

THE COMMON BEING: AN OUTLINE

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In this article, I revisit Karl Marx's claim in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, that the subject in its "individual existence is at the same time a social being." I redefine what has been translated as "social being" as "common being" in order to extrapolate an understanding of subjectivity that is a socio-ontological and collectively structured collectivity. In doing so, I demonstrate (1) that this common being is a collection of different socio-ontological traits; (2) that in order for this common being to be approximated we must take into account all modes of subjectivity production that intersect in what will appear as the subject; and (3) that the Other is the constitutive parameter of the common being on which the subject depends. Finally, I revisit three exemplary modes of practice—namely critique, solidarity, and utopia—and show that conceiving of the subject as a common being renders critique constellational, solidarity overdetermined, and utopia a koinotopia.

Dans cet article, je reviens sur la déclaration de Karl Marx dans ses Manuscrits économico-philosophiques de 1844, selon laquelle, « dans son existence la plus individuelle, il [le sujet] est en même temps un être social ». Je redéfinit ce qui a été traduit par « être social » comme un « être commun » afin d'extrapoler une compréhension de la subjectivité qui est une collectivité socio-ontologique et collectivement structurée. Ce faisant, je démontre (1) que cet être commun est la collection de différents traits socio-ontologiques; (2) que, pour que l'être commun soit abordé, nous devons prendre en compte tous les modes de production de subjectivité qui s'entrecroisent dans ce qui apparaîtra comme le sujet; (3) que l'Autre est le paramètre constitutif de l'être commun dont dépend le sujet. Enfin, je revisite trois modes de pratique exemplaires, à savoir la critique, la solidarité et l'utopie, et je démontre comment le fait de partir du sujet en tant qu'être commun rend la critique « constellationnelle », la solidarité « surdéterminée » et l'utopie une « koinotopie ».

Introduction

The idea of a subject that is composed of more than one part and therefore carries a plural or collective identity is as old as (Western) philosophy itself. Recall, for example, Plato's notion of the multiformity of the body in his *Phaedrus*. At 271a, Plato—through Socrates—wonders about the essence of the soul's composition, discerning two possibilities: the soul is either “one and all alike” or “like the body, of multiform aspect.”¹ The concrete parameters of Plato's philosophy regarding the soul or the body are of no importance to the issues explored in this article. Rather, what is interesting for our purposes here is the fact that the concept of a “multiform body” seemed to be familiar to Plato, connoting a viable, almost common-sensical givenness (judging at least by *Phaedrus*'s affirmative answers: “Certainly”; “To be sure”; “That would, I think, be excellent”).

That being said, it would be an exaggeration to argue that such an understanding of subjectivity as a plural or collective entity belongs to the paradigmatic core of the solipsistic and atomistic Western liberal narrative of the individual. Nevertheless, it permeates the modern philosophy of the subject as (what Theodor W. Adorno and Louis Althusser called) an “undercurrent”² or “underground current,”³ respectively. Karl Marx's concept of the “social being” has been pivotal to the proliferation of theories that adopt such an understanding of subjectivity. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and more precisely in the fragment on “Crude, Equalitarian, and Communism as Socialism,” Marx declares the subject to be an entity that, in its “individual existence[,] is at the same time a social being.”⁴ For reasons that will be addressed in the following section, this claim is unique within Marx's philosophical corpus. At

¹ John Burnet, ed., *Platonis Opera Vol. 2: Tetralogiae III–IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), §271a.

² See Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 45.

³ See Louis Althusser, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings 1978–1987*, (ed.) O. Corpet and F. Matheron, (tr.) G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), 165–207.

⁴ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and The Communist Manifesto*, (ed.) R. Tucker, (tr.) M. Milligan (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988), 102. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as EPM. For a more detailed reading of this Marxian quote as the basis of a theory of social-ontological subjectivation, see Thomas Telios, *Das Subjekt als Gemeinwesen. Zur Konstitution kollektiver Handlungsfähigkeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2021).

this preliminary stage, however, I would like to raise a translation issue that also explains the title of my article.

The original German text speaks of a subject that is “*in seinem individuellsten Dasein zugleich Gemeinwesen*.”⁵ The German *Gemeinwesen* is often rendered in English as *social being*, which, from an etymological perspective, is simply wrong. *Gemeinwesen*, from the word *gemein*, means something that is *common*, not *social*. Just as *Gesellschaft* is best translated as *society* and *Gemeinschaft* is best translated as *community*, *Gemeinwesen* is best translated as *common being* rather than *social being*. From a semantical perspective, however, Martin Milligan was not unreasonable in his choice of “social” to capture the *Gemein-* of *Gemeinwesen*. First, there is this one case where, as Marx writes, “das *reelle* Gemeinwesen, gesellschaftliche Wesen, die *lebendige* Gestalt ist.”⁶ Here, Marx seems to use the term *gesellschaftliches Wesen* as a parathesis to the term *Gemeinwesen*. Nonetheless, even here the English translation is more colourful than the German original: The word *Gemeinschaft* is correctly translated as “community,” but the compound *gesellschaftliche Wesen* is given as “social fabric” (EPM, 105). The second, and more substantial reason, why Milligan was not unreasonable in his choice of “social” to capture the *Gemein-* of *Gemeinwesen* pertains to the historical origins of the term *Gemeinwesen*. As Alfred Voigt makes explicit in the lemma “Gemeinwesen” in the monumental *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the word *Gemeinwesen* was used throughout German idealistic political philosophy—from Christian Wolff, via Immanuel Kant, to G. W. F. Hegel and J. G. Fichte—to connote the state or different state and societal structures. Only later, in the nineteenth century, would *Gemeinwesen* be used to express the idea of a *Gemeinschaft* (community), ultimately leading to the replacement of the term *Gemeinwesen* with the term *Gemeinschaft* (community).⁷ In addition, the translation of *Gemeinwesen* as *social being* is certainly correct with regard to the other important passages of the same period in which the word *Gemeinwesen* appears, most notably in Marx’s “Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d’économie politique*.”⁸ Clemens Dutt’s translation of *Gemeinwesen* in the “Comments on James Mill”

⁵ Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* (Berlin: Dietz, 1968), 535.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 539.

⁷ Alfred Voigt, “Gemeinwesen,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Vol. 3, (ed.) J. Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1974), 247–48.

⁸ Karl Marx, “Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d’économie politique*,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 3, (tr.) C. Dutt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 211–28.

as “communal nature”⁹ is of course completely wrong as a direct translation of the terms. It is, nonetheless, spot on in terms of the message that needs to be conveyed. What Marx argues for in these excerpts on Mill is indeed the subject’s *sociability*, namely the necessity of its being completed through practices that it exerts together with the Other, due to the subject’s own incompleteness (*Bedürftigkeit*). This is also what Milligan intended to convey by translating *Gemeinwesen* as “social being” in the *EPM*: the idea that the subject is a social entity that needs the Other to become aware of and realize itself.

These lexicological and semantic explanations notwithstanding, the word *Gemeinwesen* is used differently in the *EPM*. When Marx here refers to the subject as a *Gemeinwesen*, he does more than merely underscore the subject’s social disposition. Rather, Marx introduces the word *Gemeinwesen* in order to contrast the subject as *Gemeinwesen* (“common being”) to the subject as *an individual existence*—“in seinem individuellsten Dasein,” as the German original reads, a very uncommon but ingenious superlative phrase that unfortunately also goes astray in the English translation. This is not to say that Marx refutes the subject’s *singularity*. However, what Marx underscores is that even when concealed, pushed back, or suppressed under the subject’s “most individual way of being” (“in seinem individuellsten Dasein”), a different form of subjectivity persists and shines through that cannot be overridden or supplanted: namely, the subject as a *Gemeinwesen*, a *community in itself*, or a *common being*.

Henceforth, I will translate Marx’s *Gemeinwesen* as “common being” and will attempt to explicate it as a *collective* being. Marx’s *Gemeinwesen* is a socially constructed collective entity because it incorporates in its body the totality of the modes of subjectivity production in which it is embedded. As I will argue, it is precisely thanks to its collective structuration as a collective entity that the subject displays characteristics that have tricked such competent translators as Milligan and Dutt into translating Marx’s *Gemeinwesen* as “social being” or “communal nature.” The subject is social not because it is incomplete or deficient and must compensate for its primordial lack but because its agency has been engrafted onto it through its social structuration alongside more than one mode of subjectivity production. In this light, collectivity becomes the social-ontological explication of the subject’s sociability, *i.e.*, of its ability to become and act as a social being.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

To do so, I begin by building on three types of collectivities that I have distinguished elsewhere (collectivity as ontological necessity, collectivity as methodological necessity, and collectivity as inclusive and holistic overdetermination)¹⁰ in order to demonstrate the different modalities of this collective structuration of the subject as a “common being.” As I argue, collectivity is—at least for Marx—the ground form of the subject’s being and becoming, since the subject only exists conditioned through its/the Other. The latter, however, is more than merely diagnostically significant. Conceiving of the subject as a “common being” also conditions the subject’s agency and political practices. In this light, and if “common being” is the reformed answer to Immanuel Kant’s perennial question “What is man?” then his other three questions—“What can I know?”; “What ought I to do?”; “What may I hope?”¹¹—must be readdressed from the viewpoint of this common subjectivity. Constellational critique answers the question of knowing, overdetermined solidarity is the answer that pertains to the subject’s practices, and *koinotopia* ultimately prefigures what the subject can hope for.

Marx’s Concept of the “Common Being”

Marx’s account of the historical process of transitioning from “crude Communism” to “Communism as socialism coinciding with humane-ness” raises more problems than it solves. As is well known, Marx repudiated such an unfinished and therefore “crude” conception of Communism for the following simple—for Marx’s economistic universe—reason: in this early stage of Communism, there is still no appropriation of the means of production. Consequently, there is neither the possibility nor the potentiality of a self-determined way of being and living. Even if property has become socialized, it has done so in a merely formal manner that does not constitutively alter the (individual and communal or societal) form(s) of life. On the contrary, the third stage of Communism, in which the “*positive transcendence of private property*” (EPM, 102; my emphasis)¹² has been

¹⁰ See Thomas Telios, “Karen Barad and the Unresolved Challenge of Collectivity: A Case for New Materialisms,” *Technophany, A Journal for Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–21.

¹¹ See Immanuel Kant, *Introduction to Logic*, (tr.) T. Kingsmill Abbott (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 17; Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, (ed. & tr.) A. Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 458.

¹² Unless indicated otherwise, all emphases are in the original text.

completed, brings about “the *real appropriation of the human essence by and for man*” (EPM, 102). As Marx figuratively puts it,

This communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man; the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (EPM, 102–103)

Unlike full-blown communism, “crude Communism” is not characterized by changes that take place on an external—political, social, or economic—level. However, and as Marx recognized, something important occurs in this still immature stage of Communist processualization, which will turn out to be indispensable to the further unfolding of Communism in its final form. This “something” pertains to the realization of the *dependence* of the subject on its/the Other, or as Marx puts it,

the extent to which man’s *need* has become a *human* need; the extent to which, therefore, the *other* person as a person has become for him a need—the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social [common] being [*Gemeinwesen*]. (EPM, 102)

The highlighted passages are indicative of what Marx thinks that Communism requires in order to flourish. At the centre lies the necessity of the subject’s acknowledging that “what it *is*” is nothing but a socially constructed *common*, *i.e.*, collective, *being*. How is this collectivity to be understood? What registers does it encompass? And is the subject’s collectivity a metaphysical presupposition and/or ontological givenness, or rather the result of the socio-ontological processualization of the subject’s becoming?

To tackle these questions, it is helpful to return to considerations that I explored in a previous article, where I dealt with Karen Barad’s “agential realism.” There, I distinguished between three forms of collectivity that—to a certain extent—underlie Barad’s interpretation of Nils Bohr’s philosophy-physics: (1) collectivity as *ontological necessity*, (2) collectivity as *methodological necessity*, and (3) collectivity as *holistic and inclusive overdetermination*. As I argued, collectivity serves in this tripartite form as a safety valve that guarantees that materialist thinking will not regress into (epistemological)

solipsism, (political) individualism, (social) atomism, or what Barad more generally calls “the metaphysics of individualism.”¹³ In what follows, I will implement this tripartite conceptualization of collectivity as a *heuristic model*. My aim is to decipher Marx’s concept of “common being” alongside these three forms or types of collectivity and to demonstrate the ways in which collectivity permeates the subject’s processes of becoming and forms of being. Just as collectivity was found to permeate Bohr’s version of the uncertainty principle by rendering indeterminacy *indeterminable*, collectivity permeates the subject’s sociality by rendering sociality *sociable*.

To begin with, “collectivity as ontological necessity” connotes the fact that the subject *cannot be reduced* to a single parameter that is then enlarged so as to assume the totality of its existence, excluding other equally fundamental modes of subjective expression and structuration. As such, “collectivity as ontological necessity” underscores the necessity that in order to grasp the subject in its complexity, we must take into account the *plurality* of the subject’s constitution in an egalitarian way. This implies that no hierarchy can be developed between the subject’s biological traits, its material composition, its affective disposition, the various discourses that surround it and subjectivate it, etc. On the contrary, these parameters are to be considered co-original with regard to the subject’s structuration. Finally, “collectivity as ontological necessity” demands that we think of the various parameters of the subject’s becoming as existing and acting *simultaneously*. There is no temporal or spatial ordering among the different modes of subjectivity production; rather, they should be considered as being always-already apparent and as always-already deploying their effects upon the subject.

Marx’s description of the subject bears similar traits. The subject cannot be characterized only through its cognitive faculties or “general consciousness” (EPM, 105). At the same time, the subject possesses a really existing, “practical, sensuous and perceptible” (EPM, 113) facet that encompasses not only the senses but also feelings, emotions, and affects (cf. EPM, 106) that interact with one another and cannot be seen as behaving antagonistically toward one another. Further, the subject is neither only the onto-biological synthesis of its progeny (cf. EPM, 112), nor a sample of nature (cf. EPM, 112), nor, finally, a radically contextualized social product bereft of any essentialist or transhistorical elements. Rather, it belongs to the subject’s essence that all of these traits co-inform and co-constitute one an-

¹³ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 393.

other. As Marx puts it, “[T]he *social* reality of nature, and *human* natural science, or the *natural science about man*, are identical terms” (EPM, 111). Similarly, Marx is categorically regarding the subject’s socio-ontological plurality. Science, social activity, and language are distinctive forms of expression of the subject’s social activity. However, they are not to be examined as irreducible and incommensurable domains, spheres, and forms of practice. Rather, they are to be thought of as mutually and simultaneously conditioning each other. As Marx argues,

Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my *own* existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being [*gesellschaftlichen Wesen*].... (EPM, 105)

The second form of collectivity, “collectivity as methodological necessity,” brings to the fore the realization that in order to describe the subject in its multifaceted structuration, an equally multifaceted and kaleidoscopic methodological approach is needed. This does not merely pertain to the different philosophical disciplines that need to be engaged in order to describe the subject in its totality. The previous description speaks, after all, to the fact that Marx viewed the mobilization of concepts from theoretical philosophy to practical philosophy and from social philosophy to social ontology and the philosophy of emotions as a prerequisite for elucidating the subject’s ontological collectivity. When referring to “collectivity as methodological necessity,” I instead want to address the notion that, in order to illustrate the subject’s becoming, we must (1) also take into account the various social institutions that work through the subject, and (2) scrutinize how they interact with one another and with the subject’s socio-ontological qualities. In this sense, Marx’s work was pioneering. Take for instance the following passage, which precedes, undoubtedly in a very basic fashion, some of the basic tenets of the theory of intersectionality that were launched in the beginning of the 1990s, *i.e.*, almost 150 years after the *EPM*. In a lengthy passage that is worth quoting in its entirety, Marx argues as follows:

This *material*, immediately *sensuous* private property is the material sensuous expression of *estranged human* life. Its movement—production and consumption—is the *sensuous* revelation of the movement of all production hitherto—*i.e.*, the realization or the reality of man. Religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art,

etc., are only *particular* modes of production, and fall under its general law. The positive transcendence of *private property* as the appropriation of *human* life is, therefore, the positive transcendence of all estrangement—that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his *human*, i.e., *social* mode of existence [gesellschaftliches Dasein]. (EPM, 103)

Putting aside the economistic undertones of the excerpt, which paved the way for the base-superstructure model of Western Marxism, let us concentrate on the different social structures or practices mentioned here and how they interrelate and relate to the subject. What first needs to be mentioned is that private property, Marx's primary mode of subjectivity production, is not a merely legal-formalist issue. True, private property estranges the subject, but it does so not only because it tears it away from what should belong to it, thus depriving it of a legal right. Rather, private property succeeds in sealing the subject's estrangement and deprivation, by transposing a legal regime into the subject's "*material*" and "*sensuous*" way of being. As such, it allows for this deprivation and estrangement to appear as "immediate" and thus unquestionable.

However, there is something more important at work here, which has to do with the fact that it is not only private property that is established as a mode of subjectivity production. Rather, such diverse institutions as "religion," "family," the "state," "law," "morality," "science," "art," etc. are also considered modes of subjectivity production. These institutions, domains, and practices are of course not as well refined and intricate as the empirically showcased fourteen categories articulated, for example, by Helma Lutz, the German intersectional sociologist.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Marx's list broadens the intersectional categories in two significant respects: on the one hand, these different spheres are for Marx explicit modes of (decentred) subjectivity *production* and not "axes of inequality,"¹⁵ "axes of op-

¹⁴ The fourteen categories are gender, sexuality, "race"/skin-colour, ethnicity, nation/state, class, culture, ability, age, sedentariness/origin, wealth, North-South, religion, and stage of social development; see Helma Lutz and Norbert Wenning, *Unterschiedlich verschieden. Differenz in der Erziehungswissenschaft* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich: 2001), 11–24; Nira Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2006): 193–209.

¹⁵ Cornelia Klinger, Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, and Birgit Sauer, *Achsen der Ungleichheit. Zum Verhältnis von Klasse, Geschlecht und Ethnizität* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007).

pression,”¹⁶ “axes of difference,”¹⁷ or “lines of difference”¹⁸ of an *already construed* subject. On the other hand, Marx’s list includes domains, spheres, and practices such as law, science, and art that are yet to figure in the categories of (intersectional) subjectivity production. Last but not least, Marx is to be praised for his *maximalist* approach to subjectivity production. Rather than assuming that he can provide us with an exhaustive list of all possible modes of subjectivity production, Marx is aware that deciphering the subject must remain a process that is open to reconfiguration. Anticipating the debate sparked between Judith Butler and the intersectional theorists regarding “that embarrassed ‘etc.’,”¹⁹ Marx positions himself categorically in favour of intersectionality. The modes of subjectivity production are neither numerable nor irreducible and incommensurable. This is not to say that Marx denies the singularity of the subject. On the contrary, and as mentioned above in passing, Marx underscores the concrete subject’s *singularity* as it manifests itself as the intersectional constellation of concrete modes of subjectivity production. As he puts it, “[I]t is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* common being [individuellen *Gemeinwesen*])” (EPM, 105).

In this light, what “collectivity as ontological necessity” postulates on the logical level is demonstrated by “collectivity as methodological necessity” on the practical (real, social, political, etc.) level of subjective experience and practice. In the lengthier passage quoted above, Marx seems to assume that if we subtract religion, family, the state, etc., from the subject, what we are left with is the subject’s commonality as a fundamental ontological form of being, or, in Marx’s words, “the return of man...to his *human*, i.e., *social* mode of existence [gesellschaftliches *Dasein*]” (EPM, 103). This would then render “collectivity as ontological necessity” as belonging to the *ontological* form of collectivity, reducing “collectivity as methodological necessity” to an *ontic* form of collectivity. This notwithstanding, I

¹⁶ Gail Lewis, “Celebrating Intersectionality? Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies: Themes from a Conference,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2009): 203–10.

¹⁷ Gudrun-Axeli Knapp and Angelika Wetterer, *Achsen der Differenz. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik II* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2014).

¹⁸ Helma Lutz, “Intersectional Analysis: A Way Out of Multiple Dilemmas?” paper presented at the International Sociological Association conference, July 8, 2002, Brisbane, 13; cit. in Yuval-Davis, “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics,” 202.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 182.

think that such a reading, while faithful to the text, contradicts what Marx intended to convey when assuming the *commonality* of the subject, namely that the different elements of the subject and the different (social, cultural, political, etc.) modes of subjectivity production should be considered equal partakers of and factors in the subject's ways of becoming and forms of living. Equality and difference inhere in collectivity.²⁰ If the elements of which collectivity consists were not different from one another, we would end up not with a collectivity but with a uniform mass. Similarly, if the elements of which collectivity consists were not recognized as equal, we would end up having not a flat hierarchical collectivity but a stratified and power-laden pyramidal perceptual structure. This ethical clause of a necessarily differential and egalitarian commonality is what the last form of "collectivity as holistic and inclusive overdetermination" is called upon to cover.

Finally, in terms of the third form, "collectivity as holistic and inclusive overdetermination," it is best to examine the attributes of holism and inclusivity independently of one another. On the one hand, holism designates the logical necessity of assuming that the elements of the matter are both separate and separable even if we know that we can only tackle them together since they are both entangled and inseparable.²¹ In doing so, the holistic parameter of collectivity as overdetermination debunks the alleged individualism

²⁰ The neologism "collectiversalism" that I have introduced elsewhere attempts to show exactly how collectivity arises from the tension between universal claims of equality and particular differences that cannot exclude but, on the contrary, need to acknowledge their mutual dependence on one another. See Thomas Telios, "Post-Script: Communist Subjectivity and the Politics of Collectiversalism," in *The Russian Revolution as Ideal and Practice: Failures, Legacies and the Future of Revolution*, (ed.) T. Telios, D. Thomä, and U. Schmid (New York: Palgrave, 2019), 283–308.

²¹ The fact that, on my view, collective holism needs to use the (even if only momentarily assumable) separability of the different elements of the collective as its point of departure is my biggest point of contention with Vincent Descombes's conceptualization of "collectivist holism." As Descombes defines the term, "Such a holism of the collection (or 'collectivist' holism) asks us to understand the word 'totality' as a kind of indivisible block that cannot be further broken down despite being made up of several elements." See Vincent Descombes, *The Institutions of Meaning: A Defense of Anthropological Holism*, (tr.) S. A. Schwartz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), xxii. On the other hand, Descombes's concept of "structural holism" seems to come closer to the concept of holistic collectivity that I try to lay down here. As Descombes argues, "[S]omething is a sign only if it must be related to other signs in order for any sort of meaning to be attributed to it" (*ibid.*, 120).

of matter by demonstrating how—behind the façade of matter’s singular appearance—collectivity is always at play. This is also what Marx imparts through the concept of totality. It is true that the subject is composed of different parts that act simultaneously (*collectivity as ontological necessity*), just as it is true that in order to become aware of these elements, we need to implement different observational standpoints without ever being able to assert that we have exhaustively exploited the complexity of the subject’s becoming and being (*collectivity as methodological necessity*). At the same time, the subject is to be understood as an embodied totality. All modes of subjectivity production encounter each other and converge in the subject’s body to such an extent that they forfeit their unique irreducibility and incommensurability. This results in them appearing in a new, distinctive, condensed and collective—*sublated* would be the Hegelian word—form. As Marx puts it in a passage that contains a reference to the subject’s singularity, with which the last subsection ended,

Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* common being [individuellen *Gemeinwesen*]), is just as much the *totality*—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself. (EPM, 105)

On the other hand, the inclusivity parameter of collectivity as overdetermination draws attention to the fact that the subject is so thoroughly infused with its/the Other that it is impossible to distinguish between the subject and its/the Other. This does not just mean that we must acknowledge only the subject’s dependence on its/the Other. It also means that we must accept the *interdependence* of the subject and its/the Other. The latter is not only theoretically significant with regard to the subject’s structuration. More importantly, the subject’s dependence on its/the Other affects also the subject’s political practices: it brings into question the self-evidence of individual agency and individual practices and supplements them with collective agency and collective practices, respectively. The dependence of the subject on its/the Other necessitates that the Other is included in the subject’s practices, since the subject comes to be only through/as the Other. This ultimately radically changes the character of the subject’s emancipation. Freedom or liberation is unthinkable in such a collective framework, where the subject is necessarily overdetermined since it is the intersectional construct of more than one mode of subjectivity production. However, this does not mean

that there can be no reappropriation of the subject's production. Nevertheless, it means that instead of seeking the emancipation of the subject *from* its/the Other, and vice versa, we should opt for a emancipation of the subject *through* its/the Other, and vice versa—or, as Martin Saar, puts it, for the subject's "collective self-determination."²² By recognizing in the Other the *relation of the subject's production* (*Produktionsverhältnis*), to use a further Marxian term, the collectivist understanding of subjectivity necessitates the Other's inclusion in the subject's practices and thereby re-vindicates collectivity within the framework of a socially constructed subjectivity.

The realization of the subject's and the Other's *dependence* on each other results in a veritable Copernican Revolution. None of the new, completed, reappropriated forms of life that Marx envisages for the third stage of mature Communism can be brought to fruition if this fundamental realization does not take place in "crude Communism," namely the realization of "the extent to which man's *need* has become a *human need*; the extent to which, therefore, the *other* person as a person has become for him a need" (EPM, 102). More than one point is of crucial importance here. First, we should stop assuming that needing the Other discloses a deficiency. Evaluating the need of the Other as a deficiency is indicative of the liberal understanding of an individual that is allegedly sovereign and therefore does not need its/the Other in order to express or realize itself. Within Marx's collectivist understanding of subjectivity, however, nothing is further from the truth than such an egotistic understanding of subjectivity. Needing the Other is coherent with the subject's humanity: a socio-ontological structural necessity that cannot be evaluated axiomatically. Second, the Other's constitutivity does not depend on an identity that the Other bears. The Other as such is constitutive of the subject, not only under the guise of a certain (shared) identity or because s/he pursues the same interests or shares the same normative ideals as the subject. What is constitutive of the subject for Marx is "the *other* person as a person" (EPM, 102), and not "the *other* person as long as it carries a certain identity."²³ Finally, it is the almost redundant facticity of the subject's dependence on its/the Other that Marx does not shy away from uttering

²² Martin Saar, "What Is Social Philosophy? Or: Order, Practice, Subject," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 118, no. 2 (2018): 207–23, here 217.

²³ As such, Marx's understanding of common being anticipates the recent theories of recognition. Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (tr.) J. Anderson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

here. For Marx, it is clear that there can be no subject *except* through its/the Other. The Other is not simply another factor or vector of the subject's socialization. Nor is the Other yet another parameter that enhances the subject's self-expression. Even less is the Other an instrumentalizable crutch for the subject to lean on in times of need and therefore a means of which the subject can dispose at will. Rather, the Other is a precondition for the subject's be(com)ing and is therefore a matter of necessity.

This is ultimately why collectivity appears in all its three forms as a matter of *necessity* and not as a matter of contingency. In its necessary ontological form, Otherness comes to the fore as a condition that co-constitutes what will be addressed as the subject. In its necessary methodological form, Otherness takes the shape of a mode of subjectivity production without which the subject would remain an abstract and void entity deprived of concreteness. Finally, in its overdetermined form, Otherness is manifested as a political necessity that needs to be included in the subject's practices in order for the subject to (politically) self-actualize in a holistic way.

From the Common Being to Collective Practices: Critique, Solidarity, Utopia

What do the concrete political practices of this common being look like? What forms do they take? And which factors of the subject's structuration do they target? The practices of critique, solidarity, and utopia are not novel within the arsenal of Critical Theory. As a matter of fact, I would go so far as to assume that no critical political project can refrain from laying down an account of the concepts of critique as a principle, solidarity as a vector, and utopia as a vision of political practices, respectively. However, using the concept of a common being that depends on its/the Other for its structuration and realization as a starting point allows us to reconceive of these concepts in a fundamental way: it transforms critique into *constellational critique*, solidarity into *overdetermined solidarity*, and utopia into *koinotopia*.

1. Constellational Critique

To begin with, the critical potentiality of the common being lies in providing a bridge between an (idealist) transcendental grounding

of critique and the assumption that critique “has run out of steam.”²⁴ Against these *doxas*, the common being’s potential for critique is deeply rooted in its social structuration.²⁵ As such, the common being’s critical potentiality is not metaphysically assumed or transcendently founded. Even less can the common being’s critical potentiality be reduced to one register or Archimedean point from which then the subject will be approximated, as is the case with the various standpoint theories or the different identity politics. Rather, through its structuration as a collective, the common being comes to know itself as an embedded and embodying intersection of more than one mode of subjectivity production. The common being knows that in contexts of overdetermination, such a claim is practically impossible and conceivable only in the delusive context of a liberal, atomistic, individualist ideology.²⁶ The subject is overdetermined and never bereft of any reason or void of any identity. Negativity remains of course an essential epistemological faculty for the common being. Every mode of subjectivity production attempts to subjugate the subject’s body and to claim the subject for itself. In order to do so, it needs to exclude the other simultaneously acting modes of subjectivity production, neutralize them as irrelevant, or denigrate them as secondary. However, it is precisely through such internal and conflictual processes of negativization and neutralization that

²⁴ Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48.

²⁵ It was of course Georg Lukács who first elaborated this dialectical necessity: As he argued in the Reification-Essay of his *History and Class Consciousness*, the reified subject can address and collectively overcome its reification because, in having become a part of this process, it has become aware of its own structuration; cf. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (tr.) R. Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 83–222. Interestingly enough, Judith Butler argues also in favour of such an understanding of agency that is not the intentional result of the subject’s free will but the result of the subject’s subjectivation. As Butler puts it, “[T]he constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency”; Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations,” in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, (ed.) S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, and N. Fraser (London: Routledge, 1995), 46.

²⁶ It is from this perspective that Lewis Gordon and Charles W. Mills are correct when assuming that negative concepts like Adorno’s “non-identical” or Michel Foucault’s “unreason” cannot serve a critical theory of race and for that matter also the common being’s critical operationality. For more on that, see Lewis Gordon, “Interview with Lewis R. Gordon,” in *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, (ed.) G. Yancy (New York: Routledge, 1998), 95–118; Charles W. Mills, “Criticizing Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order*, (ed.) P. Deutscher and C. Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 233–50.

the common being becomes aware of the different modes of subjectivation that house its body.

The second point that needs to be addressed with regard to the critical potentiality of the common being is that its collective structuration *as* collective renders it possible to exert critique on multiple levels without having to privilege one over the others. The common being's critical potential cannot become unitary, unificatory, or unilateral. Given that the common being is a collective being, its potential to criticize each of its modes of production is as finite or infinite as the modes that have structured it. Seen this way, the subject does not have to curtail its potential and entertain a "*local* character of criticism,"²⁷ as Foucault suggests. Despite Wendy Brown's efforts to argue otherwise, this would indeed lead to "downgrading the project of critical theory."²⁸ The common being's collective structuration allows the subject to engage in critique on multiple levels without having to organize and hierarchize those levels. As such, the first pitfall that the common being avoids is the alleged subversiveness of the "particular," the "local," or the "regional."²⁹ This is not to say that we cannot or should not engage in an unyielding critique of any mode of subjectivity production that brings forward and perpetuates oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and an unequal distribution of power. However, it is to say that, for instance, the critique of sex and gender (re-)production cannot supersede the critique of capitalism, just as the critique of religion cannot supplant the critique of nationalism, colonialism, and ableism. The common being everts the subject's monolithicity and enables an informed and multiple critique. Seen in this way, the second pitfall that the common being can remedy is the undesirability of universal critique, given the latter's exclusive character. The common being may be an entity that, on the one hand, as we have seen, is singular thanks to its unique structuration. Yet on the other hand, the common being is aware of the fact that its structuration is the particular and collective result of processes that are intertwined and entangled in what will appear as the totality that constitutes the subject's social context. In this light, the common being makes possible and necessi-

²⁷ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, (ed.) C. Gordon, (tr.) K. Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 81.

²⁸ Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), viii.

²⁹ All quotes in Foucault, "Two Lectures," 82.

tates Étienne Balibar's concept of "ideal universality."³⁰ The universal critical potentiality of the common being does not curtail the rights of particular groups, nor does it render them invisible or indifferent. Rather, the collective structuration of the common being as a collective is capable of mobilizing, as Balibar puts it, "members of the oppressed group"³¹ by tying the rights of a group to a universal claim while realizing—due to the entanglements of the different modes of subjectivity production—that the oppressed group "can achieve its goals only...if it aims at changing the whole fabric of society."³²

This is, after all, the reason why, drawing on Adorno, I prefer to refer to the common being's mode of critique as a "constellational critique." Building upon Adorno's concept of constellation in his "Actuality of Philosophy,"³³ the constellational task of philosophy lies in unveiling the question by tackling it from different perspectives, acknowledging how these different perspectives inform each other, and finally, accepting that there is no one right way of identifying the matter at hand. This entails, for instance, questioning the givenness of the matter at hand, scrutinizing the different ways in which it could have been constructed, self-questioning the perspectives that were adopted to shed light on it, etc. From this perspective, constellational thinking brings forward a collectivity, *i.e.*, a palimpsest of moments and movements that observes the material that is to be cognized, inquires into how it was organized, and reappropriates it by suggesting different ways of reorganizing it. This disentangles critique from being a secondary, reactionary activity that answers to a previous situation, action, or ideology.³⁴ Rather, constellational critique is a *generative* epistemological faculty that begins by exploring and explaining what it will later analyze, critique, and attempt to reconfigure. In this light, constellational critique is not reserved for those who suffer discrimination. Rather, and following the intersectional insight that privilege and marginalization coexist with one

³⁰ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, (tr.) C. Jones, J. Swenson, and C. Turner (London: Verso, 2002).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos*, vol. 1977, no. 31 (1977): 120–33.

³⁴ Cf. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 121.

another and are not mutually exclusive,³⁵ “constellational critique” draws the picture of a subject that at the same time can be indulging in its privileges according to an identity while being discriminated against due to another. Constellational critique is therefore able to locate particular “discriminations” without having to assume that the universal does not exist, just as it can claim universal rights without disrespecting the singularity of the production of the common being. In this light, constellational critique remains a modernist critique and does not need to don the legitimizing guise of a post-critique. It designates the mode of thinking of a subject that strives for its emancipation, self-realization, and liberation, only this time the subject is not the absolute, solipsistic, liberal, atomistic, integral, and monadic subject of Kantian Modernity. Rather, it is the Marxian common being (*Gemeinwesen*), the result of processes of subjectivation that have rendered it collective. As such, constellational critique is a mode of constellational thinking that is not intolerant to other forms of thinking but can encompass them and take them into account since they have partaken—in one way or another—in the process of the subject’s production.

2. Overdetermined Solidarity

Just like the common being’s critical faculty, the common being’s practical potentiality, which I tackle under the conceptual form of an “overdetermined solidarity,” also balances two extremes. On the one side of the spectrum, the concept of “overdetermined solidarity” breaks free from *intentional* and *moral* theories of solidarity that see in solidarity either the expressed will of a sovereign subject or a moral good and a means of satisfying or achieving a moral goal or purpose. Intentional theories presuppose a *pre-social* subject, *i.e.*, a subject that (1) is assumed to have properties that are not dictated by or formed through processes of socialization and (2) is aware of its properties. On the contrary, moral theories of solidarity instrumentalize solidarity as a set of collective actions that are (1) acceptable only as long as they can be signified through a certain moral order or (2) can contribute to a certain, different and better, moral order as a means of overcoming problems that are considered untenable from the perspective of that moral order. Despite their theoretical disparities, both tendencies agree that, either due to a

³⁵ See Wendy G. Smooth, “Intersectionality: From Theoretical Framework to Policy Intervention,” in *Situating Intersectionality: Politics, Policy, and Power*, (ed.) A. R. Wilson (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 21.

universal, unilateral, or integral understanding of subjectivity or due to a common goal or shared moral interest, solidarity struggles cannot but require similarity or consent in order to be substantiated. On the other side of the spectrum, the concept of “overdetermined solidarity” provides the missing link with regard to theories of solidarity, with which it shares the starting point of a decentred, socially constructed subjectivity. The problem with these theories of solidarity (such as Lea Sussemichel and Jens Kastner’s recently promoted theory of “groundless solidarity”), however, is that they merely stipulate—without corroboration—that differences do not endanger but rather further solidarity struggles since difference (and not sharedness or commonality) is inherent to the concept of solidarity.³⁶

The first radical change that the conceptualization of the subject as a common being effects upon solidarity is that it locates it not on the level of practices but a step earlier, on the level of *agency*. Solidarity connotes an agential *disposition* and not a mere form of practice. As such, *i.e.*, as a mode of agency, solidarity designates the subject’s practices by providing the ground that makes collective practices possible in the first place.³⁷ As mentioned above, the subject is not agentially capable because it is metaphysically assumed to be. Rather, the subject is rendered capable of acting within a certain mode of subjectivity production because it has been brought forward by that mode. To the extent that the subject’s practices find their cause not in the self-expression of an authentic subject but in the Other(s) whom the subject has incorporated and who thereby keep(s) working through the subject’s practices, it would be absurd to insist that the subject is a sovereign agent. However, the subject is not the product of one mode of subjectivity production. Rather, it is the collective product of *more than one* mode of subjectivity produc-

³⁶ See Lea Sussemichel and Jens Kastner, “Unbedingte Solidarität,” in *Unbedingte Solidarität*, (ed.) L. Sussemichel and J. Kastner (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2022), 44–48.

³⁷ In this light, I would even go so far as to argue that every social action in Max Weber’s sense is a solidary practice. As Weber defines his term, “Action is ‘social’ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of *others* and is thereby oriented in its course”; Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, (ed.) G. Roth and C. Wittich, (tr.) G. Roth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 4; my emphasis. If, as we have seen, in Marx’s account “the *other* person as a person has become for him [the subject] a need” (EPM, 102) and therefore is not only the addressee of the subject’s intentions but also the *source of the meaningfulness of the subject’s actions*, then it is evident why every social action is inherently a solidary action.

tion. Seen this way, it is only consequent to argue that a subject formed through the combined intersection of multiple modes of subjectivity production will also be capable of acting collectively. The subject, through its practices, confirms the totality of the modes of subjectivation that collectively structured it. The latter renders the need to justify the subject's collective agency and practices obsolete. Collective agency does not need to be legitimized to be called upon as soon as individual agency has proven insufficient. Nor does collective agency need to be derived from an external normative parameter, be it the pursuit of the same interest, the materialization of an ideal, or the sharing of an identity. Rather, collective agency is grounded in the subject's collective structuration as a collective and therefore *immanently* (meaning anti-normatively) generated.

This notwithstanding, the collective agency of the common being does not entail that all the subject's practices are collective. Whereas the subject's form of *agency* is always necessarily collective since it corresponds to the subject's collective emergence as a collective, it is evident that not all of the subject's actions are (or have to be) carried out in a collective manner. From this perspective, the collectivity of the common being's *practices* is a *contingent necessity*. Nevertheless, this does not render them less collective. The subject may weigh in, assess, ponder, and attempt at each and every moment to balance how it should act in a particular case and end up acting individually. Even so, though, the subject's practices cannot but be circumscribed by the totality of the modes of subjectivity production that constitute it as a common being. What might seem to be an individual action is nothing but the epiphenomenal realization of a complex decision-making process that must *necessarily* consider all the entangled modes of subjectivity production. Once again, recall Marx's claim that the subject in its "individual existence is at the same time a social being" (EPM, 102). We might not know which of the modes of subjectivity production breaks through and determines the subject's practices, but we know that this action is the result of multiple coefficients that must be factored in in their entirety since they, at each and every moment, house the common being's body.

Finally, this socio-ontological givenness of solidarity as a *necessarily collective form of agency* that supports the subject to act in *contingently necessary collective sets of practices* is not bereft of normative potentiality. True, solidarity is not a moral good that needs to be defended, nor can practices of solidarity be viewed as moral only if they contribute to the transformation or preservation of a certain moral order. Nonetheless, this does not mean that solidarity does not realize a normative potential. However, just as soli-

darity as a necessarily collective form of agency emanates immanently alongside the common being's collective structuration as a collective, solidarity's normative potential also emanates *immanently* and unravels its own vocabulary. The normative ideal of overdetermined solidarity takes the form of *inclusion* and requires that solidarity ensures that the Other, who has already been acknowledged as a constitutive part of the subject's structuration, is taken into account and partakes also in the subject's practices. This demands that the Other cannot be either recognized and included (because it shares the same interests, goals, and identities) or rejected and excluded (when found to have a different set of interests, goals, and identities). On the contrary, the Other must always be included in the subject's practices (necessary collective agency), even if those practices need not always be executed in concert with it (the contingent necessity of solidary practices). The latter is necessitated by the fact that the Other does not have to be taken into account in its totality. Just like the common being, the Other is a collectivity of different identities. Some of the identities of the particular Other are commensurable with some of the identities of a particular subject; some are not. For the former, they will find themselves on the same side of the barricades; for the latter, on different ones. As Jodi Dean writes in her recent book on comradeship, "*Anyone but not everyone can be a comrade.*"³⁸ This does not render solidarity less inclusive. The socio-ontological interdependence of the subject and its/the Other on each other cannot be disputed. Exactly herein lies the normative potentiality of solidarity: in guaranteeing that, despite their particular differences, the subject and its/the Other cannot but act collectively since they are bound to one another by their mutually collective structuration as collectives.³⁹ Any logic, regime, discourse, or mode of subjectivity production that attempts to defy the common subject and its/the Other's collective structuration as a collective through each other, thus attempting to estrange the subject and its/the Other from each other, must be deemed unsolidary and as such is to be opposed and combatted. As Bini Adamczak puts it, "Solidarity is an already feasible experience in the past and present. It is at the same

³⁸ Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (London: Verso, 2019), 67.

³⁹ It is this dependence of the subject and its/the Other on each other which also provides the missing link that renders solidarity a *necessity* and not a merely desirable contingency or wishful thinking that, as already suggested, is the case, for instance, with Sussemichel/Kastner.

time a desire to *overthrow all conditions that make a life in solidarity for all impossible*.”⁴⁰

This is ultimately why I find it appropriate to call this account of solidarity *overdetermined*. The overdetermination of solidarity stems primarily from the fact that solidarity is, on the analytical level, *conceptually* overdetermined. It connotes a form of agency, just as it connotes a set of practices and a mode of normativity production. Nonetheless, and perhaps more importantly, solidarity is overdetermined on the level of political struggles. Solidarity struggles do not have to pursue a common interest, serve a unilateral goal, and/or presuppose a single identity. Unlike Rahel Jaeggi’s claim, solidarity does not have to presuppose a “common form of life.”⁴¹ On the contrary, solidarity is overdetermined, *i.e.*, holistic and inclusive, because (1) it is engrafted onto the subject thanks to the subject’s collective structuration as a collective; (2) it acknowledges the Other’s constitutivity during this process; and (3) it recognizes in its/the Other a further subject whose structuration—through modes of subjectivity production that promote oppression, discrimination, exploitation, exclusion, and unequal power distributions—also needs to be addressed and overcome. In the words of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, “[N]obody’s free until everybody’s free.”⁴²

3. Koinotopia

In this pluralistic and collective universe of a subjectivity, the concept of utopia must be reconsidered. It should not be considered coincidental that the concept of utopia preceded the manifestation of the sovereign, reasonable, solipsistic individual of Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* by a hundred years. Rather, it was such a vision of a utopian society that paved the way for the solipsistic, atomistic, and liberal individual as its necessary theoretical precondition. The realization that we only now, *i.e.*, after Marx, can theoretically approximate what has always been the case, namely the common

⁴⁰ Bini Adamczak, “Vielsamkeit eines ausschweifenden Zusammenhangs,” in *Unbedingte Solidarität*, (ed.) L. Susemichel and J. Kastner (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2022), 87; my translation.

⁴¹ Rahel Jaeggi, “Solidarity and Indifference,” in *Solidarity and Care in the European Union*, (ed.) R. Termeulen and R. Houtepen (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 295.

⁴² Fannie Lou Hamer, “‘Nobody’s Free Until Everybody’s Free’: Speech Delivered at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus,” Washington, D.C., July 10, 1971, in *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, (ed.) M. P. Brooks and D. W. Houck (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 136.

being's collective structuration as a collective, forces us to reconsider and reconstruct what kind of future togetherness we want to co-exist in.

The utopian potentiality of the common being cannot be exhausted in atopian, homotopian, or even heterotopian projects. The concept of *atopos* (introduced by Roland Barthes, recalling Plato's description of Socrates)⁴³ connotes the impossibility of identification. As Barthes puts it, "*Atopia* resists description, definition, language...Being Atopic...: the other is *unqualifiable*."⁴⁴ What Heidi Sohn calls *homotopia* works differently: it juxtaposes what will be established as "the homogeneous, the normal and the correct" with what is considered "the heterogeneous...the different...the anomalous."⁴⁵ It should be obvious why the utopian potentiality of the common being cannot be accommodated by either of these terms. The common being is, by definition, a collective amalgam of more than one identity and therefore anything but impossible to be determined. Similarly, the common being is a highly differentiated entity and therefore also anything but homogeneous, normal, or correct. However, this is not to say that heterotopias are suitable for expressing the common being's collective utopian potentiality. Foucault introduced the term "heterotopia" to describe emplacements that are both indicative of the ruling order and suggestive of a subversive potential.⁴⁶ However, while heterotopias might connote emplacements that have been produced by certain modes of production and as such have been rendered able to develop within themselves the potential to undermine the processes that brought them forward, these emplacements are separate, disentangled, and isolated from one another. They do not form a collectivity like the common subject, whose identities encounter, co-in-form, and intra-act—to use a term from Karen Barad—with one another in the common being's body. Seen in this light, utopia is confronted with three challenges: the first is the danger of reproducing power structures or mechanisms of exclusion, the second that of descending into idleness, the third that of providing a vision of a way of being-together that differs from the

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, (tr.) R. Howard (London: Penguin, 1978), 34–36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁵ Heidi Sohn, "Heterotopia: Anamnesis of a Medical Term," in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, (ed.) M. Dehaene and L. de Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), 43–44.

⁴⁶ See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," (tr.) L. De Cauter and M. Dehaene, in *Heterotopia and the City*, 13–29.

status quo but does not change it radically and thereby ends up legitimizing it.

Adding yet another prefix as a qualification to the basis *-topos*, I would like to coin the term *koinotopia*, from the Greek *κοινός* (common), to designate the utopian potential of the common being. As such, *koinotopia* designates, first, an *antireductionist* concept of utopia that does not exhaust itself in recalibrating the existing world to one identity, one set of interests, or one political ideal. Corresponding to the mode of “collectivity as ontological necessity,” the concept of *koinotopia* calls for a future form of being-together that is aware that it cannot be materialized in isolated communities or emplacements that have lost track of their entanglements. This is not to say that *koinotopia* rejects concepts such as “safe spaces,” which function as shelters or refuges. However, it does not see in such organizations the sole, sufficient form of societal transformation. Further, as we have seen, if the core of “collectivity as methodological necessity” lies in making us aware that the subject’s collective becoming is the result of more than one intersecting mode of subjectivity production, then the future that this subject foresees for itself cannot aim to change only certain forms of subjectivity production. Rather, *koinotopia* strives to change the totality of the modes of subjectivity production. Nothing can be allowed to remain unaltered, as if there were a hierarchy of needs and identities, with some demanding prior to the others. Targeted, partial, and incremental changes are of course welcome and a valid mode of practice. However, the *koinotopian* aim should be to change the totality of the subject’s modes of production. As Adorno puts it in the legendary discussion with Ernst Bloch, “Whatever utopia is, whatever can be imagined as utopia, this is the transformation of the totality.”⁴⁷ Finally, the form of “collectivity as inclusive and holistic overdetermination” rectifies the shortcomings of one-sided, solipsistic conceptions of the integral subject. Instead, the dependence of the subject on its/the Other forces the subject’s imagination to open up and include the Other’s utopian potentiality in order to add it to its own and thus create a common, inclusive, and holistic project that is as inexhaustible as the modes of the production of the common being. This renders *koinotopia* to a *praxeological* and *performative* concept of utopia that defies the epistemological limitations of the individu-

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch, “Something’s Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing,” in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, (tr.) J. Zipes and F. Mecklenburg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 3.

al's atomistic imagination and takes advantage of the subject's collective structuration to a collective. This is not to say that *koinotopia* is a harmonious or a peaceful process, or that its premise has to be a common, consensual, and programmatic basis. On the contrary, the particular goals and differentiated forms of practice that need to be implemented in order to correspond to the different modes of subjectivity production are to be crafted through the collective practices where the subject and its/the Other encounter each other. As Bloch, this time, puts it in the previously mentioned discussion, "[I]n that we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible."⁴⁸

In this light, *koinotopia* is more than just the utopian potentiality of yet another type of subjectivity. More importantly, *koinotopia* demands the fundamental transformation of the utopian project from contemplative imagery to practice or method, as Ruth Levitas puts it.⁴⁹ While the former suffices for merely depicting different desirable forms of life that express better versions of what we currently experience, *koinotopia* as a method is aware of the fact that the establishment of a different world can be accomplished and assessed only through the active participation of the Other on whom the subject depends. This inclusion of the Other is not one of neoliberal flexibility. Rather, it is again a matter of materialist necessity. Just as the subject cannot exist on its own since even in its "individual existence[, it] is at the same time a social being [*Gemeinwesen*]" (EPM, 102), the same subject can neither think (critique) nor act (solidarity) without the Other's partaking in forging the subject's future common world (utopia). If the expectations and promises that have always been associated with utopian thinking aim to "constantly shatter the present achievements and compromises of society and point to that which is not yet experienced in the human project of fulfilment and creation,"⁵⁰ this is not in favour of an "activity which opens human imagination beyond present limits."⁵¹ Rather, the "new and radically different/other ways of being and thinking"⁵² that *koinotopia* envisages find in the Other both their finite material precondition and the condition of their materialization. To this end,

⁴⁸ Adorno and Bloch, "Something's Missing," 3.

⁴⁹ See Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

⁵⁰ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵² Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopias* (London: Routledge, 1996), 56.

and against the assumption that “there *cannot* now be any great causes left to fight for,”⁵³ *koinotopia* discloses itself as a utopia worth fighting for. This utopia is not the solipsistic utopia of the metaphysical individual but the *koinotopia* of the subject as a common being that has incorporated the subject and its/the Other both into its way of becoming and in its way of being.

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⁵³ Krishan Kumar, *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society: New Theories of the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 155.