



Raniero Panzieri and workers' inquiry: The perspective of living labour, the function of science and the relationship between class and capital

Fabrizio Fasulo

abstract

This paper discusses the Raniero Panzieri workers' inquiry and hopes to contribute to a wider knowledge of Panzieri's thought. The role and the deep meaning of the workers' inquiry are parts of a larger and general view, developed by Panzieri about Marxism as a science of revolution and its relationship with the bourgeois disciplines and their capitalist uses. I try to illustrate how Panzieri establishes a profound connection between Marxism and the sociological discipline. Mature Marxism traces in the specificities of capitalist reality, thus giving the Marxian investigation specifically sociological foundations. According to Panzieri both class and capital must be specific objects of theoretical consideration, underlining above all how the working class – the subjective and conscious element, 'the conflicting and potentially antagonistic element' (Panzieri, 1976: 92) – does not derive automatically from the movement of capital. The scientific knowledge concerning living labour is then generated through the inquiry; an inquiry that is an integral part of political intervention. Panzieri considers the sociological discourse, circulating in neo-capitalism, as a capitalist use of science, aimed at integrating the working class into the planning of capital. Scientific tools and methods can however be socialistically used, once they are directed to producers' interests, and to the definition of another rationality, alternative to capital's quantitative one. Just as there is a capitalist use of science, there may be an antagonist and socialist use of it.

The role and function of theory in the relationship between class and capital, as well as the position of inquiry as knowledge production and political intervention in the face of basic contradictions of capitalist society, are expressed – perhaps

most clearly – in a lecture given by Raniero Panzieri in 1964¹. On that occasion Panzieri's contribution both helped to define the instruments of sociological survey and the theoretical, methodological and political issues subtended by the use of workers' inquiry. Furthermore, he also proposed an overall, general understanding of Marxism, more adequate to the capitalist society of that time, treating the question of the relationship between Marxism and 'bourgeois' disciplines.

Panzieri was opposed to the mistrust and disapproval shown by some forms of contemporary Marxism to sociology and the use of its tools, establishing a profound connection between Marxism and the sociological discipline. Mature Marxism, that is Marxism of *Capital* and of the *Critique of political economy*, in its critical apprehension of the ideological one-sidedness of political economy, traces in the specificities of capitalist reality the contradictions and the mystifications typical of that bourgeois political economy. It thus gives the Marxian investigation specifically sociological foundations:

Marxism – of the mature Marx – was born as sociology; what is *Capital*, as a critique of political economy, if not an outline of sociology? The basis of the critique of political economy is the accusation [...] of the unilateral character of political economy in itself [...]. The political economy that reduces the worker to a factor of production is seen, not in its falsehood, but in its limit, precisely in this: political economy claims to close the social reality within the confined framework of a particular mode of operation, and then accepts it as the best mode of operation, the natural one. But while in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and in all works of the young Marx this critique of political economy is then connected to a historical-philosophical vision of humanity and history [...] the Marx of *Capital* abandons this philosophical and metaphysical theme, [and] this criticism is directed only to a specific situation, that is the capitalist reality [...]. (Panzieri, 1976: 88)

Marxism is therefore regarded as sociology, a sociology as political science, as the science of revolution²:

1 The lecture was delivered at a seminar on workers' inquiry that took place on 12-14th September 1964 in Turin. The lecture was published posthumously in the fifth issue of *Quaderni Rossi* in April 1965 (Panzieri, 1965: 67-76). This essay was also republished in several anthologies by Dario Lanzardo (Panzieri, 1972a: 314-25), Sandro Mancini (Panzieri, 1976: 87-96), Stefano Merli (Panzieri, 1994: 121-8). Recently the essay has been republished also by Paolo Ferrero (Ferrero et al., 2006: 330-9). The paper is also available in English on this website: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en>. The next quotes from the essay will rely on the text published by Einaudi and curated by Mancini. All quotations, from now on, are my own translation.

2 Panzieri took part in the Italian debate about the role of sociology within the labor movement (Panzieri et al., 1956). A key moment of this debate was the 1956. The

If you have to give a general definition of Marxism I would say that is this: a sociology conceived of as political science, as a science of revolution. From this science of revolution every mystical significance is taken away, and it is then referred to rigorous observation, to scientific analysis. (Panzieri, 1976: 88)

Panzieri (1976: 88) denounces the existence of a 'current' that is traced back to some writings of Engels, in which a complete system is developed, a generic materialism and a dialectic extended both to social sciences and to physical ones. This, he argues, is contrary to this sociological and revolutionary component found in Marx.

This line recreates a 'metaphysics, which is both the metaphysics of the labour movement and the metaphysics of the tadpole and the frog', and it hides a 'mystical conception of the working class and of its historic mission' (Panzieri, 1976: 89). Its naturalistic objectivism makes it effectively impossible to demystify the class nature of the conditions of production, thus impeding the disclosure of the social relations of production, hidden behind the empirical and 'objective' crystallizations. Ferrero recognizes in these pages 'a clear distinction between Marxism as a science and Marxism as metaphysics, as a "grand narrative", as a reassuring ideology' (Ferrero et al., 2006: 41). The positive dimension of the sociology, derived from Marx, which distinguishes it from other sociologies, lies in the peculiarity of being born from the critique of political economy: that is, from the fallacy of the presumed universality which this science would aims for. This is a fallacy against which Marx declines to set a unilateral totality:

Because Marx's sociology arises from the critique of political economy, it comes from an ascertainment and an observation of the capitalist society, a dichotomous society. A society in which the unilateral representation of science – the science of political economy – leaves out the other half of reality. Treating the labour force only as part of the capital, according to Marx, causes in principle a limitation from the theoretical point of view and also an internal deformation to the system that is so constructed. (Panzieri, 1976: 89)

Panzieri reiterates what was already evident in his thinking about the concept of verification at the level of capital: that is, the dichotomous character of capitalist society, composed around two elements, in mutual antagonism: capital and working class. In contrast with the positions expressed by Tronti (who theorized

discussion around the role of sociology characterized the attempt to overcome, from left, the Stalinism, aiming to give new tools and practices to the labor movement theory. Magazines such as *Opinione* and *Ragionamenti* hosted this debate. For a wider and detailed study, see Lopez (2013). About the relationship of Panzieri with the sociological discipline I would like to point out the important role played by Panzieri during his period of work at the Italian publishing house Einaudi. During that time (1959-1963) Panzieri indeed edited several sociological studies, also promoting the translation of many non-Italian texts (Baranelli, 1985; 2006).

absolute priority – logical and historical – of the working class over capital), Panzieri sustains the inseparability of the two terms and confirms what Mancini (Mancini, 1977: 107) calls the intrinsically relational nature (*‘il carattere intrinsecamente relazionistico’*) of the class relationship that sees them involved, through the living-labour subduing, in the capital relation.

With his dichotomous view of capitalist society, Panzieri argues for the study of both, the movement of capital and the movement of labour force. The ‘science of revolution’ has thus a twofold object; it is not one-dimensional, because neither of the two movements can be deduced from the other. (Mancini, 1977: 109-10)

So, I think that the movement of the workforce, to which Panzieri refers, should relate also to the dialectic between class *in itself* and class *for itself*, between variable capital and the working class, between workforce and living labour. Panzieri, asserting the sociological character of Marxism, reiterates the fact that both class and capital must be specific objects of theoretical consideration, underlining above all how the working class – the subjective and conscious element, ‘the conflicting and potentially antagonistic element’ (Panzieri, 1976: 92) – does not derive automatically from the movement of capital:

Therefore, in the opinion of Marx, socialist sociological analysis (understood as political science, because it is an observation that pretends to overcome that one-sidedness and to reach the social reality in its entirety) is characterised by the specific consideration of the two fundamental classes that constitute it. I stress again the sociological character of Marx’s thought from this point of view: he refuses to identify the working class starting from the movement of capital, that is, he affirms is not possible to trace back automatically from the movement of capital to the study of the working class. The working class requires an absolutely scientific observation aside, both when it operates as a conflictual element, therefore capitalist, and when operates as antagonistic element, therefore anti-capitalist³. (Panzieri, 1976: 89-90)

-
- 3 As I will show later, Panzieri distinguished between ‘conflict’ and ‘antagonism’. He argues capitalism is indeed an inherently conflictual system, in which conflictuality between living-labour and capital is the inner motor of the capital development. Since his essay *On the capitalist use of machinery* and his studies on the fourth section of the first book of *The capital*, Panzieri sees development and innovation as the internal driving forces of capitalism itself. These forces constantly reacting to the living-labour insubordination, conflictually opposed to its transformation into variable-capital. If conflict is a part of the capitalist device – because of the capitalist pole is able to subsume it within its expansion process – antagonism is referred to a wider attempt. Antagonism indeed represents the historical affirmation of the working class, a radically new balance of society, a new political class organization able to prefigure and anticipate an overall new form of society and articulation of social needs, overcoming and incorporating the social organization founded on capital. Around this issue see Mancini (1977: 103): ‘It must gain the real terms of the conflict, which can then be transformed into antagonism. The transition from conflict to antagonism

Since it is not possible to reduce capital to the working class and vice versa, the study of both is necessary. Scientific knowledge concerning class is generated through the inquiry; an inquiry that is an integral part of political intervention. So, it is impossible to conceive of the results of the inquiry as an external knowledge of static objects.

The inquiry, approaches and ascertains the degree of workers' awareness, to determine the mode of its development – the object of its knowledge and its method are therefore a constitution of a conscious subjectivity. The rigorous use of scientific and sociological tools and the refusal of mystical and eschatological concepts of the class, do not mean, for Panzieri, adopting a detached model of the class knowledge. Rather, these factors involve the awareness that the knowledge level about class directly affects the class's own process of theoretical awareness and its political struggle.

Panzieri takes into consideration the great development of bourgeois sociology in his time. He considers the sociological *discourse*, circulating in neo-capitalism, as a use of science, aimed at integrating the working class into the planning of capital (as already pointed out in his 1961 essay on the capitalist use of machinery):

One can hazard a guess, in Marxian language, that capitalism, having lost classical thought in political economy [...], has, on the contrary, found its not-vulgar science in sociology. (Panzieri, 1976: 90)

Neo-capitalism requires sociology, because its Fordist paradigm must extend its accumulative rationality to the whole of society, by means of capitalist planning. It needs to ensure consensus and social reactions that develop from the productive sphere. Also, from the point of view of capitalist use of science, therefore, the concept of *extension of the factory into society* has important consequences. The arrival of neo-capitalism inaugurates a use of bourgeois science aimed at the management of consensus and the management of a rationality of accumulation. The latter is extended to the whole range of social relations, now subsumed by the capital relation:

At first, capitalism needs to investigate its own operating mechanisms. Later, as it matures, it needs instead to organize the study of consensus; it needs to study social reactions that emerge from its mechanisms. This clearly becomes all the more urgent for capitalism, as it develops and evolves to the upper phase, the planning phase, and, instead of property relations, it bases more and more of its

is the transformation of the class *itself* in the class *itself*, is the process of formation of class consciousness, is – as Lukacs writes – the proletariat which becomes “identical subject-object of history”.

stability and its power over the growing rationality of accumulation. (Panzieri, 1976: 90-1)

This is why Panzieri, in order to define the relationship between the non-Marxist sociology and the 'working class' sociology, uses a parallel to Marx's position on classical economics. Marx indeed does not reject classical economics inasmuch it's bourgeois. On the contrary, he subjects classical economics to a critique, and denounces its bias, one-sidedness and limits. Classical political economics is not able to consider these features of its own one-sidedness and, on the contrary, tries to sublimate them ideologically into their opposite. That's why classical political economics needed a critical but, after that, could be also used by the living labour point of view:

We can use, treat and criticize sociology as Marx did with classical political economy, that is, seeing it as a limited science (and, moreover, it is evident that, in the kind of inquiry that we are planning, there are already all the assumptions that go over the framework of current sociology). However, this means that what sociology knows, in general, is true, is not falsified in itself, but is, rather, something limited, which causes internal distortions. However, it keeps what Marx considered the character of a science, that is, an autonomy based on a scientific and logical rigor of coherence. (Panzieri, 1976: 91)

Panzieri complains about an ideological connotation, present in sociology and in the knowledge produced by capitalist society in general. This connotation, however, is not entirely false. The ideological character lies in the non-recognition of the foreignness of living labour, of its alienation and enslavement within the capitalist relation, in considering the working class only as variable capital. There is no negation of the totality of scientific knowledge, just because produced within the capitalist society. There is, if anything, an assumption of limitation, due to the ideological concealment of the rationality of accumulation, operating in scientific knowledge. This concealment also covers the nexus of class, the agent at the heart of the subsumption of knowledge to the needs of valorization of capital, as opposed to living labour. Therefore, there is no simple opposition between Marxism and bourgeois ideologies, around the respective poles of falsehood and truth⁴.

4 It is exactly the centrality of living labor that allows Panzieri to criticize Adorno: 'Adorno [...] does not see the proletariat, does not see the forces that, in the sphere of production, at the root, they can overthrow those processes. It then falls back to this humanitarian-existentialist position' (Panzieri, 1972c: 213). On the relationship between Panzieri and the Frankfurt School, see Meriggi (1975), Marramao (1975), D'Alessandro (2003) and Mancini (1977: 77-8), where it is also tracked down an interesting parallel between Panzieri and Hans Jürgen Krahel: 'Must be reported an interesting analogy between Panzieri's thought and the reflection initiated by H.J. Krahel, the most significant theoretical exponent of the new German Left. Indeed both

Ideology is thus the acceptance of the supposed neutrality of capital's rationality, of the economic structure and of the development of productive forces; ideology is the concealment of the class relationship, the relationship that is the pulsating core of the productive process. Such an ideology can therefore be traced even in orthodox Marxism that uncritically assumes the neutral logic of the economic development. Panzieri, on the contrary, since his essay *On the use of machinery into neo-capitalism* (Panzieri, 1961)⁵, has uncovered the fetishistic effects of capital, inherent to the same presumed objectivity of the production, and he has retrieved its constitutive class relationship, its constitutive class connotation and its command of living labour to extract value from it.

Even theory, therefore, must act symmetrically, coherent with the critique of fetishism, operating into the heart of production objectivity. Theory must find the fundamental contradiction of capitalist society, the contradiction between dead labour – accumulated under objective conditions and operating within the capital relationship – and living labour. The theory must assume, pre-emptively, the awareness of partiality, unspoken by the ideological sciences:

What characterizes the revolutionary perspective, in the theoretical field, is, instead, the attitude aimed at highlighting the separation between the capitalist conditions of production, of social life, and the subjectivity of living labor. (Mancini, 1977: 115)

It is no longer a simple opposition between truth and falsehood, but rather between an awareness of the dichotomous dialectic of society (and therefore the awareness of demystification of the same category of objectivity) and the supine assumption of the capitalist class relation.

This is why scientific tools and methods can be used, once they are directed to producers' interests, and to the definition of another rationality, alternative to

authors assimilate from the Frankfurt School the conceptual instrumentation for the critique of technocratic and planned form of capitalism, but reject, on the one hand, the split between ideology critique and political economy critique and, on the other hand, they reject the separation between theory and practice as of fact it has been made by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School. In reality, the substantive aspect that separates the two theorists of the New Left from the Critical Theory is the theory of the integration of the working class. It is therefore significant that Krahel [...] formulates, in respect of technical progress, the same criticism developed by Panzieri'. See also Krahel (1978: 322, 383).

- 5 The essay was published by Panzieri in the first issue of *Quaderni Rossi* in 1961 (Panzieri, 1961: 53-72). Also this essay was republished posthumously by several editors: (Panzieri, 1972a: 148-69), (Panzieri, 1976: 3-23), (Panzieri, 1994: 25-41); more recently the essay has been repropose by Paolo Ferrero (Ferrero et al., 2006: 308-24). The paper is also available in English on this website: <http://libcom.org/library/capalist-use-machinery-raniero-panzieri>.

capital's quantitative one. Just as there is a capitalist use of science, there may be an antagonist and socialist use of it.

Mancini points to Panzieri's 'keep[ing] in mind the distinction and the relationship between the level of analysis of society and the other levels of knowledge' (Mancini, 1977: 109). In fact, Panzieri thought it was possible to find a distinction between capital's rationality of accumulation and scientific knowledge in general. The latter is compromised by the concealment effect, due to fetishism, and partiality arises from it, but it is not at all dismissible in terms of a falsehood. In this regard Mancini points out that:

While the first [capital's rationality of accumulation] is entirely determined by the class relationship that shapes it, the second [scientific knowledge in general] is only affected by it, since it contains a specific irreducible residue, consisting of the knowledge that mankind has accumulated in its path. For this reason Panzieri speaks of capitalist rationality and antagonistic rationality, in reference to the mechanisms of social development, and of the contrasting [*contrapposto*] use of science [...], in reference to the general problems of knowledge. (Mancini, 1977: 116-7)

The revolutionary use of theory and knowledge depends on assuming the perspective of living labour, of its possible construction of a rationality opposed to capital planning rationality, which redefines and redirect the function of the knowledge accumulated by the society. In a society free of capitalism, objective conditions of production would assume completely different connotations, just as they would be subsumed under different social relations. Similarly, with living labour, rather than capital, at the centre of social relations, the socialist use of science would re-polarize and give new meaning to what was previously known to humans.

Panzieri's inquiry belongs in this framework. As primary level knowledge about the class and of the class, it constitutes the heuristic expression of the irreducibility of living labour to capital, and therefore an immediate translation of revolutionary theoretical needs:

I would say that the method of the inquiry [...] is of permanent political reference for us [...]; it means the refusal to draw from an analysis of the capital level, the analysis of the working class level. It means, in essence, that we want to repeat Lenin's proposition that the workers' movement is an encounter between socialism and the working class's spontaneous movement. That is, that in the working class spontaneous movement, [...] if there isn't an encounter with socialism, as something voluntary, scientific and conscious, then there is the class adversary's ideology. The method of the inquiry is therefore the method that should allow you to escape any form of mystical vision concerning workers' movement; it should ensure, always, a scientific observation of the working class consciousness level, and therefore it should also be the way to bring this

awareness to higher grades; from this point of view there is a definite continuity between the moment of the sociological observation, conducted with rigorous and serious criteria, and political action. (Panzieri, 1976: 92)

Panzieri is aware that revolutionary theory, beyond reflecting the objective determinations of capital, has to look to what Mancini (1977: 109) calls 'the intersubjective operations of living labour', from which to gain knowledge about workers' awareness, through a practice that is already a political action in itself. This is the sense of continuity between observation and political action, which are logically separable, but that belong together in a theory and action nexus, determined by the centrality of the struggle. It is the *a priori* assumption of the class instance, which directs the use of science and investigation to bring out the contents on which to implant political action. But the same cognitive moment belongs to a wider political action, since it is oriented from the latter, starting from the perspective of living labour.

The inquiry was designed 'as 'co-research' [*conricerca*], that is, research focussing mainly on working conditions and on the workers' political consciousness; a research that workers and intellectuals must lead together' (Mancini, 1977: 110). The object of the inquiry is at the same time the subject of the investigation, a subject involved in a simultaneous process of gaining awareness and therefore involved in a change occurring at the centre of the cognitive dynamic. This process lies beyond the boundaries of 'traditional' knowledge, because what is known, is acquired by itself (with the fundamental mediation, not vertically or hierarchical, of intellectuals) and it changes within the acquisition process itself. The knowledge, of which the inquiry is the cognitive instrument, defines then, not an objective model of truth, but, a politically characterized truth, understood as progressive and conscious acquisition, starting from a dialectic of negativity that dwells within the same subject. The constitution of a conscious, dialectical subjectivity is triggered by the inquiry.

Panzieri explains how the use of socialist sociology involves very precise choices in the heuristic field: for example, selecting antagonising topics as opposed to ones that can easily be absorbed in a simple conflictual dimension. This is a clear indication of the priority of the living labour perspective and the socialist hypothesis:

It is evident that the use of socialist sociology requires a rethinking, changing ones mind; it requires that these tools are studied in light of fundamental assumptions, which then can be summarized in one: the fact that conflicts can be transformed into antagonisms and therefore no longer be functional to the system (taking into account that the conflicts are functional to the system, because it is a system that goes on with conflicts). (Panzieri, 1976: 93)

The basis of the inquiry method is then the assumption of the radical experience of living labour and of its 'look', the assumption of the new society latent request, together with a total rejection of subordination. In moments of struggle and conflict, Panzieri suggests, we are to 'study the relationship between conflict and antagonism, that is, study the manner the system of values, expressed by the worker in normal times changes, and how values are replaced with alternative awareness' (Panzieri, 1976: 94). The necessity to investigate the relationship between workers' solidarity in times of struggle and the rejection of the capital system, implicitly brings the issue of prefiguration to the foreground:

It is basically to verify the extent to which workers are aware of claiming, in the face of an unequal society, a society of equals, and how much they are aware this can become a general value for the society, as a value of equality in front of the capitalist inequality⁶. (Panzieri, 1976: 94)

In this context, it is always necessary to refer to the level achieved by the capital development, confirming the need for the overcoming of the latter that the working class must be able to bring about. Here is the verification of the inquiry's purpose of political recomposition:

We have instrumental goals, obviously very important, which are represented by the fact that the inquiry is a correct method, effective and politically fruitful for getting in touch with the workers [...]: there isn't a gap or a contradiction between the inquiry and this work of political construction, but the inquiry is also a key aspect of this work of political construction. (Panzieri, 1976: 95)

The use of socialist inquiry, and in general the use of science theorized and proposed by Panzieri, defines a specific relationship between intellectuals and workers, thus establishing a specific role and function of intellectuals in the political and knowledge production process mediated by the inquiry itself:

[Panzieri] sees in the inquiry the tool to create a new positive relationship, [a new positive link], between intellectuals and workers, without any of the two political subjects denying, a priori, its own identity [...]. The inquiry therefore configures a new role for the intellectual, tied directly to the working class environment, that places side by side – without confusing – theoretical engagement and a political one. (Mancini, 1977: 110)

6 On the issue of values in Panzieri, see Mancini (1975: 215): 'Panzieri considers the communist values, such as conscious explication of the needs emerged in antagonistic struggles: they are, therefore, based on the needs and do not have an autonomous existence. The development of needs antagonistic in the new values, and their subsequent interiorization into the workers' consciousness, are important because they allow the worker antagonism stabilization and its materialization in the working class organization'.

In contrast to the positions expressed by *Classe Operaia*, and its denial of culture and cultural struggle (Mancini, 1977: 108 et seqq), Panzieri confers a significant role to the intellectuals: however, not in the sense of their separateness and externality to the class dynamics, bringing from the outside consciousness or political leadership⁷. This is instead the risk inherent in the position of Mario Tronti. The coincidence of tactics and the party, in fact, means that the intellectuals can assume the role of political organizers and tacticians of workers' autonomy (this, despite the intellectual function was officially rejected in the name of working class science).

For Panzieri, autonomy of the class is declined in the light of the theme, derived from Rodolfo Morandi⁸, of free institutions in which the class struggle itself is composed. Without wanting to dissolve the specific position of intellectuals, and in so doing ignore the heterogeneous distribution of knowledge in an unequal society, Panzieri involves intellectuals in a political process of class composition, in which they cooperate with workers, in the production of knowledge. Panzieri's analysis of neo-capitalism has shown how the subordination of labour to capital generates a new class composition, in which intellectuals and technicians⁹ become proletarians in the sense of an increasing dependence on capital, a growing dependence on a wage (even for those who possess education and culture):

Here's how the transformation of the working class must be seen: essentially of new relationships that are established between workers and technicians, in terms of the creation of new categories, and changes in the composition of the working class itself. (Panzieri, 1976: 95)

For Panzieri, the fact that intellectuals belong as part of the process of political class composition mediated by the inquiry is based on this aspect of the development of capital. Intellectual does not pretend to be what he is not. He does not simulate a 'workerism' of convenience as if he would melt, through a negation of himself, in an indistinct 'mass' of the oppressed, eschatologically considered. Instead he gives his contribution, through the inquiry, as an effective

7 Concerning the line of *Classe Operaia* on this subject see, however, the views expressed in Tronti, (2006: 246 et seqq) and in Asor Rosa (1973: 39-48). An interesting and detailed reconstruction of the debate is the one made by Trotta and Milana (2008) in their book, in which is also available a digital version of all the issues of the journal.

8 About Rodolfo Morandi, see Agosti (1971).

9 Panzieri uses the word 'tecnici', that means the cultured technical social stratum involved in the modern and advanced fordist planned industrial production. So it is not a traditional intellectual group (neither umanistic nor scientific in the classic sense) because operates directly under capital control in the productive field.

component involved in the whole process of socialization and generalization of the labour's enslavement to the self-expansion's capital cycle. According to the above reflections I think it is possible to dissolve the aporia Tomassini would identify right in intellectual function inside the construction of class strategy:

The vanguard function should foster the development of this autonomous strategy, without regarding it as a given in the structural conditions of economic development and without pretending to centralize its consciousness. However, the intellectual function, developed in minority status, often seems to be a prerequisite for the process of class recomposition. Nor do we understand how this external consciousness, which, while it denies its own separateness and is related to the quality of the real movement, may be internal to the process of recomposition of class. (Tomassini, 1975: 72)

Tomassini does not adequately consider the non-dogmatic concept of class, which Panzieri brings out from reflections on neo-capitalism: a concept that also includes the intellectual, as an element also subject to the general subordination of labour to capital, subject to the extension of the relations of production to the entire society, subject to generalization of the surplus value's law. This means that the intellectual is no longer an independent creator of culture and is no longer considered an unproductive worker. The extension of the factory into society¹⁰ implies that relations of production and, therefore, processes of valorisation, also involve the intellectual function. The intellectuals collaborate, as such, in the process of gaining awareness of the social whole and of its inherent contradiction. It becomes possible, in this way, the process of political composition of the class and the prospect of a shared knowledge, not separated from the leading role played by the subjectivity of living labour.

In this regard, Franco Momigliano writes, in the second issue of *Quaderni Rossi*, about the research method in QR:

The 'research' by the group, is seen as 'co-research', that is as research, which has an element of verification and validity in its own capacity to determine a process of participation, not only of the so-called 'active subjects' (such as the leaders of the trade union), but also of the so-called 'passive subjects' of social research (the workers organized in trade unions or not, workers involved in the struggles) [...]. These analyses were made, aiming to realize a particular situation, whereby:

- a. the worker becomes the protagonist not only of the struggle, but also of the research, within the company, on his condition in relation to the internal process of production;

¹⁰ This concept is not related to a simply internal enlargement of factories. It is, despite, the Marxian real subsumption process, in which capital relationship conquers new social territories, capital plan is generalized and the capitalist social relation dominates the living labor.

- b the social researcher does not conceive himself, in the moment of his investigation, as an outside objective observer, but as an active protagonist directly involved in the workers' struggle.

[...] The research itself is conceived as an element of solicitation to a new process of initiative and bottom-up participation in the formation of the organization [...]. (Momigliano, 1962: 100)

The inquiry, for Ferrero, must be an expression of:

The non-complete real subjugation of the class to capital. The inquiry explores the gap, the non-coincidence between the capitalist utopia of reducing workers to mere objects, to commodities, and the concrete reality of the class; the inquiry sheds light on the never completely realised real subsumption of labour to capital¹¹. (Ferrero et al., 2006: 42)

The method of the inquiry is, therefore, cognitive and practical simultaneously; inquiry arises as a phenomenological dimension of the subject-object dialectic characteristic of the class itself (because it is forced to deny itself, as a mere workforce), a dialectic that is a consequence of the dialectic of capitalist society. Bringing into light the becoming subject of the class – through comparison and verification with the other element of the dialectic, the level of development of capital – the inquiry unfolds a space of political action, a space of concrete anticipation, with an entire strategic horizon of possibility, enclosed in a society based on the community of labour:

The inquiry is an attempt to seize [...] the unexpressed possibility of the class. The inquiry is an attempt to identify the 'already but not yet' of the class. This centrality of the inquiry, that is, the knowledge of the class in its concrete existence and in its concrete contradiction, in its tension between being subject and object, allows Panzieri to break with two settings, largely present in Marxism [...]. The first is the one that tends to see the class [...] as in need of an external consciousness to guide and enlighten it [...]. It is the idea of the class that needs a Guide Party, an external consciousness of a minor subjectivity, never able to fully master the conflict with the class enemy [...]. The second trend [...] is instead the one that tends to see the class – by virtue of capitalist development – as a subject full and 'continuous', always operating, already fully self-reflecting [...]. In this second Marxist trend, directly by virtue of capitalist development, class is no longer a dialectical unity of subject-object, but directly a full subject [...]. The inquiry establishes Panzieri's political speech because it investigates the dialectic between subject and object, which is proper to class and identifies the concrete space of politics in the construction of the class subjectivity, that is always opposed by capital and never given once and for all. (Ferrero et al., 2006: 43-5)

11 Similar considerations are reiterated in Ferrero (2008: 94-6).

At the core of Panzieri's method there is therefore an awareness of the centrality of the 'possible' dimension: the possibility for the labour force to avoid reification, thus becoming class *for* itself, becoming an aware subject that could be a base of a transformed society; a possibility that is not deterministically guaranteed, but dialectically dependent on the development of capital's dominance. According to Miegge,

[...] the passage from the centrality of labour, in the production process, to the workers' struggle for power is not in fact spontaneous: it depends on the variables of autonomous organization and class consciousness. Here precisely lies the role of the inquiry. (Miegge, 2006: 192)

The political and theoretical frameworks within which we can insert Panzieri's concept of workers' inquiry are formed by the cognitive function of struggles: struggles must show, in effect, what capital is. All this allows us for a few brief remarks, regarding the topic of 'verification'¹² in Panzieri.

Workers' struggles thematize the subordination of class to the capital, and workers' claims express the working class level to the capital level. Indeed it is through the refusal and the needs expressed by the living labour subjectivity, that the most advanced point of development of the capital are demystified in their class mechanisms. So, thanks to the worker struggles, these points become non-ideologically knowable, and it is concretely possible to overcome them. The refusal expressed by workers' subjectivity demystifies the most advanced position of capitalist development. The level of worker consciousness, gained from the struggles and into the struggles, to be successful must therefore incorporate the overall capitalist relationship and be able to deal with the advanced levels of capital, overcome them. The social production based on the contradiction between capital and living labour, is centred on the despotism and the power of capital. The latter, with the increase of constant capital and of organic composition of capital, is likely to grow bigger. Therefore, only if the point of view expressed by the struggles is able to complete and get the whole relationship between capital and class, focusing on the subordination and despotism on which it is founded, would it be possible to overcome the society built on that

¹² The concept of 'verification' was very important in the last theoretical period of Panzieri and it is possible to view it strongly related with concepts as 'conflict' and 'antagonism'. He specially developed the concept of 'verification' in a lecture took place in Siena, in March 1962. The lecture was published for the first time posthumously, edited by V. Rieser and entitled *Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico*, in the twenty-ninth issue of *Quaderni Piacentini*, in January 1967 (Panzieri, 1967). Then the essay was also published by Lanzardo (Panzieri, 1972a: 240-66), Mancini (Panzieri, 1976: 25-50), Merli (Panzieri, 1994: 73-92). The next quotations from the essay will rely on the text published by Einaudi and curated by Mancini. All quotations, from now on, are my own translation.

relationship. Class and capital are contradicting terms, politically and ideologically the latter dominates and tries to absorb the contradiction itself. Capital is not a 'thing' but an ensemble of relationships. These relationships, being dominant, involve the class as part of a more general dialectic – a dialectic that involves the formation of the same class 'in itself', starting from variable capital. The verification of the level reached by the struggles must be placed, therefore, at the level of capital because of the set of social relations to overcome, the rationality to supplant, the set of objective conditions of production to redefine and renew, were established throughout the process of capitalist development.

We need to go to see what is the adversary, and if these struggles reveal the characteristic and objective traits of capital, or not; that is, you must go and see how capital is made, to decide, then, the political significance of these struggles. You have to have this verification: verification is always on the level of capital, can never be only within the worker level. Instead, the worker level is built seriously, only if it is raised to the level of capital, if he manages to dominate, to understand, to incorporate capital. [...] We can say that properly, the advanced nature of workers' struggles reveal, let us even say, advanced characteristics of capitalism, reveal, actually, the reality of today's capitalism. (Panzieri, 1976: 33)

What needs to be anticipated, prefigured, are then the trends of capitalist development. Of course living labour has not to anticipate the same capitalist production choices. Conversely it has to take an antagonistic position within the contradictions produced by capitalist development. According to the dialectical relationship between class and capital, a certain level of subordination and exploitation of labour gives a certain political content to the workers' claims, which they otherwise would not acquire:

This variable capital tends constantly to become working class and, tending to recognize the mankind that composes it and then to become working class, tends towards insubordination against the constant capital (even against himself as variable capital, which is very important to avoid a mystical concept of the working class). (Panzieri, 1976: 34)

The process of affirming free subjectivity therefore originates in the heart of the dialectical dynamic of capitalist society. The recognition of humanity reified by capital, must pass, dialectically, through the objective conditions that are prepared by capital itself, as it holds the levers of production and power. That is why struggles should be related to the level of capital to incorporate it, to enclose and redefine the entire sphere of social production.

The basis of the constitution of class, starting from the basic contradiction of a society governed by capital, is a subject-object dialectic. Panzieri considers this dialectic of subjective acquisition, and this rejection of objectification in the form

of variable capital as central. He identifies this dynamic with political and theoretical actions of the class. The rejection of ideologies and of integration, to ensure the workers recognise themselves as part of a worker collective, is what makes defining the process of class composition, and the creation of a society regulated by producers, possible.

The alternative rationality, of which living labour must be the bearer, thus comes from a refusal, by the class, of objective conditions prepared by capital. These conditions, however, involve the same workforce as such, as objectivity rationalized by capital in the form of variable capital. As variable capital, living labour must refuse itself because in this form is also part of the productive objectivity to be overcome, and must stand as subject, founding a new society.

If labour needs to overturn the dependency that sees it subordinated to capital, it must be able to incorporate the latter, anticipating its developments and its contradictions. It must provide a 'verification': this means that labour forces have not only to express the highest capitalist level. They have also to prove to be able to overcome capitalist society, reacting antagonistically to its contradictions and directing them to other forms of society. So it is necessary to develop the next process of class recomposition, the reconstruction of the collective worker and the affirmation of a social regulation of production. Starting from a productive moment, the relationship of class is already a political relationship. The centrality of the sphere of political mediation is not denied but rather extended to all production relations; it is no more confined only to the institutional level or at the state level. If we generalize the relation of production and the level of capital, we generalize the political relationship that underlies them:

Already in the factory, the class relationship tends to become a political relationship, a relationship of power. The sphere of political mediation not only does not disappear, but it is growing, and therefore the necessity of political action of the working class not only does not weaken, but rather is strengthened [...]. We must really see how, today, the political relationship of class, as political relationship, dominates every moment, all areas of the factory, of civil society, of the state. But capitalist development burns an older type of political mediation, old contents. Political mediation is no longer found only at the level of the state. (Panzieri, 1976: 45-6)

For Panzieri the planning of struggles consists of a unitary class composition process, but also of an awareness of the whole of the capitalist process:

The planning of the struggles corresponding to the level of capitalist planning, is not the sum of the new tensions, is not an automatic result of the new tensions

[...]. It is a process that can only be conceived as a process of awareness, of the whole of the process of capitalist unification¹³. (Panzieri, 1972b: 284)

The unification of struggles is in no way intended as an automatic and deterministic reflex to the trends of capital development. The class level, the subjective dimension, is not taken for granted, but is the result of a conscious and aware political intervention, mediated with the knowledge of the level of capital, but with no guaranteed outcomes:

Automatically, to the socialization of capital [...] does not correspond the planning of the struggle, does not correspond the working class. (Panzieri, 1972b: 285)

The thought of Panzieri is 'anticipatory' thought. He is able to articulate the latent conditions of possibility for the political action of the class, owing to a particular reflection on the nature of the contradiction between the working class and capital, and owing to a specific mode of action, the inquiry.

references

- Agosti, A. (1971) *Rodolfo Morandi. Il pensiero e l'azione politica*. Bari: Laterza.
- Asor Rosa, A. (1973) 'Fine della battaglia culturale', in Id., *Intellettuali e classe operaia*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Baranelli, L. (1985) 'Raniero Panzieri e la casa editrice Einaudi. Lettere e documenti 1959-1963', *Linea d'ombra*, 2(12): 64-75.
- Baranelli, L. (2006) 'Un ricordo di Raniero' in Ferrero, P. (ed.) et al. *Raniero Panzieri. Un uomo di frontiera* (2nd ed.). Milano: Edizioni Punto rosso / Carta.
- Ferrero, P. (Ed) et al. (2006) *Raniero Panzieri. Un uomo di frontiera* (2nd ed.). Milano: Edizioni Punto rosso / Carta.
- Ferrero, P. (2008) 'La condizione operaia e l'inchiesta', in Pugliese, E. (ed.) *L'inchiesta sociale in Italia*. Roma: Carocci.
- Krahl, H. J. (1978) *Costituzione e lotta di classe*. Milano: Jaka Book. Italian translation (by de Waal, S.) of Krahl, H. J. (1971) *Konstitution und Klassenkampf*. Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Neue Kritik KG.
- Lopez, A. (2013) *Sociologia e marxismo. Un dibattito degli anni Cinquanta*. Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura.
- Mancini, S. (1975) 'Due puntualizzazioni sull'interpretazione di Panzieri', *aut aut*, (149/150): 199-216.
- Mancini, S. (1977) *Socialismo e democrazia diretta. Introduzione a Raniero Panzieri*. Bari: Dedalo Libri.
- Marramao, G. (1975) 'Teoria della crisi e problematica della costituzione', *Critica marxista*, (2-3): 115-45.
- Meriggi, M. G. (1975) 'Raniero Panzieri e il "francofortismo": Il movimento operaio dall'apologia del piano "socialista" all'analisi di classe', *aut aut*, (149/150): 103-21. Now also in Id. (1978) *Composizione di classe e teoria del partito*. Bari: Dedalo libri.
- Miegge, M (2006) 'Raniero Panzieri e la questione del controllo operaio', in Ferrero, P.

13 The text is an excerpt of a discourse of Panzieri, held in a meeting of QR, which took place in Milan in November 1962.

- (ed.) et al. *Raniero Panzieri. Un uomo di frontiera* (2nd ed.). Milano: Edizioni Punto rosso / Carta.
- Momigliano, F. (1962) 'Possibilità e limiti dell'azione sindacale', *Quaderni Rossi*, (2): 99-115.
- Panzieri, R. et al. (1956) 'Politica e cultura. Cronaca di una discussione redazionale sui problemi attuali della cultura marxista in Italia', *Opinione*, (1): 41-8.
- Panzieri, R. (1961) 'Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo', *Quaderni Rossi*, (1): 53-72. Subsequently published also in Panzieri, R. (1972a) *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni;
- Panzieri, R. (1976) *Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico* (edited by Mancini S.). Torino: Einaudi;
- Panzieri, R. (1994) *Spontaneità e organizzazione. Gli anni dei «Quaderni Rossi» 1959-1964. Scritti scelti a cura di Stefano Merli* (edited by Merli S.). Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini Edizioni;
- Ferrero, P. (ed.) et al. (2006) *Raniero Panzieri. Un uomo di frontiera* (2nd ed.). Milano: Edizioni Punto rosso / Carta.
- Panzieri, R. (1965) 'Uso socialista dell'inchiesta operaia', *Quaderni Rossi*, (5): 67-76. Subsequently published also in Panzieri, R. (1972a) *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni;
- Panzieri, R. (1976) *Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico* (edited by Mancini S.). Torino: Einaudi;
- Panzieri, R. (1994) *Spontaneità e organizzazione. Gli anni dei «Quaderni Rossi» 1959-1964. Scritti scelti a cura di Stefano Merli* (edited by Merli S.). Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini Edizioni;
- Ferrero, P. (Ed) et al. (2006) *Raniero Panzieri. Un uomo di frontiera* (2nd ed.). Milano: Edizioni Punto rosso / Carta.
- Panzieri, R. (1967) 'Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico', *Quaderni Piacentini*, (29). Subsequently published also in Panzieri, R. (1972a) *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni;
- Panzieri, R. (1976) *Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico* (edited by Mancini S.). Torino: Einaudi;
- Panzieri, R. (1994) *Spontaneità e organizzazione. Gli anni dei «Quaderni Rossi» 1959-1964. Scritti scelti a cura di Stefano Merli* (edited by Merli S.). Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini Edizioni.
- Panzieri, R. (1972a) *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni.
- Panzieri, R. (1972b) 'Pianificazione delle lotte e pianificazione del capitale' in Id. *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni.
- Panzieri, R. (1972c) 'Relazione sul neocapitalismo' in Id. *La ripresa del marxismo-leninismo in Italia* (edited by Lanzardo D.). Milano: Sapere Edizioni.
- Panzieri, R. (1976) *Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico* (edited by Mancini S.). Torino: Einaudi.
- Panzieri, R. (1994) *Spontaneità e organizzazione. Gli anni dei «Quaderni Rossi» 1959-1964. Scritti scelti a cura di Stefano Merli* (edited by Merli S.). Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini Edizioni.
- Panzieri, R. (2005) 'The capitalist use of machinery: Marx versus the objectivists'. [<http://libcom.org/library/capalist-use-machinery-raniero-panzieri>].
- R. Tomassini, R. (1975) 'La ricomposizione di classe come nuovo partito operaio in Raniero Panzieri', *aut aut*, (149/150): 51-73.
- Tronti, M. (2006) *Operai e capitale* (1st ed. 1966). Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Trotta, G and Milana, F. (Eds) (2008) *L'operaismo degli anni sessanta. Da «Quaderni rossi» a «classe operaia»*. Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Panzieri, R. (1965) 'Socialist uses of workers' inquiry' (translated by Bove, A.). [<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en>].

the author

Fabrizio Fasulo received his PhD in '*Studi Culturali Europei*' (European Cultural Studies) from the University of Palermo. He has a philosophical background with a focus on the Italian Marxist theories of subjectivity. After his Master thesis, focusing on Raniero Panzieri's thought, his PhD dissertation examines some Italian social inquiries. Currently, his research interests mainly concern subaltern groups representation patterns, the Meridionalism debate and the Gramsci thought revolving around subalterns. Email: fabrizio_fasulo@libero.it