Jacques Camatte

The Wandering of Humanity

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Contents

Original Black & Red Introduction

The essays included in the present work first appeared in the journal *Invariance* (Année 6, Série II No. 3, 1973) with the titles, "Errance de l'humanité; Conscience repressive; Communisme," and "Declin du mode de production capitaliste ou declin de l'humanité?" The author of these essays, Jacques Camatte, worked with Amadeo Bordiga and the group of Marxist theoreticians who were known as the Italian communist left. After the events which took place in France in May of 1968, Camatte, together with his comrades on *Invariance*, began a critical analysis of the activities of the Italian communist left, the work of Bordiga as well as the work of Marx. The title of the journal originally referred to "the invariance of the theory of the proletariat," the theory of the League of Communists and the First International. By 1973 critics said of this journal that "nothing varies more than *Invariance*." Camatte and his comrades, pursuing the critical analysis they had begun, were led to conclude that "what is invariant is the aspiration to rediscover the lost human community, and this cannot take place through a reestablishment of the past, but only through new creation." Their theoretical quest led them to a complete rejection of the theory of revolutionary parties and organizations, the theory of revolutionary consciousness, the theory of the progressive development of productive forces. "The French May movement showed that what is needed is a new mode of living, a new life." (The above quotations are from the last article in *Invariance* No. 3, 1973.)

(. . .) The essays in the present work were translated from French by Fredy Perlman with assistance from Camatte; the illustrations were selected and prepared by Allan Foster; Lorraine Perlman and Judy Campbell participated in the photography, printing and binding. (. . .)

I. Repressive Consciousness — Communism

1. Despotism of Capital

When capital achieves real domination over society, it becomes a material community, overcoming value and the law of value, which survive only as something "overcome." Capital accomplishes this in two ways: 1) the quantity of labor included in the product-capital diminishes enormously (devalorization); 2) the exchange relation tends increasingly to disappear, first from the wage relation, then from all economic transactions. Capital, which originally depended on the wage relation, becomes a despot. When there is value it is assigned by capital.

Capital is capital in process. It acquired this attribute with the rise of fictive capital, when the opposition valorization/devalorization still had meaning, when capital had not yet really overcome the law of value.

Capital in process is capital in constant movement; it capitalizes everything, assimilates everything and makes it its own substance. Having become autonomous, it is "reified form" in movement. It becomes intangible. It revitalizes its being — that vast metabolism which absorbs ancient exchanges or reduces them to exchanges of a biological type — by despoiling all human beings in their varied activities, however fragmented these may be (this is why capital pushes human beings to engage in the most diverse activities). It is humanity that is exploited. More than ever the expression "exploitation of man by man" becomes repulsive.

In its perfected state, capital is representation. Its rise to this state is due to its anthropomorphization, namely to its capitalization of human beings,[1] and to its supersession of the old general equivalent, gold. Capital needs an ideal representation, since a representation with substance inhibits its process. Gold, if it is not totally demonetized, can no longer play the role of standard. Capitalized human activity becomes the standard of capital, until even this dependence on value and its law begin to disappear completely. This presupposes the integration of human beings in the process of capital and the integration of capital in the minds of human beings.

Capital becomes representation through the following historical movement: exchange value becomes autonomous, human beings are expropriated, human activity is reduced to labor, and labor is reduced to abstract labor. This takes place when capital rises on the foundation of the law of value. Capital becomes autonomous by domesticating the human being. After analyzing-dissecting-fragmenting the human being, capital reconstructs the human being as a function of

[1] This does not exclude an opposite movement: capital forces human beings to be human.

its process. The rupture of the body from the mind made possible the transformation of the mind into a computer which can be programmed by the laws of capital. Precisely because of their mental capacities, human beings are not only enslaved, but turned into willing slaves of capital. What seems like the greatest paradox is that capital itself reintroduces subjectivity, which had been eliminated at the time of the rise of exchange value. All human activity is exploited by capital. We can rephrase Marx's statement, "Labor, by adding a new value to the old one, at the same time maintains and eternizes [capital]"[2] to say: all human activity "eternizes" capital.

Capital as representation overcomes the old contradiction between monopoly and competition. Every quantum of capital tends to become a totality; competition operates between the various capitals, each of which tends to become the totality. Production and circulation are unified; the ancient opposition between use value and exchange value loses its *raison d'être*. Besides, consumption is the utilization of not only material products but mostly representations that increasingly structure human beings as beings of capital and revitalize capital as the general representation. Prices no longer have the function they had in the period of formal domination of capital, when they were representations of value; they become mere indices or signs of representations of capital. Free goods are not impossible. Capital could assign a specific quantity of its products to each programmed individual; this quantity might depend on the required activity imposed on this individual. Such a despotism would be more powerful than the present one. Human beings would wish they had the money which had "given" them free access to the diversity of products.

During its development capital always tended to negate classes. This has finally been accomplished through the universalization of wage labor and the formation — as a transitional stage — of what is called the universal class, a mere collection of proletarianized men and women, a collection of slaves of capital. Capital achieved complete domination by mystifying the demands of the classical proletariat, by dominating the proletarian as productive laborer. But by achieving domination through the mediation of labor, capital brought about the disappearance of classes, since the capitalist as a person was simultaneously eliminated.[3] The State becomes society when the wage relation is transformed into a relation of constraint, into a statist relation. At the same time the State becomes an enterprise or racket which mediates between the different gangs of capital.

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2 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Pelican, 1973, p. 365.

3 Here we see a convergence with the Asiatic mode of production, where classes could never become autonomous; in the capitalist mode of production they are absorbed.

Bourgeois society has been destroyed and we have the despotism of capital. Class conflicts are replaced by struggles between the gangs-organizations which are the varied modes of being of capital. As a result of the domination of representation, all organizations which want to oppose capital are engulfed by it; they are consumed by phagocytes.

It is the real end of democracy. One can no longer hold that there is a class which **represents** future humanity, and *a fortiori* there is no party, no group; there can be no delegation of power.

Advertising crassly reflects the fact that capital is representation, that it survives because it is representation in the mind of each human being (internalizing what was externalized). Advertising is the discourse of capital:[4] everything is possible, all norms have disappeared. Advertising organizes the subversion of the present for the sake of an apparently different future.

> "We now face the problem of letting the average American feel moral when he flirts, when he spends, even when he buys a second or third car. One of the basic problems of this prosperity is to give people sanction and justification to enjoy it, to show them that making their lives a pleasure is moral and not immoral. This permission given to the consumer to freely enjoy life, this demonstration that he has a right to surround himself with products that enrich his existence and give him pleasure, should be one of the main themes of all advertising and of every project designed to increase sales."[5]

The disintegration of consciousness which can be seen in manifestations like the women's liberation movement, the gay liberation movement and anti-psychiatry (which are only possible after the work of Freud, Reich, and the feminist movement at the beginning of this century) is not part of the simultaneous emergence of revolutionary consciousness, but only reflects the end of bourgeois society based on value, on a fixed standard which affected all levels of human life. The disintegration began when the general equivalent conflicted with circulation. If the former general equivalent gave way, it was lost. The State had to force all subjects to respect a normalcy based on a standard which established the values of society. The law of value imprisoned human beings, forcing them into stereotypes, into fixed modes of being. The highest development of morality appeared in Kant's categorical imperative. By engulfing the general equivalent, by becoming its own

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4 See the book of D. Verres, *Le discours du capitalisme*, Ed. L'Herne. interesting material will also be found in the works of Baudrillard: *Le systéme des objets* and *Pour une critique de l'économle politique du signe*, Ed. Gallimard.

5 Dichter, cited by Baudrillard in *Le système des objets*, pp. 218–219.

representation, capital removed the prohibitions and rigid schemas. At that point human beings are fixed to its movement, which can take off from the normal or abnormal, moral or immoral human being.

The finite, limited human being, the individual of bourgeois society, is disappearing. People are passionately calling for the liberated human being, a being who is at once a social being and a *Gemeinwesen*. But at present it is capital that is recomposing man, giving him form and matter; communal being comes in the form of collective worker, individuality in the form of consumer of capital. Since capital is indefinite it allows the human being to have access to a state beyond the finite in an infinite becoming of appropriation which is never realized, renewing at every instant the illusion of total blossoming.

The human being in the image of capital ceases to consider any event definitive, but as an instant in an infinite process. Enjoyment is allowed but is never possible. Man becomes a sensual and passive voyeur, capital a sensual and suprasensual being. Human life ceases to be a process and becomes linear. Aspired by the process of capital, man can no longer be "himself." This aspiration evacuates him, creating a vacuum which he must continually satisfy with representations (capital). More generally, capital in process secures its domination by making every process linear. Thus it breaks the movement of nature, and this leads to the destruction of nature. But if this destruction might endanger its own process, capital adapts itself to nature (by anti-pollution, for example).

The non-living becomes autonomous — and triumphs. Death in life: Hegel had intuited it, Nietzsche described it, Rainer Maria Rilke sang about it, Freud almost institutionalized it (the death instinct), Dada exhibited it as buffoon art, and the "fascists" exalted it: "Long live death." The U.S. feminist movement has individualized it:

> "The male likes death — it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die."[6]

The autonomy of form affects all aspects of life dominated by capital. Knowledge is valid only if it is formalized, if it is emptied of content. Absolute knowledge is tautology realized; it is dead form deployed over all knowledge. Science is its systematization; epistemology is its redundancy.

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[6] Valerie Solanas, *The SCUM Manifesto* (The Society for Cutting Up Men), New York: Olympia Press, 1970.

In the era of its real domination, capital has run away (as the cyberneticians put it), it has escaped.[7] It is no longer controlled by human beings. (Human beings in the form of proletarians might, at least passively, represent a barrier to capital.) It is no longer limited by nature. Some production processes carried out over periods of time lead to clashes with natural barriers: increase in the number of human beings, destruction of nature, pollution. But these barriers cannot be theoretically regarded as barriers which capital cannot supersede. At present there are three possible courses for the capitalist mode of production (in addition to the destruction of humanity — a hypothesis that cannot be ignored):

- complete autonomy of capital: a mechanistic utopia where human beings become simple accessories of an automated system, though still retaining an executive role;
- mutation of the human being, or rather a change of the species: production of a perfectly programmable being which has lost all the characteristics of the

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[7] We analyzed the autonomization of capital in *Le VIe chapitre inédit du Capital et l'oeuvre économique de Marx* (1966), particularly in the notes added in 1972.
In a future article we will analyze this subject more thoroughly by showing that Marx had raised the problem without recognizing it in its totality, and by analyzing the capitalist mode of production of today. This will also lead us to define labor and its role in the development of humanity. G. Brulé already began such an analysis in his article in *Invariance* No. 2, Série II: "Le travail, le travail productif et les mythes de la classe ouvriére et de la classe moyenne." (Labor, productive labor and the myths of the working class and the middle class).
In general we can say that the concept of labor is reductive: it encompasses only one part of human activity. But the call for its abolition is a call for the destruction of this remainder of activity, which is a utopian demand of capital. The project of communism inserts itself into the context of human life, activity being no more than a modality of expression. Love, meditation, day-dreaming, play and other manifestations of human beings are placed outside the field of life when we trap ourselves within the concept of labor. Marx defined labor as an activity which transforms nature or matter for one or another purpose, but the concept of nature can no longer be accepted as it is. In the period of domination of capital, the human being is no longer in contact with nature (especially during work). Between nature and the individual lies capital. Capital becomes nature.
On the other hand, in his so-called "philosophical" works, Marx clearly refers to all human activity and asserts that communism cannot be reduced to the liberation of labor. This position does not completely disappear from the rest of Marx's works, and survives alongside the "revolutionary reformist" conception expressed in *Capital*. For the Marxists the problem is subsequently simplified: they exalt labor, pure and simple. In Trotsky's work, for example, there is no longer a trace of Marx's complex analysis, but rather a display of the language of domestication, the language of capital: "The entire history of humanity is a history of the organization and education of social man for labor, with a view to obtaining from him greater productivity." (*Terrorism and Communism* (French ed.: Paris: Ed. 10/18, 1963, p. 2181.)

species *Homo sapiens*. This would not require an automatized system, since this perfect human being would be made to do whatever is required;

- generalized lunacy: in the place of human beings, and on the basis of their present limitations, capital realizes everything they desire (normal or abnormal), but human beings cannot find themselves and enjoyment continually lies in the future. The human being is carried off in the run-away of capital, and keeps it going.[8]

The result is ultimately the same: the evolution of the human being is frozen, sooner in one case than in another. These possibilities are abstract limits; in reality they tend to unfold simultaneously and in a contradictory manner. To continue on its indefinite course, capital is forced to call on the activity of human beings, to exalt their creativity. And to secure its permanence, capital has to act quickly. It runs into barriers of time and space which are linked to the decrease of natural resources (which cannot all be replaced by synthetic substitutes) and the mad increase of human population (which causes the disappearance of numerous forms of life).

It becomes clear that raising the banner of labor or its abolition remains on the terrain of capital, within the framework of its evolution. Even the movement toward unlimited generalization of desire is isomorphic to the indefinite movement of capital.

The capitalist mode of production is not decadent and cannot be decadent. Bourgeois society disintegrated, to be sure, but this did not lead to communism. At most we can say that communism was affirmed in opposition to bourgeois society, but not in opposition to capital. The run-away of capital was not perceived; in fact this run-away was realized only with the rise of the fascist, Nazi, popular front movements, the New Deal, etc., movements which are transitions from formal to real domination. It was thought that communism was emerging from the socialization of human activity and thus from the destruction of private property, while in fact capital was emerging as a material community.

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[8] This possibility is described and exalted in *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler.

2. Growth of Productive Forces; Domestication of Human Beings

The capitalist mode of production becomes decadent only with the outbreak of effective revolution against capital. As of now, human beings have been decaying for a century, they have been domesticated by capital. This domestication is the source of the proletariat's inability to liberate humanity. Productive forces continue to grow, but these are forces of capital.

> "Capitalist production develops technique and the combination of the social production process only by simultaneously using up the two sources from which all wealth springs: the land and the laborer."[1]

It makes no sense to proclaim that humanity's productive forces have stopped growing, that the capitalist mode of production has begun to decay. Such views reveal the inability of many theoreticians to recognize the run-away of capital and thus to understand communism and the communist revolution. Paradoxically, Marx analyzed the decomposition of bourgeois society and the conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production: a society where productive forces could develop freely. What he presented as the project of communism was realized by capital.

Man elaborated a dialectic of the development of productive forces.[2] He held that human emancipation depended on their fullest expansion. Communist revolution — therefore the end of the capitalist mode of production — was to take place when this mode of production was no longer "large enough" to contain the productive forces. But Marx is trapped in an ambiguity. He thinks that the human being is a barrier to capital, and that capital destroys the human being as a fetter to its development as productive power. Marx also suggests that capital can escape from the human barrier. He is led to postulate a self-negation of capital. This self-negation takes the form of crises which he perceived either as moments when capital is restructured (a regeneration carried out by the destruction of products

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1 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I [*Le Capital*, I. 1, t. 2, p. 182.]

2 This requires a detailed study which would include the analysis of labor. In the article which follows we begin this study: it presents the first conclusions we've reached. In particular we want to analyze the stage of this decadence of humanity, how it is expressed, etc. In addition we want to show the intimate connection between the movement of value and the dialectic of the productive forces. The end of the movement of value and of capital is the end of a mode of representation and destroys its autonomy. The Marxian dialectic will be completely overcome.

inhibiting the process: another reason why capitalism must disappear), or as the actual moment when capital is destroyed.

In other words, while providing the elements necessary for understanding the real domination of capital over society, Marx did not develop the concept; he did not recognize the run-away of capital. For Marx, gold remained a barrier to capital, the contradiction between valorization and devalorization remained in force, and the plunder and estrangement of proletarians remained an obstacle to the evolution of capital.

> "In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money)..."

(Before continuing the citation, we should mention the retardation of those who proclaim that capital now develops only destructive forces. It turns out that for Marx, in 1847, capital is destruction; he continued to hold this view.)

> "... and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class."[3]

The proletariat is the great hope of Marx and of the revolutionaries of his epoch. This is the class whose struggle for emancipation will liberate all humanity. Marx's work is at once an analysis of the capitalist mode of production and of the proletariat's role within it. This is why the theory of value and the theory of the proletariat are connected, though not directly:

> "The above application of the Ricardian theory, that the entire social product belongs to the workers as **their** product, because they are the sole real producers, leads directly to communism. But, as Marx indicates too in the above-quoted passage, formally it is economically incorrect, for it is simply an application of morality to economics. According to the laws of bourgeois economics, the greatest part of the product does not belong to the workers

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[3] Engels, Marx, *The German Ideology*, [Moscow, 1964, p. 85.]

> who have produced it. If we now say: that is unjust, that ought not to be so, then that has nothing immediately to do with economics. We are merely saying that this economic fact is in contradiction to our sense of morality. Marx, therefore, never based his communist demands upon this, but upon the inevitable collapse of the capitalist mode of production which is daily taking place before our eyes to an ever greater degree . . . "[4]

Marx did not develop a philosophy of exploitation, as Bordiga often recalled. How will the capitalist mode of production be destroyed, and what does the "ruin" consist of? (Engels, in 1884, provided arguments for those who today speak of the decadence of capitalism.) This is not specified. After Marx the proletariat was retained as the class necessary for the final destruction, the definitive abolition of capitalism, and it was taken for granted that the proletariat would be forced to do this.

Bernstein grasped this aspect of Marx's theory, and applied himself to demonstrating that there were no contradictions pushing toward dissolution.[5] But this led Bernstein to become an apologist for the old bourgeois society which capital was about to destroy, especially after 1913; consequently his work does not in any way clarify the present situation.

Marx left us material with which to overcome the theory of value, and also material necessary for overcoming the theory of the proletariat. The two theories are related, and justify each other. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx praises the capitalist mode of production, which he considers revolutionary. What is not stated explicitly is that the proletariat has this attribute to the extent that it carries out the internal laws of capitalism. The proletariat is present in the analysis. Marx postulates that the proletariat's misery will necessarily push it to revolt, to destroy the capitalist mode of production and thus to liberate whatever is progressive in this mode of production, namely the tendency to expand productive forces.

In *Capital* the proletariat is no longer treated as the class that represents the dissolution of society, as negation at work. The class in question here is the working class, a class which is more or less integrated in society, which is engaged in revolutionary reformism: struggle for wage increases, struggle against heavy work imposed on women and children, struggle for the shortening of the working day.

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[4] Engels, "Preface" to *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Marx, New York: 1963, p. 11.

[5] See particularly "The Movement of Income in Modern Society" and "Crises and Possibilities of Adaptation" in *Presuppositions of Socialism and the tasks of Social Democracy*, Rowohlt Verlag, pp. 75ff.

At the end of the first volume, Marx explains the dynamic which leads to the expropriation of the expropriators, to the increase of misery[6] which will force the proletariat to rise against capital.[7]

In the third volume, and also in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx does not describe a real discontinuity between capitalism and communism. Productive forces continue to grow. The discontinuity lies in the fact that the goal of production is inverted (after the revolution; i.e., the discontinuity is temporal). The goal ceases to be wealth, but human beings. However, if there is no real discontinuity between capitalism and communism, human beings must be wilfully transformed; how else could the goal be inverted? This is Marx's revolutionary reformism in its greatest amplitude. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the transitional phase (in the *Grundrisse* it is the capitalist mode of production that constitutes this transitional phase: this is obviously extremely relevant to the way we define communism today) is a period of reforms, the most important being the shortening of the working day and use of the labor voucher. What we should note here, though we cannot insist on it, is the connection between reformism and dictatorship.

The proletariat seems to be needed to guide the development of productive forces away from the pole of value toward the pole of humanity. It may happen that the proletariat is integrated by capital, but — and this is abused by various Marxists — crises destroy the proletariat's reserves and reinstate it into its revolutionary role. Then the insurrection against capital is possible again.

Thus Marx's work seems largely to be the authentic consciousness of the capitalist mode of production. The bourgeoisie, and the capitalists who followed, were able to express only a false consciousness with the help of their various theories. Furthermore, the capitalist mode of production has realized Marx's proletarian project. By remaining on a narrowly Marxist terrain, the proletariat and its theoreticians were outflanked by the followers of capital. Capital, having achieved real domination, ratifies the validity of Marx's work in its reduced form (as historical materialism). While German proletarians at the beginning of this century thought their actions were destroying the capitalist mode of production, they failed to see they were only trying to manage it themselves. False consciousness took hold of the proletariat.

Historical materialism is a glorification of the wandering in which humanity has been engaged for more than a century: growth of productive forces as the condition *sine-qua-non* for liberation. But by definition all quantitative growth takes place in the sphere of the indefinite, the false infinite. Who will measure the "size" of the productive forces to determine whether or not the great day has

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6 Here we should be careful, as Bordiga justly observed, not to reduce this to an economic concept.

7 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, New York: Random House, pp. 831–837.

come? For Marx there was a double and contradictory movement: growth of productive forces and immiseration of proletarians; this was to lead to a revolutionary collision. Put differently, there was a contradiction between socialization of production and private appropriation.

The moment when the productive forces were to reach the level required for the transformation of the mode of production was to be the moment when the crisis of capitalism began. This crisis was to expose the narrowness of this mode of production and its inability to hold new productive forces, and thus make visible the antagonism between the productive forces and the capitalist forms of production. But capital has run away; it has absorbed crises and it has successfully provided a social reserve for the proletarians. Many have nothing left to do but to run on ahead: some say the productive forces are not developed enough, others say they have stopped growing. Both reduce the whole problem either to organizing the vanguard, the party, or resort to activities designed to raise consciousness.

Development in the context of wandering is development in the context of mystification. Marx considered mystification the result of a reversed relation: capital, the product of the worker's activity, appears to be the creator. The mystification is rooted in real events; it is reality in process that mystifies. Something is mystified even through a struggle of the proletariat against capital; the generalized mystification is the triumph of capital. But if, as a consequence of its anthropomorphization, this reality produced by mystification is now the sole reality, then the question has to be put differently. 1) Since the mystification is stable and real, there is no point in waiting for a demystification which would only expose the truth of the previous situation. 2) Because of capital's run-away, the mystification appears as reality, and thus the mystification is engulfed and rendered inoperative. We have the despotism of capital.

The assertion that the mystification is still operative would mean that human beings are able to engage in real relations and are continually mystified. In fact the mystification was operative once and became reality. It refers to a historical stage completed in the past. This does not eliminate the importance of understanding and studying it so as to understand the movement which leads to the present stage of the capitalist mode of production and to be aware of the real actors through the ages.

Both the mystifying-mystified reality as well as the previously mystified reality have to be destroyed. The mystification is only "visible" if one breaks (without illusions about the limitations of this break) with the representations of capital. Marx's work is very important for this break. But it contains a major flaw: it fails to explain the whole magnitude of the mystification because it does not recognize the run-away of capital.

Earlier, revolution was possible as soon as the mystification was exposed; the revolutionary process was its destruction. Today the human being has been engulfed, not only in the determination of class where he was trapped for centuries, but as a biological being. It is a totality that has to be destroyed. Demystification is no longer enough. The revolt of human beings threatened in the immediacy of their daily lives goes beyond demystification. The problem is to create other lives. This problem lies simultaneously outside the ancient discourse of the workers' movement and its old practice, and outside the critique which considers this movement a simple ideology (and considers the human being an ideological precipitate).

3. Repressive Consciousness

Mystification does not only affect capitalist society but also affects the theory of capitalism. Marxist theory elevated to the rank of proletarian consciousness is a new form of consciousness: repressive consciousness. We will describe some of its characteristics, leaving aside the problem of determining whether or not all forms of consciousness throughout history are repressive.

The object of repressive consciousness is the goal which it thinks it controls. Since there is a gap between this goal and immediate reality, this consciousness becomes theological and refines the differences between the minimum or immediate program and the maximum, future, or mediate program. But the longer the path to its realization, the more consciousness makes itself the goal and reifies itself in an organization which comes to incarnate the goal.

The project of this consciousness is to frame reality with its concept. This is the source of all the sophisms about the divergence between objective and subjective elements. It exists but it cannot be. And precisely because of its inability to be, it has to negate and scorn whatever is trying to emerge, to be.

In other words, it exists but it needs certain events to be real. Since it is a product of the past it is refuted by every current event. Thus it can only exist as a polemic with reality. It refutes everything. It can survive only by freezing, by becoming increasingly totalitarian. In order to operate it has to be organized: thus the mystique of the party, of councils, and of other coagulations of despotic consciousness.

All direct action which does not recognize this consciousness (and every political racket pretends to embody the true consciousness) is condemned by it. Condemnation is followed by justification: impatience of those who revolt, lack of maturity, provocation by the dominant class. The picture is completed by litanies on the petit-bourgeois character of the eternal anarchists and the utopianism of intellectuals or young people. Struggles are not real unless they revive class consciousness; some go so far as to wish for war, so that this consciousness will at last be produced.

Theory has turned into repressive consciousness. The proletariat has become a myth, not in terms of its existence, but in terms of its revolutionary role as the class which was to liberate all humanity and thus resolve all socio-economic contradictions. In reality it exists in all countries characterized by the formal domination of capital, where this proletariat still constitutes the majority of the population; in countries characterized by the real domination of capital one still finds a large number of men and women in conditions of 19th century proletarians.

But the activity of every party and every group is organized around the myth. The myth is their source. Everything begins with the appearance of this class which is defined as the only revolutionary class in history, or at least as the most revolutionary. Whatever happened before is ordered as a function of the rise of this class, and earlier events are secondary in relation to those lived or created by the proletariat. It even defines conduct. Whoever is proletarian is saved; one who is not must expiate the defect of non-proletarian birth by various practices, going so far as to serve terms in factories. A group achieves revolutionary existence only at the moment when it is able to exhibit one or several "authentic" proletarians. The presence of the man with calloused hands is the guarantee, the certificate of revolutionary authenticity. The content of the program defended by the group, its theory, even its actions, cease to be important; all that matters is the presence or absence of the "proletarian." The myth maintains and revives the antagonism between intellectual and manual. Many councilists make a cult of anti-intellectualism which serves them as a substitute for theory and justification. They can pronounce any idiocy; they'll be saved; they're proletarians.

Just as it is thought by many that one who leaves the party thereby ceases to be revolutionary, so it is considered impossible to be revolutionary without claiming one's proletarian position, without taking on the virtues thought to be proletarian. The counter-revolution ends at the mythical frontiers which separate the proletariat from the rest of the social body. Any action is justified in the name of the proletarian movement. One does not act because of a need to act, because of hatred for capital, but because the proletariat has to recover its class base. Action and thought are unveiled by intermediaries.

This is how, especially after 1945, the proletariat as revolutionary class outlived itself: through its myth.

A historical study of proletarian revolutionary movements would shed light on the limited character of this class. Marx himself clearly exposed its reformist character. Fundamentally, from 1848, when it demanded the right to work, to 1917–1923, when it demanded full employment and self-management by workers' unions, the proletariat rebelled solely within the interior of the capitalist system. This seems to conflict with Marx's statements in his "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform.' By a Prussian". But at this moment the proletariat really manifested itself as a class without reserves, as a total negation. It was forced to create a profound rupture which makes possible an understanding of what communist revolution and therefore communism can be.[1] Marx was right;

[1] In the original Fredy Perlman translation the two sentences immediately before this, beginning 'But at this moment (. . .)', were shown as a quotation from Marx and a reference was given to an english translation of Marx's text 'The King of Prussia (etc.)'. Looking at the french text this is evidently

but the capitalist mode of production, in order to survive, was forced to annihilate the negation which undermined it. The proletariat which is outside of society, as Marx and Engels say in *The German Ideology*, is increasingly integrated into society; it is integrated to the extent that it struggles for survival, for reinforcement; the more it organizes itself, the more it becomes reformist. It succeeds, with the German Socialist Party, in forming a counter-society which is finally absorbed by the society of capital, and the negating movement of the proletariat is over.[2]

Didn't Kautsky, Bernstein and Lenin simply recognize the reality of the workers' movement when they declared that it was necessary to unite it with the socialist movement: "The workers' movement and socialism are in no way identical by nature" (Kautsky)?

Doesn't Lenin's discredited statement that the proletariat, left to itself, can only attain trade-union consciousness, describe the truth about the class bound to capital? It can be criticized only from the standpoint of the distinction, made by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, between class as object of capital and class as subject. Without a revolutionary upheaval the proletariat cannot become a subject. The process through which it was to become a subject implied an outside, external consciousness, which at a given moment would become incarnated in the proletariat. This consciousness coming from the outside is the most reified, the most estranged form of repressive consciousness! Consequently, the point is not to rehash the debate and return to Marx, but to recognize that the cycle of the proletarian class is now over, first of all because its goals have been realized, secondly because it is no longer the determinant in the global context. We have reached the end of the historical cycle during which humanity (especially the part situated in the West) moved within class societies. Capital has realized the negation of classes — by means of mystification, since it retains the conflicts and collisions which characterize the existence of classes. The reality is the despotism of capital. It is capital we must now face, not the past.

Almost all social democrats were aware of the divorce between the real, reformist movement of the working class and the socialist goal. Bernstein proclaimed that it was necessary to adapt once and for all, clearly and straightforwardly, not hypocritically (like the majority of the socialists) by making revolutionary proclamations in order to hide compromises.[3] At the same time, it became

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an error based on a misprint and this sentence is actually by Camatte. Thanks to Antagonism for drawing attention to this.

2 Which proves that it was impossible to hold on to a "classist" discourse and behavior while maintaining the basic "aclassist" thesis of the necessity of the proletariat's self-negation.

3 On this subject, see the book by H. Mueller published in 1892, *Der Klassenkampf in der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Verlags-kooperative Heidelberg-Frankfurt-Hanover-Berlin, 1969. This book clearly shows the duality-duplicity of men like Bebel, who expressed themselves as "rightists"

increasingly problematic to define and delimit the proletarian class. This problem became so acute that by the beginning of this century almost all revolutionaries were trying to define the proletariat in terms of consciousness: Luxemburg, Pannekoek directly, Lenin, Trotsky indirectly through the party, etc. The Russian revolution merely increased the urgency of specifying the proletarian class; this is the context of Korsch's attempts, and especially of Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*. Later on Bordiga held that the class should be defined in terms of the mode of production which it builds. Thus it can be a class for itself only from the moment when its actions move toward this goal, only to the extent that it recognizes its program (which describes this mode of production). For Bordiga, it exists when the party exists, because the program can only be carried by the party. "We still need an object, the party, to envision the communist society."[4] But to the extent that men and women are able to move on their own toward communism, as is evident among young people today, it becomes obvious that this object, the party, is not needed.

In sum, for party as well as council advocates, the problem of action would largely be reduced to finding a direct or indirect means for making the proletariat receptive to its own consciousness — since in this view the proletariat is itself only through its consciousness of itself.

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in parliament and as "leftists" at workers' meetings, who told one audience it would be very long before the principles of socialism could be realized, while telling another that socialism was around the corner. This book is also interesting because it contains positions which were later to be taken up by the KAPD (German Communist Workers' Party).

[4] Bordiga at meeting in Milan, 1960.

4. Communism

Revolutionary reformism — the project of creating socialism on the foundation of capitalism and in continuity with the capitalist mode of production — disintegrated between 1913 and 1945. It is the end of what turned out to be an illusion: the illusion of being able to direct the development of the productive forces in a direction which differed from the one they had taken in reality. We can actually agree with Marx's view that after 1848 communism was possible precisely because the irruption of the capitalist mode of production had broken all social and natural barriers and made free development possible. But the mentality, the representations of people were such that they could neither concieve nor perceive such a future. They were too dependent on the millenarian movement of value, or they were too debilitated by the limitations of the perverted remains of their ancient communities, to be able to set out on a new path to reach another community. Even Marx and Engels ultimately considered capitalism a necessary moment, and thought that all human beings everywhere would inevitably come to experience it. Only the revolts of the Russian populists, and their desire to avoid the capitalist road, made Marx understand his error. But this recognition was insufficient. From the middle of the 19^{th} century, with the justification provided by Marxist theory (the theory of the proletariat), all humanity set out to wander: to develop productive forces.

If we can no longer accept Marx's theoretical analysis of the role of the productive forces, we can nevertheless agree with him after a detour. Capital enslaves humanity in the very name of humanity because it is anthropomorphized. This is nothing other than the reign of death. Human beings are dominated by their past being, while they contemplate it. It is a process which continually starts over again. Capital penetrates thought, consciousness, and thus destroys human beings such as they have been produced by centuries of class society. Their loss of substance is the loss of their former being, which capital has pumped out of them. Since this process is almost over, capital is now turning from its attack against the past dimension of humanity to an attack against its future dimension: it must now conquer imagination. The human being is thus despoiled and tends to be reduced to the biological dimension. The phenomenon reaches the roots. In other words, the development of productive forces appears to have been necessary for the destruction of old schemas, modes of thought, archaic representations which limited human beings (this destruction is now being analyzed by philosophers like Foucault). Threatened in their purely biological existence, human beings are beginning to rise against capital. It is at this point that everything can be

re-conquered by generalized creation. But this becoming is not simple, unilinear. Capital can still profit from the creativity of human beings, regenerating and resubstantializing itself by plundering their imaginations. The importance and profundity of the struggle can be grasped in the face of the alternative: communism or destruction of the human species. And it should not be forgotten that during the wandering various revolutionary movements looked for an exit and various possibilities were blocked; they can now manifest themselves.[1]

We have to stop wandering and destroy the repressive consciousness which inhibits the emergence of communism. To do this we have to stop perceiving communism as a prolongation of the capitalist mode of production, and stop thinking it is enough to suppress exchange value and make use value triumphant. This dichotomy no longer signifies anything. Use value is tied to value even if it revolves around the principle of utility instead of productivity; related to the direct domination of human beings, it is inseparable from private property.

Communism is not a new mode of production[2] ; it is the affirmation of a new

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1 Absolute irreversibility is not a fact of history. Possibilities which appeared thousands or hundreds of years ago were not abolished for all time. History is not a Moloch which swallows possibilities, condemning the human future to an inevitable and irremediable despoliation. In that case history would be no more than a justification for what happened. Many would like to reduce history to this, making it the worst of despots.

Hegel's philosophy with its dialectic of supersession (*Aufhebung*), of movement which abolishes and preserves at one and the same time, was an attempt to salvage what human beings had produced in earlier epochs. Hegel was troubled by the problems of loss of reality, of the multiplicity of manifestations and possibles, etc. Thus he attached enormous importance to memory (see particularly the chapter "Absolute Knowledge," in the *Phenomenology of Mind*.)

By contrast, the movement of capital abolishes the memory of its previous stages (by mystification and magic) as well as the stages of humanity, and presents itself, as it is, at its highest level of development — the "reified" (or ossified) form" (See Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*,[Moscow: 1971] , Vol. III, chapter on "Revenue and its Sources. Vulgar Political Economy."

2 The concept of mode of production is in reality valid only for the capitalist mode of production, just as the concept of class is in reality operative only in bourgeois society. The concept of production in Marx's work is quite rich in attributes. It becomes impoverished when we move from the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* to *Capital*. It is closely related to the concept of nature and also to a certain conception of the human being. In other words, we have a much more complex "given" when we can examine it only in relation to the existence of initial communist communities and their dissolution. The separation of the human being from the community (*Gemeinwesen*) is a despoliation. The human being as worker has lost a mound of attributes which formed a whole when he was related to his community.

The process of expropriation of human beings is real. Those who do not understand this do not understand what capital is. Man has been reduced to an inexpressive being; he has lost his senses, and his activity has been reduced to quantified labor. Man turned into abstract being longs for music which still preserves the ancestral sensuality (thus the vogue of jazz and South American music). The reduced human being now has only one element relating him to the external world: sexuality which fills the void of the senses. It is precisely this which explains the pansexuality, or

community. It is a question of being, of life, if only because there is a fundamental displacement: from generated activity to the living being who produced it. Until now men and women have been alienated by this production. They will not gain mastery over production, but will create new relations among themselves which will determine an entirely different activity.

Nor is communism a new society.[3] Society grows out of the subjugation of some ethnic groups by others, or out of the formation of classes. Society is the network of social relations which quickly become despotic intermediaries. Man in society is man enslaved by society.

Communism puts an end to castes, classes and the division of labor (onto which was grafted the movement of value which in turn animates and exalts this division). Communism is first of all union. It is not domination of nature but reconciliation, and thus regeneration of nature: human beings no longer treat nature simply as an object for their development, as a useful thing, but as a subject (not in the philosophic sense) not separate from them if only because nature is in them. The naturalization of man and the humanization of nature (Marx) are realized; the dialectic of subject and object ends.

What follows is the destruction of urbanization and the formation of a multitude of communities distributed over the earth. This implies the suppression of monoculture, another form of division of labor, and a complete transformation

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more exactly the pansexualization of being which Freud interpreted as an invariant characteristic of human beings, whereas it is the result of their mutilation. What is the subconscious if not the affective-sensual life of the human being repressed by capital? The human being has to be domesticated, shaped to a rationality which he must internalize — the rationality of the process of production of capital. Once this domestication is achieved, the human being is dispossessed of this repressed sensual life which becomes an object of knowledge, of science; it becomes capitalizable. The unconscious, becoming an object of commerce, is thinly sliced and retailed in the market of knowledge. The unconscious did not always exist, and it exists now only as a component in the discourse of capital; this is also true of human perversions.

Reduced to perfect inexpressivity, the human being increasingly becomes comparable point by point to the elementary particle studied by nuclear physics, where one can find the principles of the psychology of the capitalized human being who is moved by the field of capital.

[3] It is also unsound to speak of primitive society. We will substantiate this by making a new analysis of primitive communities. If it is true that Marx's work does not deal adequately with the existence, development and dissolution of primitive communities, it is not true that Marx is absolutely wrong because of Europocentrism or the spirit of enlightenment, namely that his work suffers from the same shortcomings as bourgeois theory. The majority of those who hold this view have not understood the question of community in Marx's work and have reduced his work to a simple historical materialism.

What Marx's work lacks is a detailed analysis of the way "the economy" appears in primitive communities and provokes their disintegration.

We should add that it is becoming increasingly misleading to speak of capitalist society. We will return to this.

of the transportation system: transportation will diminish considerably. Only a communal (communitarian) mode of life can allow the human being to rule his reproduction, to limit the (at present mad) growth of population without resorting to despicable practices (such as destroying men and women).

The domination of one group over another, the society of classes, originates in the sedentarization of the human being. We still live with the myths generated at the time of this fixation somewhere in our mother-earth: myths of the homeland, the foreigner; myths which limit the vision of the world, which mutilate. It is obvious that the reaction cannot be a return to a nomadism of a type practiced by our distant ancestors who were gatherers. Men and women will acquire a new mode of being beyond nomadism and sedentarism. Sedentary lives compounded by corporeal inactivity are the root cause of almost all the somatic and psychological illnesses of present-day human beings. An active and unfixed life will cure all these problems without medicine or psychiatry.

The passage to communism implies a transformation of technique. Technology is not a neutral thing; it is determined by the mode of production. In the West, more than elsewhere, the various modes of production increasingly separated human beings from technology, which was originally no more than a modality of human being. The call for a convenient technology is a call for a technology which is again a prolongation of the human being and not an autonomous thing at the service of an oppressive being.[4]

Human beings in communism cannot be defined as simple users; this would be communism conceived as a terestrial paradise where people dispose of what there is with such immediacy that human beings are indistinguishable from nature

[4] In primitive communities human beings rule technology. Technology starts to become autonomous in ancient Western society, and this was feared by the ancients. Technology forces man to copy nature, even if later he can find a procedure not found in nature; thus he is subjected to a compulsory procedure, a how-to-do, a sort of natural order. He seems to lose the capacity to create freely. (On this subject, see the comments of J.P. Vernant in *Mythe et pensée chez les grecs*, Ed. Maspéro.) When human beings no longer fear technology, they simultaneously become reconciled with art, which had been disparaged at the end of slave society. This took place at the time of the Renaissance, when philosophers defined man as a being who makes himself (See Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*). But the development of technology did not lead man toward nature; on the contrary, it led to the expropriation of man and the destruction of nature. The human being increasingly loses the faculty of creativity. In this sense, the fear of the ancients was justified.
From the philosophers of the Renaissance, through Descartes and Hegel, to Marx, the human being is defined in relation to technology (man is a tool-maker: Franklin) and to production. To go beyond Marx, it is necessary to reexamine the "human phenomenon" from the disintegration of primitive communities until today and to rethink the works of philosophers and economists from Aristotle to Marx in order to understand more clearly how human beings perceived themselves in a period when value and then capital dominated, and in order to understand how, now that we have come to the end of the phenomenon value, we can conceive humanity, and thus communism.

(man, as Hegel said in this context, would be an animal). Human beings are creators, producers, users. The entire process is reconstituted at a higher level, and for every individual. In relations between individuals, the other is no longer considered in terms of utility; behavior in terms of utility ends. The sexes are reconciled while retaining their differences; they lose the differences and rigid oppositions produced by millenia of antagonism.

These few characteristics should adequately clarify how the movement of ascent to the human community can be conceived.

We are all slaves of capital. Liberation begins with the refusal to perceive oneself in terms of the categories of capital, namely as proletarian, as member of the new middle class, as capitalist, etc. Thus we also stop perceiving the other — in his movement toward liberation — in terms of those same categories. At this point the movement of recognition of human beings can begin. This is obviously only the beginning of the liberation movement, and is continually threatened with failure. Refusing to take this into account denies the power of capital. What has to be perceived is a dynamic. We are slaves; our goal is not to become masters, even without slaves, but to abolish the entire dialectic of master and slave. This goal cannot be realized by the establishment of communities which, always isolated, are never an obstacle to capital, can easily be surrounded by capital, and are no more than deviations in relation to its norm (deviations which make that norm visible for what it is). Nor can the goal be reached by the cultivation of one's individual being, in which one would finally find the real human being. In reality these approaches should be connected. Perceiving oneself as a human being unshackled by any attributes already removes the dog collar imposed by class society. The desire for community is absolutely necessary. The reaffirmation of individuality (especially in its temporal aspect) is a rejection of domestication. But this is inadequate even as a first element of rebellion; the human being is an individuality and a *Gemeinwesen*. The reduction of the human being to his present inexpressive state could take place only because of the removal of *Gemeinwesen*, of the possibility for each individual to absorb the universal, to embrace the entirety of human relations within the entirety of time. The varied religions, philosophies and theories are mere substitutes for this essential component of human being. Since communism is the death of sameness, of repetition, human beings will emerge in all their diversity; *Gemeinwesen* will be affirmed by each. This implies that as of now we reject the despotism of a religion, a philosophy, a theory.

The refusal to be trapped by a theory is not a rejection of all theoretical reflection. It is just the opposite. But this refusal does postulate that the theoretical act is insufficient. Theory can call for the reconciliation of senses and brain but it remains within the boundaries of this separation. What must be affirmed is the whole of life, the entirety of its manifestations, the whole unified being. It may

still be necessary to proceed with the help of Marx's insights, for example, but it becomes increasingly imbecile to proclaim oneself a Marxist. Furthermore, like repressive consciousness, theory can become a simple alibi for inaction. At the start, the refusal to act might be perfectly justifiable. Nevertheless, separation from reality often leads to failure to perceive new phenomena which shape it. At that point theory, instead of helping establish contact with reality, becomes an agent of separation, of removal, and in the end is transformed into a protrusion, an ejection from the world. Waiting is particularly difficult for those who do not want to recognize that others can arrive at theory without us, our group, or our party as intermediaries. Theory, like consciousness, demands objectification to such an extent that even an individual who rejects political rackets can elevate theory to the status of a racket. In a subject posing as revolutionary, theory is a despotism: everyone should recognize this.

After the domination of the body by the mind for more than two millenia, it is obvious that theory is still a manifestation of this domination.

It is the whole of life that becomes determining. All the varied productions of the past — art, philosophy, science — are fragments. They are elements of the vast despoliation of human beings as well as attempts to remedy it. But the point is no longer to realize art or philosophy; capital has already done this in its way; the point is to conquer and create another world: a world where all the biological potentialities of the species can finally develop. In this vast movement, it is futile to want to present oneself as the repository of truth. First of all truth, like value, needs a measure, a standard, a general equivalent, a norm, hence a **State**. Secondly, truth is never more than one truth. The historical inflation of this concept parallels the ever more thorough destruction of human beings. Nothing less can be proposed than another life where the gestures, the words, the imaginations and all the feelings of human beings will no longer be chained, where senses and brain will unite — only this union can eliminate all the fixations of madness. It is obvious that all this can only be conquered by the destruction of the capitalist mode of production. It is all of humanity perceived through time that is hostile to capital. Human beings will have to undergo a profound revolutionization to be able to oppose capital; the actions of this movement are accompanied by the production of revolutionaries.

The emergence of revolution in all the domains of our lives leads some people to overemphasize the places where they felt this emergence.

Revolution does not emerge from one or another part of our being — from body, space or time. Our revolution as a project to reestablish community was necessary from the moment when ancient communities were destroyed. The reduction of communist revolution to an uprising which was to resolve the contradictions posed by the capitalist mode of production was pernicious. Revolution has to

resolve all the old contradictions created by the class societies absorbed by capital, all the contradictions between relatively primitive communities and the movement of exchange value currently being absorbed by the movement of capital (in Asia and especially in Africa). Beyond this, the revolutionary movement is the revolution of nature, accession to thought, and mastery of being with the possibility of using the prefrontal centers of the brain which are thought to relate to the imagination. Revolution has a biological and therefore cosmic dimension, considering our universe limited (to the solar system); cosmic also in the meaning of the ancient philosophers and mystics. This means that revolution is not only the object of the passion of our epoch, but also that of millions of human beings, starting with our ancient ancestors who rebelled against the movement of exchange value which they saw as a fatality, passing through Marx and Bordiga who, in their dimension as prophets, witnessed this inextinguishable passion to found a new community, a human community. Wanting to situate the revolution is like wanting to fix its height. Saint-Just said that revolution could not stop until happiness was realized, thus showing the falsity of wanting to judge men in terms of the purely historical-material facts of a given epoch. The human being is never a pure being-there. He can only be by superseding and he cannot be only that which has to be superseded (Nietzsche). Structurally and biologically man is a supersession because he is an overpowerful being. In other words, human beings are explorers of the possible and are not content with the immediately realizable, especially if it is imposed on them. They lose this passion, this thirst for creation — for what is the search for the possible if not invention? — when they are debased, estranged, cut off from their *Gemeinwesen* and therefore mutilated, reduced to simple individuals. It is only with the real domination of the capitalist mode of production that the human being is completely evacuated.

All the revolutions of the species are revolutions which try to go beyond the present moment, beyond what is permitted by the development of productive forces (Bordiga). This reach beyond the possible is what constitutes the continuity among the human generations, just as the perspective of communism conceived as the destruction of classes, exchange, and value constitutes the continuity among the varied revolutionaries; this is what, following Marx, we call the historical party.[5]

The struggle against reduction of the amplitude of the revolution is already a revolutionary struggle. The reader should not be astonished if to support this amplitude we refer to authors classically tagged religious, mystical, etc. What matters is the reappropriation of *Gemeinwesen* (and past beings are part of it), which can only be done after the unification of the species, and this unification

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5 "Origine et fonction de la forme parti" (1961), published in *Invariance*, No. 1, Serie 1.

can only be conceived by grasping the aspiration, desire, passion and will for community expressed through the ages. The human being can simultaneously be a *Gemeinwesen* only if humanity lives in community. As soon as fragmentation appears, the need to recompose a unity emerges. In the West this unity had a mediate and coercive form: the individual was defined by the State; knowledge was a means for hierarchization and for justification of the established order; the vicious circle of practice-theory emerged.

Communist revolution is complete revolution. Biological, sexual, social, economic revolutions are no more than partial attributes; the predominance of one is a mutilation of revolution, which can only be by being all.

Communist revolution can be conceived only if it is grasped through the history and paleontology of human beings as well as all other living beings. By grasping this we become aware that, if this revolution has long been necessary, it can now be realized. Earlier it was possible but not unavoidable. There were still other "human" paths in that they still allowed a human development; specifically, they allowed the externalization of human powers. Now almost everything has been externalized and plundered by capital, which describes the only path other than communist revolution: the total negation of human beings. Therefore we must understand our world; we must understand the despotism of capital and the movement of rebellion breaking out against it. This act of understanding which is taking place not only intellectually but also sensually (the rebellion is to a large extent bodily rebellion) can only be reached by rejecting the wandering and the repressive consciousness.

II. Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?

It has often been thought and written that communism would blossom after the destruction of the capitalist mode of production, which would be undermined by such contradictions that its end would be inevitable. But numerous events of this century have unfortunately brought other possibilities into view: the return to "barbarism," as analyzed by R. Luxemburg and the entire left wing of the German workers' movement, by Adorno and the Frankfurt School; the destruction of the human species, as is evident to each and all today; finally a state of stagnation in which the capitalist mode of production survives by adapting itself to a degenerated humanity which lacks the power to destroy it. In order to understand the failure of a future that was thought inevitable, we must take into account the domestication of human beings implemented by all class societies and mainly by capital, and we must analyze the autonomization of capital.

We do not intend to treat these historical deviations exhaustively in a few pages. By commenting on a passage in Marx's *Grundrisse* we can show that it is possible to understand the autonomization of capital on the basis of Marx's work, and we can also see the contradictions in Marxist thought and its inability to solve the problem. The passage is from the chapter on the process of circulation. To understand it, we should keep in mind what Marx had said shortly before this passage:

> "**Circulation time thus appears as a barrier to the productivity of labour** = an increase in necessary labour time = a decrease in surplus labour time = a decrease in surplus value = an obstruction, a barrier to the self-realization process [*Selbstverwertungsprozess*] of capital."[1]

Here Marx makes an extremely important digression:

> "There appears here the universalizing tendency of capital, which distinguishes it from all previous stages of production and thus becomes the presupposition of a new mode of production, which is founded not on the development of the forces of production for the purpose of reproducing or at most expanding a given condition, but where the free, unobstructed, progressive and universal development of the forces of production is itself the presupposition of society and hence of its reproduction; where advance beyond the point of departure is the only presupposition."[2]

What makes capital a barrier is not stated here, whereas its revolutionary, positive aspect is emphasized (this aspect is emphasized on many other pages

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1 Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Pelican, 1973, p. 539.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 540.

of the *Grundrisse*, and of *Capital*): the tendency toward universal development of the forces of production. However, and this is what interests us here, capital cannot realize this; it will be the task of another, superior mode of production. The future of society here takes the form of an indefinite, cumulative movement.

> "This tendency — which capital possesses, but which at the same time, since capital is a limited form of production, contradicts it and hence drives it towards dissolution — distinguishes capital from all earlier modes of production, and at the same time contains this element, that capital is posited as a mere point of transition.[3]

Hence capital is driven towards dissolution by this contradiction. It is a pity that Marx did not here mention what he understands by "limited form of production," since this keeps us from "seeing" clearly what he means by contradiction in this specific case. This conditions the understanding of the statement that the capitalist mode of production is a transitory form of production. Even without an explanation of the contradiction, we can understand it as follows: the capitalist mode of production is not eternal — Marx's polemical argument against the bourgeois ideologues. This is the content of his main statements. But another argument is embedded in the preceding one: the capitalist mode of production is revolutionary and makes possible the passage to another, superior social form where human beings will no longer be dominated by the sphere of necessity (the sphere of the production of material life) and where alienation will cease to exist.

Today, after the blossoming of Marxism as a theory of development, another part of this sentence appears basic: there is a continuum between the two periods. What is a transition if not the opposite of a break? This continuum consists of the development of the forces of production. From which follows the shameful but real relationship: Marx-Lenin-Stalin! But this is not our topic. Our aim is to determine what constitutes the productive forces and for whom they exist, according to Marx in the *Grundrisse*.

> "All previous forms of society — or, what is the same, of the forces of social production — foundered on the development of wealth."[4]

Wealth resides in the productive forces and in the results of their action. There is a contradiction here which, according to Marx, characterizes the totality of human history: wealth is necessary and therefore sought, but it destroys societies.

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3 *Ibid.*
4 *Ibid.*

Societies must therefore oppose its development. This is not the case in the capitalist mode of production (it thus destroys all other social formations), which exalts the productive forces, but for whom?

> "Those thinkers of antiquity who were possessed of consciousness therefore directly denounced wealth as the dissolution of the community [*Gemeinwesen*]. The feudal system, for its part, foundered on urban industry, trade, modern agriculture (even as a result of individual inventions like gunpowder and the printing press). With the development of wealth — and hence also new powers and expanded intercourse on the part of individuals — the economic conditions on which the community [*Gemeinwesen*] rested were dissolved, along with the political relations of the various constituents of the community which corresponded to those conditions: religion, in which it was viewed in idealized form (and both [religion and political relations] rested in turn on a given relation to nature, into which all productive force resolves itself); the character, outlook, etc. of the individuals. The **development of science alone** — i.e. the most solid form of wealth, both its product and its producer — was sufficient to dissolve these communities. But the **development of science**, this ideal and at the same time practical wealth, is only one aspect, one form in which the **development of the human productive forces**, i.e. of wealth, appears. Considered **ideally**, the dissolution of a given form of consciousness sufficed to kill a whole epoch. In reality, this barrier to consciousness corresponds to a **definite degree of development of the forces of material production** and hence of wealth. True, there was not only a development on the old basis, but also a **development of this basis itself**."[5]

For Marx, the productive forces are human (from the human being) and they are for the human being, for the individual. Science as a productive force (thus also wealth, as was already shown in the *1844 Manuscripts* and in *The German Ideology*) is determined by the development of these forces and corresponds to the appearance of a large number of externalizations, a greater possibility to appropriate nature. Even if it takes an ambiguous form, the blossoming of the human being is possible; it is the moment when, in the development of the dominant class, individuals can find a model of a fuller life. For Marx, the capitalist mode of production, by pushing the development of productive forces, makes possible a liberating autonomization of the individual. This is its most important revolutionary aspect.

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[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 540–541.

> "The highest development of this basis itself (the flower into which it transforms itself; but it is always this basis, this plant as flower; hence wilting after the flowering and as a consequence of the flowering) is the point at which it is itself worked out, developed, into the form in which it is compatible with the highest development of the forces of production, hence also the richest development of the individuals. As soon as this point is reached, the further development appears as decay, and the new development begins from a new basis."[6]

There is decay because the development of individuals is blocked. It is not possible to use this sentence to support the theory of the decline of the capitalist mode of production[7] since it would have to be stated that the decline started, not at the beginning of this century, but minimally in the middle of the previous century; or else it would have to be shown that the decline of individuals is simultaneously the decline of capital, which contradicts what can be observed; Marx himself repeatedly explained that the development of capital was accompanied by the destruction of human beings and of nature.

When did the development of productive forces accompany the development of individuals in different societies? When was the capitalist mode of production revolutionary for itself and for human beings? Do the productive forces advance continually, in spite of moments when individuals decay? Marx said: "... the further development appears as decay..." Do the productive forces stagnate; does the capitalist mode of production decay?[8]

The remainder of Marx's digression confirms that the decay refers to human beings. Individuals blossom when the productive forces allow them to develop, when the evolution of one parallels the evolution of the other. By means of a comparison with the pre-capitalist period, Marx shows that capital is not hostile to wealth but, on the contrary, takes up its production. Thus it takes up the development of productive forces. Previously the development of human beings, of their community, was opposed to the development of wealth; now there is something like symbiosis between them. For this to happen, a certain mutation was necessary: capital had to destroy the limited character of the individual; this is another aspect of its revolutionary character.

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 541.

7 As is done by Victor in *Révolution Internationale* No. 7, série 1, p. 4 of the article "Volontarisme et confusion."

8 Various authors have spoken of stagnation and declining production between the two world wars. Bordiga always rejected the theory of the decline of the capitalist mode of production as a gradualist deformation of Marx's theory (see "Le renversement de la praxis dans la théorie marxiste," in *Invariance* No. 4, série 1.

> "We saw earlier that property in the conditions of production was posited as identical with a limited, definite form of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], hence of the individual with the characteristics — limited characteristics and limited development of his productive forces — required to form such a community [*Gemeinwesen*]. This presupposition was itself in turn the result of a limited historic stage of the development of the productive forces, of wealth as well as the mode of creating it. The purpose of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], of the individual — as well as the condition of production — is the reproduction of **these specific conditions of production** and of the individuals, both singly and in their social groupings and relations — as living carriers of these conditions. Capital posits the **production of wealth** itself and hence the universal development of the productive forces, the constant overthrow of its prevailing presuppositions, as the presupposition of its reproduction. Value excludes no use value; i.e. includes no particular kind of consumption etc., of intercourse etc. as absolute condition; and likewise every degree of the development of the social forces of production, of intercourse, of knowledge etc. appears to it only as a barrier which it strives to overpower."[9]

This passage has momentous consequences. There is no reference to the proletariat; it is the revolutionary role of capital to overthrow the prevailing presuppositions. Marx had already said this, in a more striking manner:

> "It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces."[10]

We are forced to take a new approach toward the manner in which Marx situated the proletarian class in the context of the continual upheaval carried out by the capitalist mode of production. What is immediately evident is that the capitalist mode of production is revolutionary in relation to the destruction of ancient social relations, and that the proletariat is defined as revolutionary in relation to capital. But it is at this point that the problem begins: capitalism is revolutionary because it develops the productive forces; the proletariat cannot be revolutionary if, after its revolution, it develops or allows a different development of the productive forces. How can we tangibly distinguish the revolutionary

[9] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 541.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 410.

role of one from that of the other? How can we justify the destruction of the capitalist mode of production by the proletariat? This cannot be done in a narrowly economic context. Marx never faced this problem because he was absolutely certain that the proletarians would rise against capital. But we have to confront this problem if we are going to emerge from the impasse created by our acceptance of the theory according to which the production relations come into conflict with the development of the productive forces (forces which were postulated to exist for the human being, since if this were not the case, why would human beings rebel?) If the productive forces do not exist for human beings but for capital, and if they conflict with production relations, then this means that these relations do not provide the proper structure to the capitalist mode of production, and therefore there can be revolution which is not for human beings (for example, the general phenomenon which is called fascism). Consequently capital escapes. In the passage we are examining, Marx makes a remarkable statement about the domination of capital:

> "Its own presupposition — value — is posited as product, not as a loftier presupposition hovering over production."[11]

Capital dominates value. Since labor is the substance of value, it follows that capital dominates human beings. Marx refers only indirectly to the presupposition which is also a product: wage labor, namely the existence of a labor force which makes valorization possible:

> "The barrier to **capital** is that this entire development proceeds in a contradictory way, and that the working-out of the productive forces, of general wealth etc., knowledge etc., appears in such a way that the working individual **alienates** himself [*sich entaussert*]; relates to the conditions brought out of him by his labor as those not of his **own** but of an **alien wealth** and of his own poverty."[12]

How can this be a limit for capital? One might suppose that under-consumption by the workers causes crises, and the final crisis. This is one possibility; at least it appears that way at certain times. Marx always refused to ground a theory of crises on this point, but this did not keep him from mentioning this under-consumption. For Marx capital has a barrier because it despoils the working individual. We should keep in mind that he is arguing against apologists for

11 *Ibid.*, P. 541.
12 *Ibid.*

capital and wants to show that the capitalist mode of production is not eternal and does not achieve human emancipation. Yet in the course of his analysis he points to the possibility for capital to escape from human conditions. We perceive that it is not the productive forces that become autonomous, but capital, since at a given moment the productive forces become "a barrier which it strives to overpower." This takes place as follows: the productive forces are no longer productive forces of human beings but of capital; they are for capital.[13]

The despoliation (alienation) of the working individual cannot be a barrier for capital, unless Marx means barrier in the sense of a weakness; such a weakness would make capitalism inferior to other modes of production, particularly if we contrast this weakness to the enormous development of productive forces which it impels. In Marx's work there is an ambiguity about the subject to which the productive forces refer: are they for the human being or for capital? This ambiguity grounds two interpretations of Marx. The ethical interpretation (see especially Rubel) emphasizes the extent to which Marx denounces the destruction of the human being by capital, and vigorously insists that the capitalist mode of production can only be a transitory stage. The interpretation of Althusser and his school holds that Marx does not succeed in eliminating the human being from his economic analyses, which reflects his inability to abandon ideological discourse, from which follows Althusser's problem of correctly locating the epistemological break.

It is possible to get out of this ambiguity. If capital succeeds in overcoming this barrier, it achieves full autonomy. This is why Marx postulates that capital must abolish itself; this abolition follows from the fact that it cannot develop the productive forces for human beings while it makes possible a universal, varied development which can only be realized by a superior mode of production. This contains a contradiction: capital escapes from the grasp of human beings, but it must perish because it cannot develop human productive forces. This also contradicts Marx's analysis of the destruction of human beings by capital. How can destroyed human beings rebel? We can, if we avoid these contradictions, consider Marx a prophet of the decline of capital, but then we will not be able to understand his work or the present situation. The end of Marx's digression clarifies these contradictions.

> "But this antithetical form is itself fleeting, and produces the real conditions of its own suspension. The result is: the tendentially and potentially general

[13] This is what Marx shows when he analyzes fixed capital in the Grundrisse, and also in Book I of *Capital* "where he analyzes the transformation of the work process into a process of production of capital (see also *Un chapitre inédit du Capital*, Paris: Ed. 10/18, 1971).

development of the forces of production — of wealth as such — as a basis; likewise, the universality of intercourse, hence the world market as a basis. The basis as the possibility of the universal development of the individual, and the real development of the individuals from this basis as a constant suspension of its **barrier**, which is recognized as a barrier, not taken for a **sacred limit**. Not an ideal or imagined universality of the individual, but the universality of his real and ideal relations. Hence also the grasping of his own history as a **process**, and the recognition of nature (equally present as practical power over nature) as his real body. The process of development itself posited and known as the presupposition of the same. For this, however, necessary above all that the full development of the forces of production has become the **condition of production**; and not that specific **conditions of production** are posited as a limit to the development of the productive forces."[14]

If this process is to concern individuals, capital has to be destroyed and the productive forces have to be for human beings. In the article, "La KAPD et le mouvement proletarien,"[15] we referred to this passage to indicate that the human being is a possibility, giving a foundation to the statement: the revolution must be human. This is in no way a discourse on the human being conceived as invariant in every attribute, a conception which would merely be a restatement of the immutability of human nature. But we have to point out that this is still insufficient, since the development of productive forces which, according to Marx, will take place in a superior mode of production, is precisely the same development presently carried out by capital. The limit of Marx is that he conceived communism as a new mode of production where productive forces blossom. These forces are undoubtedly important, but their existence at a certain level does not adequately define communism.

For Marx, capital overcomes its contradictions by engulfing them and by mystifying reality. It can only apparently overcome its narrow base, its limited nature which resides in the exchange of capital-money against labor force. Capital must inevitably come into conflict with this presupposition; thus Marx speaks of the opposition between private appropriation and socialization of production. Private appropriation of what? Of surplus value, which presupposes the proletarian, and thus the wage relation. But the entire development of capital (and Marx's own explanations are a precious aid in understanding it) makes the mystification effective, making capital independent of human beings, thus enabling it to avoid

[14] Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 541–542.
[15] *Invariance*, Série II, No. 1.

the conflict with its presupposition. One might say that the conflict nevertheless persists, as a result of the total process: socialization. This is true. But the socialization of production and of human activity, the universal development of the productive forces and thus the destruction of the limited character of the human being — all this was only a **possible** ground for communism; it did not pose communism automatically. Furthermore, the action of capital tends constantly to destroy communism, or at least to inhibit its emergence and realization. To transform this possible ground into reality, human intervention is necessary. But Marx himself showed that capitalist production integrates the proletariat. How could the destruction of human beings and of nature fail to have repercussions on the ability of human beings to resist capital and, *a fortiori*, to rebel?

Some will think we are attributing to Marx a position which is convenient to us. We will cite an extraordinary passage:

> "What precisely distinguishes capital from the master-servant relation is that the **worker** confronts [capital] as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the **possessor of money**, in the form of money he becomes a simple center of circulation — one of its infinitely many centers, in which his specificity as worker is extinguished."[16]

One of the modalities of the re-absorbtion of the revolutionary power of the proletariat has been to perfect its character as consumer, thus catching it in the mesh of capital. The proletariat ceases to be the class that negates; after the formation of the working class it dissolves into the social body. Marx anticipates the poets of the "consumer society" and, as in other instances, he explains a phenomenon which is observed only later and then falsely, if only in terms of the name given to it.

The preceding observations do not lead to a fatalistic conception (this time negative), such as: whatever we do, there's no way out; it's too late; or any other mindless defeatism which would generate a sickening patch-work reformism. First we have to draw the lesson. Capital has run away from human and natural barriers; human beings have been domesticated: this is their decadence. The revolutionary solution cannot be found in the context of a dialectic of productive forces where the individual would be an element of the contradiction. Present day scientific analyses of capital proclaim a complete disregard for human beings who, for some, are nothing but a residue without consistency. This means that the discourse of science is the discourse of capital, or that science is possible only after the destruction of human beings; it is a discourse on the pathology of

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[16] Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 420–421.

the human being. Thus it is insane to ground the hope of liberation on science. The position is all the more insane where, as with Althusser, it cannot make its own break, liquidate its "archeology," since it remains faithful to a proletariat — a proletariat which in this conception is merely an object of capital, an element of the structure. But this inefficient, destroyed human being is the individual produced by class societies. And on this we agree: the human being is dead. The only possibility for another human being to appear is our struggle against our domestication, our emergence from it. Humanism and scientism (and the followers of "ethical science" *à la* Monod are the most absolute slaves of capital) are two expressions of the domestication of humanity. All those who nurse the illusion of the decadence of capital revive ancient humanist conceptions or give birth to new scientific myths. They remain impermeable to the revolutionary phenomenon running through our world.

Until now all sides have argued as if human beings remained unchanged in different class societies and under the domination of capital. This is why the role of the social context was emphasized (man, who was fundamentally good, was seen to be modified positively or negatively by the social context) by the materialist philosophers of the 18th century, while Marxists emphasized the role of an environment conditioned by the development of productive forces. Change was not denied, and after Marx it was repeated that history was a continual transformation of human nature. Nevertheless it was held explicitly or implicitly that an irreducible element continued to allow human beings to revolt against the oppression of capital. And capitalism itself was described in a Manichean manner: on one side the positive pole, the proletariat, the liberating class; on the other the negative pole, capital. Capital was affirmed as necessary and as having revolutionized the life of human beings, but it was described as an absolute evil in relation to the good, the proletariat. The phenomenon which emerges today does not in the least destroy the negative evaluation of capital, but forces us to generalize it to the class which was once antagonistic to it and carried within itself all the positive elements of human development and today of humanity itself. This phenomenon is the recomposition of a community and of human beings by capital, reflecting human community like a mirror. The theory of the looking glass could only arise when the human being became a tautology, a reflection of capital. Within the world of the despotism of capital (this is how society appears as of today), neither a good nor an evil can be distinguished. Everything can be condemned. Negating forces can only arise outside of capital. Since capital has absorbed all the old contradictions, the revolutionary movement has to reject the entire product of the development of class societies. This is the crux of its struggle against domestication, against the decadence of the human species. This

is the essential moment of the process of formation of revolutionaries, absolutely necessary for the production of revolution.

Jacques Camatte May, 1973

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The Wandering of Humanity
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