Harry Cleaver
Kropotkin, Self-valorization And The Crisis Of Marxism
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Abstract

The collapse of the socialist states and the ongoing crisis of Western capitalism — both brought on by pervasive grassroots opposition — demands a reconsideration of the issue of the transcendance of contemporary society by anarchists and Marxists of all stripes. Such a reconsideration should include a reexamination of the thinking of earlier revolutionaries as well as of their experiences within past social upheavals.

With respect to the issue of transcendence, there are traditions of Anarcho-Communism and Marxism whose similar approaches to the question of the recreation of society warrant renewed attention and comparative consideration. These include the analyses of Peter Kropotkin of how a new society could be seen to be emerging out of the materiality of capitalism and those of "autonomist" Marxists who have argued that the future can be found within the present processes of working class "self-valorization" — the diversity of autonomous efforts to craft new ways of being and new forms of social relations. This paper examines these two approaches and compares and contrasts their ways of handling the issue of builting alternatives to capitalism. It ends with a call for the application of these approches in the present crisis.

Kropotkin, Self-valorization And The Crisis Of Marxism Options

The collapse of the Soviet regime has left the peoples of Russia and of the other nations it once dominated in the midst of crisis. As the old social structures are torn apart a new set of threats has appeared but also a new freedom. This is the meaning of crisis: new dangers and new opportunities. On the one side, there is the obvious (and only partially televised) mad rush into the power vacuum created by the dissolution of communist party authority. Various coteries of would-be authorities are vying to fill the vacuum and concentrate power in their own hands. Some of these coteries are new; a variety of new political parties and

coalitions have been whipped together and now seek a piece of the power pie. Others are old; from the efforts of ex-CP members to regroup (or change their stripes) to the foreign forces, especially those of Western capitalism, which seek to reshape society in their own image. On the other side, less obvious and less discussed, the collapse of the communist regime by loosening the old mechanisms of domination and control has certainly created some wider possibilities for people to take the initiative, to act in their own interests, to take a larger control over their own lives.

The situation today seems to be both more volatile and more open than it has been at any time since 1917. For revolutionaries throughout the world the big questions are how and to what degree will the peoples of the former Soviet Union be able to take advantage of the situation to gain more freedom for the self-determination of their own lives?

At such a time, the reexamination of past revolutionary thought and experience becomes urgent. Although such moments of crisis are never the same, and always have to be grasped in their uniqueness, nevertheless there are obviously lessons to be gained from looking at the past and comparing the present with it. Therefore, it seems most appropriate in Russia today, in the midst of an open-ended social and political crisis, for anarchists — indeed for all those who would transcend the old social order — to reexamine the life and thought of Peter Kropotkin, certainly the deepest and most creative thinker of all the Russian revolutionary anarchists. Indeed, it was just such political archeology that allowed Kropotkin in the period of the Russian revolutions from 1905 to 1917 to use the French Revolution and the Paris Commune as vehicles to help his comrades and the Russian people think about the possibilities and dangers that lay along various paths of political change. Today, we have not only 1789 and 1871 as historical points of reference, but also the experience of the Russian Revolution and several others in the 20th Century.

In what follows I highlight one particular aspect of Kropotkin's thinking about revolutionary change and social evolution: his approach to the question of the emergence of post-capitalist society. His approach, I will argue, is not only one of enormous contemporary importance but is also close to one utilized by a small number of revolutionary Marxists in the West. Given this similarity, it seems to me, their work should be

rhetoric is no longer possible and in its place there is only the drab, alienating language of national and supranational state officials.

What Kropotkin did then, and what it would still behoove us to do today, was to seek out and understand the desires and self-activity of the people, and then to articulate them in ways which contribute both to their circulation and to their empowerment. The only way to honor Kropotkin's work in a meaningful way is to continue and develop it within the present context. Now, in the midst of crisis, let us seek out and support, as he did, the sources of popular innovation and strength, while at the same time identifying and combating all obstacles to their development.

As a stranger in this strange land, I would like to hear from the Russian participants at this conference about what they draw from Kropotkin that is of use to them in dealing with the present crisis? I would like to learn from them where the spirit of mutual aid still thrives amidst the ruins of the Soviet Union? I would like to hear what are its possibilities and what local dangers threaten its growth? In turn, I am sure that a few of us know something about the dynamics of these things on the other side of the world. So let us conspire together. Let us tell stories of struggles and movements and possibilities, the kind of stories Peter Kropotkin used to tell, and see what we can do together.

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appealing and exciting when he was alive and still give them a freshness that inspires. It was not just that he was an inveterate optimist whose hopes were bright (but doomed); it was rather that he knew how to see and to make others see the beginnings of better paths into the future. It has been that same character has made the contemporary work of "autonomist" Marxists so interesting. As a replacement for an exhausted and failed orthodoxy they offer a younger, stronger Marxism, one that has been regenerated within the struggles of real people and as such, has been able to articulate at least some elements of their desires and projects of self-valorization.

In either case, there are implications to be drawn from the methods employed. In the midst of crisis, as much of the world is today, including Russia and the other nations of the former USSR, ways forward must be sought in the self-activity of the people themselves. Only there can "solutions" be found, and only there can the power to implement such solutions be mustered. In 1917 Kropotkin saw the dangers in the crisis: both those of reaction and those disguised in the garb of revolution, whether parliamentary or Bolshevik. In 1992 we again need to identify and name the dangers: whether in the Congress of People's Deputies or in the offices of the International Monetary Fund. In 1917 Kropotkin also knew where to look for the power to oppose those dangers and to create the space for the Russian people to craft their own solutions: in the self-activity of workers and peasants. In 1992 we again need to look about us to see where such power may lie and work for its mobilization, both within Russia and without for it is no longer as isolated as it was then and the experience of the last two decades have taught that for all peoples everywhere, an important source of support for self- realization lies in the mobilizations of others, often far away.[24] In 1917, as we know, the power of workers to resist both reaction and centralization proved inadequate partly because the spokespersons of the later cloaked their intentions behind a bright rhetoric of revolution. Today, in 1992, such

[24] The examples are legion but most obvious are those of Vietnam, South Africa, Nicaragua and Palestine. In each case it has only been through the mobilization of international support that enough space and resources could be gained to keep the struggles for autonomy alive.

of interest to those inspired by Kropotkin's just as they should find in Kropotkin's efforts inspiration for their own.

Kropotkin and the Transcendence of Capitalism

There are many different issues involved in the general notion of "transcending", or going beyond, the current social order. As a revolutionary militant Kropotkin was acutely aware of many of these, both practical issues of political struggle and more abstract issues of the character of human social evolution. From the time he began to participate actively in anarchist politics, he was involved in evaluating and embracing or rejecting a variety of political tactics and strategies: e.g., terrorist politics of the deed (like assasination attempts against the Tsar), tactics of expropriation (armed robberies), revolutionary propaganda (contributions to bourgeois journals, the publication of militant newspapers, the preparation of scientific book-length treatises), the stance to adopt vis a vis trade unionism and syndicalism or the activities of other political groups (social-democratic parliamentarism, the formation of the soviets, Bolshevik centralism) and the role to play in such world-historical events as World War I and the Russian Revolutions.

At the same time, however, Kropotkin sought to base such judgements in a more general understanding of the nature of human society and of the historical character of its evolution. It was to provide such a general understanding that he pursued his researches on "mutual aid", published a variety of articles on that subject and eventually a substantial book containing a considerable mass of collected data. That work was not merely a scientific critique of Huxley's narrow Darwinism, it was also aimed at providing a foundation for his anarcho-communist politics by demonstrating that there was an inherent tendency in human society, as well as in a variety of other animal societies, for individuals to cooperate with other members of their species and help each other rather than to compete in a war of all against all.

In his research he traced the manifestation of the "law of mutual aid" down through history. He found it sometimes triumphant, sometimes defeated by the contradictory forces of competition and conflict but always present and providing the foundation for recurrent efforts at cooperative self-emancipation from various forms of domination (the state, institutional religion, capitalism).

In this founding of his politics in an analysis of a continuing and developing aspect of human society, Kropotkin differentiated himself from all utopian approaches to the creation of a new society. On the one hand, he was obviously sympathetic to the efforts of some of his predecessors those he called "modern socialists". On the other hand, he was hostile to the "Jacobin Utopias" of revolutionary centralizers.[1] He came to be quite explicit about his differences with those who would draw up blueprints for the future. "As to the method followed by the anarchist thinker," he wrote in 1887, "it is entirely different from that followed by the utopists . . . He studies human society as it is now and was in the past . . . tries to discover its tendencies, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes."[2] Thus, Woodcock's characterization of Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* (1892) as a "proposition" rather than a utopia must be judged inadequate. In that book Kropotkin was presenting the results of research into those concrete developments in the present which constituted elements of a post-capitalist society. He was not just sketching "how a different kind of society might begin to emerge". He was showing how the future was already appearing in the present![3]

[1] For an example of Kropotkin's sympathetic comments on the utopians see his preface to (Kropotkin 1906). On Fourier's influence on Kropotkin and other Russian anarchists see (Avrich 1967, p.36) , (Woodcock and Avakumovic 19 , p. 317) , and (Cahm 1989, pp. 7, 8, 11) . For his attack on the "Jacobin Utopias" see (Kropotkin 1882), republished in (Kropotkin 1885), and later included in (Kropotkin 1892, 1906).

[2] Quoted from (Kropotkin 1887). Reprinted in (Baldwin 1970, pp. 46–78). Kropotkin repeated the same argument in almost the same words some 23 years later in (Kropotkin 1910).

[3] The phrase is Woodcock's in his introduction to *The Conquest of Bread*; the emphasis is mine.

"official" work but in the pursuit of their (and their friends') own interests. What has been striking over the last few years has been the constitution of a proliferating network of networks almost totally devoted both to the subversion of the current order and to the elaboration of autonomous communities of like-minded people connected in non-hierarchical, rhizomatic fashion purely by the commonality of their desires. Examples include not only independent networks like PeaceNet, EcoNet, or the European Counter Network, but also radical nets within official nets, such as Pen-L (the Progressive Economist Network) and Activ-L (the Activist Mailing List) within Listserv on BITNET.

What needs to be emphasized here is that these networks are not constituted merely by "computer nerds" — introverted middle class kids who like to play with computers — but by far the greater number of participants in these collectivities are workers in a diverse array of institutions. While some networks such as the Progressive Economist Network may be constituted mainly by academics, others such as PeaceNet or the European Counter Network involve people in all kinds of activity and all kinds of struggle. What has been remarkable about the proliferation of the "personal" computer in the U.S. (which is more extensive than anywhere else) has been the way it has rapidly evolved into a gateway of communication and mobilization linking otherwise isolated people and movements. In striking contrast to the first generation of arcade-style computer games, which were widely interpreted as contributing (like television) to the collapse of social being into screen-glued and purely reactive protoplasm, the modem and the spread of communication nets are providing the sinew of a growth of large scale collective social cooperation in dramatic ways.

The Implications

The common element in these two approaches to the problem of transcending capitalism is the search for the future in the present, the identification of already existing activities which embody new, alternative forms of social cooperation and ways of being. This search and its results are, it seems to me, what made Kropotkin's research and writings so

What these Marxists have shown is how this creation of the *fabbrica diffusa* was initiated and carried through by the workers themselves so powerfully and so autonomously as to force capital to adapt. What study of a parallel evolution in the Parisian garment industry has revealed is a new level of cooperative self-management by highly independent workers.[21]

At a much broader level, indeed to some degree at a global level, we can also see how computer communication networks are being, increasingly, appropriated by people for their own uses. Originally constructed and operated to facilitate the development of technology at the service of capital (ARPANET), contemporary networks (e.g. INTERNET, BITNET) have not only been largely constructed by the collectivities which use them — and retain the material stamp of that autonomy in their uncentralized and fluid technical organization — but constitute a terrain of constant conflict between capitalist attempts at reappropriation and the fierce allegiance of most users to freedom of use and "movement" throughout the "cyber" space they have created and constantly recreate. The most visible evidence of this autonomy, and of the class character of the confrontation involved, is the conflict between the "hackers" who repeatedly break down the barriers to free movement created by capital in its attempt to harness and control these networks and the state.[22] They mostly became visible in the U.S. as a result of the recent wave of inept state actions aimed at disrupting and repressing their activities.[23]

Less visible but more important are the myriad participants of the networks who, operating from personal or institutional (academic, corporate, or state) entry points, utilize the technology not only for their

[21] *Fabbrica diffusa* translates as decentralized or diffused factory. See (*Quaderni di Territorio* 1978) and (Mattera 1980). This analysis has been partly based on a study of working class self-activity in the Italian and French garment industries. (Negri, Lazzarato and Santilli, 1990).

[22] See (Levy 1984).

[23] See (Sterling 1992). Other state interventions have occurred through juridical and police actions in defense of "intellectual property rights" (i.e., the control over the reproduction of software) against the pervasive "pirating" and sharing of programs. The communist character of the free redistribution of innovation is apparent and has taken legal form in the proliferation of "shareware" and "freeware" widely available for downloading from computer networks.

This focus on tendencies, or developing patterns of concrete behavior, differentiated his approach from both early utopians and later Marxist-Leninists by abandoning the Kantian "ought" in favor of the scientific study of what is already coming to be.[4] Neither Fourier nor Owen hesitated to spell out the way they felt society ought to be organized, from cooperatives to phalansteries. Nor were Lenin and his Bolshevik allies reluctant to specify, in considerable detail, the way work should be organized (Taylorism and competition) and how social decision-making ought to be arranged (top down through party administration and central planning).[5]

Kropotkin deepened the research necessary to root his politics in the concrete trends of the present in the later 1880s and 1890s. Settled in London after release from the French prison at Clairvaux, he was able to devote much more of his time to research. It was the work of the next few years — those leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1905 — that provided the material for the articles on mutual aid, industrial decentralization, the division of labor, agricultural development, and so on, that would be collected to form the three books in which he provided a vision of the future rooted in the past and the present: *The Conquest of Bread* (1892, 1906), *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (1899) and *Mutual Aid* (1902).

Kropotkin's researches into the actual working of society both revealed to him, and then came to be guided by, a general principle which he treated most systematically in his writings on mutual aid. The progression of human evolution (including periodic revolution), he argued,

[4] Even though Kropotkin's earliest movement toward revolutionary politics was motivated, in part, by his observations of proto-communist social behavior (in Siberia and in the Swiss Jura), his focus on actual tendencies rather than ideal "oughts" and "shoulds" emerged out of his political work over a period of years. His early 1873 essay for the Chaikovsky Circle "Must We Occupy Ourselves With an Examination of the Ideal of a Future Society?", for example, is replete with "shoulds" and lacks the focus on the future in the present which comes to be so characteristic of his later work. See (Kropotkin 1873, pp. 46–116).

[5] See, for example, (Lenin 1918) . At least in the case of the early utopians, they sought to imagine better alternatives to the existing order; whereas Lenin, as the cited essay illustrates, was too often all too quick to simply adapt the most sophisticated capitalist methods.

occurred through the working out of the conflicts between the "law of mutual struggle" and the "law of mutual aid". What this meant empirically was that one could always find, at any point in history, or within the social context of ones' own struggles, divergent manifestations of these forces. On the one side were the institutions and behaviors of mutual struggle such as narrow-minded individualism, competition, the concentration of landed and industrial property, capitalist exploitation, the state and war. On the other side were those of mutual aid such as cooperation in production, village folkmotes, communal celebrations, trade unionism and syndicalism, strikes, political and social associations. However, in Kropotkin's view, these "laws" were not so evenly balanced as to leave the course of human history totally indeterminant. On the contrary, he thought that the law of mutual aid could be seen, through the course of history, to be ascendant. Within the context of the 19 Century, he argued, not only the survival of the peasant village but also the rapid growth of industrial progress was due primarily to the growing scale and efficacy of cooperation, not "competition" as capitalist ideologs always argued. "For industrial progress", he wrote, "mutual and close intercourse certainly are, as they have been, much more advantageous than mutual struggle."[6] And if the development and expansion of mutual aid lay at the heart of human progress, then it was only logical to base both ethics and politics on this understanding. The work of the anarchist was to attack the impediments to this development and to help organize its growth.[7]

In his researches then, Kropotkin sought to discover, and to separate as much as possible for the sake of clarity, the contradictory embodiments of these two tendencies. Sometimes this was relatively easy — as in the case of the survival or rebirth of peasant village communes. These lived, or were reborn, in relative geographical and cultural isolation and their communal institutions and behaviors could be, and indeed had been, studied (by the populists) directly. It was not hard to demonstrate

[6] "Conclusion" to (Kropotkin 1902, p. 233) .

[7] At the level of ethics, Kropotkin's "ought" never disappeared. What changed was that he came to root his prescriptions in a detailed analysis of what was already going on. Thus his anarchist calls for the transcendence of capitalism were not merely anguished moral protests but intended to articulate the forces of change already at work.

capitalist control.[19] Within the interpersonal interactions and exchanges of information that they associate with the "computer and informational society", these theorists believe to have identified an increasingly collective appropriation of (i.e., control over) "communication." The analysis runs as follows: the period of mass production was characterized by radical divisions between and within mental and manual labor (both within and outside of the factory) that limited daily participation in any kind of collective system of interactive communication to a small minority of skilled workers (e.g., engineers and scientists) — this was a continuation of the same divisions both Kropotkin and Marx condemned. However, the dynamics of the class struggle has increasingly forced a spatial and temporal recomposition of work that is undermining that division. On the one hand, automation has been dramatically reducing the role of simple manual labor — increasingly in the "service" sector as well as in manufacturing. At the same time, the needs of global coordination and continuous innovation have expanded not only the role of mental labor but its collective character, creating ever more jobs that require the manipulation of information flows, intelligent and informed decision making within production, independent initiative, creativity and the coordination of complex networks of social cooperation.[20] The essential point is that at a social level, these developments embody the adaptation of capitalist command to the emergence of an increasingly independent collective subject whose self-organization of essentially intellectual work and play repeatedly outruns capital's ability to limit and control it. The pattern discovered in the case of the garment industry in the Veneto region of Italy provides a striking modern illustration of that movement toward the villages of which Kropotkin perceived in the 19th Century.

[19] The term "socialized worker" (operaio sociale) was coined by Romano Alquati in (Alquati, Negri and Sormano, circa 1976) and taken over and broadened by Antonio Negri's since the late 1970s. On this evolution see (Wright 1988), (Negri 1979) and his "Archeologia e proggetto. L'operaio massa e l'operaio sociale" in (Negri 1982). This last is also available in English as "Archaeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker" in (Negri 1988).

[20] See: (Coriat 1990) and (Lazzarato 1990). This tendency to overcome the division between manual and mental labor is obviously one which would have keenly interested Kropotkin who called for reinforcing any such development.

Parallel to such work on rural areas, especially in the Third World, has been the study of the evolving pattern of domination and struggle in urban industrial areas. But whereas Marx, and orthodox Marxism, focused almost exclusively on the factory, the development of autonomist Marxist theory has traced the extension of capitalist domination throughout social life and outlined the emergence of the "social" factory, i.e., the integration of private life (home, school, etc) into the reproduction of capitalism.

Unlike Western critical theory, however, this extension has been seen to involve an equal extension of conflict and struggle which has been transforming both the meaning of work and the content of social cooperation and mutual aid. The object of research has become one of discovering past and emerging patterns of cooperation, especially those that repeatedly slip the constraints of capitalist instrumentalization.

With respect to the current period of crisis and restructuring, some Italian and French theorists of working class autonomy have suggested that at the heart of the current crisis of capitalism is a new kind of working class subjectivity which is replacing that of the mass worker. They suggest that only by understanding the positive characteristics of that subjectivity, which ruptured capitalist control and continues to defy its present efforts at subordination, can we understand either those efforts or the emergent possibilities of liberation. One early characterization of this new subjectivity (which is actually seen as a diversity of subjectivities) was that of a new "tribe of moles" — a loose community of highly mobile, drop-out, part-time workers, part-time students, participants in the underground economy, creators of temporary and ever changing autonomous zones of social life that forced a fragmentation of and crisis in the mass-worker organization of the social factory.[18] Another characterization has been that of the "socialized worker" which focuses on how the crisis of the social factory has been generated precisely by a subject whose self-activity in all moments of life challenges the fabric of

[18] (Bologna 1977). In English as "The Tribe of Moles" in (Red Notes & the CSE, 1979). The term "temporary autonomous zone" is taken not from Bologna but from (Bey 1991).

how the peasants collaborated in building roads and irrigation ditches, in taking care of their forests, harvesting, in producing milk and dairy products,in building hourses, in preparing dowries and in a host of other areas of work and life.[8]

But the more the social phenomena he studied had been reshaped by the rise of capitalism, private property and the world market, the more difficult and subtle his analysis had to be. He had to seek out and identify, at every level, from the local workshop and industry to the global organization of the economy, signs of the forces of cooperation and mutual aid working at cross purposes to the capitalist tendencies to divide all against all. It remains singularly impressive that he was able to do this. He was able to cut through the rhetoric and the reality of competition to perceive and demonstrate the omnipresence of social cooperation at all levels of society. Where economists emphasized static comparative advantage, Kropotkin demonstrated the dynamic countertendency toward increasing complexity and interdependence (cooperation) among industries — a development closely associated with the unstoppable international circulation of knowledge and experience. Where the economists (and later the sociologists of work) celebrated the efficacy and productivity of specialization in production, Kropotkin showed how that very productivity was based not on competition but on the interlinked efforts of only formally divided workers.

When, for example, he turned his attention to the relationship between the urbanization of industry and the relative neglect of agricultural production, he did not merely attack the former and lament the later or evoke nostalgic pastoral images of the past. Instead, he sought out and explored situations where this ecologically and socially crippling specialization was already being overcome, as in the culture maraichere around Paris — where the wastes of the city were being reunited with the soil to the benefit of all. Such living examples, he argued, were manifestations of the counter-tendency of a cooperative interdependence and constituted at least one way forward in this domain.

Similarly, he ferreted out and analysed multiple examples of the tendency to reunite industry and agriculture via a movement of the former

[8] (Kropotkin 1902, pp. 184–205).

toward the later, the persistence or relocation of industry in rural villages and towns. He neither denied nor simply criticized the growth of large scale industry but pointed out not only that its size was often a function more of capitalist profit making than of technology and also that it could be seen to continually stimulate a parallel growth of small complementary industries on the margins of towns or in the villages. Thus, when he spoke of "the pronounced tendency of the factories toward migrating to the villages", he was indulging neither in wishful thinking nor mere prophecy.[9] Kropotkin's work of this sort was "scientific" in the usual sense of being based on empirical observation and on developing an analysis that was consistent with and made sense of the data.

My present interest in this aspect of Kroptokin's efforts lies less in the accuracy of his observations and extrapolations than in his method of work. It is of importance to study, as many have done, where he was right and where he was wrong. That is to say which of the tendencies he identified became dominant and which have faded away or been overwhelmed.[10] But the importance of discovering these things lies not in the judgements we make of the accuracy of his perceptiveness, but rather in the renewal of his method. His work fascinates not because it gives us formulae for the future but because it shows us how to discover tendencies in the present which provide alternative paths out of the current crisis and out of the capitalist system. As that system has developed in the years since he wrote, some of the alternatives he saw were absorbed and ceased to provide ways forward. Others have survived. Others, inevitably, have appeared. Our problem is to find them.

The Crisis of Marxism and the Question of Transcendence

In an important sense, Marxism understood as the activities of those who call themselves Marxists has been in a state of crisis throughout the

[9] (Kropotkin 1899 , p. 151).

[10] As in the commentary provided by Colin Ward to each chapter of *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow* in the Freedom Press edition.

he investigated tendencies in both agriculture and industry, as well as their interrelationships, so have these Marxists. Where Kropotkin went back to the French Revolution and the Commune, these researchers have explored moments of class conflict and working class self-activity such as the liberation of London's Newgate Prison in 1780, the slave revolt in San Domingo in 1791, the IWW struggles in the 1910s, the German workers' councils in 1918 and 1919, the industrial mass-worker sit-downs of the 1930s, the Italian factory worker revolt against the unions in the 1950s, the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956; the student and women's movements of the 1960s, the struggles of peasants and the urban poor in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s, and so on.[16] Such studies have been carried out with a focus on self-activity and in a growing number of cases, the research has focused on new forms of social cooperation.

As in the case of Kropotkin, some of the clearest results have come from the study of rural areas, of the self-activity of peasants in their villages. Despite the ongoing urbanization of the 20th Century, vast numbers of peasant cultures have continued to survive and to grow and develop. As in the past, their isolation would seem to make them readily susceptible to analysis. Yet research has shown that such isolation is only relative, their self-activity has constructed networks of connections among different groups both in the countryside and with urban areas. Not only do many of the cooperative activities of the sort that Kropotkin observed continue, but such networking has provided the means to circulate both information and struggle in ways that extend the notion of community far beyond the isolated locality even beyond national frontiers. In Mexico, such networks have been called "hammocks" because rather than trapping the participant they are adaptable to the specificities of local needs and projects.[17]

[16] The studies refered to are: (Linebaugh 1992) ; (James 1963) ; (Cartosio 1973); (Buonfino 1973); (Bock 1976); (Bologna 1972); Mario Tronti, "Capital and Labor" postface to the 1972 edition of (Tronti 1964); (Panzieri 1973); (Alquati 1975); (James, Lee and Chaulieu 1958) ; (Carpignano 1975); (Dalla Costa and James 1972); (Roufignac 1985); (Cleaver 1988); (Esteva 1983).

[17] See (Rouffignac 1985). On "hammocks" see (Esteva 1987).

of capitalist development was determined by working class negativity (blocking and forcing changes) to the study of the positive content of those struggles (which capital seeks to stem or coopt).

An important step in the development of this kind of analysis was the articulation of the concept of working class "self-valorization" against the valorization of capital. A concept generated in the intense class struggles and cultural revolution that took place in Italy and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, self-valorization denoted not merely the self-activity of workers, but those aspects of struggle which went beyond mere resistance or negation to the creation of new ways of being.[13] Because the term has been developed in a way that conceptualizes working class self- valorization not as unified but as diverse, it provides a theoretical articulation of the tradition within autonomist Marxism of recognizing the autonomy not merely of the working class but of various sectors of it. To both recognize and accept diversity of self-valorization, rooted like all other activity in the diversity of the peoples capital seeks to dominate, implies a whole politics — one which rejects traditional socialist notions of post-capitalist unity and redefines the "transition" from capitalism to communism in terms of the elaboration from the present into the future of existing forms of self-valorization.[14] In other words, communism is reconceptualized in a manner very much in harmony with Kropotkin's own views, not as a some-day-to- be-achieved utopia but as a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed of constraint.[15]

Like Kropotkin's studies, such efforts to discover the future in the present were based not only on a theory of collective subjectivity but on empirical studies of real workers in action. Just as Kropotkin studied the past to inform the present, so have these autonomist Marxists. Just as

[13] The concept of self-valoriztion or "autovalorizzazione" is Antonio Negri's (Negri 1991).

[14] On the reformulation of the transition from capitalism to communism and on the limits of the concept of socialism see: lesson 8 in (Negri 1979b, 1991) and Harry Cleaver, "Socialism" in (Sachs 1992).

[15] This reconceptualization is in keeping with Marx's concept, long abandoned by most orthodox Marxists, that "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things." (Marx 1845–46)

20th Century. As Kropotkin saw quite clearly, the rise of first social-democratic Marxism and then of Marxism-Leninism turned Marxism into an ideology of capitalist and socialist domination. Whether among the social-democratic contenders for power in Western Europe, or among the Leninist-Stalinist holders of power in the Soviet Union, Marxism was transformed from a theoretical analysis of the antagonistic conflict between capitalist exploitation and workers' struggles for self-liberation into a theoretical justification for centralized power and socialist accumulation. This was the heart of "orthodox Marxism" in all its guises throughout the world.

A central issue, viewed as of only theoretical importance in the rest of the world, but of immediate concern within the Soviet Union, was that of the processes by which capitalism could be transcended. The formulation of the problem was that of "the transition" and the solution was "socialism". In a linear and teleological development through which all societies must pass, capitalism had to be replaced through a process of transformation (called socialism) which would gradually produce communism. In the West social-democrats sought such transformation through marginal modifications of the state's role. In the Soviet Union, Marxist-Leninists set out to achieve the transformation rapidly through their control of the state and central planning. In both cases, of course, whatever the degree of success, "socialist" accumulation was little more than capitalist accumulation and continued the subordination of most people's lives to the treadmill of endless work under corporate or state supervision. What improvements people were able to achieve they had to fight for — in the USSR as in the West. Inevitably Marxism came to be perceived even by those who were at first deceived — as just one more rationale for power and exploitation. The most general crisis of Marxism, therefore, has been its rejection by millions of workers as an obstacle rather than a help to their struggles.

Outside and against this process of turning of Marxism into an ideology of domination, however, were various revolutionary tendencies which still drew on Marx's work to inform their struggles and which rejected both social-democratic and Marxist-Leninist versions of his theory. The most interesting of these, those that are relevant to my current

purpose, have been those which insisted on the primacy of the self-activity and creativity of people in struggle against capitalism.[11] Within the space of these tendencies there has developed a coherent critique of "orthodox Marxism" that includes not only a rejection of the concept of "the transition" but a reconceptualization of the process of transcending capitalism that has remarkable similarities to Kropotkin's thinking on this subject.

This insistence on the autonomy of working class self-activity, not only vis-a-vis capital but also vis-a-vis the "official" organizations of the class, e.g., the trade unions and the party, leads me to use the name autonomist Marxism to designate this general line of reasoning and the politics associated with it. With respect to the issue of transcendance, the emphasis on workers' autonomy has led to the rejection of the orthodox Marxist argument that the only path to a post-capitalist society lies through a transitional socialist order managed by the party commanding the state in the name of the people. On the contrary, the process of building a new society, like the process of revolution itself, is seen as either being the work of the people themselves, or as being doomed from the start. Thus one of the earliest political tendencies within which this approach appeared after the Russian revolution of 1917 was that of "Council Communism" which saw the "workers councils" in Germany, or the soviets in Russia, as new organizational forms constructed by the people. As with the anarchists, they too saw the Bolshevik take-over of the soviets (like that of the trade unions) as subverting the revolution and beginning the restoration of domination and exploitation.

Over the years this emphasis on working class autonomy has resulted in a reinterpretation of Marxist theory that has brought out the two-sided character of the class struggle and shifted the focus from capital (the preoccupation of orthodox Marxism) to the workers. That shift has led to many new perceptions, not least of which has been the recognition that the "working class" is itself a category of capital — one that denotes a condition which people of all sorts have struggled to avoid or to escape from.[12] As a result, not only has there been a recognition that capitalism

[11] For an (incomplete) sketch of these tendencies see the introduction to (Cleaver 1979).
[12] See, for example, (Tronti 1964) .

seeks to subordinate everyone's life (from the traditional factory proletariat to peasants, housewives and students) but that all those peoples' struggles involve both the resistance to this subordination and the effort to construct alternative ways of being. It has been in the observation and study of this last phenomenon that autonomist Marxists have been led to the same kind of research that Kropotkin pursued in his efforts to discover emerging trends of mutual aid working at cross purposes to capitalist domination. The theoretical framework has been somewhat different, but the character of the work has been the same.

The differences in the theoretical frameworks can be found, of course, in Kropotkin's eschewing of Marxist class analysis. While there was considerable overlap in many aspects of the analysis of capitalism (e.g., in its historical origins in the seperation of the producers from their means of production), Kropotkin's guiding thread was a theory of human nature and society quite different from Marx's. His contending "laws" of mutual struggle and mutual aid have but little counterpart in Marx's theories of class struggle and unalienated cooperation. As Kropotkin made clear, for him these were tendencies inherent in all life, including human life, whereas for Marx class struggle was seen as a phenomenon which had arisen in history only with emergence of classes and could be surpassed by a classless society. The two came closer to each other in their respective analyses of alienation and cooperation. Both saw and deplored the crippling of the individual that resulted from the way capitalists divided labor and pitted workers against each other. Both also recognized and analysed the fundamental force of cooperation which was at the heart of both past and current levels of productivity. Moreover, there was a parallel between Kropotkin's insistence on the way the tendency of mutual aid asserted itself and Marx's insistence that workers' expanded their own self-organization in response to capital's exploitation.

In Marx's own writings, however, especially in the *Grundrisse* (1857) and *Capital* (1867+), the historical analysis provided much more detail on capitalist domination than on working class subjectivity. It took considerable work, over a period of decades, for autonomist Marxists to draw out of those texts and to develop on their own a systematic Marxist analysis of working class autonomy that would parallel Kropotkin's work on mutual aid. That work evolved from a study of how the pattern