contemporary CHAT**

The previous edition of *Theory and Struggle* (No. 116) featured discussions of the work of a range of Soviet contributors to Marxist thinking. Leo Impett outlined the increasing use of Lev Vygotsky’s psychology in artificial intelligence; Jonathan White discussed the contemporary relevance of Evald Ilyenkov’s work on dialectics; Chik Collins posed the challenge of ‘rediscovering and reconstructing’ the work of Vygotsky and his collaborators, and also that of Valentin Voloshinov, in our attempts better to theorise language and ‘discourse’; and finally John Foster demonstrated the relevance of these thinkers in understanding and applying Marx’s method in the study of history.

Collins sought, moreover, to introduce contributions which have been made from within the vibrant and expansive contemporary research field known as Cultural Historical Activity Theory, or CHAT. This name registers the combined influence of Vygotsky’s ‘cultural-historical’ psychology and the closely related, but ultimately quite distinct, ‘psychological theory of activity’ (or ‘Activity Theory’) of Vygotsky’s colleague and collaborator, A N Leont’ev.<sup>2</sup> This field may be considered as the continuation of some of the most important theoretical contributions made in the USSR – initially inspired by the work of Vygotsky and his collaborators, notably Alexander Luria and, of course, A. N. Leont’ev, but drawing too on the related work of Ilyenkov, and also the Bakhtin Circle (including Valentin Voloshinov).<sup>3</sup> Since 2002, work in this field has been fostered under the auspices of the International Society for Cultural-Historical Activity Research, with key contributors including Michael Cole, James Wertsch, David Bakhurst, Vladimir Zinchenko, Yrjö Engeström and Anna Stetsenko. Given the obvious interest in the above-named writers from whom these contemporary CHAT theorists have taken their inspiration, readers of *Theory and Struggle* are likely also to be interested in the potential relevance of contemporary CHAT to their own thinking and activity. In this article, we cast a critical eye specifically on the ‘Activity Theory’ component within contemporary CHAT research, focussing in particular on the theoretical innovations of the Helsinki school of Engeström<sup>4</sup>.

Like Vygotsky’s ‘cultural-historical’ psychology, to which it is intimately connected, the Activity Theory of A.N. Leont’ev was a powerful and creative attempt to draw out the implications of Marx’s writings on human labour for a theory of psychology.<sup>5</sup> However, in contrast to Vygotsky’s own work, with its emphasis on the preeminent role of signs (particularly linguistic signs) and ‘sign mediation’ in human development<sup>6</sup>, Activity Theory gave analytical primacy to reality-transforming social activity itself as the site of emergence of distinctively human intellectual powers. This shift of theoretical attention to the social matrix of mental life and development gave Activity Theory a more clearly pronounced sociological dimension. As Leont’ev argued in his *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*: “the psychological features of the individual consciousness can only be

understood through their connections with the social relations in which the individual becomes involved”<sup>7</sup>. This recognition of the inseparability of the psychological from the social pointedly raised the question of how these ‘social relations’ should be understood and analysed, and of the relationship between this analytical procedure and the method of Marx’s Capital.

There are grounds for considering this relationship to have been problematic from the start.<sup>8</sup> Leont’ev gives us little more than brief illustrative sketches, sometimes entirely speculative, of the ways in which individual mind and social relations interconnect within a complex division of labour. Furthermore, while he provides a certain amount of critical commentary on problems of alienation within capitalist society, which is undoubtedly insightful, there are no detailed empirical studies of labour activity in Leont’ev’s work and no reference, to our knowledge, to working practices in the USSR<sup>9</sup>. The whole question deserves further investigation.

In what follows, however, we discuss the opening up of a much clearer and wider divergence between Marx’s thinking and the analysis of social activity offered in the work of Engeström and colleagues. We do so in the pages of Theory and Struggle because the issues raised are of more than mere ‘academic interest’; they prove to be fundamental to our ability to understand and confront the horrors of the global crisis unfolding since the financial crash of 2008.

### **The ‘secret’ of Activity Theory and the challenge of relevance**

These contradictions and crises were signalled most acutely in September and October 2008 – when so much that had seemed solid just ‘melted into air’, and when even the Archbishop of Canterbury was to be found quoting Marx.<sup>10</sup> The continuing crisis was duly to become the pretext for a still-ongoing ruling class offensive against whole societies – arguably against society itself – under the banner of ‘austerity’ and ‘we are all in it together’. The parameters of this crisis are well-known to readers of this journal, but we shall say more about it towards the end of our article.

The somewhat polemical challenge we wish to present meantime is simply this: What has contemporary Activity Theory got to say about this still unfolding economic and political crisis? How would it approach the crisis and on what basis would it map out a case as to how we should respond to it? What special resources and insights is Activity Theory able to bring to bear which makes it relevant to the demands of this most dramatic context?

This might seem a tall order for a body of (largely academic) theory – to some almost an unfair question. And for academic theories making only limited claims about their own scope and significance, such might well be the case. But this would be much less defensible in the case of CHAT in general and for Activity Theory in particular, precisely because of the bold and expansive claims made by their proponents about the special nature of the theory and method they have inherited from Marxism and from Vygotsky, Leont’ev and others, and the special capacity this gives in understanding the world, its contradictions and its changing.<sup>11</sup> Activity Theory in particular claims to have a special

understanding of human activity itself – not just certain activities going on in specific places, but activity in general. It claims to have unique insights regarding the very nature of human activity as such, and to offer a transformative vision and agenda for social practice. Indeed, Engeström and Miettinen went so far as to describe Activity Theory as “a well-kept secret”, and declared their willingness to “pull aside the curtain” to allow the “Western scientific community” to come to appreciate its special potential and its “rich texture”.<sup>12</sup>

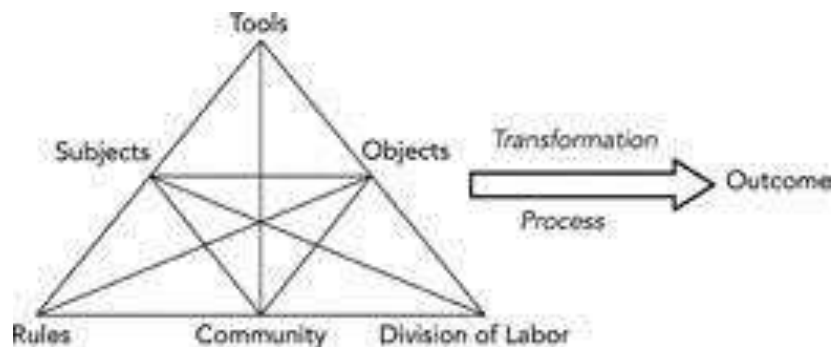
Now, the transformative potential claimed by the Activity Theory tradition is often linked to its well-documented theoretical allegiance to the work Marx. But the actual relationship of contemporary Activity Theory research to Marx has tended in practice to be a sensitive issue. On the one hand, the tradition claims, as we have seen, profound roots, not just in Marx’s analysis of human activity and the contradictions of capitalism, but also in the dialectical philosophy he elaborated, and in its further expounding in Soviet psychology and philosophy. On the other hand, the particular change agenda which Marx advocated in relation to capitalism is conspicuously absent in most contemporary Activity Theory research, and this raises the quite reasonable question about its actual relationship with Marx’s most fundamental thinking about human activity, and about capitalism.

### **Activity and ‘Activity’**

On the face of it, the links – conceptual and methodological – between Activity Theory and Marx’s own thinking appear to be deep and solid in much of the contemporary research. On closer inspection, however, we find that all is not quite as it seems.

Inspired by Ilyenkov’s exposition of Marx’s method of ‘ascending from the abstract to the concrete’, Engeström and Miettinen argue for a ‘unit of analysis’ that will allow an understanding and reconstruction of the dynamic development and interconnections of different spheres of productive activity within contemporary society.<sup>13</sup> That ‘unit of analysis’ they find “in the concept of object-oriented, collective, and culturally-mediated human activity, or activity system”. An ‘activity system’ is a particular sphere of labour or professional activity, such as adult education, a GP practice or a practice in banking or industry. Such systems are seen as analysable in accordance with a common conceptual framework, often represented diagrammatically in the form of a triangle (see below), consisting of the following elements:

- ‘the subject’ (“the individual or sub-group whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis”);
- ‘the object’ (the ‘raw material’ or ‘problem space’ at which the activity is directed);
- ‘the tools’ (“mediating instruments and signs”);
- ‘the community’ (“multiple individuals and/or subgroups who share the same object”);
- ‘the division of labour’ (both task-related or ‘horizontal’ and power-related or ‘vertical’);
- ‘the rules’ (“regulations, norms and conventions”).<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 1: Engeström's representation of a 'human activity system'**

But how does this approach to the analysis of social activity compare with Marx's?

Marx, in *Capital*, described human activity in glowing terms as “free, conscious activity”, “life activity”, “the life of the species”, “life engendering life”, “man's species-character”, and so on. He also referred to it variously, and more prosaically, as “labour”, “the labour process”, or even just “work”. “The process of labour”, as he puts it at one point, “is nothing but work itself, viewed at the moment of its creative activity”. His more detailed description of what he called the “simple elements” of the labour process, cited below, clearly includes conceptual components which have been incorporated into the Activity Theory ‘unit of analysis’ as outlined above:

‘(1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work’.<sup>15</sup>

Marx calls these “simple elements” the “universal features of the labour process” and it might therefore seem reasonable to adopt them, as Activity Theory researchers have done, as a general analytical framework to be applied to the whole gamut of concrete working practices today.

But there, precisely, is the nub, and the rub. We submit that this is not at all Marx's intention. After all, does work in the world today, for most people at least, really deserve the glowing tribute to creativity and freedom presented by Marx? Hardly! So, what exactly is Marx describing in the quotation above?

Looking more closely, we see that activity, or the labour process (which is the same thing in this context), is described as “the eternal natural condition of human existence”. The three “simple elements” are “independent of every specific social development” and so cannot be straightforwardly identified with any particular historical instance of “the process of social production”.<sup>16</sup> Putting it more plainly, and in light of the challenge of relevance we are here posing, these “simple elements” do not pertain to the specific features of work under capitalist conditions at all. What Marx is referring to as ‘work’ is

not at all what we could call ‘a job’ or ‘profession’ in an ‘activity system’. What, then, is Marx actually up to?

Marx’s point is that the labour process – the exercise of human creative faculties in the production of life-sustaining goods – is always going on in any society, otherwise everybody would starve. His description of the “simple elements” of the labour process, therefore, tells us absolutely nothing at all about what distinguishes one mode of production (say, feudal) from another (say, capitalist). That is why his “simple elements” cannot be used to describe or explicate the defining characteristics of work as we experience it in society today. While we may throw the general term ‘activity’ around quite loosely to refer to things people are employed to do – from classroom teaching to making cars or trading collateralised debt obligations – this is not what Marx had in mind when conceptualising ‘activity’, ‘work’ or ‘labour process’ in the passages quoted above, and for good reasons.

For, while the “simple elements” of the labour process are necessarily present within capitalism, what actually makes that production capitalist production is something else – there is another ‘activity’ going on which changes the character of the labour process, and to which the labour process plays second fiddle. And that ‘activity’ is what Marx calls the ‘valorization process’ – the production of goods as commodities having value and, within and through this process, the production of surplus value by extracting more value from labour activity than is paid in wages. Human activity is clearly there within the process of capitalist production but it is subordinated to, appropriated, subjugated and exploited by the ‘activity’ of valorization.

So, Marx’s simple description of human activity is clearly not meant to be used to describe capitalist production, but is put forward in order to be able to show us the difference between acting freely, acting humanly, on the one hand, and acting as per the conditions and dictates of capital on the other. Marx wants us to see precisely how human activity, the labour process, has become entangled in and imprisoned by the capitalist valorization process, so that we will appreciate the historically specific and, therefore, transient nature of the whole inhuman capitalist system. He wants to show, and us to understand, that the system of wage labour, commodity production, money, capital, and ‘the market’ is not some natural or eternal way of doing things, whatever the ‘solidity’ of its appearance may for long periods suggest, but a state of affairs which, while it has proved historically unavoidable, has had its day and should be done away with.

From Marx’s point of view, the current crisis, unfolding over nearly a decade, would be a graphic demonstration not only of the destructive irrationality of this whole system but also of its senile fragility. The task before us, as he saw it, was to free human activity, to liberate human creative potential, from the parasitic ‘activity’ of valorization – along with all the other ‘activities’ of coercion, pacification and mind control that are necessary to keep the whole thing going.

Contemporary Activity Theory has converted Marx's "simple elements of the labour process" into a kind of sociological framework which its adherents take as being equally applicable to any 'activity system' within capitalist societies. But Marxism is not such a sociology – if indeed it can be seen as a sociology at all. As Slaughter emphasised, sociology typically accepts, describes and even dignifies the alienation of contemporary social life in presenting all forms of human endeavour as exemplars of a single, general social template. Marxism, by contrast, shows "in what way these supposedly 'general' social phenomena and mechanisms are but an ideological reflection of the surface of capitalist society itself".<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the general category of 'activity system' developed within Activity Theory, by conflating and confusing the labour process with the valorization process, ends up, like doctrines Marx and Engels might have described as ahistorical and 'ideological', in danger of masking the narrow, historically specific and deeply exploitative economic relations at the heart of the whole social system.

### **Commodities, contradictions and units of analysis**

We appear to be saying that Activity Theory has lost contact with what it has identified as its own Marxian roots and, in particular, with Marx's critique of capitalist production. But how can that be? After all, it is widely recognized within Activity Theory research that the main contradiction within social life today results from nothing other than commodity production, namely the contradiction between use-value and value? As Engeström puts it: "In capitalism, the basic contradiction is the dual nature of commodities, the tension between the use value and the exchange value".<sup>18</sup>

Once again, however, on closer examination, we find a problem. While capitalist production involves making commodities, commodity production does not make capitalism. As Marx puts it: "The fact that it produces commodities does not distinguish it [capitalism] from other modes of production". Rather, capitalist production "is marked from the outset by two peculiar traits". The first has to do with the existence of wage labour, in which "the laborer himself acts in the role of a seller of commodities". From this, Marx concludes that "the relation between wage labor and capital determines the entire character of the mode of production". The second "peculiar trait" is "the production of surplus-value as the direct aim and determining incentive of production".<sup>19</sup> The contradiction between use-value and value within the commodity, then, is not only not the most basic or determining contradiction within capitalist production; it is not even a "peculiar trait" of this particular social system. The main contradiction, in Marx's view, is that between wage labour (the agents of human activity) and capital (those who seek to exploit their activity to produce surplus value).

It is certainly true that Marx begins in *Capital* with the commodity. This is perhaps why the commodity and its properties are mentioned so often as the starting point of current Activity Theory. But Marx provides his reader with some advice on this matter. His working method, he explains, is both analytic and synthetic. The order of the presentation of ideas in *Capital* does not reflect the actual logic of the analysis of capitalism. So, while the exposition in *Capital* begins with the commodity, capitalism itself does not start with that. In fact commodities are only a "prerequisite for capitalist development", as Ilyenkov

puts it. The real history of capitalism only begins at “the point at which capital began to build its body out of the unpaid-for labour of the wage worker”. And at that point, there is a flip-over in the way the system works: commodities are still produced – indeed, everything has its price – but commodities are now “products of capital itself”.<sup>20</sup>

It rather seems, therefore, that Activity Theory has taken what is only a prerequisite for capitalist development – the commodity – for its defining characteristic. And while this at least makes it possible to acknowledge the role of commercial considerations in particular ‘activity’ spheres, it leaves capital and the specific mechanisms of capitalist production out of the analytical picture.

### **Pulling aside the curtain on ‘the innermost secret’?**

From the foregoing, it seems that there are two key cases of mistaken theoretical identity in contemporary Activity Theory:

1. Marx’s general concept of ‘activity’ (or ‘the labour process’) is taken as a model (or ‘unit of analysis’) of actual working practices under specifically capitalist conditions;
2. The commodity, rather than the contradiction between wage labour and capital, is taken as the distinguishing feature of capitalist production.

But do these theoretical departures really matter, and, in particular, do they matter in terms of the relevance of Activity Theory to the present crisis?

We submit that these departures are far from mere academic niceties. Such ill-advised theoretical switch-rounds make a concrete analysis of work under capitalist conditions very difficult, to say the least. This was a serious enough problem in the period prior to 2008, when capitalism seemed to many to be booming interminably and more generally all-conquering – almost as if it might be a solid and permanent feature of human life for the imaginable future. But with the post-2008 blowing away of such illusions, the actual implications are more clearly crystallized: Contemporary Activity Theory is at profound risk of being unable to offer a cogent analysis of the violent contradictions and crises being experienced around the world, and of their roots, causes and potential remedies.

At each stage in this unfolding crisis the prescience and power of even the young Marx’s analysis of capitalist production has been crystal clear:

‘Modern bourgeois society ... a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells’.<sup>21</sup>

That was written in 1848. Over the next three and a half decades Marx sought to demystify that awesome and awful form of society that had emerged, and was still emerging on a global scale, from the subordination of the labour process to capitalist production. In *Capital* he presented the results of that research. Marx did not start his



analysis with a general notion of ‘activity’ for the simple reason that the humane activities of teaching or making vehicles or tending to the sick do not give you capitalist production. You cannot deduce capitalist relations, however hard you try, from the ‘simple elements’ of human activity identified by Marx. Instead, as Engels explains in his Preface to Volume 3 of Capital, Marx “makes the simple production of commodities his historical premise and then proceeds from this basis to capital”.<sup>22</sup> Proceeding thus, Marx finds his way to money-capital, interest-bearing capital, credit and “fictitious capital”. He makes his way, in other words, to the whole pack of cards which collapsed dramatically around the world over seven years ago. And he did so because the only way to understand concretely the connections and interconnections between different spheres and types of ‘activity’ is to penetrate these wild and wacky forms of economic value and get to the heart of the global beast that lives through the pumping out of surplus value from living labour: A beast which suffered cardiac arrest in 2008 but has been kept on life support, in part due to our collective failure – intellectual and practical – to see that the plug needs pulled.

The two theoretical departures identified above, then, place the essence of what has been at stake in the continuing drama beyond the theoretical reach of the mainstream of contemporary Activity Theory. Its proponents proceed, unwittingly, on the basis of the kind of abstract and ahistorical model of human activity that historical materialism long ago refuted. And in its own version of a kind of ‘fetish of the commodity’, it neglects what Marx at a later point in Capital crystallizes as being “the innermost secret of the entire social structure” in any actually given set of historical circumstances – “the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers”:

“The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers — a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity — which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis — the same from the standpoint of its main conditions — due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.”<sup>23</sup>

In this light, the previously referenced “well-kept secret” from which Activity Theory needs to “pull aside the curtain”, might be seen to be a ‘secret’ it is keeping from itself. It is a ‘secret’ from which Marx, the ostensible inspiration of the tradition, and Ilyenkov, the

tradition's philosophical mentor, long ago 'pulled aside the curtain'. Grasping this 'secret', they understood, was fundamental to the challenge of relevance in analysing a myriad of "empirically given circumstances" of economic and political life. That remains the case today – but our particular "empirically given circumstances" demand, perhaps more than ever, that the 'secret' actually be grasped.

### **Conclusion: The Relevance of Activity Theory to the Crisis**

More than seven years on from the 2008 Banking collapse, the world is still reeling and recoiling from the trauma of the implosion, with the future arguably just as uncertain now as it was then. If Marxist positions were vindicated by the nature and scale of capitalist collapse, Marxist solutions, as popular left commentators have noted, have remained a distant prospect:

'future generations will surely look back with a mixture of astonishment and contempt at how British society is currently organized: the richest 1,000 individuals worth £520 billion, while hundreds of thousands of people have to queue to eat in food banks; a thriving financial elite that helped plunge Britain into a vortex of economic collapse, which was rescued by over £1 trillion of public money but continues to operate much as before; a reigning dogma that treats the state as an obstacle to be eradicated and shunned, even as the state serves as the backbone for private interests; a corporate elite, dependent as it is on state largesse, that refuses to contribute money to the state; a media that does not exist to inform, educate, as well as challenge all those with power, but which serves as a platform for the ambitions, prejudices and naked self-interest of a small number of wealthy people'.<sup>24</sup>

In America, between 2009 and 2012, 'the incomes of the top 1% grew by 31.4%, whereas the incomes of the bottom 99% grew only by 0.4%'.<sup>25</sup> If allegedly 'free-market capitalism ... was rescued by the state'<sup>26</sup>, the direct outcome has not been socialism for the working people but that 'socialism for the rich' known as austerity.

In parallel, on the world political stage, the western capitalist powers, their military-industrial strategies in tatters, flail violently at the new enemy no. 1 (the self-styled 'Islamic State') whose existence and strength can be traced to the incalculable human suffering and chaos brought about by successive western imperialist attacks and invasions affecting Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, along with unfailing western support for Israeli expansion and aggression in Palestine.

This whole terrain provides a context ripe for the application of Marxist concepts – of the profound exploitation of the great majority by a ruling class which has taken control of the state (and of inter-state institutions globally) and wields its power in its own narrow interests; of the mobilisation of ideology, 'the ideas of the ruling class', in the unrelenting service of those interests; of severely damaging forms of alienation which leave many vulnerable to the manipulation of their ideas and to the reification of identities and forms of consciousness, 'collateral damage' of an ongoing class warfare waged by the ruling

class against almost everyone else over several decades, but, since 2008, in a particularly acute form.

Inevitably, this calls forth responses – both those which bear the ugly scars of all of the above ‘damage’ (UKIP here, the National Front in France, the ultra-xenophobic Republican Right in the US), and also those which show the potential for meaningful resistance and change (Syriza in Greece – backsliding on EU bailout notwithstanding – Podemus in Spain, Bernie Sanders’ campaign in the US, and, most recently, a Corbyn-led UK Labour Party).

Such a terrain poses a challenge to all who claim to theorize human activity – its history, its development, its current state and its potentialities. It poses a particular challenge to those who draw on, and seek to take forward, Marx’s thinking – and there is perhaps no more basic challenge than that of relevance. In this article we hope to have shown that there are some interesting results to be had by re-visiting the Marxian ideas which are the ostensible source of key concepts in the Activity Theory tradition. In particular, we have made the case that the theoretical architecture, at least of the most influential version of Activity Theory, is not so much firmly rooted in Marx as it is the product of a misunderstanding of his analysis. Marx, we have argued, is not simply, or even primarily, offering a theoretical model of human activity, but a vision of how things could be if we flexed our economic and political muscles, and threw off the shackles of capitalist forms of production so as to be able to give free rein to our creative and productive potential. He is insisting on the fundamental humanity of activity, which is struggling to escape from a temporary, and increasingly calamitous and tragic, set of social relations. Human activity, seen in this way, is not something to be comprehended as part of an ‘activity system’ in the Activity Theory sense, but something to fight for in the anarchy and devastation all around us.

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<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to many people for discussion of the ideas presented here. But we would particularly like to thank: the following, who are, needless to say, not responsible for what we have to say: Ines Langemeyer, Anna Stetsenko, Reijo Miettinen, Paul Warmington, James Avis, Andrew Brown, David Bakhurst, Jan Derry, and Seth Chaiklin.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, we leave out of account the rival, and contemporaneous, Activity Theory tradition of Sergei L Rubinshtein and its continuation in the work of Andrei V Brushlinsky. See P.E. Jones, “‘The word becoming a deed’: the dialectics of ‘free action’ in Vygotsky’s ‘Tool and Sign in Child Development’”, in A. Stetsenko & D. Robbins (eds.) *Voices within Vygotsky’s non-classical psychology: past, present, future*, Nova Science, 2002, pp.143-159.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Y. Engeström, *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*, Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit, 1987; *Learning, Working and Imagining: Twelve Studies in Activity Theory*, Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> See esp. *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*, Prentice Hall, 1987; *Problems of the Development of the Mind*, Progress, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, *Thinking and Speech*, in *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, Volume 1, Plenum, 1987; *Mind in Society: The Development of the Higher Psychological Process*, Harvard, 1978. For a critical view see P.E. Jones, “Vygotsky, Marxism and Pavlov’s Reflexology”, [https://www.academia.edu/6981375/Vygotsky\\_Marxism\\_and\\_Pavlovs\\_Reflexology](https://www.academia.edu/6981375/Vygotsky_Marxism_and_Pavlovs_Reflexology), 2013.

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<sup>7</sup> Activity, Consciousness and Personality, p.191.

<sup>8</sup> P.E. Jones, "Breaking away from Capital? Theorising activity in the shadow of Marx". *Outlines*, 11(1): pp.45-58, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Though some attempt was made by A. R. Luria in *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, Harvard, 1976.

<sup>10</sup> "Marx long ago observed the way in which unbridled capitalism became a kind of mythology, ascribing reality, power and agency to things that had no life in themselves ... And ascribing independent reality to what you have in fact made yourself is a perfect definition of what the Jewish and Christian Scriptures call idolatry" (*The Times*, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Y. Engeström et al (eds.), *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Engeström and Miettinen, "Introduction", in Engeström, Y. et al (1999), op. cit., pp.1-2.

<sup>13</sup> E. Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, Progress, 1982; Engeström and Miettinen, op. cit, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Y. Engeström, *Learning, Working and Imagining: Twelve Studies in Activity Theory*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit, 1990, p. 79. For further discussion see P.E. Jones "Activity, Activity Theory and the Marxian legacy". In P.E. Jones (ed.), *Marxism and Education, Renewing the Dialogue: Pedagogy and Culture*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp.193-213.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, ps.86, 998 and 224.

<sup>16</sup> *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.998, also *Capital*, Vol. 3, Chicago: Charles H Kerr & Co, 1909, p.1030.

<sup>17</sup> C Slaughter, *Marxism and the Class Struggle*, London: New Park Publications, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Engeström, *Learning, Working and Imagining*, p.84.

<sup>19</sup> *Capital*, Vol 3, pp1025-1026.

<sup>20</sup> *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.102; Ilyenkov, op. cit, ps.211 and 214.

<sup>21</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in R.C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition, London: Norton and Co, 1978, p.476.

<sup>22</sup> *Capital*, Vol 3, p.24.

<sup>23</sup> *Capital*, Vol 3, Ch.47.

<sup>24</sup> O. Jones, *The Establishment: And how they get away with it*, London: Allen Lane, 2014, p.293.

<sup>25</sup> T. Piketty and E. Saez, cited in D. Dorling, *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists* (revised edition), Bristol: Policy Press, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> P. Mason, *Meltdown. The End of the Age of Greed*, London: Verso, 2010, p. vii.