

The Dussel's concept of the Other: Marx's Ideas interpretation*

El concepto de Dussel del Otro: La interpretación de las ideas de Marx

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Artículo de Investigación

Resumen

El tema del *Otro* ocupa un lugar central en la obra de Dussel y es la base de muchas de sus otras ideas filosóficas. Al abordar el problema de la exclusión de grupos individuales y pueblos enteros de la historia mundial, Dussel intenta describir la situación del Otro y construye su concepto a partir de la noción de “trabajo vivo” tomada de *El Capital* de Marx. Al igual que el Otro es externo en relación con la totalidad europea occidental, el trabajador ocupa una posición externa en relación con el capital. Partiendo de esta idea, Dussel interpreta el concepto de “dependencia” como el movimiento

de plusvalía de un capital nacional menos desarrollado a otro más desarrollado. De este modo, caracteriza la posición del Otro en términos de exclusión económica y política. Dussel cree que el último Marx es un idealista. En su interpretación, *El Capital* no es únicamente una obra de economía política, sino también una obra de carácter ético. Como resultado, Dussel muestra que los “países del Tercer Mundo” producen capital global mientras permanecen fuera de él, y que el Otro no es sólo una categoría teórica abstracta, sino un individuo oprimido concreto.

Palabras clave: Latinoamérica, dependencia, el Otro, pensamiento nacional, Filosofía de la Liberación.

Historia del artículo / Article Info:

Recepción / Received: 13 de marzo del 2025

Evaluado / Evaluated: 09 de mayo del 2025

Aprobado / Accepted: 12 de mayo del 2025

* The research is an independent study conducted at the RUDN University

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Citación / Citation: Basmanov, A. (2025). The Dussel's concept of the Other: Marx's Ideas interpretation. *Cuestiones de Filosofía*, 11 (36), 161-177.
<https://doi.org/10.19053/uptc.01235095.v11.n36.2025.19072>



Basmanov, A. (2025). El concepto de Dussel del Otro: La interpretación de las Ideas de Marx. *Cuestiones de Filosofía*, 11 (36), 161-177.
<https://doi.org/10.19053/uptc.01235095.v11.n36.2025.19072>

Abstract

The theme of the *Other* occupies a central place in Dussel's work and is the basis for many of his other philosophical ideas. In addressing the problem of the exclusion of individual groups and entire peoples from world history, Dussel attempts to describe the situation of the Other and builds his concept on the notion of "living labour" taken from Marx's *Capital*. Just as the Other is external in relation to the Western European totality, the worker occupies an external position in relation to capital. Based on this idea, Dussel interprets the concept of "dependency" as the movement of surplus value from a less developed national capital to a more developed one. In this way, he characterizes the position of the Other in terms of economic and political exclusion. Dussel believes that the late Marx is an idealist. In his interpretation, *The Capital* is not only a work of political economics, but also a work with an ethical character. As a result, Dussel shows that "Third World countries" produce global capital while remaining outside it, and that the Other is not just an abstract theoretical category, but a concrete oppressed individual.

Keywords: Latin America, dependence, the Other, national thinking, philosophy of liberation.

Introduction

This article is devoted to the topic ‘The genesis of the concept of the Other in Dussel’s philosophy’. The theme of the Other occupies, perhaps, a central place in Dussel’s work and is a kind of basic setting and starting point for many other ideas of the philosopher designed to show the genesis and uniqueness of national thinking. What is the essence of Dussel’s concept of the Other, what are the origins and prerequisites for its formation?

The Philosophy of Liberation makes us think about the basic ideas on which the space of European philosophical discourse is built. Liberation philosophers manage to draw our attention to the horizons of the concept of ‘rationality’, which, from their point of view, are determined by cultural and historical features and cannot claim universality. In the context of the ‘liberation philosophy’, the concept of ‘universality’ becomes synonymous with enslavement.

The Dussel’s concept of the Other: Marx’s Ideas interpretation

Enrique Dussel, a philosopher born in Argentina, is one of the most famous and influential Latin American philosophers of our time. He attempts to justify the need for the liberation of oppressed social groups by referring to the categories of European philosophical thought, which he tries to give a special reading. The study of his work opens up the possibility for us to follow the interaction of European and non-European thought. Enrique Dussel, like no other, seeks dialogue with his Western colleagues in his works, analyzes their concepts and gives them a new interpretation within his system. It is formed largely as a result of the interdisciplinary approach applied by the Argentine thinker, when he analyzes the problems stated in his writings from the point of view of history, philosophy and theology.

The philosophy of Marxism, in its Dusselian interpretation, should provide us with invaluable help in understanding the radical views of the Argentine thinker, who aspires to the liberation of Latin American peoples. We will build our comparative analysis in the following sequence: first, we will turn to Dussel’s interpretation of Marx’s method, as well as to the concept of ‘living labor’. This will help us, on the one hand, to determine the place of the Argentine thinker in the extremely extensive Marxist tradition, and, on the other hand, will allow us to further achieve greater depth in the analysis of

the original Dussel's concepts. Secondly, it will be necessary to pay attention to Dussel's understanding of the Marxist category of 'dependence', which in turn will be of great help to us in the last part of the work, when we talk about the phenomenon of exclusion. Here it would make sense to focus on Dussel's attitude to Immanuel Wallerstein's theory, which describes the world through the concept of 'world-system', which the Argentine actively uses, giving it, of course, its own content.

Dussel turned to the works of Karl Marx, a classic of European socio-economic thought, in the mid-1970s, when he was forced to move from Argentina to Mexico. This period of his work is connected, among other things, with the philosopher's interest in the problem of exclusion of individual groups, entire peoples and continents from world history. Through Marxism, the Argentine philosopher hoped to open up new perspectives for criticism of the socio-economic system that had developed in Latin America as a result of its colonization. One of the most important tasks of the thinker was to create an original interpretation of Marx's works, which would be able to describe the reality surrounding the inhabitant of Central and South America. As we will see later, his approach to understanding the ideas of the classic German social thought differs markedly from those that existed in the Soviet Union and from those that were developed in Western Europe (the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt school, the Freudomarxism of Erich Fromm, the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser).

In the second half of the 20th century, particularly following the public dissemination of the *Economic and Philosophical manuscripts* (1844) in the public space at the end of the 1920s, a question arose among European social thinkers (at the suggestion of Althusser) about how to relate to the differences between the thoughts of the young and mature Marx. Dussel, who is familiar with various interpretations of the legacy of the German thinker, in his thought correlates with the concept of Althusser, who asserts an 'epistemological gap' between the Marx of *Economic and Philosophical manuscripts* and the Marx of *Capital*. The Argentinean takes an original position that allows adapting the conceptual core of Marxist theory to analyze Latin American reality and the continent's colonial (and later neoliberal) dependence on Europe.

The position of the Latin American thinker is close to the ideas of the French structuralist. He also recognizes the existence of a conceptual difference

between the early and late periods in the work of the classic communist. However, he looks at the problem from a different angle. His research interest is not focused on the ideas of the young Marx, which is typical for many thinkers, for example, Fromm. He is interested in *Capital*, as well as the *Economic Manuscript of 1861-1863* (see the works of Dussel, 2001; 1990a). At the same time, he, in contrast to Althusser—who argues for the need to overcome the influence of Hegel in Marx's interpretations (as the German thinker himself did in adulthood)—, argues that Marx has always remained influenced by the philosophy of idealism and this should be the starting point.

The basis of the methodology of the Argentine thinker is the principle of searching for the position of the Other in the philosophy of European thinkers. This is also typical of Marx's Husserl analysis. According to the Argentine thinker, it is through referring to the economic and political works written by Marx already in adulthood that he manages to discover the Other in the texts of the German thinker:

I didn't see Marx as a Marxist. For me, his theory turned out to be a means to gain an understanding of what it means to be poor. This is not about an individual, moral, or abstract level, but about what poverty is in economic, geopolitical, and historical terms. Understanding a beggar as the Other is different from how the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas used this term. When I talked to him, he couldn't understand why we found his ideas so interesting. Indeed, for us, the primary problem was poverty, not externality (Mahvish, 2011, p. 5).

Relying on both Marx and Levinas, Dussel builds his concept. We will consider his position to be "Levinasian Marxism" (Mendieta, 2003, p. 9).

At first, the Argentine tries to understand exactly how Marx deduces his concepts, in particular, 'living labor' and 'dependence'. He suggests doing this through a Marxist method that is understood in a certain way (for Dussel, it consists, as we will see, in moving from idealistic concepts to a specific historical situation). To substantiate his approach, Dussel turns to the problem of the German philosopher's understanding of the concept of 'science'. The latter appears in the works of a 19th-century thinker, from the point of view of a Latin American, as a critique of the entire socio-political system. Dussel believes that science according to Marx can be defined as "criticism

of phenomena” (Dussel, 2001, p. 188). In the manuscripts addressed by the Argentine, the German thinker provides a critical overview of the political economic tradition, questioning the scientific constructions of various economists. In the process of their reflections, they “skipped categories” (p. 188). Their constructions were contradictory, because they worked with abstractions that are not adequate to describe the existing reality. This leads to the fetishization of economic categories, each of which is embodied in a specific subject of public relations:

Interest-bearing capital is personified in the money capitalist, industrial capital in the industrial capitalist, rent-bearing capital in the landlord as the owner of the land, and finally, labor in the wage worker. As such fixed images, personified in independent personalities, who at the same time act as only representatives of personified things, they enter into competition and into the actual production process (Marx, 1964, p. 541).

Dussel gives another argument of Karl Marx, which he takes from *Capital*: “Vulgar political economy actually does nothing more than doctrinaire interpretation, systematization and justification of the ideas of the agents of bourgeois production, captured by the relations of this production” (Marx, 1962, p. 384)

For Marx, science –in Dussel’s understanding– is a movement that should reveal the connection between external manifestations and internal moments of phenomena, which will then allow him to ‘develop the concept’ (Dussel, 2001, p. 188). In the process of this development, a system of different categories appears. All categories are connected by a special relationship, when one requires the presence of the other. The creation of such a system without any gaps is an essential sign of what Marx, from Dussel’s point of view, means by science. The mistakes that some political economists find are the inefficiency of the analysis (skipping categories), mixing several categories. However, it is not the description of the connection between Marx’s philosophy and other economists of his time that interests the Latin American thinker. The Argentine philosopher concludes that “we are not very interested in historical description. We are more interested in the way that allowed Marx to carry out his criticism, the way he formulated his categories. Therefore, our task was the ‘archaeology of categories’” (p. 199)

To accomplish this task, Dussel needs to find a concept that would become the foundation for creating an extensive system of categories. An analysis

of the process of searching for this concept makes it possible to highlight the original facets of Dussel's interpretation of Marx. The described Marxist method of constructing a categorical system, from Dussel's point of view, combines the logical constructions of Hegel and Marx's *Capital*. In a certain sense, we can say that Dussel draws a parallel, identifies Hegelian ontology and Marxist economics.

It is worth noting that such a line of thought can be criticized. Marx does not create parallel terms to Hegel's in order to simply apply the ontological description given by the latter to the existing economic reality. He does not just seek to reformulate Hegel's philosophy, but suggests a 'reversal' of the relationship between the elements of its categorical structure. Louis Althusser characterized this feature as follows: "In Marx, both the terms and the relations between them change their nature and their meaning" (2006, p. 158). The Argentine philosopher suggests that the links between Hegelian and Marxist thought are closer. From this point of view, the influence of the former on the latter looks almost decisive. Dussel seeks to give an original answer to the question of whether Marx remained a Hegelian in his mature years and whether he used the Hegelian method to criticize the capitalist system of production. For this purpose, Dussel, as we will see, uses in his analysis some provisions of Schelling's philosophy. To conclude how right Dussel is, it is necessary to pay attention to how exactly he correlates concepts from the different two mentioned philosophical systems. The analysis of a short article on *Hegel, Schelling and Surplus Value*, in which Enrique Dussel outlines his position, will allow us to reveal the course of his thought (2006).

As it is well known, according to Marx, value has several types and is directly related to the category of 'commodity'. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the German philosopher observes that "every commodity is represented from two points of view: as a use value and as an exchange value" (1959, p. 13). In the interpretation of the Argentine thinker, the 'commodity' turns out to be the 'existence in existence' ('*Dasein*' in Hegel) of value. This follows from the fact that, according to Dussel, both types of value correspond to the categories that define existence in the system of Hegelian philosophy. Use value is what Hegel called 'quality', and exchange value is 'quantity'. In turn, money is what describes and unites the relationship between quality and quantity, i.e. between different types of value. They are the way the product exists. And already turning to the analysis of the movement

of the German philosopher's thought from the category of 'money' to the category of 'capital', Dussel notes the fundamental importance of the latter for Marx's system. It is the structure of the concept of "capital" that the Argentine, following the German thinker, tries to reveal through a range of other concepts: 'commodity', 'value', 'money'. This structure, according to Dussel, is copied from the Hegelian one.

However, Dussel also recognizes that Marx did not just borrow a way of thinking from Hegel, but created an original way of describing the structure of his basic concept –the concept of capital. Dussel finds an important difference in the systems of German thinkers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is precisely in him that lies the essence of Husserl's interpretation of Marx, which provides the Argentine with the opportunity to argumentatively substantiate his reflections on totality, exclusion and others. It is worth noting that Dussel understands 'Totality' as an all-encompassing unity, 'the totality of all that exists' (1985, p. 30). Hence, Dussel's 'totality' refers to the whole world, which sets the horizon of existence, the horizon of a specific historical situation in which a person finds himself, a horizon that excludes all multiplicity. This generally corresponds to Levinas' understanding of 'totality' (for example: "Totality consumes the multiplicity that the world contains" (Levinas, 2000, p. 224).

Dussel sees the main difference between Marx and Hegel in understanding essence as identity. Dussel recalls that, for Hegel, essence is "simple equality with oneself" (Hegel, 1929, p. 74). But with Marx, the situation is completely different. For him, capital does not coincide with itself. This happens because at the final moment of the existence of capital there is a surplus value that is absent at the initial moment of production. It is the latter that, in Dussel's interpretation, is a category parallel to the Hegelian 'foundation' (*Grund*). Where does this surplus value come from, which, in its essence, determines the final type of capital? Answering this question, Dussel makes an interesting historical and philosophical move, arguing that in order to overcome the identity inherent in Hegel's philosophy, Marx turned to Schelling's philosophy.

Dussel suggests that Marx was indeed trying to break with Hegelian influence in his later writings. However, he did this not from a materialistic standpoint, but based on the idealistic thought of one of the leading representatives of

German classical philosophy: Schelling. The identification of the connection between the thought of Marx and Schelling is not obvious and, combined with the integration of the thought of Marx and Levinas, forms the originality of Dussel's historical and philosophical analysis. It is necessary to point out the controversial position of the philosopher, which caused his criticism.

This position is indeed at odds with the generally accepted view of Marx and his attitude towards German idealism. For example, the Soviet researcher E. S. Linkov, who is most likely not familiar with the Dussel's way of thought, emphasizes that:

Marx and Engels were the first to point out the contrast between the initial and final periods of Schelling's philosophical activity, which was progressive only until 1806, when Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, made a huge step forward in comparison with the natural philosophical point of view (1973, p. 8).

That is, according to our compatriot, Marx did not consider Schelling as a source of inspiration for criticizing Hegel and creating a new socio-philosophical system. The Argentine philosopher, on the other hand, discovers a very important point in Schellingian's criticism of Hegel, which helps him to take a fresh look at Marx's philosophical constructions. Dussel strives to read Marx in the right way –to come to certain conclusions about the role of the Other in the context of criticism of the current socio-economic system. He does this based on Schelling and his *Philosophy of Revelation* (*Philosophie der Offenbarung*). Dussel's idea is that if capital in its final moment is not identical to itself, then there is something before it. Here he refers to Schelling's 12th lecture, in which the German thinker writes: "All our efforts were to find what is before and above existence (...) This has consistently led us to the concepts of pure being, pure being, and in the act of being as the potency of being" (2003, p. 303). What Schelling is looking for is the source of Being. For the Argentine philosopher, it is a source of capital, its transformation.

What is the basis of capital for Marx? This is the cost. The reason for this should be understood procedurally, since the cost is constantly increasing. In the final moment of capital, a value appears, including wages received for work that has spent a certain amount of time. However, the added value is created from the labor that is not paid to the worker. This means that it is

created from what is not present in capital, i.e., what is “before being and above it” as Schelling writes. This creation of value out of nothing is the point (speaking in terms of logic) that distinguishes Marx’s constructions from Hegel’s. On the other side of the source of capital is the source that creates surplus value. It turns out that Marx turns Hegel’s philosophy not from a materialistic point of view, but still does it from an idealistic standpoint, trying to find the reason for the non-identity of capital.

What is beyond the totality of capital? The answer to this question means Dussel’s transition from Schelling to Levinas, who spoke of exteriority precisely as something that precedes being. Dussel interprets the concept of exteriority in almost the same way as Levinas, however, he points out the need to see the exteriority of Another as a specific cultural and historical situation in which a person lives. Thus, Dussel defines the inability to see the Other as one of the disadvantages of Levinas’ system:

Despite the fact that Levinas was able to find the ‘external’ in his existential experience (which allowed him to criticize European thinking), his Other, according to Dussel, was never thought of in its definiteness as an Indian, an African, an Asian (Petiaxsheva, 2000, p. 151.)

For Dussel, the ‘place’ from which the author creates his work plays an important role in the interpretation of any texts. A similar approach applies to the philosophy of Karl Marx. It turns out that Dussel, who is influenced by Levinas, interprets Marx as being influenced by Schelling. This construction defines the movement of thought of the Argentine philosopher, who is looking for a category from Marx that helps to go beyond the totality of capital, into the realm of the external. This must be something that has not only theoretical, but also concrete historical significance, because Marx “criticizes not only texts (vulgar economists or classics of political economy), but, above all, capitalist reality” (Dussel, 2001, p. 190).

Dussel draws attention to Marx’s statement that “capital is the duping of the worker, and nothing more. Labor is everything” (Marx, 1964, pp. 268-269). It is here, where the Other (in this case, the worker) is located, that the space of exteriority opens. The Argentine philosopher notes the existence of different forms of labor: ‘living labor’ is opposed to ‘objectified labor’ as a product, a thing, a commodity. Living labor is outside of capital, while objectified labor is included in it. For Marx, this is a “purely ideal form of labor

existence” (Majdanskij, 2011, p. 116), which is an expression of the creative essence of human activity that has not yet had time to materialize into a commodity. ‘Living labor’, in Dussel’s interpretation, refers to a specific person. ‘Living labor’ as Dussel understands it, is the vital activity of a certain individual in specific cultural and historical conditions, it is the “actualization of subjectivity” (2001, p. 191). The Latin American philosopher believes that by taking this concept as a starting point, we can begin a critique of totality. This avoids fetishism, which is manifested in the mixing of two types of labor and, consequently, an attempt to analyze the capitalist system from within itself, which does not lead to any adequate result. Dussel tries to show that the German thinker starts in his constructions from the real physicality and subjectivity of a particular person. In this light, it seems to him that “Marx’s materialism is a historical, productive, anthropological materialism” (p. 192). The central and primary element of it, therefore, is a specific person. It is he who allows the totality of capital to exist, just as the exteriority of Another allows my Self to exist. Living labor is the source of all pricing, therefore, it is on the basis of it that criticism of the entire economic system is possible. The Argentine philosopher defines these relations (between living labor and capital) as ethical. Dussel goes even further, calling this criticism “transcendent criticism” (p. 193), since it, being an external criticism, opens up the possibility of questioning objectified labor, which is the main structural element of any economic system, including the one as it was seen by many socialists before Marx. It turns out that, in contrast to many Western social thinkers (in particular, Althusser), Dussel believes that the late Marx is an idealist, and *Capital* is not an economic literary work, but an ethical one.

A logical continuation of the arguments about exteriority and totality (‘living labor’ and capital) is the analysis of Marx’s understanding of the category of ‘dependence’, which describes the relationship between the center and the periphery of the capitalist world and allows for a better understanding of the relationship of the countries of Central and South America with the countries of the West. Dependence should, from Dussel’s point of view, be interpreted as “the movement of surplus value from a less developed national capital to a more developed one” (1990b, p. 73). Dependence itself is part of the competition of capital and is possible due to the contradiction between consumer and exchange values.

Since capital is often represented as a thing, the competition between capitals is rarely analyzed from the point of view of social relations, which,

according to the Argentine philosopher, constitute the essence of the relationship between labor and capital. They are social because they are human relations, face-to-face relations (p. 80). Competition exists not just between abstract economic entities, but specifically between individuals, between capitalists, and between the national bourgeoisie of several countries. This leads to the dominance of some over others, to the withdrawal of surplus value. And if living labor is forced to sell itself, then the capital of a less developed country is forced to participate in international competition. For Dussel, the ‘third world countries’ produce global capital while remaining outside its totality. The experience of Latin America, cited by Enrique Dussel (p. 89), shows that if a country refuses to participate in competition, it will be returned to the common system through military and violent intervention.

Dussel pays special attention to the recognition of the materiality of the Other. For Dussel, the Other is really ‘something physical’ (Sørensen, 2010, p. 94), as opposed to abstract metaphysical judgments. This position allows us to focus ethical judgments on the main thing –achieving a decent life for people. The tendency for physicality was largely borrowed by Dussel from Levinas. For the latter, addressing each other becomes possible only if the Other is perceived as a “Face” (1994, p. 117). It is also important to note that for Levinas, “Face” is mainly a category of ethics, which he understands as an attitude towards something radically different (Yevstropov, 2010, p. 101).

Dussel focuses on the material existence of the Other because the physicality, or using Levinas’ concept (Levinas, 2000, pp. 199-221), the “Face” of the Other is the starting point for understanding the process of liberation of the oppressed. The practice of liberation becomes the basis of philosophy of liberation. This changes the perspective: all the problems and themes of logic, philosophy of language, anthropology, metaphysics become visible in a new light and acquire a new meaning –philosophy becomes an instrument of liberation of the oppressed (Dussel, 1980).

Dussel’s interpretation of Marx’s ideas is aimed at solving problems internal to his philosophy. For Dussel, the Other is not just a theoretical category, but a specific oppressed individual. That is why he needed to find resources to describe the relationship between totality and externality as a relationship of economic and political suppression. That’s why he turns to Marx. Influenced

by Levinas, Dussel interprets Marx in a similar way, giving his philosophy the status of ethics. He does this because Dussel refuses to see the late Marx as a materialist. For him, the author of *Capital* tried to overcome the philosophical influence of Hegel from an idealistic standpoint, turning to the theoretical constructions of Schelling. It is from him, according to Dussel, that Marx borrows the idea that being is not identical to itself and there is something that defines it, but is beyond it (external to it). Dussel believes that for Marx, 'living labor' becomes such an external but defining category of the final moment of capital movement. Dussel uses this concept as a synonym for the phrase 'human labor' and even (judging by the context of its use in various works) sometimes as just 'man'. 'Living labor' is external to the totality, unlike 'objectified labor', which is a part of it. So it turns out that Dussel's Marxism is "Levinas' Marxism", which allows the philosopher of liberation to describe, based on his own position, the economic, political, social and cultural exclusion to which the peoples of Latin America, Asia, and Africa have been subjected.

In accordance with the above ideas, Dussel suggests that the dominance and seizure of surplus value by the center from the periphery is expressed in the robbery of the lives of specific people. Since it is live labor that is the source of this value, it is not the national bourgeoisie of less developed countries that is the victim of the current situation, but ordinary people who are forced to work so that other countries receive income. The masses of the people, as it seems to the Argentine philosopher, can resist the established system through a national revolution: "His proposed interpretation of Marx, which is antidogmatic and anthropological, proves the vitality of *Capital's* ideas" (Kolesnikov, 2023, p. 323). Also speaking of upcoming (and passing) "centrality" of European civilization Dussel suggests considering history as a constant development of interregional systems, each of which had its own center and periphery, but only one spread to the whole world (2013, p. 3).

Conclusion

Relying on both Marx and Levinas, Dussel builds his concept, which can be called 'Levinas Marxism'. Working with the problem of the exclusion of individual groups and entire peoples from world history, Dussel tries to describe the situation of the Other. He does this through the concept of 'living labor', borrowed from Marx's *Capital*. 'Living labor' is located outside of

capital and is related to a specific person. A person, a worker, has an external position in relation to capital, just as the Other is external in relation to the Western European totality. Using the interrelation of these categories, Dussel interprets the concept of ‘dependence’, which describes the relationship between the center and the periphery of the capitalist world, namely, as the movement of surplus value from a less developed national capital to a more developed one. As a result, the “third world countries” produce global capital while remaining outside its totality.

Thus, Dussel expands the understanding of the ‘Otherness’. He describes the relationship between totality and exteriority not only in notions of cultural and intellectual suppression, but also as an economic and political relationship. The Other is now not just an abstract theoretical category, but a concrete oppressed individual.

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