

## A Kind of Conclusion

### Against Full-Stops and Bookends?

*Alpesh Maisuria and Grant Banfield*

#### Introduction

Given the intention of this edited collection is to capture the stories of students, researchers, and academics grappling with critical realism, as the Editors, we thought it appropriate for at least two reasons that we do the same. First, if reasons are causes, as Bhaskar insisted, then our stories will (hopefully) give some causal context to the book. Second, and more importantly perhaps, is that our particular stories might be useful to others – especially those, like us, who draw on the work of Marx or are open to the possibilities that Marx might offer. In this chapter, we narrate our respective critical realism journeys (and their intersections) from our PhDs and beyond. This e-dialogue draws from a conversation that has been ongoing for more than 13 years. We offer this as a conclusion to the collection of works. But we are wary of closure, full-stops, and bookends. So, in the spirit of both the Marxian and Bhaskarian dialectic, the conclusion, we hope, serves as an invitation to others to come and explore critical realism.

**Grant:** Well, Alpesh, we have set ourselves the task of writing the final chapter. As you know, I was not completely comfortable with us having the final say. To position us at the beginning and end of the collection – like bookends keeping all between in order and in place – didn't represent what the project had become for me.

**Alpesh:** Yes. I understand what you say. And, to a certain extent, I share your reservations. The project – and if we define 'project' as this edited collection – has become more than what either of us anticipated.

**Grant:** Exactly. For example, in the process of working closely over time with all the contributors in the crafting of their chapters, I learned a lot. This was certainly the case in relation to theoretical issues and matters of applying critical realism across disciplines and contexts. But there was more to it than this. The back and forth we had with everyone in the writing process together with the phone calls and video calls hook-ups gave a life to the project that is more than what appears on these pages.

**Alpesh:** I get it. Our conversation and this final chapter could not be what it is without the exchanges we have had with the contributors. So, there is something wrong with us writing the 'full stop'. However, we must get *real* about this...

**Grant:** I know where you are going with this. We know each other too well! And I will agree with what you are about to say.

**Alpesh:** OK, the first reality check is to recognise that *we* brought the project (the book) into being. And, with that comes certain responsibilities.

**Grant:** Agreed! And that means that, while all contributors are authors *in* this project, we are the authors *of* the project. So, in critical realist terms, we are different *kinds* of authors.

**Alpesh:** With different responsibilities.

**Grant:** Exactly. This is simply a 1M critical realist acknowledgement of difference. I can now say to myself: ‘Get on with it, Grant, and begin putting in the full-stop’.

**Alpesh:** Ha, ha. Now *I* know where *you* are going! In giving attention to your suspicion of bookends and full-stops you are really working your way to a couple of points that are appropriate to a concluding chapter like this one. First, as we have seen, Bhaskar’s *dialectic* (with Marx) insists that we be wary of closure. However, we have transformative agency to act *in* and *on* the world, which requires making a mark. And wasn’t this a reason why we and all the other authors turned to critical realism in the first place? Full-stops and bookends are necessary and unavoidable if we are to get things *done* in the world – and this includes absencing absences.

**Grant:** You are right. Am I really that transparent? All of us, in the end, have no choice but to ‘get on with it’ – but only with the best knowledge available to us. So, what do you think my other point is?

**Alpesh:** I would say it has something to do with collaboration. The two of us have noted how much we have gained from working with the contributors.

**Grant:** Spot on. Social life is thoroughly collaborative. Or, I might say, a fully human life is necessarily a life *with* and *for* others. We must all be underlabourers not overlords. Eudaimonia rests on the realisation that the full flourishing of each depends on the flourishing of all. I was thinking of collaboration in this light. And this is not possible in a class society.

**Alpesh:** To be ruled by the logic of capital is to be condemned to a world of demi-reality.

**Grant:** Yes, a logic that Marx exposed in his three volumes of *Capital*. This draws us to the very thing that brought us both to critical realism and began our conversations nearly 15 years ago. We can now fulfil our responsibility to tell our story and stories. Our coming to critical realism has been through a desire to better *know* Marx and Marxism. Would this be fair?

**Alpesh:** I think so. For quite a while now we have been discussing the potential uses of critical realism to strengthen our scholarship and practice in what might be broadly described as the field of Marxist Sociology of Education, Critical Education, and ethnography (Maisuria and Beach, 2017). For me, it has taken the form of a comradely solidarity with very different types of collaborators that has been so important in the development of my appreciation of critical realism.

**Grant:** I agree Alpesh. Likewise, your involvement in my journey through Marxism, critical realism, and education has been significant. If this journey had a track, you helped me stay on it – or at least hold onto some vague sense that I knew where I was going! The value in having someone to bounce ideas off, share frustrations, and celebrate the little wins along the way cannot be overstated. We are fellow travellers. Both of us carry a commitment to radical and transformative education strongly influenced by Marx. However, it was our mutual interest in critical realism that brought our paths together. There have been many phone calls and Skype sessions between London and Adelaide over the years as we made our ways through and eventually beyond our PhDs. And, in those times, when we were on the same continent and in the same city, we continued those conversations – often over a curry and always with a little bit too much beer and wine if I recall. But fellow travellers do what fellow travellers must do.

Before we talk about the critical realism content of those conversations, can I ask you if you remember our first meeting and its context?

**Alpesh:** Ha – there’s a question. You were in England, Institute of Education in London, to speak at the inaugural *International Conference on Critical Realism and Education*. I came to your session mainly because I had to! What I mean is that My PhD supervisor, Tony Green, was a co-organiser and also presenting at the session where you gave your paper. I’m glad I did though. I recall you presented on *Critical Realist Impulses in Paul Willis’ Learning to Labour: Towards an Emergent Marxist Ethnography*.

**Alpesh:** Given where we are now, and where critical realism is after Bhaskar’s passing, it’s interesting to check back to reflect on that conference. There was a clear emphasis on education and also Marxism. But critical realism was nowhere near the mainstream. Let me read you the blurb:

This conference is designed to lay the basis for the development of an *International Centre for Advanced Studies in Critical Realism and Education*. In recent years there has been growing interest in the interface between critical realism and education, which makes this conference especially timely. Education is central to the critical realist project. On the other hand, critical realism is still, relatively speaking, a newcomer in the field of education and education studies, and only too rarely explicitly utilised in research or thematised in teaching. ... The bulk of the conference will address the development of a mediating level of theory and description between philosophy and the day-to-day concerns of educational practice. Throughout, the conference will attempt to initiate, develop, and enrich a two-way interaction between critical realist philosophy and educational research and practice.

At the time, I’m not sure that I had grasped the profound nature of what Roy was trying to achieve – it was brave and momentous. Let me explain: Marxism was (and still is) widely perceived as some sort of quirky hobby of a few eccentrics who were in schools of education, so those of us who synthesised Marxism and education were not taken very seriously at all; secondly, in my experience of readings groups and events, mainstream philosophy tended to be very conservative by sticking to theory and the classics concerning questions of knowledge rather than reality and the world. They probably would have seen as critical realism as a rival. So, Roy was stepping on people’s toes right from the start and ironically at a place called the *Institute of Education*!

**Alpesh:** Yes, really interesting. I am thinking that, if critical realism is to have an underlabouring role for Marxist science then critical realism’s relationship to Marxism must be examined. However, fissures have emerged among subscribers to critical realism, how would you characterise these?

**Grant:** When you talk of ‘fissures’, I take it you are referring to something like ‘disagreements’ within both critical realism and Marxism as well as to the nature of the relationship between the two. As I mentioned earlier, critical realism and Marxism do not provide doctrines for the faithful to blindly follow. Disagreement is a sign of life. Consistent agreement leads ultimately to death. Harmony is not unison. Life is not a search for ‘balance’.

To me, the important point rests in understanding the nature of the fissures (i.e., what those disagreements are *about*) and the weight they carry in moving forward with what, in the end, is an ethical project (i.e., what such ‘fissure work’ is ultimately *for* and *what* is at stake). I take this to be the nub of your question. It is, as I have said, what brought me to critical realism in the first place: I wanted to know and better understand the nature of the fissures in Marxism.

It is worth reminding ourselves that Bhaskar’s critical realism project (at least as it relates to the human sciences) was built on the resolution of what he identified as a number of persistent fissures or debilitating splits in the philosophy of the human sciences. As critical realists well know, these include: collectivism/individualism, structure/agency, cause/reason, mind/body, and fact/value (Bhaskar, 1998, xiii–xiv). According to Bhaskar, the fundamental split underlying all was the positivism/hermeneutics ‘antinomy’. It is this fissure that someone like myself who had had more

than a little postgraduate dabbling in social science methodology was well aware. And I can say that, in the process of my studies, I was schooled to take the hermeneutic side of that fracture. Not that I was subjected to overt indoctrination. It was just the times.

**Alpesh:** That time still exists. In my experience, most social science students at all levels are told they are not positivists so they are told that they MUST be working in the interpretivist paradigm or within constructivism. This is the default advice I see given to novice and emerging researchers.

**Grant:** It is interesting that this is not the case for the contributors to this book. Of course, they are a self-selecting group but the default, as you describe it, is not hegemonic. All of our accounts tell stories of dissatisfaction in one way or another with the positivism/hermeneutics split.

**Alpesh:** So, there is hope.

**Grant:** I think so – or would like to believe so. As far as my story is concerned – which begins with my time as a postgraduate student – the post-positivist push was in full swing. The only show in town was hermeneutics. We were to hold heavy structural and functional sociology at arm's length (for good reasons of course). As a young sociologist brought up on the 'Founding Fathers' approach I could see Durkheim and Weber slotting easily into the neat structural-interpretivist scheme of things. But Karl didn't seem to fit so easily. This bothered me. I was told he was a 'conflict theorist', and this was supposed to explain something. To me, it didn't explain much – only that he didn't fit. The bigger lesson I learnt for all this was that, if you don't fit, you'll have a new category invented for you so you will. The old scheme remains in place, nothing really changes, and the show rolls on. I was later to learn that making and trying to live in rigid boxes was not a good idea. Derek [Sayer \(1987\)](#) aptly called it the 'violence of abstraction'. So maybe you can see why Willis was such a revelation for me. It was a coming together (a resolution?) of hermeneutics (via ethnographic method) and Marxist theory (via a radical humanism).

**Alpesh:** I really like that phrase – bravo to Sayer for capturing the zeitgeist. While there were, of course, some orthodox Marxists who mistakenly did try to advance an economic/historical determinism and/or a rigid base super-structure model, equally I do think that perhaps, some anti/non-Marxists were intent on creating a strawman of all Marxist theory and its apparent lack of application to the real world. All of this was powerful and ubiquitous in the academy, and I almost got lost in trying to avoid structuralism while paying heed to culture, agency, and change; and, like many others, I briefly had an interest what *discourse* could offer, this was until critical realism came into my thinking while doing my PhD. Before critical realism, I was opening the door to one intellectual rabbit hole before quickly closing it only to find myself in another, and doing the same thing over and over again. Tell me more about your journey to steer through the conundrums that we've mentioned above.

**Grant:** OK, let me begin by fleshing out in a little more detail what brought me to critical realism in the first place. Like you, it was part of my PhD journey. My first PhD supervisor introduced me to critical realism. She insisted that Bhaskar's early work would provide an understanding of the materialist (and, more generally, realist) grounding to Marx's thinking she believed I needed to grasp. Her strategy was to set me on a course of intense reading. I was to suspend all reading that I thought was important and read selected works of Bhaskar. I was thrown into the critical realist deep end. Without a background in philosophy this was hard going: a steep climb! I am not sure how much of those works I got through in the time I was given. I am not even sure how much I understood! Whatever the case, this started a long process of reading Marx through Bhaskar and Bhaskar through Marx.

**Alpesh:** Ah yes, my experiences were similar with *Realist Theory of Science* and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Bhaskar, 1975, 1979), and then later *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (Bhaskar, 1986). It's therapeutic to hear you say you found them a slog too!

**Grant:** Yes, it certainly was a slog at times, but nonetheless rewarding. I wouldn't wind back the clock. This includes the long periods where I had no supervisor. Through intermissions and periods of non-enrolment I continued to read and to develop a growing respect for the underlabouring capacity of critical realism. I have to add that I did manage to formally complete a PhD. While I would have been quite happy continuing to craft my own (non-credentialed) intellectual journey, times in Australian universities were changing. Neoliberalism was biting and its managers had a different view of 'academic freedom' to the one in which I was socialised. It was time to 'get it done'. What about you?

**Alpesh:** Well, like you – and many of the contributors to this book – I was guided (read coerced!) to take-on critical realism. I say 'take-on' because it has been – and continues to be – a challenging encounter!

**Grant:** I whole-heartedly agree. And your honesty resonates with the ethos of this book – a project to encourage newcomers to critical realism. And the hard conceptual work that engaging with critical realism demands needs to be recognised and embraced. We must also support each other in this.

**Alpesh:** In the early days it was definitely a struggle – and I'm not afraid to admit that. The crop of introductory and intermediate books that are now available didn't exist back then. Your *Critical Realism for Marxist Sociology of Education* (Banfield, 2016) is very accessible. ... Just before I go on, are there any that you particularly recommend?

**Grant:** In my early 'slog', I found Andrew Collier's introductory text, *Critical Realism*, indispensable (Collier, 1994). It put Bhaskar's transcendental realism and critical naturalism into a language I could understand. Collier was one of my early critical realism/Marxian guides and it is to him that I still direct my students today. I'd also suggest two of Sean Creaven's books *Marxism and Realism* and *Emergentist Marxism* (Creaven, 2000, 2007). Furthermore, I would add the edited collection by Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood, and John Michael Roberts, *Critical Realism and Marxism*, as essential reading (Brown et al., 2002). Indeed, for those looking to see whether they wish to weigh into the field of critical realism in order to understand or clarify some of the persistent problems within Marxist thought then this could be a good first-off source.

**Alpesh:** Good shout. To add to that, I think Tom Fryer's *A Short guide to ontology and epistemology* is superb. Anyway, back to your question ... I began my journey during my undergraduate being taught by Dave Hill who is a well-known Marxist professor within Critical Education. I was greatly influenced by his and others' scholarship, which gave me a lens to understand myself, the world around me, and also myself in this world. Itching for more Marxism – which was largely absent at Goldsmiths University of London where I was reading my Masters – I started to attend at the *Marxism and Education: Renewing Dialogues* (MERD) seminar series convened by Glenn Rikowski and Tony Green in 2002 at the Institute of Education (IoE).

Tony became my PhD supervisor in late 2007 and, crucially for me, was influential in bringing Ram Roy Bhaskar to the IoE in 2007/8 as a *World Scholar* – a newly established title to recognise eminence. Tony had an emerging interest in critical realism to make Marxism more philosophically sophisticated. In my first months he introduced me to Roy who had moved into the office next door. Serendipity is kind!

**Grant:** Now you are really rubbing it in! I've always felt terribly jealous of your easy access to major players in critical realism – not to mention Roy Bhaskar himself – and the opportunities open to you

to attend regular critical realist and Marxist seminars. Being in Adelaide felt like being on the moon. Efforts were made to form an Australian critical realist network. But nothing came of it. Enough of my complaining. What was your PhD about?

**Alpesh:** It focused on social class in a social democracy where inequality levels were relatively lower and presumably social class more hidden. I used the case of Sweden. My concern was with exploring the way that class was in consciousness and practice, or not. This concern was investigated both in terms of how my participants reflected on themselves as classed beings and how they felt this articulated with their own actions; I was equally interested in how they perceived other people to situate themselves as classed beings in consciousness and practice. I was clearly working at the level of the empirically real and actual domains, and my supervisor was ushering me towards depth ontology – the deep laying mechanisms and structures that generate tendencies for social class to materialise in consciousness and practice in the form that my participants described to me. This intellectual excavation through explanatory critique of the deep real is now what I firmly believe ought to be the aim of social scientific research, which is unfortunately widely unacknowledged, especially in strong versions of interpretivism and constructivism. It means that most mainstream social science researchers stay at the level of events and that what is apprehended in experience through observations and interview methods. At best they acknowledge epistemological relativism but miss the importance of ontological stratification, and this includes the likes of Michael Young and his Social Realism (Young, 2008).

**Alpesh:** I think Young was trying to deal with ontology in some way. In a private correspondence, he wrote that:

*social realism* does not imply asserting a difference from critical realism, at least not in principle. ... It was explicitly developed to counter the various social constructivism's that had pervaded sociology of education since the 1970s. It has two aspects- first it refers to the *reality of the social* as external to our everyday perception of it and is in opposition to those such as Steve Shapin who assert that 'it is ourselves and not reality that are responsible for what we know'. Secondly social realism refers to the *reality of knowledge* that has emergent properties not dependent on or reducible to the practices or interests of knowers or the contexts in which it is acquired or produced.

(original emphasis)

I think there's a danger lurking in what he says. The primacy he gives to knowledge, risks falling foul of the epistemic fallacy.

**Grant:** There is nothing a critical realist would necessarily disagree with in what Young said to you. His 'first aspect' expresses 'common sense realism' such that "objects exist (and endure) independently of them being perceived" (Psillos, 2007, 399). This is fine. There is no critical realist quarrel here. However, to his 'second aspect', a flag of caution must be raised. From a critical realist vantage point, knowledge is real in its effects and is of the transitive dimension of science. Bhaskar's transitive-intransitive distinction is important here. Knowledge is *about* something. If this is what Young means then there is, as he claims, no difference, in principle, between social realism and critical realism. If not, then the path is open to reducing ontology to epistemology or conflating the transitive and intransitive domains of science. As you suggest, a danger is lurking.

**Alpesh:** For Marxist science and praxis, recognising the intransitive domain is crucial. Without it, depth explanation of mechanisms and structures is impossible. In the absence of a *real* response to the question of *what conditions enable the possibility of X to be realised*, emancipatory possibilities are thwarted. This is what critical realism brings to my Marxist research. And this started with my PhD.

I recall one early supervision meeting in 2008 where Tony led me next door to Roy's office. I talked to Roy about my interest in class, social democracy, and Sweden. Given Roy's Scandinavian affiliations and his self-identification as a socialist our interests aligned. The conversation that ensued was instrumental in cultivating my curiosity of critical realism. Roy instructed me (he was helpful and forceful simultaneously) to come to his reading group.

**Grant:** You are doing it again Alpesh! You are making me jealous!

**Alpesh:** I must say that I admire you coming to critical realism largely by yourself – these readings groups were so very helpful because most of us were novices, and also, meeting people like Bushra Sharar, Par Engholm, Birendra Singh, Rachel Rosen, and Sharon Tao was instructive for me to work out that critical realism could be productively deployed specifically as a meta-theory *with* Marxism for emancipatory practice. I reflect now on the value of this reading group. This approach characterised in the spirit of our ongoing video call *dialogues* and through this book is a continuation and the epitome of my point. It was at this time, around 2009 that I began my serious engagement with the Marxist method, utilising critical realism's depth ontology. Now before we elaborate on that and some of the critical realism toolkit, let me put a direct question to you stemming from criticism that I've encountered. Roy made it clear that critical realism is an aid to progressing socialism – hence the focus on Marxism at the first conference we talked about above. But let me play devils-advocate – should any Marxist be afraid of critical realism?

**Grant:** My short response would be that no Marxist should be afraid of critical realism. It is crucial to understand that critical realism is a theory about theories. We can describe critical realism as a meta-theory or, as Steve Fleetwood has put it, a 'full-blown' philosophy of science (Brown, Fleetwood and Roberts, 2002, 3). There are two important points from Fleetwood's observation that help me explain my short and confident response to your provocation. The first picks up on critical realism as a full-blown *philosophy*. We take from this that critical realism operates, conceptually, at higher levels of abstraction than do more concrete conceptual systems like Marxism. In other words, critical realism is a different *kind* of conceptual system than Marxism and, as such, cannot replace it. Nor does critical realism set out to do so. It is in virtue of this difference that a critical realism-Marxism relation is possible. And that relation is one where critical realism acts as an underlabourer to Marxism. Critical realism takes a humble and respectful role in working with – not on or against – Marxism. This also means that Marxist theorists and practitioners are not obliged to blindly accept all that critical realism purports to offer (see Banfield, 2022; Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003; Brown, Fleetwood and Roberts, 2002; Creaven, 2011).

The second point is that critical realism is a full-blown philosophy *of science*. While Marxism is a science, it does not have a fully developed philosophy of science.

**Alpesh:** Yes, the missing methodological fulcrum in Marx's work, this is the role of critical realism as Bhaskar put it.

**Grant:** Exactly. Marx did not attempt a philosophical explication of his scientific realism as he did for his materialist view of history. Historically, this has not only led to internal confusions within Marxism around the development of praxis but also provided grist for mill of external challenges to the relevance and coherence of Marxist theory. It is to the clearing up of these confusions and challenges that critical realism can claim to be of use. In this regard, it is important to register that Bhaskar not only believed there to be "an elective affinity between critical realism and historical materialism" (1991, 143) but also expressed the founding intent of critical realism "to support the science of history that marks had opened up" (2010, 134).

**Alpesh:** Critical realism provides the philosophy of science to Marxism's science for the purpose of explanatory and emancipatory leverage. At the time of coming to critical realism, I was grappling

with tensions within Marxism that you have put a spotlight on. I found that critical realism could help Marxism reject abstract utopian idealism and naïve empiricism. This would come via the revindication of ontology. The notion of underlying generative mechanisms that have the causal power to create a tendency towards acting on empirical and actual reality is perhaps the one that I attached the most value.

Critical realism has helped me unpack some of the history of Marxist theory. I am thinking of the young Hegelians and utopian socialists who posited an abstracted utopian idealism and reduced ontology into epistemology. It seemed that empirical reality and the deep real escaped them – they were at operating at the level of the actual, they had flattened reality. I began to be struck by how often I observed this epistemic fallacy. The issue of reality, existing and available to obtain, as well as being stratified and differentiated, and also changing is important in scientific research. All of this about the importance of what Roy called *seriousness*. My interest is advocating for a Marxism serious about bringing an alternative world into being. This means having an account of the world as it *really* is – which makes it possible to conceive of new worlds.

**Grant:** Indeed: getting serious in a *concrete* utopian sense. As Bhaskar has forcefully argued throughout his work, there is something fundamentally unserious about contemporary philosophy (which subsequently infects social theory and practice). Just as he showed how the early Greek philosophers were not immune to the influence of aristocratic power, relations of domination (Bhaskar, 1994), contemporary philosophy remains unserious about, as you put it, ‘the world as it really is’. As it generates more unserious questions, philosophy can say little about the real (personal, social, and ecological) grounds of our existence.

**Alpesh:** And Bhaskar lays blame firmly at the feet of Hume in this regard. In a reading group I recall him explaining what he meant by seriousness. While chuckling, Bhaskar ridiculed Hume who suggested that there is no better reason to leave the building he was in by the ground floor door than by the second-floor window. This is preposterous. If Hume really believed what he said, then he would, when convenient, exit the building by the second-floor window. Of course, Hume never did because he *knew* he would encounter the actually existing force of gravity and suffer real material consequences of his unseriousness. Roy continued his offensive suggesting that Hume had no better reason to prefer the destruction of his little finger to that of the whole world. Again, preposterous. Destroying the world would also destroy his finger. Hume’s finger is in the world. With ontological realism absent from Hume’s philosophy it is fundamentally unserious.

**Grant:** So, we have Humean empiricism and its substantial influence on the philosophy of science. No wonder Bhaskar said that, for an emancipatory social science to be possible, “philosophy has to be thoroughly ex-Humed” (1993, 359).

**Alpesh:** Yes, ex-Hume-ing for a Marxism that is serious about revolutionising the exploitive social relations of capital that negate human flourishing. Of course, this has been – and remains – a long struggle and we need a philosophical base to our praxis that is serious about the world (natural and social). This is the struggle against forms of exploitation and alienation.

**Grant:** Struggle – yes. How can such work be anything else? A struggle to be human. After all, as Marx reminds us via his famous adage of “the worst of architects and the best of bees” (1976, 284), it is the capacity for critical thought and consciousness that, at least in part, makes us human. So, to labour both *as* a human being *for* humanity is an act of love i.e., it is to live and, in doing so, realise the possibility of human life. Conversely, to have this capacity (read: potential, power) diminished or thwarted is to be condemned to a less than human life, like you say, an alienated existence. Given that it is our burden to be human, we are compelled to struggle for our collective fulfilment – which includes our (class) struggle for the material realisation of non-alienating social relations. Or, as Bhaskar might put it, this refers to our struggle to negate, to absent, social ills. However, the



conditions upon which the possibility of a non-alienated life depends may not be within easy reach. Or, indeed, we may actually conspire – wittingly or otherwise – to deny ourselves such conditions and such a life. However, we must recall that it is the nature of capitalism to mystify and obscure the way it systematically degrades human life along with the very natural ecology upon which our material existence rests (Maisuria, 2022).

So, I have no problems with shouting loud and clear that it is a labour of love to work towards the demystification and the ultimate transcendence of social relations that injure us all. Love is struggle. It demands uncovering and getting to know with great clarity the nature of those things that would deny us our humanity. Otherwise, how are we to absent them? Marx knew this well. This was his purpose in writing *Capital*: his greatest scientific work. This was an act of love. It was also hard work – as it must be: “There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits” (Marx, 1976: 104).

**Alpesh:** Viva la revolucion! And we benefit from a critical realism’s philosophy of science to underlabour a serious Marxism.

**Grant:** Indeed! Intellectual work is a revolutionary act and vital to revolutionary action.

**Alpesh:** We’re returning to my question earlier regarding the fear that some Marxists have of critical realism. I’ve been involved with critical realism since Roy came to the Institute of Education in 2007, and I feel as strongly as ever that critical realism is helpful for the raison d’être of the Marxist project of revolution for human flourishing. I feel like this because, as history through pandemics, wars, political trajectories, and irreversible environmental doom, we are brushing with the probable annihilation of our very existence; but simultaneously, we are also traversing the possibility of positive change too. We’ve got to grasp this reality through the philosophy of science that critical realism offers in conjunction with classics, such as Trotsky’s *Permanent Revolution* and his *The Revolution Betrayed* (Trotsky, 2004, 2020). I suppose this is what you profoundly said earlier: “Marx through Bhaskar and Bhaskar through Marx” to find our way through to hope and struggle for a different world – a socialist world – in which, as Bhaskar has put it echoing Marx, “the free flourishing of each is the condition of the free flourishing of all” (Bhaskar, 1993, 98).

**Grant:** With these words, we are forced to look beyond difference. They bring us to consider the reality of identity – or more specifically, perhaps, synchronic identity. Here we have the 1M–4D rhythmic or movement. I don’t know how many times I have mouthed ‘free flourishing of each is the condition of the free flourishing all’. However, in all honesty, for most of those times I don’t think I really grasped the dialectical significance of the words. I hope my conversations with Celina and Loretta captured in Chapter 12 reveal this. I was schooled in sociology which entailed the erection of particular conceptual bookends around my thinking. I got the sociological ‘flourishing for all’ bit. That was comfortably ‘out there’. However, the significance of the ‘flourishing of each’ passed me by. That was uncomfortably ‘in here’. I also hope the chapter shows how Celina and Loretta (who came to critical realism with different histories, interests, and motivations) played a significant part in bringing me to new realisations.

**Alpesh:** I get a sense of on-going open-ness in what you are saying.

**Grant:** Definitely. And this takes us back, I think, to where we began this conversation. Bookends are just convenient things that allow us to present other things in certain ways. They are not – and should not be – final or ultimate frames.

**Alpesh:** I get that. Marx agonised and spent years wondering how to present his critique of capital. The way he eventually set it out in Volume I was not how his research proceeded. Rather, he began his presentation where his analysis (or retroductive abstractions) ended – with the commodity.

**Grant:** That's a good example. And, in his presentation, he retraced (retrodictively) his steps back to where he started – in the concrete world of emerging capitalist life.

**Alpesh:** And full-stops?

**Grant:** They are simply pauses. They allow us to take a breath, reflect, and move on. Might I say: 'get on with it'? But above all, full-stops allow for the possibility – and offer the promise – of more to come.

**Alpesh:** Absolutely, practically this could be returning to our contributors in some years to circle back on their *stories of methodological encounters* published in this volume. ...

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