

The Superstructure and The Base – Paper II

But Marx was no Mechanical Materialist. The dominant materialism of his day was that espoused by the most radical of the scientists, but saw everything as mechanisms- as machines. Marx had learned from the master, Hegel, that such an approach was inadequate to deal with the total width and potentiality of Reality. It was an Engineers' Philosophy: a mechanical pragmatism, and never really went beyond "things". Its basic belief was that ALL individual fragments of Reality that were understood then, and would be understood in the future, would fit together into a complete causal system of explanation. They believed that everything from the tiniest fragments of Matter, all the way to Human Thinking could be explained in the *same terms*. This was NOT Marx's position, just as it had not been Hegel's position.

But, the difference was that Marx DID consider that all was Matter in Motion. He was a Materialist, but he also knew that all areas of Reality had their OWN Laws and Entities, they were NOT of identical stuff. There were Levels within Reality.

Marx rejected Gods, and Magic! Only Matter in Motion was addressed, but there were modes of matter in motion which delivered very different properties and Laws. He rejected the direct, determinism if the scientists as a fiction, and though everything in Human Society indeed WAS **dependant** upon the Economic Base, it was not directly **determined** by that Economic Base: you could not directly derive it from that Base!

On the contrary, such continuous, unmediated and causal sequences were impossible of explaining anything. The relationships were in fact in hierarchies of levels and layers, and each level was an Emergent gain – a **creation** of new modes and laws. The monolithic direct dependence was a myth. The connections between the Base and all elements in the Superstructure were diverse and multiply mediated, not merely simple and linear sequences.

They came to call this rich hierarchy above the Base, the Superstructure, and it was clearly part of the Marxist approach, that the Superstructure though ultimately dependant upon that Base, also has a certain and important independence.

It may NOT exist without its Base, but is not wholly determined by its Base.

Now, this surprising situation comes about because the explanatory linkages were both interrupted AND articulated by Level Change.

NOTE: At this point I am impelled to bring out my favourite quote from Modigliani who stated that,

“Art is the articulation of Form!”

I have long known what he meant in my own area of sculpture, but it seems that this was only an aspect of a much more profound and general statement, as it seems to apply beautifully to Emergent Levels too.

In modern terminology, we therefore talk about Emergences and Emergent Levels, but even such extra information does not tell us much. It amounts to a vague admission of “something” between the Base and the various elements of the Superstructure. At the time of Marx, there was not sufficient knowledge available for a fuller description of these phases or Levels, but research since that time in various areas has begun to clarify a few of the features that make Emergences happen, and that determine the nature, properties and relations of the various Emergent Levels.

Until recently, it could only be affirmed that the provision of detailed trajectories for such transitions were actually impossible to provide, while at the same time the straight-through dependence was indubitably in place. In other words, destruction of the Base, would also destroy its supported Hierarchy, so that the absolute dependence was definite, but its detailed nature and determinations were not.

To those trained in Formal Logic, and the classical ideas of explanation, such seemingly woolly descriptions would be dismissed as wholly inadequate, and indeed “a smokescreen” for the “believers” own inadequacies. But, the questions involved ARE the most profound of all those in Explanation. The scientists’ Reductionism, which is the “hoped for” embodiment of straight-through determinism has turned out to be a forlorn hope, and its Gaps, which are universally expected to be “filled in later”, are congenitally incapable of being supplied by Mankind’s present methodologies.

Though there ARE causal linkages, they are *inexpressible in terms of our present methods*, which are based on the assumption of Plurality.

For Plurality determines our technique of dividing each and every Whole into Parts, and then studying these separately and in detail. And the downwards hierarchy of those Parts into their own constituents, and so on *ad infinitum*, PROHIBITS a treatment of Emergences and Emergent Levels. This is because the crucial contributing features of these transitions were inretrievably dumped and forgotten WITHIN the pluralistic method.

If you have thrown away both Context and currently minor detail in your method of analysis, you will have also scuppered your chance of explaining a major revolutionary transition, such as an Emergence, because such overturns are SOURCED precisely in the very things you have thrown away.

Let us recap on this crucial decision.

The route to study and understanding, via a division of Wholes into constituent Parts, and by so doing eliminating completely the Context, is termed Pluralism. It is our method! Further, the isolation and extraction of these Parts from even inextricable minor processes is a fiction: these processes will not always be ignorable. These two – Context and Perturbation-like sub processes ARE the sources of subsequent Emergence, and to ignore them emasculates our explanations in these areas. They become quite simply inexplicable!

But, notice that is NOT a description of the Nature of Emergence, as much as it is a condemnation of our pluralist and simplifying methodology.

So, the Levels in the Superstructure are Emergent Levels, which may retain “in the last analysis” dependence on the Economic Base, but any hope of sweetly and predictably explaining things is scuppered by our flawed methodology.

We may have dependence, but NOT determinism! To understand this difference is the crux,

The same methodology that prohibits the explanation of Consciousness in terms of neurons, Thought in terms of Consciousness, Biology in terms of Physics, Physiology in terms of living cells AND ALL THE REST. They are NOT linked in a Reductionist way using our old methods of Explanation.

(1,040 words)