

# Post – Fordism and its Discontents

Edited by Gal Kirn

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## Editorial note

How to rethink the recent transformations of global capitalism in the light of its manifold internal fractures and contradictions? This book addresses complex connections between culture and economy in order to scrutinise what underpins the logic of late capitalism. Post-Fordist theories offer a very provocative and illuminating slant on the developments within the new regime of capitalist accumulation. In many ways, this theoretical research challenges mainstream economic and cultural theories.

Even though it does not have a coherent departure point, it provides us with productive tools for the contemporary research in the associated fields of speech, biopolitics, migration, economy and emancipation. This volume offers an affirmative and critical account of some major controversies of post-Fordist theory, debated by researchers and scholars from a variety of theoretical contexts, ranging from Marxist, post-Marxist to post-Fordist. They present their takes on rethinking a return to a fundamental theoretical rupture: to Karl Marx's critique of political economy.



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Reading Post-Fordist Theories as a Specific Return  
to Marx and a Critique of Political Economy  
by Gal Kirn

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This book is a product of the theoretical labour that began in 2004 in Ljubljana, where the collective Workers'-Punks' University (WPU) organised 'Post-Fordism', a yearlong series of lectures. This series resulted in an intense exchange of critical views on the topic that had largely disappeared from the theoretical horizon since the fall of Yugoslavian self-management socialism. A somewhat brutal transition to the neoliberal form of capitalism took place in the post-Yugoslav context, which comprised 'typical' processes such as privatisation, the collapse of the socialist welfare state, the destruction of political forms of self-management, the rise of class inequalities, unemployment, exclusion and social insecurity in general. These processes were inextricably bound up with a large ideological offensive and an apology of the existing order and sacredness of the market forces. It then hardly comes as a surprise that no major publication appeared that could claim to be a *critique of political economy* or at least would try to think critically about the new economy.<sup>1</sup> The academic discipline of economics has been dominated by two approaches: there has been a massive neoliberal push towards neoclassical economical analysis – the main focus of which remains microeconomics –, while the only counter-hegemonical theoretical force was the Keynesian approach. In opposition to this ideological constellation, the lectures and discussions on post-Fordism signified a fresh approach that reaffirmed the validity of the critique of political economy and was not afraid to think in Marxist terms. This point can be regarded as a decisive theoretical rupture within the liberal ideological context, where the figure of Karl Marx was largely ignored or dealt with in a tendentious way. Being aware of the theoretical relevancy of the lecture series 'Post-Fordism' the programme committee of WPU decided to publish some contributions of lecturers and invite new authors that would add a critical perspective to the existing post-Fordist schools of thought.

1 There are some honorable exceptions, e.g. Rastko Močnik's book *World Economy and Revolutionary Politics* (2006, Ljubljana: založba / \*cf) and a few other articles, but they have remained in the peripheries of the academic and journalistic worlds.

One of the book's major stakes is the re-affirmation of the critique of political economy in the post-Yugoslav context, but also in a more general theoretical one. There is not much literature on post-Fordist theories. Post-Fordist analyses are fairly known in the French and Italian academic contexts, elsewhere they have not yet received broader intellectual attention. In the Anglo-Saxon academic world there is only one reader on post-Fordism (Ash Amin, 1994), which offers a general, but relevant overview of the existing schools of post-Fordism and is a good starting point for researches. Many post-Fordist texts are dispersed in the journals of their own schools (e.g. *Multitudes*) and hence remain quite isolated. What this book offers is not a general overview, but an attempt to present both an affirmative and a critical account of the theories of post-Fordism, how they deal with the 'material' and critically discuss their central stakes and concepts. In comparison to Amin's reader, this book is less homogeneous, but more theoretically complex and diverse, since it consists of a plurality of critical approaches that centre on the key concepts and how they help understand their specific material. Even though all contributions remain within the 'post-Fordist discursive space', they elaborate on different topics and exert internal or external critique to the pertinent framework of post-Fordism. Theoretical diversion is one of the major characteristics of the theoretical body of post-Fordism.

What is the major research 'object' of the post-Fordist theories? They locate and conceptualise a passage from Fordist to the *post-Fordist accumulation mode*; in other words, they analyse the transformations of the conditions of work and work itself and how these processes have affected the entire capitalist organization of the social structure. They pose the question, 'What is new in late capitalism?' The dynamics and scope of structural changes are nicely elaborated on in the first article that follows the introductory note, written by Igor Pribac. His text can be read as a general introduction and presents the reader with recent historical transformation. It explains what Toyotism is, how communication and speech have become most significant in the production forces, how flexible contracts affect the relationship between capital and labour. Pribac's article is

essential to understand the material upon which post-Fordist theories based their research object.

Accompanying these structural changes in the reorganization of the capitalist mode of production, there was also a major change in the theoretical field. The critical approach to the field of the political economy had always been internally linked to the project of Marx, but in the last decades many progressive and revolutionary thinkers abandoned his analysis of the capitalist mode of production. Marxism was proclaimed dead and the field of the economical transformation has been left to the marginal Marxists. Progressive and critical thought transferred the discussion to the critique of ideology (Butler, Laclau, Žižek) or to thinking politics (Rancière, Badiou, Balibar).<sup>2</sup> Quite symptomatic of these approaches is the stress of their communist and not Marxist engagement. In this regard we must affirm the gesture of post-Fordist theoreticians who intervene in the current discourse that refrained from thinking economic transformations on the one hand, and criticizes the ideological notions of neoliberal economists on the other. The post-Fordist analyses thus remain faithful to Marx's project of the critique of political economy, or at least could be viewed as a peculiar continuation of his project. In the current crisis it is not only historical necessity that pushes us towards a new critique of the political economy, it is also a theoretical necessity to be able to evaluate certain (non-)returns to Marx.

Even though almost all post-Fordist theoreticians would agree that Marx needs to be revised, especially his value theory,<sup>3</sup> we can name their theoretical position as post-Marxist. They supplement and provide Marx either with the theory of

2 This remark has been made by Slavoj Žižek in his book *The Ticklish Subject* (1999, London: Verso).

3 Even though one can agree with certain problems in Marx's project, most of the post-Fordist theories do not develop an alternative understanding of the value production. As every Marxist knows, this is one of the major contributions of Marx, which needs to be read together with the concept of exploitation. Marx without the value theory melts into air.

State (regulationist school) or with the conceptualisations of the society of control, the emergence of the biopolitical regime of production (Foucauldian influence on Negrian research) or the analysis of new technological developments (the neo-Schumpeterian school). No matter how 'revisionary' some tendencies in post-Fordist readings are, we have to read them against the backdrop of a specific return and continuation of Marx. Each return embraces a particular reading of Marx. Let us situate the differences in the existing Marxist and post-Marxist theories with the help of a provisional tool, one that considers their points of departure. Each theoretical school concentrates on a different moment in the economical process. As Marx already showed in *Grundrisse*, the economic process consists of different moments: production, circulation, distribution and consumption. The world-system theory (Wallerstein, Frank, Arrighi, Silver, among others) takes trade/circulation as the most important element. Without trade we could not understand the global development of capitalism. It is true that their analyses differ from one another (cf. Arrighi and financial, merchant, political-military hegemony), but nevertheless they share the starting point. The moment of consumption has also been extremely popular beyond Marxist studies, within postmodernist accounts of economy, for example Naomi Klein's work on advertising and logos, Colin Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, or the return to Baudrillard or Bataille is especially telling in this regard. However, the post-Fordist theories are internally diversified and do not take the same moment as starting point. Production is central to the technological school (neo-Schumpeterians), which insists on the development of technological forces (production) and to the Regulationist school, which develops a specific concept of the accumulation regime.<sup>4</sup> Optimist post-Fordists are internally diversified. Negri insists on the primacy of production that is now assigned to biopolitical production (not labour but life

4 The influence of Althusser's mode of production on regulationist theoreticians is developed by Alain Lipietz ("From Althusserianism to 'Regulation Theory'." in: *The Althusserian Legacy*. Eds. Ann E. Kaplan and Michel Sprinker, London: Verso. pp. 99-138).

is dominated by capital), Sergio Bologna offers a very interesting account in which the moment of 'distribution' (logistics) is central to his analysis. We can claim that post-Fordism does not have one common theoretical framework, but is a theory in becoming, a work in progress, which has not yet grounded itself by firm theoretical pillars. Post-Fordism acquired its specific status, which is characterised by some groundlessness, maybe precisely because of its structural place. It is positioned between critical economic and cultural theories, in their cross-section, which besides or precisely because of its groundlessness brings about new and productive insights.

The 'deadlock' and productivity of the post-Fordist condition are inscribed into the internal structure of the book itself. The book has a divisive line, which reflects the multitude of various approaches to the post-Fordist problematic. The articles are organised around two general sections regarding their 'object' of study. The first section, 'Key Theoretical Positions in Post-Fordism' has a strong critical edge, whereas the second section, 'Use of Conceptual Framework: Case Studies in the Post-Fordist Horizon', shows how new concepts are used or produced via the theoretical work on the specific material.

The first section gives an overview of some theoretical discussions and the use of key concepts of post-Fordist theories. This section is metatheoretical and largely critical towards the post-Fordist cause and provides internal and external critique. It starts with Sandro Mezzadra's article, in which he argues for an important methodological shift in migration studies. Instead of focusing on the integration of immigrants, or on economical aspects of migration only, he proposes a so-called post-Fordist manifesto and a sketch of a theoretical framework to understand the autonomy of migrations. Via migration, the policy and control of migrations, we are not only able to understand the dynamic and transformation of the late capitalist production, we can also analyse how labour is subsumed to capital, how immigrant labour becomes extremely important in the 'class recomposition'. While Mezzadra's text focuses on the immigrant labour, the general concept of labour is taken into rigorous analysis in the article of Katja Diefenbach. She follows carefully a theoretical development from workerism

to postworkerism and exposes the problematic of the idealist kernel of 'living labour'. She also criticises Structuralist Marxism, which failed to address issues of agency and ideology of productivism. A similar theoretical stake, but coming from an external perspective, is elaborated by Gorazd Kovačič. He advocates an Arendtian perspective on the concept of work, which draws an alternative schema that enables to establish a different relationship between politics and economy. The text forces the reader to challenge the very notion of society, which is usually a presupposed notion in the majority of social sciences. Another 'external' critique follows by Jacques Rancière who criticises the 'onto-technological' trick of some post-Marxist and post-Fordist theories which claims that the immaterial tendency is not yet the fulfilment of a utopian promise. On the contrary, Rancière claims that capitalism will not destroy itself. The emancipation of politics will have to come from people, that is, from their own political work. This political work is proper to the communist gesture. The section concludes with an article by Zdravko Kobe, who closely analyses the theoretical deadlock of immaterial labour and poses the question, 'Why do post-Fordist theories not analyse more traditional branches of economy?' According to him post-Fordism incorrectly focuses on the shift of the distribution of wealth and not the production of surplus value. The article then theorizes a problematic status of the May '68, which saw a specific synthesis: the managerial revolution went hand in hand with the anticapitalist movements. The result of this synthesis was the transformation called the post-Fordist turn: it was about the flexibility of the production relations, which was ironically desired by both the capitalist avant-garde and workers and students.

The second section works on more specific examples of the transformations of capitalism, which are analysed within the post-Fordist conceptual framework. It starts with the text that has launched many controversies in the Italian post-workerist circles. Sergio Bologna provides us with a concrete analysis of the situation of precarious and independent workers in Italy. How is this new class to be considered? The government on the one hand and the trade union with political parties on the other avoid considering this new reality. Bologna shows how the Italian Left

capitulated and pushed this class to the margins, thus not taking this class into account. As opposed to this lack of engagement, he asserts possible ways of finding new forms of political organisation. Just like Tronti went to the US (Marx in Detroit), Bologna goes to New York. According to Bologna, today we need to come up with new strategies of organisation against capital as well as strategies against their cooptation by the state and the trade unions. A similar political urgency is at work in the text of Rastko Močnik. He criticises the insufficiency of the concept of class composition and instead launches Marx's concept of *Gesellschaftsformation* (social formation). Capitalism needs to be crushed as a dominant mode of production, therefore political action that only posits one type of the dominant worker (which is at present the cognitive worker) as the main political force cannot be successful. Political action should be about establishing class solidarity between different types of workers. The capitalist mode of production is dominant, but is only one of the production modes. Močnik elaborates his standpoint with an analysis of the May '68 movement and the recent trade unionist movement in Slovenia. In his article Gal Kirn sheds light on the post-Fordist tendency that could enable our understanding of the break-up of Yugoslavia. If the emergence of the socialist Yugoslavia was a revolutionary event founded on antifascist struggles, the transition to Yugoslavian socialism meant a synthesis of communism and capitalism. Exerting a critique of the Yugoslav self-management economy, Kirn twists the central thesis of post-Fordist theories. It is not in the capitalist core that one can see the 'truth'. On the contrary, the truth of the capitalist system (tendency) is manifested precisely in the margins. The analysis re-orientates the stress on post-Fordist tendency as being genuine in the core capitalist countries. The last part of the book focuses on the relationship between post-Fordist theory and art. Marina Vishmidt is interested in concepts like 'social factory' and Paolo Virno's 'virtuosity', which map a common field between salaried exploitation and the free labour of the artist. Commenting on the work of feminist and conceptual artists she poses the following question, What dynamics of transformation and contagion do we observe in an increasingly unregulated sphere of work and an increasingly under-determined and socially expansive field of

art? Her article is an attempt to articulate the feminist analysis exemplified by *Wages for Housework* in relation to a politics of reproduction within the art practice. The last article of Ciril Oberstar closely studies the failed encounter between film theory (Chion) and Virno's theory in *Grammar of Multitude*. The author expounds a powerful critique of Virno's linguistic theory, which ignores the polyphony and multidimensionality of voices within the production process. Yet, film theory can give useful insights into post-Fordist theory. Oberstar puts forward a very interesting and suggestive structural analogy between the filmic process and the post-Fordist production process. The silent film ended when the sound became part of shooting a film and the silence on the set became a necessary condition. The essential shift that is frequently associated with a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism is reversed. When in Fordist factories workers followed the imperative 'Silence, men at work!', in the post-Fordist enterprise the imperative is, 'Men at work. Talk.' There is a polyphony of voices in the post-Fordist condition, where some are steering the production process and others help reorganising it. The author thus poses a pertinent question, What had to be silenced for the workers to have become audible for theory?

Let us conclude with giving credits to those who cannot speak here, or did not write an article and are hence not included in the table of contents, but without whom the project would have been impossible. Firstly, I have to thank Goran Forbici without whose assistance and consultancy the whole conceptualisation of the project would not have materialised. For some important remarks in thinking post-Fordist theories I have to thank Ciril Oberstar. Many thanks for the flexible and important labour of all the translators who assisted in the making of the book: Ozren Pupovac, Ben Carter, Bruno Besana, Dušan Rebolj, Barbara Formis, Oliver Feltham and Katja Kosi. My special thanks go to the designers, Jens Schildt, Matthias Kreutzer, Nina Støttrup Larsen and Žiga Testen, who patiently and insistently laboured and to the organisational efforts of Anouk van Heesch, general coordinator artistic productions at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Koen Brams and Petra van der Jeught. Last but not least, I would like to thank the institutions Jan van Eyck Academie, Peace Institute and B-Books for their financial assistance.





Post-Fordism – a Contextualisation  
by Igor Pribac

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Most analysts and historians of the economies of developed capitalist societies agree that one cannot consider the period since the Second World War as a unified whole regulated by a single dominant model of economic logic. The post-war period is divisible into two stages in which two distinct models operate. The first developmental paradigm has been examined fairly well. There is also a broad consensus regarding the moment when its crisis set in. However, the question of what came after has been examined less thoroughly, and is the subject of a vibrant discussion that seems to be heating up rather than reaching a conclusion. The disagreement concerns the second stage, the one that encompasses the present. The tentative nature of these explorations stems, at least in part, from the fact that the transformation they are attempting to describe has not reached completion: the forms of surplus value creation are still changing, and this process – having yet to develop its full potential – defies analysis.

The problem is partly a general one: the historic perspective becomes increasingly burdened with various difficulties as it nears the present. In its dealings with the past, the more it approaches what is merely half-bygone and what still lasts, the more complicated things get. As the point of the time axis to which we direct our attention gets closer to the present, it is ever more obviously demonstrable only through suggestion, through deviation from the commonplace, through pointing out atypical alterations. Detecting these suggestions of the new is problematic. Rare and relatively insignificant, they remain barely visible and exist largely as non-actualised virtualities, so that attempts to single them out are always subject to the suspicion that the selection of facts meant to prove that the change has occurred is arbitrary. Thus, these attempts must endlessly combat the opinion that individual, presumably new constellations are explicable in the established terms of old paradigms and reducible to normal deviations and oscillations that do not require new premises to be introduced.

There is very little dispute regarding the first post-war stage – what dispute there is, is limited to the issues of nomenclature and emphasis. The concept acknowledged as the description of the socio-economic organisation of capitalist

societies in the decades immediately following the war is Fordism, named after the American automobile magnate Henry Ford and the management measures he introduced in his factories in the 1920s and 1930s. Some oppose this choice of designation, and accuse it of failing to encompass the specificity both of the regime of surplus value creation and of the model for societal development, which they consider to be broader categories. Fordism, they claim, can at best serve as a component of such a model – the component describing the changes at the level of corporate management. These authors assert that the modifications introduced by Ford into his factories did not become a social model until they were augmented by systemic solutions at the national level as part of Roosevelt's New Deal, the most influential but not the only emergence of the welfare state in capitalist societies. However, merely equating New Deal with a state social policy that promotes social solidarity with people in need and strengthens the middle classes entails the risk of disregarding the policy's economic function (Dioguardi 2007: 78–89). Social sciences regard this function as a redistribution of newly created value, as an application of moral and political ideals, divorced from the methods of value creation. Such redistributive policies are seldom regarded as having an economic dimension, as important economic factors in the shaping of company business policies.

If we are concerned with this aspect of the post-war era, we may name the reversal that began in the United States in the 1930s, and reached its peak following the war, the period of Keynesianism – after its theoretical originator John Maynard Keynes. This suggestion seems easier to accept. Contrary to classical economists who favoured a minimal role of the state in the regulation of economic currents, Keynes thought it necessary for the state to intervene in the regulation of markets. Following the collapse of the American financial system in 1929 and, subsequently, of the real economy, Keynes found it easy to prove in the most convincing of terms that, in itself, the market's capacity for self-regulation did not guarantee a stable development of economy and society. The Keynesian reversal in economic policy gave the state a socialist coat – the state became an employer and initiated a number of infrastructural

public works, contributing to the general boost in the productivity of private capital. Thus, a new era of economic impetus was born, during which the state maintained an active role in the regulation of market conditions and the maximising of long-term stable economic growth.

Yet as a response to the question of the causes and conditions of the economic cycle, this notion seems somewhat one-sided. It reflects a macroeconomic perspective that observes and regulates the relations between economic categories at the grand national economic level, leaving aside the goings-on in the production unit. In his factories, Henry Ford had instituted certain changes with regard to the “accumulation regime” even before the stock market crashed, and one would argue that in the dispute regarding nomenclature, these are the very grounds for favouring the term Fordism over Keynesianism.

The reversal of the “accumulation regime” was also made possible by certain technological advances in industrial production, particularly by the introduction of electro-mechanical means of production, which increased productivity considerably and enabled large-scale serial production of an extent not feasible in earlier times. Having triggered a rise in labour productivity, this technological leap did cause products to become cheaper, but it also demanded vast, stable and relatively wealthy markets inhabited by a broad class of people whose purchase power and demand were capable of supporting the emerging economy of scale. In contrast to Germany in the 1930s, Fordism in the U.S. did have at its disposal such a broad national market, and it directed its efforts at creating a supply of serially produced commodities that accommodated the increasing demand.

Regarded henceforth in a broader sense, as an arrangement, as neither a mere philosophy of a single business corporation nor a corporate philosophy of economic subjects in general, but as a comprehensive paradigm of the capitalist socio-economic order, Fordism functions on four levels:

- 1        *as a new conception of the industrial production process.*  
In this sense, Fordism entails massive industrial production that, since it is dominated by electro-

mechanic machines, no longer requires a highly skilled labour force, but simple, easily learnable labour operations. Having already segmented the production procedure into individual stages, machines were supplemented by the invention of the conveyor belt that joined separate labour results in the final product. Thus, mass production of commodities also gave rise to the unskilled mass labourer who differed from the previously prevalent, less readily replaceable skilled labourer. The increase in productivity was tied to good central organization of the segmented production process where the employees' labour time was not needlessly wasted. We can call this level Taylorism, after F. W. Taylor who used so-called "scientific management" to optimize production times necessary for individual labour procedures. Based on his measurements, he set work norms for workers, aimed at making the best possible use of machines. Of course, large-scale serial production did not penetrate all industrial branches, but it did become the dominant form;

2 *as a capital "accumulation regime"*. Fordism ensured constant growth with economies of scale, with the growth in productivity and rise of employees' salaries, and consequently with the aggregate demand for mass consumption commodities, making the process come full circle;

(Aglietta 2008: 30–33);

3 *as an "economic regulation" method*. Fordism was based on the separation of the ownership of capital from its management – on the emergence of the managerial class – on centrally coordinated production, price monopolies, and the acknowledgment of trade unions as representatives of workers' interests and partners indispensable to the equation, important in achieving long-term, stable conditions for production and commodities' market valuation. With workers' unions, employers began negotiating collective contracts about

the price of the labour force, tying salary policies to the growth in productivity and to the inflation of retail prices. In this dialogue between social partners established by Fordism, the state, acting as the third major partner in addition to employees and employers, provided monetary emissions and credit policies that ensured adequate demand on the market;

- 4 as a “*societal paradigm*” (Lipietz 1994: 341). In nuclear family households on which it was based the Fordist economy encouraged the consumption of standardised goods and services. The state assumed an important role in the negotiations between employers and employees. The tripartite negotiations between capital, labour and the state became the basis for ensuring long-term, stable conditions of production and consumption, a prerequisite for Fordist new value creation. In the case that the previous three levels of comprehension of Fordism failed to do so, this one unambiguously points to the cultural and anthropological dimensions of Fordist solutions (e.g. the priority of conformism over non-conformism).

According to the general view, in the mid-1970s this comprehensive socio-economic arrangement began to inwardly fracture and crumble. While different schools of thought ascribe different values to the dynamics and structural causes of these changes, there are three distinct approaches to interpreting the changes themselves: the neo-Schumpeterian approach, the approach emphasizing flexible specialization, and the regulation approach (Amin 1994: 6–20). Not unlike the regulation approach, the neo-Schumpeterian approach speaks of the systemic and cyclical nature of capitalist development, of the role played by the synchronicity between the techno-economic paradigm and the broader socio-institutional framework, the accumulation and regulation regimes. However, neo-Schumpeterians emphasise the significance of technology and technical standards in promoting and sustaining long conjunctural waves. Their analysis is based on Kondratieff’s theory on 20- and 50-year conjunctural cycles, which Schumpeter supplemented in the

1930s by calling attention to the boosting role of entrepreneur-inventors who laid the technological groundwork for a new stage of development. Theirs is the thesis on the “quantum leaps” of growth in industrial productivity that spread throughout the industrial realm, provided the technological breakthroughs are followed by appropriate institutional support. Also, they stress the importance of leading products and individual industrial branches in triggering larger developmental trends. They consider the period, left behind along with Fordism, the fourth Kondratieff cycle, characterised by electromechanical technology, mass consumption products, and petrochemical energy products, i.e. oil. In their view, the crisis resulted from oligopolies’ poor competitiveness in introducing new technologies. This, accompanied by the growing price of labour, lessened profit rates and diminished the efficiency of big corporations. The crisis of Fordism in the 1970s was caused by the rise of a new techno-economic paradigm and its divergence from the institutional framework that remained attuned to the conditions of the fourth cycle. Objections raised against this explanation address mainly its technological determinism: it claims the socio-political institutional framework depends on the techno-economic paradigm.

The “flexible specialisation” approach to the analysis of changes is taken primarily by a group of American sociologists who ground the bulk of their claims in the opposition between mass production and flexible, specialised production. Large serial production requires a semi-qualified workforce, while specialised production calls for a qualified workforce capable of producing a number of different products. According to this interpretation, these two types of production have coexisted, and continue to do so, without either of the two ever completely replacing the other. While at different times one or the other may have been dominant, this is by no means a reflection of some logical or historical necessity. Rather, it is a consequence of a concept created by political choices of various agents (trade unions, local governments, managers, politicians, etc.). The proponents of this school of thought point out two “industrial milestones”: the first one was laid at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the creation of large serial production technology

curtailed the development of craft-based production; the second milestone followed the early 1970s stagnation symbolised by the crisis of Fordism in the U.S. (decrease in demand, the collapse of international regulatory mechanisms, increase in the demand for individualised products). The crisis brought flexible technologies to prominence and stifled mass production. Critics frequently accuse this approach of underestimating Fordist serial production, and doubt the feasibility of reverting to craft-based production. Given that the “flexible specialisation” interpretation mistakes the high productivity of small businesses for competitiveness, the bright future that adherents of the flexible model predict for flexible economy is questionable to say the least.

Both approaches – the former with its technological determinism, as well as the latter with its thesis on the coexistence and struggle for domination between two production types – tend to deny that, presently, the capitalist arrangement is undergoing a radical overhaul. Fordism and post-Fordism were not paired paradigmatically until the mid-1970s when the regulation approach, which would gain immense international influence, developed in France. “Accumulation regime” and “mode of regulation” are this school’s basic concepts. They were developed by Michel Aglietta in his seminal book, an analysis of the American post-war economy entitled *Régulation et crises du capitalisme*; 1976 (2000). He asserts that four distinct factors indicate the crisis of Fordism: a) diminished profitability of production activities due to labour demands and technical restrictions (problems with managing longer and longer production chains); b) globalisation of economic currents disrupting the management of national economies; c) growing share of social transfers in public spending that propels the inflationary spiral and fosters distributive conflict; d) differentiation of consumption patterns demanding a broader range of supplied use-values. Those who object to this approach focus mainly on the existence of non-Taylorist forms of production organisation, non-Fordist production processes and non-Keynesian state policies. They point out that while the ideal types of accumulation regimes and regulation modes described by regulationists is an acceptable description of the

U.S., deviations from the model render the concept inapplicable to other places around the world.

Just as economic interpretations of the “short century” differ, so do the visions of the future. While the neo-Schumpeterian school predicts that in the fifth Kondratieff cycle microelectronics will be the industrial branch to rejuvenate all others (this long wave of stable economic growth, one must point out, is not a certainty; it is predicated upon appropriate macroeconomic framework – the advanced knowledge that such development requires is only obtainable through profound educational, administrative, political, and above all cultural change), regulationists are more cautious in predicting, as well as naming, the coming age. In their view, the present developments are merely experiments in various directions, occasionally preserving certain Fordist elements. Regulationists call attention to a new mode of accumulation based on a monopolist market order, on the linking of smaller companies into networks, and on international financial concentration; they bring up the decreasing relevance of trade unions, the shrinking of the welfare state and the shifting of its focus to economically active groups, as well as the new corporatism of technologically advanced states and industries.

Different schools of thought give different diagnoses as to what caused the crisis in the Fordist accumulation regime, but regardless of what factors are determined as decisive, the fact remains that it was then that the productivity in economies of scale dropped considerably (Glyn 2006: 15). National markets became saturated with material mass consumption goods, attempts at breaking through to foreign markets were tied to additional costs, including political ones, increasing labour demands provoked a portion of the employers to relocate production to territories with cheaper and more governable workforces and raising unemployment levels, which in turn burdened welfare budgets even further. Consequently, inflation spiralled to new heights, and the ability to ensure a satisfactory degree of general social welfare – the very justification for Keynesian state policies – dwindled.

Initially, state macroeconomic policies were ambivalent in their reactions, but then the U.S., and subsequently numerous

other national economies, responded to the crisis in the functioning of the accumulation regime with privatization, with deregulation measures, and by combating inflation generated by the increasing welfare state expenditures in state budgets. Faced with the dilemma whether to institute an expansionist monetary policy that, while socially and politically sustainable, would engender the risk of further inflation growth, or to go for a more restrictive monetary policy that would cause the labour market to shrink and the ailing portion of the economy to die off, political elites decided to take the latter course. The social contract between labour, capital, and the state as its guarantor ensuring the prospect of stable economic conditions was broken. Rather than granting workers a chance to participate in the ownership and management of companies – a credible proposal made at the time at least by social democratic parties in Europe – the solution in the U.S. favoured rerouting the employees' surplus earnings into stock market funds, often into the ones participating in the ownership structures of companies that employed the fledgling small shareholders. The filling of these funds provided companies with fresh capital. And since the labour-shareholders had their future tied to the companies' fate on the stock market, they were motivated to produce more, while as minority owners they were kept from co-managing the companies (Marazzi 2002: 33). These shifts signalled a thorough political and economic reversal, an extensive macroeconomic reorganisation of developed capitalist societies which throughout subsequent decades continually gained momentum. The financial crisis triggered last year is undoubtedly a milestone in this very reversal. Presently, it is impossible to tell whether the crisis is merely an inner milestone that will cause no serious deviation from the liberalization and deregulation of markets, a course prevalent in the last three decades. What is clear is that when writing these lines the research into the causes of the crisis has only begun (Aglietta 2008; Attali 2008), and is closely tied to the thesis on the break within the self-comprehension of value and organisation in capitalist societies, to which we refer here as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism.

The crisis of the 1970s provoked thinking on how to frame the ongoing changes in conceptual terms. The first

attempt is always to express historical novelty through the available categorical apparatus, and by invoking the states that the collective memory holds as the most similar to the new circumstances, so that the latter are regarded as mere repetitions of those former states. Consequently, the initial response was to understand the emerging paradigm of new value creation as a return to the old, pre-Fordist arrangement. But this response was not satisfactory and took no root, partly because its macroeconomic schematics failed to account for the numerous and increasingly visible structural differences that distinguished the new circumstances of production from the pre-Fordist economic liberalism. Some of these circumstances were indeed macroeconomic (apart from directing small savers to the stock markets *en masse*, the structural changes undoubtedly included the increase of the share of service activities in the total gross social product), but in addition to these, microscopic changes were taking place at the societal (diversification of lifestyles and values and the blossoming of the cultural industry that provided them with an adequate supply of goods and services) as well as technological level (automatisation, the birth of the personal computer and later of the World Wide Web, both of which can be said to have, as means of production, permeated all segments and levels of the production process). These changes were sufficiently significant to do away with the search for a historical basis to the newly arisen circumstances, and demanded the creation of concepts that would encompass the new constellation more fully.

Those who based their assertions on “the law of tendency of the rate of profit to fall” (Marx 1973: 239), and on the thesis of Ernest Mendel on late capitalism, thought that the crisis of Fordism foreshadowed the imminent collapse of capitalism, and named Fordism itself a “late capitalist social arrangement” (e.g. Habermas in *Legitimationsprobleme in Spätkapitalismus*). Today, after the expectations of capitalism’s collapse have proven unwarranted, more modest terms are used to denote this shift: “structural crisis”, “transformation”, “transition”, etc. In contrast to the term “late capitalism” that implied the prediction of the capitalist order’s impending demise, these expressions point to its (painful) renovation. Frankly, these voices fell completely silent following the introduction and

the economic successes of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, and to an even greater extent when faced with the collapse of the great antagonist, the socialist planned economy, and its disappearance from the global geopolitical chessboard. Up until the 1970s the alternative to the market economy could withstand the comparison to the results of the most successful Western economies, confirming the assumption that regard for unionist and workers' demands was a necessary, politically stable choice. Its downfall, however, cleared the way for the sanctification of economic liberalism and the marketplace as touchstones of social legitimization: the victorious march of "unleashed capitalism" (Glyn 2006) seemed unimpeded.

During this time, the necessary temptation to express novelties in old terms had run its course and had given way to the attempts to give a name to a period that, according to widely-held perceptions, dispensed with old schemes and paradigms. Expressions prefixed by post- came into season. In principle, we may agree that such expressions do nothing to further our understanding, but let us repeat the introductory words regarding the problems with singling out suggestions of emerging social forms: if we wish to delineate a border between two periods of a development that has yet to assume a clear form, taking into account that the latter of the two periods remains definitionally open, one of the options is to resort to the prefix post-.

But post-Fordism is not the first expression of this sort to draw the attention of the broader public. Quite the opposite; it is only the last in a series of three, and its acceptance is contingent solely upon our acknowledging in it an added explanatory value in relation to its predecessors. Actually, the terms denoting the present with which post-Fordism must compete are even more numerous. In addition to "post-industrial society" and "post-modernity", the terms established as descriptions of our age include "globalisation age", "information society" and particularly "transition age", which seems to offer a universal substitute for all "post-isms", and dissolves through the inflation of its use into a fluidity lacking any substance or content, into Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity". Post-Fordism certainly fits into this group of expressions, and not only morphologically: in part it attempts to grasp the very same

phenomena, and shares points of intersection with all of the above. Yet each of these intersections has a centrifugal element. Globalisation, for instance, describes the geopolitical dimension of economic, social and cultural phenomena. Once we start referring to the post-modern age, we may very easily invite into the debate post-modernism as a cultural and artistic movement, landing ourselves in a variety of discussions on culture, art, history, civilisation, and values.

The tie between post-Fordism and post-industrial society is a bit more problematic and deserves a consideration more serious than the one we will give here. The expression itself was established by Daniel Bell in his book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973). He proposed the thesis that in modern developed societies the production of material goods was becoming less and less significant, while the significance of service activities was increasing. In empirical terms, this is doubtlessly the case: according to the data published by the ILO in 2005, the service sector employs 37 percent of all the world's employees, and its rapid growth indicates it will soon overtake agriculture, which employs 42.8 percent of the world's population. The share of workers in the industries, 20.3 percent, has long since been surpassed (Giaggi & Narduzzi 2007: 12). Yet, these figures do nothing to solve the basic problem of using the term "post-industrial society". The concept itself implies that we are leaving the industrial age and entering an age characterised by non-industrial forms of production. The question arises whether the tertiarisation of production (i.e. the strengthening of the service sector), or the so-called "non-material production, in itself actually constitutes the abandonment of the industrialist framework. In its traditional sense, industrialism is indeed linked with machine production of commodities in the primary and secondary sectors, but viewed essentially as serial production caused directly by the introduction of machines into the production process, it yields an altogether different picture. As it turns out, a large section of the service industry is imprinted with seriality. An analysis of the introduction of microelectronic data processing technologies into the service industry lends a powerful argument to support this claim. One can therefore concur with *Manufacturing Matters* (1987), an influential study by

Stephen Cohen and John Zysman who found that there was no such thing as post-industrial economy, and that the shift from the production of commodities to the production of services was merely a transition from one form of industrial society to the next. (1987: 260)

The concept and theory of “information society” were developed as offshoots of the theory of post-industrial society. They have at their core the examination of an extraordinary technological novelty – the personal computer – which in the 1980s, as the theory was taking shape, transformed from a prohibitively expensive item to a relatively affordable, commonly used device. One may view the theory of information society as an expression of enthusiasm about the potential of this device. The theory’s supporters stressed not only the benefits to production, the cutting of costs and the higher level of knowledge in society, which they hoped to gain from a widespread use of digital technologies, but thought the introduction of computers into production processes and social communication would have political effects, e.g. more leisure time, increased participation in the democratic decision-making processes, and, as a consequence of the former two, the spread of deliberative democracy. To information they ascribed the role that energy products played in the industrial society. Yet objections similar to those concerning the thesis on post-industrial society can be levelled at the claims regarding the “revolutionary” changes that the inherently democratic computer technology was supposed to bring. Leaving aside the techno-utopian dimensions of the image of computerised society and limiting oneself to the economic aspects of the information society concept, one will find that information technology has entered all production sectors – from service to manufacturing industries – and became their integral part without significantly altering the power relations within them. Its entry into these segments contributed to the seriality and automatising of activities. In this respect, it merely continued the long history of machines’ introduction into industrial production. Undoubtedly, the advent of digital machines rearranged the production logic to a great extent, yet this contribution was not as destructive to systemic solutions

of large-scale production as it made them more flexible. Computer technology facilitated the differentiation of large-scale production; it made production capable of following the enormous fragmentation of demand without suffering an unmanageable increase in production costs.

A few brief remarks on post-modernism and globalisation. Post-modernism as, on the one hand, an ideology of the “end of grand meta-narratives” of progress, mind, enlightenment, freedom, class war and its abolition in a just society, and on the other, a theory of the emergence of micro-narrativity of the human condition’s particularities previously silenced by the grand narratives (Lyotard), lead to the relativisation of the key Enlightenment categories of Truth and Reality. In light of radical post-modernist theories, these categories proved to be effects of discourse organisation, hyper-reality (Baudrillard), completely arbitrary and subjective, lacking any reference outside language. By emphasising the productivity of language/symbolic communication that establishes itself as its own reference point, post-modernism did offer a framework in which to analyse the increasing and omnipresent significance of the culture industry, but its scope remained confined to the perspective of culture studies, or even mere aesthetics, and failed to display any particular interest in merging this dimension with the economic dynamics of modern societies.

One could object to the assertion that globalisation is the most significant feature of modernity on grounds complementary to those on which the post-modernist thesis is based. Post-modernism focused on the relation between reality and language in an allegedly post-ideological age when all points of reference, as well as the universal value system, were supposed to have been lost. Meanwhile, the thesis on the hegemonic role of globalisation continued professing the primacy of geo-economic and geopolitical analysis of relations of the powers displayed and established during the globalisation process, even at the time when globalisation itself was centred on cultural, rather than exclusively economic aspects of delocalisation and transnationalisation of production processes and lives of modern humans. Excluding a handful of exceptions (Negri, Hardt), the insistence on this viewpoint caused the

thesis on globalisation's hegemonic role to lose sight of the anthropologic-economic structural matrix of these "spatial" processes.

In this plethora of competing descriptions of modern societies' most important aspects, one should reserve a special place for the concept of network society. Even though those who favour it advise against seeing it as a thesis destined to encompass all theories presented thus far and become their "successor", they simultaneously claim it "encompasses numerous elements" of these discourses and is presently the brightest star of the entire constellation (Barney 2004: 25). One can agree with this, and even argue that the concept of network society is somewhat affiliated with some of the theses explained above. At the very least, it is assured the role of their successor by the mere fact of its temporal posteriority in relation to them. As demonstrated, the aforementioned discourses took shape during the 1970s and 1980s, while the description of modernity as network society coincided with the widespread use of sophisticated digital technologies of mass communication and information management that became the basic infrastructure of social, economic and political activities. Of course, the World Wide Web is a symbol of this infrastructure, and Manuel Castells did not carry out his extensive studies of the sociological dimensions of modern societies' network organization – theoretically the most influential argument in favour of this hypothesis – until the final days of the last millennium. In his work, he made a conscious effort to distinguish his thesis from those on informatization and globalization of modern societies (2000: 18), on post-Fordism (164), on post-modernism (ibid., 492), and on post-industrial society (218–220), while pointing to the intersections between them. The theory of net societies postulates the existence of three basic types of structural elements: node, tie, and flow. A node is an individual point tied at least to one other point of its kind in the network. A flow is what passes between them. This simple, elementary structure, capable of taking on a variety of content, is telling in itself. It clearly builds on – metabolises, even – the thesis on the information society (by that fact alone, on that of the post-industrial society), and to the extent that the network is viewed

globally, on the globalisation thesis. Its relationship with post-Fordism is more puzzling: the non-hierarchy and dispersion (post-modernist elements both), contained in the description of the network society's elementary structure, may be viewed as a technological platform for communication in the new accumulation regime, making the concepts of post-Fordism and net society complementary or at least non-exclusive.

Having presented a number of conceptualisations of developed societies, and attempting to ascertain the place of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism within this framework, one finds that the regulationist definition of Fordism as a special accumulation and regulation regime essentially justifies the use of the term, since it preserves the specificity that other competing descriptions seem to circumvent – namely, the economic-social-political core of the transitional changes.

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Section I  
Key Theoretical Positions in Post-Fordism



Capitalism, Migrations and Social Struggles. Preliminary  
Notes for a Theory of the Autonomy of Migrations<sup>1</sup>  
by Sandro Mezzadra

1 The text is elaborated version of the paper that I presented at the international conference "Indeterminate Kommunismus" in Frankfurt from 7th to 9th November, 2003.

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Fiet uti nusquam possit consistere finis  
Effugiumque fugae prolatet copia semper.

(Lucrezio, *De rerum natura*, I, vv. 982 s.)

1. Migrations and capitalism: a complex subject, one might say. Confronted with the totality of problems that should be dealt with under this title, from both a historical and a theoretical perspective, one shivers with apprehension. Let's start by narrowing down the field this text will focus on. The general context in which I would like to situate my argument is research into the mobility of work in historical capitalism (see in particular Moulrier Boutang 1998 and Mezzadra 2001, chapter 2). This research has demonstrated how capitalism is characterised by a structural tension between the set of subjective practices in which the mobility of work is expressed – to be understood of course also as one of the responses to the continual disruption of 'traditional' social assets determined by capitalistic development –, and the attempt to exercise 'despotic' control on the part of the capital via the fundamental mediation of the State. The result of this tension is a complex system made by both the valorisation and the *interweaving* of the mobility of work, and also by the specific form of subjectivity corresponding to the latter (see Read 2003, in particular chapter 1). Migrations, from this perspective, constitute a fundamental field of research; one could say there is no capitalism without migrations. Moreover, the system of control of migrations (of the mobility of work) is in specific historical circumstances the key that allows one to reconstruct, from a specific but paradigmatic point of view, the entire form of the submission of work to the capital. At the same time, this approach offers a privileged perspective from which one can decipher transformations in the composition of classes. Starting from this kind of research, we have tried to develop, in many and different continents (often independently from one another), the thesis of the *autonomy of migrations*, to be understood as the irreducibility of contemporary migratory movements to the 'laws' of supply and demand which govern the international division of work, as well as the surplus of practices and subjective questions that these movements express in regard to the "objective causes"

that determine them. What follow here are a few preliminary – and very schematic – considerations for a more thorough development and subsequent specification of this thesis, with a particular reference to its consequences on a theoretical-political level. We shall begin from the premise that the crisis – nowadays particularly evident either “if one considers the demands from entrepreneurs” or “if one faces the subjective motivations of the migrants” – of the representation of migratory movements in terms of governable “fluxes” poses a radical challenge to any migratory politics orientated by the concept and perspective of *integration* (Raimondi & Ricchiardi 2004: 11).

2. If we had to briefly reconstruct the manner in which international *mainstream* research on migrations has developed during the last twenty years, we would first of all emphasise that the autonomy of migrations has henceforth found recognition, albeit partial. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller write in *The Age of Migration* (which recently saw its third edition and became a ‘classic’): “Yet, international migrations may also possess a relative autonomy and be impervious to governmental policies [...] official policies often fail to achieve their objectives, and may even bring about the opposite of what is intended. People as well as governments shape international migration. Decision made by individuals, families and communities - often with imperfect information and constrained options - play a vital role in determining migration and settlement” (2003: 278). The neo-classical and theoretical models (developed in economical and/or demographical terms) that reduce migrations to the combined action of the ‘objective’ factors of *push* and *pull*, have been widely criticised, and today very few researchers propose them in a linear form. The multidisciplinary approach is the rule, the theory of “migratory systems” has focused attention on the historical density of population movements whilst the contributions on the part of anthropology have lead to research of great ethnographical interest about new emerging transnational social spaces. These spaces are often real mines of information for the description of social behaviours and practices that express the autonomy of migrations (Brettell & Hollifield 2000). The approach defined as the “new economics of migration” (Massey et al 1993, Portes 1997), which has rapidly

imposed itself as a kind of new orthodoxy in the international debate, has underlined the fundamental input of familial and “communitarian” networks in the determination of all phases of the migratory process. This approach has, in particular, given a new impulse to a whole set of investigation into “ethnic” forms of enterprise that emerge within the diaspora and transnational spaces built up by migrations: forms of enterprise in which familial and communitarian networks procure the “social capital” that initially constitutes the surrogate of the financial capital possessed by the big multinationals (Jordan & Düvell 2003: 74).

3. A critique of this “new orthodoxy” (in international research on migrations) has to start, in my view, from the fact that we are facing, once again, a theory of *social integration* in the full sense of the term. Firstly, according to the classical modalities of American public speech – in which it was incubated – this “new orthodoxy” ends up using the reference to migrations as a sort of confirmation of upwards social mobility that would characterise the capitalistic system and American citizenship in itself. The processes of exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination – that are certainly emphasised in the literature – appear in this frame as mere collateral effects of a capitalism (and a citizenship) whose fundamentally integrational code is not brought into question. On the contrary, this integrational drive is considered to be continuously reconstructed and reinforced precisely by migrations (I will return to this point). Second, the “new orthodoxy” effectuates a substantial elision or removal of the social struggles and politics of the migrants that have in the United States of the last years brought about a profound renewal of trade unionism, by regathering momentum after 9/11 and finding an expression in an initiative on a federal scale, the “Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride” (Caffentzis 2003). From the perspective of the “new orthodoxy”, these struggles are at best considered as mere variables dependent upon a model of access to citizenship that is essentially *commercial* (Honig 2001: 81). Meanwhile, American citizenship is endowed with a unilaterally expansive image that does not take into account either the constitutive role that the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion has played in its story

(in particular by the position of *illegal aliens*), or its internal hierarchical organisation along ethnical and racial lines that has produced the genuine and unique figure of the *alien citizen* (Ngai 2003: 5-9).

4. The thesis of the autonomy of migrations thus has to be redefined and recalibrated against this background. This may be done on the one hand by reasserting the fundamental link between the migrants' social movements (with elements of autonomy and 'excess' that energise its subjective profile) and the *exploitation* of living labour, and on the other hand by considering the migrants' *struggles* as the most important aspect (Bojadzijev 2002). Moreover, these struggles should be understood not only as determining the entire duration of the migratory experience, but also as a fundamental term of reference for a new conceptualisation of 'racism' capable of showing its continual restructuring within social relations characterised by the presence of migrants – the latter considered not as mere victims but specifically as subjects expressing resistance as well as engaging in innovative and conflictual practices. Moreover, it is evident that in every case – as we have always pointed out – migrations are not established in empty space. One cannot understand contemporary migrations without taking into account the radical and catastrophic transformations caused by the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF in many African countries during the 1980s, as well as by the multinationals' direct foreign investments during the 1960s with the creation of "production and exportation zones" and the disruption of traditional agriculture (see in particular Sassen 1988). The thesis of the autonomy of migrations has to be placed at a secure distance from any kind of aestheticising apology for nomadism whilst underlining the fact that the entirety of phenomena we have identified has been a response to the social insurrections and to the demands for citizenship that distinguished the phase of so-called decolonisation. Our thesis emphasises the richness of the subjective behaviours expressed by migration within *that* field of experience. In the light of the thesis of the autonomy of migrations the *turbulent* elements that increasingly characterise these behaviours (Papastergiadis 2000) appear

as a structural *surplus* compared to the equilibrium of the “work market”. The redefinition of the system of exploitation hinges on this surplus, with effects that irradiate the whole of contemporary living work.

5. When one speaks of a global regime of government of migrations, (see for example Düvell 2002), one denotes by this formula a structurally *hybrid* regime of the exercise of sovereignty, whose definition and functioning depend on national states (to an increasingly smaller degree, but nevertheless persisting within the scenario of “globalisation”), on “postnational” formations like the European Union, on new global actors like the International Organization for Migration and on Non-Governmental Organisations with “humanitarian” ends. It is important to keep in mind that it is *this* complex regime that is at stake. It is evident that this governmental regime of migrations – despite its immediate effects being the fortification of boundaries and the refinement of the system of detention/ expulsion – does not aim at the *exclusion* of migrants, but rather at increasing the value of, adjusting to economical proportions, and hence *exploiting* the surplus (or *autonomous*) elements that characterise contemporary migratory movements. In other words, the purpose is certainly not to hermetically close the boundaries of the “rich countries”, but rather to establish a system of dikes, to produce in the final instance “an active process of migrant labour inclusion through its becoming illegal” (De Genova 2002: 439), to use a formulation proposed by a particularly close American colleague of ours. It is from this standpoint that we can interpret Claude-Valentin Marie’s statement, in an OCSE report of 2000, according to which the immigrant worker employed in a “clandestine” manner in the informal economy is in many aspects emblematic of the present phase of globalisation (2000). Let’s analyse some of these aspects *from our point of view* (which is not that of the OCSE report). The “illegal” migrant, we can assert, is the subjective figure in which the maximum “flexibility” of work – at first presented as the social behaviour of the worker – encounters the most onerous apparatuses of control (to the point of being negations) of this flexibility. It is in no way a case of seeing in the “illegal immigrant” a potential “avant-garde” within class structure, but rather one of reading

this specific subjective position through in order to understand the composition of contemporary living work in its all complexity, the latter being characterised – in its *global* dimension – by an alchemy of “flexibility” (mobility) and control, according to a very diverse scale. From this point of view, the category of the labour market, with the segmentations that characterise it (Piore 1979), demonstrates all of its fragility (its less than metaphorical value); thus leaving a space for a consideration of the “encounter” (a Marxist category) between labour power and capital in which relations of domination and exploitation are immediately at stake, precisely around the management of mobility. These relations – and their constitutive violence – continuously shuffle the cards and mix up the theoretical models, showing for example (just to limit the discussion to an important point) the simultaneity of the extraction of absolute surplus-value and of relative surplus-value, of the formal and real subsumption of work under capital, of immaterial work and forced work; thus demonstrating the structural nexus between the *new economy* and the new forms of primitive accumulation with their new precincts.

6. The specific advantage of the thesis of the autonomy of migrations thus consists in its offering a way to reconstruct a framework for the transformations of contemporary capitalism from the point of view of living work and its *subjectivity*. At this point we have to take a step backwards, and return (as we announced) to the consideration of the “new orthodoxy” which has asserted itself in the international research, precisely in one of the areas where it seems to conceive a larger space to the “autonomy of migrations”: the consideration of the fundamental contribution of familial and communitarian networks. Criticising the abstract image of the rational individual as the main player of migratory movements (this image being presupposed for a long time by the neo-classical approach), Alejandro Portes writes for example: “Reducing everything to the individual plane would unduly constrain the enterprise by preventing the utilization of more complex units of analysis – families, households, and communities, as the basis for explanation and prediction” (1997: 817). Only in this manner would social experience enter into the analytical field. It is easy to see here an accurate parallel between the critique of neo-classical economics developed by the “new

economics of migration” and the communitarian critique of liberal theory. This parallel is confirmed by the positions concerning immigration sustained by Michael Walzer, who thinks that the main contribution of the “migratory waves” directed towards the United States consists precisely in the fact that the migrants grant the host society those communitarian corrections, that affective supplement of the social bond, that the development of capitalism continuously brings up for discussion (see in particular Walzer 1992). I believe that this parallel should warn us against using in an uncritical manner references to familial and communitarian networks. Indeed it is evident, and this has been brilliantly argued by Bonnie Honig in an important book *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001: 82-86), that Walzer’s “progressive” inspiration can be obliterated with no difficulty in a series of discourses that highlight the importance of migrants (obviously some of them more than others) in establishing the valence of social roles and codes that have been brought into question in the West by movements of the latest decades. It should not appear as an abstract or irrelevant reference that an entire market sector in continual expansion – that of transnational wedding agencies – was born from a male demand for patriarchal re-normalization of gender roles inside the family, offering “docile and affectionate women” for whom “the only things that count are the family and the husband’s desires” (Honig 2001: 89). It is obvious that the xenophilia nourished by exoticism and fantasies of a “new masculinity” can easily translate into xenophobia when facing the discovery that a lot of the women presented as “docile and affectionate” are only interested in the *green card*, and in the first opportunity to take flight...

7. Once again, I believe that these womens’ line of flight, which it would be interesting to compare to the behaviour of many “extra-communitarian” sex-workers inside Schengen Europe (see Andrijašević 2004), offers us a privileged point of view for reasoning about migrant subjectivity. Obviously it is not a matter of restoring neo-classical economics and defining the migrant through the abstract figure of the rational individual. Feminist research on migrations, due to it being developed in a theoretical field characterised by the radical critique of this figure, has a lot to teach us (see for example, amongst the most recent literature,

Ehrenreich & Hochschild: 2003). What is described as the growing feminization of migrations (Castles & Miller 2003: 9) provides an extraordinary field of investigation from this point of view. It is clear that we are facing profoundly *ambivalent* processes. In a recent research project on the condition of Philippinian domestic workers in the cities of Rome and Los Angeles, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) has underlined the complex interplay between the escape from patriarchal relations in their original country, substitution for the affective work and care of 'emancipated' women of the West, and the reproduction of class and gender conditions of subordination which is certainly characteristic of many contemporary female migrations. One could probably go deeper into the argument if we possessed more research material on female migrations inside the "global South", with particular reference to the movements of labour power that have sustained the productivity of the "zones of production for exportation". What is certain, however, is that migrations do express a process of desegregation (and certainly a continuous recomposition and "putting into question") of the traditional systems of belonging. This renders impracticable – in an analytic and political sense – the image of the migrant circulating widely in the international literature on migrations; that is, the image of the migrant as a "traditional" subject, completely *embedded* in familial and communitarian networks, opposite whom the Western *individual* arises (to take comfort from the other or express resentment at them). Taking a Lacanian image – of which one could easily find antecedents in Marx – the migrant is a "split" subject, living a complex and contradictory relation with his or her sense of belonging to a nation, no matter how this belonging would be defined. It is from this "split" (to make it easier: the clash between the individual action and the circumstances of time and space that circumscribe it, inscribed under the sign of a non-compensatory privation) that we should start in order to develop a *political* reading of contemporary migrations.

8. Let's admit it up front, in order to avoid misunderstanding: the "split" or "bar" is only a metaphor, and perhaps not even a good one. And one has to handle metaphors very carefully when speaking about the conditions of the migrants. We already mentioned, in order to distance ourselves

from it, the broad tendency, especially in Anglo-Saxon cultural studies, towards the production, concerning migration, of disembodied and aestheticising apologies for nomadism and uprooting. It is also by looking at the absolutely privileged position that the reference to the refugee and the migrant has taken on in the philosophical and theoretical-political contemporary debate (from Derrida to Agamben, from Hardt and Negri to Balibar, only to mention a few names), that one cannot avoid having here and there the impression that, through the proliferation of metaphors and evocative images, the material experience is lost, the sensible experience, we would say, of immigrants, with its charge of *ambivalence*. The risk, to cite the late Edward Said, is that of forgetting that “the exile is something singularly fascinating to think of, but terrible to live” (1984: 173). However, in favour of the metaphorical language, but also as a healthy warning as to its limits, we can quote the extraordinary book and photographic reportage of the 1970s that attempted to illustrate the *experience* of migrant workers. “The language of economical theory” one reads in this book (*A Seventh Man*), “is necessary abstract”. Thus, in order to collect the forces that determine the migrant’s life and to understand them as part of his or her personal destiny, one needs a less abstract formulation. “We need metaphors: and metaphors are temporary, they do not replace theory” (Berger & Mohr 1975: 41). We need metaphors, we can add thirty years later, especially in a situation – like that of contemporary global capitalism which migrations allow us to grasp in some of its more innovative traits – in which it seems that the traditional distinctions between economy, politics and culture have disappeared; in which it is no longer possible to talk about exploitation and the valorisation of capital without dealing with the problem of transformations of citizenship and “identity”; in which it is no longer possible to talk about the working classes without taking into account the entire set of processes of disarticulation of the system of belongings (processes which bear the indelible sign of the subjectivity of living labour) which irreversibly define this class as a *multitude*. The condition of migrants lies precisely at the intersection of these processes, and in a sense even the apparently abstract philosophical discussions, in which it has

claimed a place in the spotlight, are dominated by the necessity to reflect on these processes.

9. Moving towards a conclusion, I would like to call attention to a supplementary problem concerning the definition of the *politics* of the migrant condition. In what sense, once we establish the paradigmatical character of this condition, and we underline the elements of autonomy and excess which energise contemporary migrations considered as *social movements*, can we and should we understand the migrant's struggle? In order to locate the first partial responses, but also in order to indicate the limits of our political imagination, I would like to refer to two books, which I consider to be the most important contributions to the theoretical-political debates of the last few years: Jacques Rancière's *La Méésentente*, and the already cited *Democracy and the Foreigner* by Bonnie Honig. The general lines of Rancière's reasoning are well known, and can be brutally simplified here: politics exists only as the subjectivisation of disordered parts, as the reactivation of "the contingency of equality, neither arithmetical nor geometrical, between all the beings endowed with language", the "count of parts" (the distributive architecture) on which Rancière, following Foucault, calls "police" (1995: 50). It is difficult to resist the temptation to read in the reference to the "part-without-part" – on which Rancière's reasoning is based –, the 1996 struggle of the *sans-papiers*, the year after the publication of *La Méésentente*. Rancière himself authorises this reading, underlining how the "immigrants" were a relatively new subject in France, for the simple reason that twenty years previously they would have been called "immigrant workers" and would have had a precise *part* in the distributive mechanism of a determined regime (a Fordist one, some might add) of "police" (1995: 161). Because they became without part, the immigrants (or migrants, as we prefer to say) start being "natural" candidates for that role of "part without part" which by its own subjectivisation, as the modern age has shown through the proletarian struggles and the struggles of women, can ground *political action* – and thus the reinvention of the universal. Bonnie Honig's reasoning repeats Rancière's essential points, though from within a different analytical framework. By criticising in a very convincing manner

the homology between the “xenophile” image of the stranger as a subject having something to give and the “xenophobe” image of the stranger being interested in “taking” something from the society in which he or she is installed, Honig, in a undoubtedly fascinating move, proposes to invert the terms and to think “precisely in this ‘taking’ what the migrants have to give us” (Honig 2001: 99). The *practices* through which Honig thinks the migrants’ citizenship is expressed (even in conditions of radical exclusion from the juridically codified citizenship), would bring into question the structural foundation of democracy, and they would reopen up its movement beyond its institutional configuration, towards its deepening and its requalification both in an intensive and extensive manner (i.e. beyond the barriers of the national State). The reference to Rancière is explicit: it is a conception of politics where the claims of those who do not enter into the “count” of the “police” regime promote the birth of “new rights, new powers, new visions” (1995: 101).

10. Let’s stop for a moment, considering the image of the “political community” that takes form in this manner: the political community, Rancière writes, “is a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community from itself” (1995: 186) I think it is clear that here we are facing a theory that could be defined as “radical democracy”, in the sense that the political emergence of the without-part is thought as a moment of disarticulation of a specific regime of “police”, a moment of *opening* that will however establish another regime of “police”, with its own parts and “part without-parts”. Let’s be clear: the aim is not to flatten Rancière’s thought onto the work that initiated the debate on radical democracy, notably Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). In my eyes Rancière’s book is infinitely richer and more interesting, firstly because it states the problem of *production* of democracy and does not consider the latter, as Laclau and Mouffe do on the base of their reinterpretation of the concept of hegemony, as something that is *given*, something ultimately coinciding with the *generality* of the political “articulation” that is opposed to the structurally “partial” character of the singular social struggles

(Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 169). If, however, one wanted to recognize some “merit” in Laclau and Mouffe’s work, it would be precisely to have anticipated a whole constellation of problems that was destined to mark a long historical cycle. The global movement of the last years has inscribed its action within a field of references that could be defined as radical-democratic – and the “natural” way in which this movement has spoken the language of the rights is, I think, a clear illustration of this. Other more interesting theoretical propositions raised in the last years (from Hardt and Negri’s to Holloway’s, in order to cite two that are very distant from one another) innovatively and extensively rework the frame, they even force it, but they do not offer effective alternatives for a perspective of deepening democracy (intensively or extensively, as we have seen with Honig). Coming back to the migrants, both Etienne Balibar’s research and our own political and theoretical practices have taken place substantially within the same scenario.

11. Indeed, the problem is not only the “counter-factual” nature of these arguments on democracy (in the sense that the evolution of *real* democracies has been directed during these years in quite another direction...). One has to understand – without turning to dogmas and certitudes that should be abandoned without regrets – whether it is possible to imagine a *discontinuity* in the political history of modern democracy, a rupture in the continuity of domination and exploitation on which the mode of capitalistic production is based. This was, in a sense, the Marxist “dream of a thing”, the revolution, the *communism*. It is not a case to playing the game of communism against democracy again (no matter how the latter is defined): we have learnt to distinguish – and this is a point that Slavoj Žižek often seems to forget, even though he deserves credit for drawing attention to the type of problems that we are discussing (Žižek 2004: 183-213) – democracy as an *institutional system* of equilibrium (as a form of government in classical terms) and democracy as a *movement*, capable of politically linking together a whole set of subjective instances that exceed the institutional codification of citizenship and the network of commercial relations. By reading the crises of welfare systems in Western Europe together with those of “real socialism” one can see this

disconnection (Piccinini 2003). The main point is nevertheless that between democracy as a form of government and democracy as a movement there must be a relation, and this relation, in the logic of democracy, cannot be thought otherwise than in the form of *equivalence* (of the “count of parts”, in Rancière’s terminology): in order to remain within the terms of our own argument, the elements of excess and autonomy that differentiate contemporary migrations cannot find recognition, within the perspective of radical democracy, without a mediation with the ensemble of proportions upon which the fiction of the job market is based, and this without criticizing their constitutive *violence*. In other words, what is evident here is the irreducibility of *exploitation* to any theory of justice; a point that has been underlined also by the vicissitudes and lately by the setbacks of “analytical Marxism”. We can then provisionally agree on yet another metaphor: communism is nowadays thinkable as a *supplement* of radical democracy, being inside its horizon but irreducible to its logic, as the indication of the *limits* of democratic movement and of the field of political *possibilities* that are structurally excluded from the latter. I have the impression that our work on the autonomy of migrations is going in this direction, because it clarifies the rich subjective weave of instances that in contemporary migrations express themselves in forms that are not reducible to the dialectics of democratic recognition.

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**'Living Labour, Form-Giving Fire. The Post-Workerist  
Reading of Marx and the Concept of Biopolitical Labour'  
by Katja Diefenbach**

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“We are just readers of Marx, and political revolutionary agitators in our time.”

Toni Negri, Trani Special Prison, 1988 [1980]: 251

## 1. Marx with Foucault and Deleuze

“Only death,” Negri observes in an autobiographical conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle, “can destroy this relation between the body and *kairos*. It may become necessary one day to repeal death. [...] Living labour is what constitutes the reality of the world: it is a bodily *kairos* that generates physical and mental energy. [...] Indeed, it is a production that fills the whole of life – a bioproduction, biolabor” (2004: 105-6) These remarks, which conceive the political as the production of life and world, announce a strategic reversal of the concept of biopower and a peculiar combination of Marxist and post-structuralist thought. The bringing together of these two theoretical directions and the corresponding renewal of materialism in a tradition linking Machiavelli, Spinoza and Marx was the promise with which post-workerism appeared at the beginning of the 1990s; however, its theoretical manoeuvre was then limited to reducing biopower to the power of living labour and its identification with the concept of potentiality, enclosing Foucault’s and Deleuze’s thought in a heretical reading of Marx.

In post-workerism, the political is determined by the constituent power of labour, whose expenditure is not limited to the factory but is assumed to take place with the increasing inclusion of intellectual and affective activities in capitalist production within the whole social field. The thesis that the whole of society has been subsumed by capital is combined with the thesis that in post-Fordism living labour as a productive and antagonistic power of world-making and world-changing reveals its proto-communist potentiality on the stage of history. Post-Fordism is declared as the final mode of capitalist regulation, a “communism of capital,” (Virno 2004: 110) in which elements of a potential communist society are integrated in new forms of control. According to post-workerist authors, post-Fordism finally allows us to recognise how the history of productive forces that oscillate between revelation and

integration is written in the history of being: “ontology revealing itself phenomenologically,” as Virno puts it (2004: 110). How can this theory of post-Fordism, which is based on a theory of living labour as constituent power, be understood? What are its presuppositions and effects?

With a heterodox reference to Machiavelli, Spinoza, Marx, Foucault and Deleuze, labour-power is understood as a general vital force, a *vis viva*,<sup>1</sup> an indestructible creative potentiality that elevates the multitude to the status of a god on earth and a historical principle. Critical guidelines of post-Marxist thought, such as the demands to deconstruct the division into productive and non-productive activity, to not concentrate on the immediate production process, and to grasp capitalism as a complex and dynamic regulation system, are directed towards the potentiality of creative subjectivity. The political is subjectivised and thought in two categories: firstly, in a tradition linking Spinoza and Deleuze in the category of potentiality; secondly, in the tradition of Marx in the category of labour. Oscillating between these categories and projecting them into each other, post-workerism comes into conflict, through its idea of an antagonistic vital force, with decisive post-Marxist positions that had already been drawn by structuralist Marxism in the 1960s: the political has no anthropological and ontological foundation;<sup>2</sup> material being and militant praxis are not immediately, necessarily or dialectically related; the potentiality-for-work (as a trans-individual cooperative potential to act) is neither a substance of the political nor content of freedom; all tendencies in Marxism to return to an essentialist philosophical understanding of history have to be interrupted.

This raises two questions. Firstly, how does post-workerism think the relationship between politics and labour

1 Cf. Negri & Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, p. 21: “The Renaissance discovered the freedom of labor, the *vis viva*: materialism interpreted it and capitalist modernity subjugated it.”

2 Cf. Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 43-45; Althusser points out that after 1845, Marx turned away from the Feuerbachian problematic, and hence from the idea that an imminent revolution gives humanity possession of its own being.

(theoretical problem)? Secondly, what does it mean to read Foucault and Deleuze with Marx when discussing the problematic of the political (meta-theoretical problem)? This automatically leads to two other questions. How can Marxist and post-structuralist notions of the political status of the productive be combined outside of an ontological idea of living labour? And – reflecting on the act of thinking and its possible exterior – what is the relationship between politics and theory? The following eight sections will deal with this meta-theoretical problematic of a post-workerist reading of Marx.

## 2. Marx's heirs

What does it mean to align oneself with Marx and to want to actualise his thought? To align oneself with Marx means taking on a heterogeneous, theoretically aporetic and politically dramatic legacy marked by an activist, messianic and analytic aspect: the convening of an international workers' movement, the promise of revolutionary change, and a critique of the political economy. This encounter has been catastrophically marked by the fact that it led to the creation of a productivist and police-based order. Therefore, the acceptance of Marx's legacy requires a critique, a choice and a revision. It requires the clarification of why, for one, the name of Marxism is treated as a militant promise, and what one hopes to achieve from the "plurality of demands to which since Marx everyone who speaks or writes cannot fail to feel himself subjected, unless he is to feel himself failing in everything," (1997: 98) as Blanchot put it in 1968. It requires a distance to the idealisations in Marx's texts, the violence of his theoretical blockages, and a positioning in relation to Stalinism. Foucault has pointed out that one should not pose the question of Stalinism in terms of error, but in terms of reality. Instead of searching for what might serve – in the theoretical and practical context of Marxism – to condemn the camp system, the productivism and the bureaucratisation of the political, one should search for what these developments made possible. (Foucault 1980: 135) In "Sur la crise du marxisme", Althusser, who until the 1970s, represented a scientific tendency in Marxism, announced that there is no "return to origins,"

no purifying turning back, with which it might be possible to rescue an unscathed legacy that “was distorted by an individual called Stalin, or by the historical period that he dominated.”<sup>3</sup> While Foucault searches the texts of Lenin and Marx for “what in those texts could have made the Gulag possible, what might even now continue to justify it and what makes its intolerable truth still accepted today,” (ibid: 135) Althusser, who starts from the same inability of the communist activists to face up to their own history, turns the operation around and searches the texts of Lenin and Marx for a theoretically coherent way to think capitalist society and its political abolition, and, at the same time, to reflect on its theoretical contradictions, idealisations and aporias. Althusser wants to find in Marxist theory itself the means to think what remained dark and inscrutable for it (2006: 9), and thus to convert Marxism’s crisis into “the beginning of its liberation, hence its rebirth and transformation (ibid: 12).” Just as Althusser – in order to overcome essentialist philosophical and idealistic tendencies in Marxism – imports non-Marxist concepts that he passes off as being genuinely Marxist, even as Marxian quintessence (the effectivity of a structure on its elements, ideology articulates the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence<sup>4</sup>), in the Stalinism debate, instead of dismissing certain theoretical and practical elements of Marxism, he renews them. The danger of this strategy becomes particularly evident with the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the concept of ideology. The disaster remains obscured. Althusser cannot think the problematic of the extent to which the theoretical contradiction in Marx – in the analysis of the social relations of production, to reject any concept of

3 Althusser, “Sur la crise du marxisme” translated from the German “Über die Krise des Marxismus”, p. 61.

4 Cf. Althusser/ Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 29; cf. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, pp. 32-39; Balibar brings Althusser’s theory of ideology to the following conclusion: “[...] in the last instance there is nothing like a dominant ideology of the rulers (for example, a dominant ‘capitalist’ ideology). The dominant ideology in a given society is a specific universalization of the imaginary of the dominated” (Balibar, “The Non-Con-temporaneity”, p. 13).

human essence, and at the same time, to repeatedly articulate the socially determining effect of the economy in such a way that productivity becomes the essence of the human – is accompanied by practices of socialist biopower. The analysis of this would involve showing how, after the revolution of 1917, the worker-soldier was created as a socialist form of subjectivation, while the self-organised council structures in the factories and the army were abolished and replaced by rival party or army cadres. Althusser concentrates on filtering out the anthropologising, idealisation and essentialism in Marx's work, remodelling Marx's concept of ideology with Lacan and Spinoza. What remains inscrutable is the relationship of the concepts' ideology, *Weltanschauung*, class-consciousness, and dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>5</sup> in Marx, Engels and Lenin to practices in which social struggles in the socialist states were inscribed into mechanisms of state racism, and the class enemy was converted into a biological threat to the workers' state.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The Marxism of Workers' Autonomy

In the 1960s, Italian workerism intervened into this dark disaster with a strategy that strengthened the council communist tradition. Besides the conceptualisation of a new class subjectivity, Italian workerism is marked by a critique of real socialism, above all its productivism, in terms of reality. The excitement it generated over two brief decades was the result of its attempt to liberate Marxism on a theoretical and

5 In Althusser's discussion of Marx's and Lenin's idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the absence of a radical micro-political analysis of authoritarian practices, which does not dismiss violence but analyses the danger of its effects, becomes particularly evident, cf. "Marx in his Limits", pp. 85-95.

6 Cf. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 83: "So, who is the class enemy now? Well, it's the sick, the deviant, the madman. As a result, the weapon that was once used in the struggle against the class enemy (the weapon of war, or possibly the dialectic and conviction) is now wielded by a medical police which eliminates class enemies as though they were racial enemies" (Foucault 1997: 83).

practical level from its catastrophic petrification and from party bureaucracy. The Italian concept of workers' autonomy evolved out of an exchange with heterodox currents of 1950s Trotskyism, particularly the writing of Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis and the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, and the positions of the *Correspondence Publishing Committee* in the USA, to which C.L.R. James, Raja Dunajevskaja (until 1955) and later James Boggs belonged.<sup>7</sup> In the 1950s, both of these groups developed positions that were incorporated into workerism via the reception and translation of Danilo Montaldi: the Soviet Union as state-capitalist system; the increasing importance of bureaucracy, planning and management for capitalist production; the renunciation of the Leninist principle of organisation; the interest in workers' self-management in the context of everyday class resistance. The focal point of this French and US-American attempt to investigate workers' autonomy, everyday factory experience and wildcat strikes in order to reveal their revolutionary potentials, was the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which Lefort, James, Castoriadis and Lee-Boggs collectively wrote about.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1961 and 1965, inspired by this project of rethinking the revolution, a group of Italian intellectuals, belonging, in part, to the PCI and PSI, worked in the *Quaderni Rossi* on a reinterpretation of Marx's theses on labour-power, technological development, socialisation of production, class and the law of value, taking the primacy of the class struggle as a

7 Harald Wolf, who contributed to the rediscovery of "Socialisme ou Barbarie" in the German-speaking world, wrote an article about Castoriadis and S. ou B. in which he also examines the collaboration with "Correspondence", cf. Wolf, "Die Revolution neu beginnen", pp. 69-112.

8 Cf. James, Lee, Chaulieu (pseudonym of Castoriadis): Facing *Reality*; the foreword can be found online. Castoriadis' annoyance at James' interventions in his article brought about the end of their collaboration; cf. in addition Lefort, "L'insurrection hongroise", pp. 87-116.

9 Cf. on the meaning of *conricerca* "as participation in the pressure of the workers" Alquati, *Klassenanalyse als Klassenkampf*, pp. 33f., 49f., and Malo de Molina, "Common Notions, Part 1".

starting point. At the same time, in the six issues of the journal, a number of empirical studies were published that were carried out in collaboration with workers, so-called *conricercas*,<sup>9</sup> co-research, which examined the scientific management in the new factories of northern Italy, disciplinary mechanisms in factories and housing, and strategies of militant self-organisation and autonomous class behaviour. The *conricercas* were influenced by US-American industrial sociology, which abandoned the division between investigating subject and investigated object. Already in 1956, Danilo Montaldi and Romano Alquati, who would later carry out two factory surveys at Fiat and Olivetti, had begun with the first workers-inquiry in the Province of Cremona. The *conricercas* were seen as a “method of direct action” (Alquati 1974: 40) that would strengthen the organisation of autonomy and support the constitution of worker-politicians in the council-communist tradition. At the PSI Congress in Turin in 1961, Romano Alquati announced, summarising the results of his inquiry into politically organised workers at Fiat, that the “new forces” in the large factories – workers who are young, with few qualifications and little organisation in a union or party, and mostly migrated from the south – are bearers of a new form of class struggle, of clandestine revolt organised within everyday life with whom it is necessary to search together for ways in which the “currently led struggle might lead to the conscious realisation of a socialist system” (ibid: 40).

#### 4. Between Leninism and Minoritarian Politics

Workerism arose, in a singular way, out of the encounter between a theoretical and a practical experience, between a new type of Marxist intellectualism and a new type of factory activism; two practices that were bound together ever more closely until they drifted apart in the movement of 1977. The transmission belt of this militant connection was the factory surveys. Rejecting the classical dualism between leadership and the spontaneity of the masses, Bologna points out that the factory activism represented the initiating moment of this encounter. For Bologna, workerism emerged from the organised micro-systems of the factory struggle, which – still partly marked by the experience of the

Resistenza<sup>10</sup> – had broken with union and party structures, and, at the beginning of the 1960s, appeared in individual divisions at Fiat, Pirelli, Innocenti, Olivetti (Bologna 2000: 92). Their practices were drawn on by theorists working on a rewriting of Marx's theory. Mario Tronti's reversal of the relations between capital and labour, in which he replaced an economic analysis of capitalism with a political one, reveals the theoretical problematic of workerism in a paradigmatic way. He sees labour-power as a constitutive principle, and – referring to the development of the notion of labour in Marx from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to *Capital* – as a subjective precondition of capital.<sup>11</sup> Tronti defines the political as a process in which labour-power removes itself from capital, refuses to carry out capital's needs, a process whereby labour-power stops being active and simultaneously organises itself as a force of attack: "Here, we are happy to see Schumpeter's figure of the entrepreneur with his initiative of the innovator reversed in the permanent initiative of struggle of the great worker masses. On this path, labour-power can – indeed must – become a power of struggle. This is the political transition from labour-power to working class" (ibid: 177). During this period, Alquati, referring to the chapter "Machinery and Modern Industry" in *Capital*, developed in the journals *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia* the thesis of a re-composition of the working class that would change along two dimensions: on the technical level, through the reconstitution of labour in the course of capitalist development (technical composition of class); on the political level, through the autonomising and organising effects of the workers' struggles directed against the disciplining of the technical level (political composition of class). Primarily Negri and Alquati discussed the extent to which this antagonistic

10 On the meaning of the Resistenza in the autonomous factory struggles, cf. Balestrini/Moroni, *Die goldene Horde*, pp. 19-20, and Montaldi, "Italien, Juli 1960", p. 22.

11 Cf. Tronti, *Arbeiter und Kapital*, pp. 78f.; cf. the 11th section of "First Theses", "The Strategy of the Refusal" in "Workers and Capital", which is translated into English.

dynamic between the restructuring of capital and the political re-composition of class would lead to a permanently expanding and increasingly social conflict. In “Proletari e Stato” in the mid-1970s, Negri diagnosed a rupture in this dynamic brought about by the birth of the socialised worker. The latter is the subject of a class that is no longer produced in the factory, in capital against capital, in the dialectics of living potentiality (labour-power) and dead object (the means and product of labour), but in a process of the becoming-abstract of every activity through the socialisation of production, a multitude *avant la lettre*: “The more capital extended the norms of production to all areas of society, the more the struggle also infiltrated all these areas. This struggle re-assimilated, on the one hand, the traditional demands and aims of the mass worker; on the other hand, it gave their contents and motives a new quality and purpose: from wage to guaranteed income, from negotiation to appropriation, from unionism to liberation” (1998: 127). Here, one can see how Negri starts to abandon the category of negativity in the thinking of the political that had determined Tronti’s reversal of the relationship between capital and labour, since the political status of labour was bound to its becoming-inactive, its self-negation as force of production. This turning away from the category of negativity was consolidated in subsequent years through Negri’s encounter with Spinoza, when he linked the force of production with potential being (1991: 136-144)

The question of the self-organisation of class brought about the first break in the workerist project. Raniero Panzieri, who translated and provided a commentary to “Fragment on Machines” in the *Grundrisse* and worked on a new reading of *Capital* in which he paid particular attention to the relationship between class and technological development, wanted to win over the classical workers’ organisations for the new factory activism. The other part of the *Quaderni Rossi* editorial staff, including Negri, Tronti, Alquati, wanted to develop a militant politics outside of the established parties and trade unions. When, during the strikes in the Turin car and metal industry, their journal was accused of advocating provocation and revolt, Raniero Panzieri blocked an intensification of the political initiative. This was after the summer of 1962, in which around

250,000 workers had taken part in strikes in Turin, which developed into extremely brutal, three-day clashes on the Piazza Statuto when it became known that the social democratic trade union UIL had made a separate deal with Fiat. Negri, Alquati and Tronti finally left the *Quaderni Rossi* and founded the journal and group *Classe Operaia*.

The second rupture in the workerist project also ran along the difference between class autonomy and class organisation; this time as a result of the Leninist positions of the political leadership and the primacy of the party as they were introduced especially by Tronti between 1963 and 66 in “Lenin in England” and “Workers and Capital”, arguing that the non-institutionalised workers’ power must be placed next to an organ of revolutionary will. His thesis that “at a particular point, the party must impose on class what the class itself is,” (1974: 226) led to sharp tensions in *Classe Operaia*, and in 1966 to the collapse of the group that had been formed around the journal.<sup>12</sup> The faction around Mario Tronti rejoined the PCI and advocated a neo-Leninist “autonomy of the political”, the other part radicalised the approach of workers’ autonomy and self-organised factory struggles. When, in 1973, the national organisation *Potere Operaio* dissolved into the network of the *Autonomia Operaia*,<sup>13</sup> there was a further critique of the Leninist strategies, this time bound up with a debate about the gender-blind concept of labour of the workerist Left.<sup>14</sup> For the

12 On the conflicts and ruptures in *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*, cf. Bologna, “A Review of Storming Heaven”, pp. 97-105; Bologna: *For an Analysis of Autonomia*, pp. 92-95, 100-101; cf. Rieland, “Die ‘Erneuerung der Arbeiterbewegung’”, pp. 27-38; and Moroni & Balestrini, *Die goldene Horde*, pp. 85-100.

13 *Autonomia Operaia* (AO), “workers’ autonomy”: loose association of factory committees and social collectives, which were held together by free radio stations such as *Radio Alice*, *Radio Onda Rossa*, *Radio Sherwood* and journals such as *Rosso*, *Senza Tregua* or *Primo Maggio*, the remains of *Potere Operaio* and other Marxist groups; from 1972 to 1983, AO was the organisation of the radical left movement in Italy.

14 Cf. Dalla Costa & James, *Women and the Subversion of the Community*; Dalla Costa, “The Door to the Garden”.

first time – if in the margins – the figure of the minoritarian struggles in autonomous Marxism emerged. In opposition to the substantialisation of the political in labour-power and privileging of a single act – namely, the strategy of refusal in the factory – a new question of the political was devised: How can the different forms of dissidence traversing a situation relate in such a way that their forces are developed by this relation and, in the process of the upheaval, become more intensive? The extent to which the strategic question of minoritarian politics remained marginal in relation to that of class struggle appears in a paradigmatic way in a dispute between Franco Berardi (Bifo) and Félix Guattari at the end of the 1970s. While for Bifo, the refusal to work represented *the* expression of the politics of class struggle, Guattari focuses on desubjectivising revolutionary concatenations: “One cannot [...] seriously believe that the refusal to work and a particular workers struggle are the only and defining factors for a transformation of social concatenations. There are still so many other factors. Instead of speaking about subjectivity, one should speak about subjective, machinic concatenations, about decentralised forms of subjectivation. I therefore reject your idea that a contradiction inherent to labour [...] guides the historical and productive processes” (1978: 73). Here, the profound difference between two ideas of the political is revealed in an exemplary way: on the one hand, an effect without cause, substances and subject that emerges through the connection of different forms of dissidence and resistance, which coexist with various power relations; on the other hand, the force of a trans-individual, transformatory potentiality that is embedded in being, and comes to the fore in history with the development of capitalism.

## 5. Reading Marx

What aspects of Marx’s texts are activated by post-workerism fifteen years later? Which Marx does it read? If one abandons the simplifying idea of an epistemological rupture in Marx’s works dividing it along the break-line of scientificity – a thesis that was developed by structuralist Marxism in the 1960s and that Althusser revoked in 1973 as “theoreticist

error”<sup>15</sup> – the polyvalence of Marx’s theoretical work is revealed in which philosophically, politically and scientifically held problematisations of the relationship between labour, capital and their critical reproduction overlap and connect with the pressing question of their abolition. Against Althusser’s affirmation of a scientific Marx of *Capital*, Blanchot, in his brief and essayistic text “Marx’s Three Voices”, distinguishes the disparate coexistence of three modes of speaking: firstly, a direct, long and (anti-)philosophical mode, in which Marx gives answers in terms of the history of logos – “alienation, the primacy of need, history as the process of material practice, the total human” (Blanchot 1997: 98) – answers that want to be what they say: a break with the former course of things, whose corresponding question remains, however, undefined; secondly, a political mode, which is brief, direct and rallying, announcing the immediate dissolution of bourgeois society through the praxis of the proletariat, and referring again to the performativity of Marx’s political thinking – it expresses the urgency of what it announces; and thirdly, the indirect speech of the scientific, economical-critical discourse, in which the conditions of production and reproduction of capital are analysed; a speech that undermines itself since it “designates itself as radical transformation of itself, as a theory of mutation always in play in practice, just as in this practice the mutation is always theoretical” (ibid: 99). Even if Blanchot ignores the developments and breaks in Marx’s work, the displacements of his questions, and the re-emergence of abandoned concepts by concentrating entirely on the thesis that science and thought do not emerge unscathed from Marx’s work and that its productivity consists in the multiplicity of its modes

15 In *For Marx*, Althusser adopted Bachelard’s concept of the epistemological break, arranging Marx’s writings into the early works, the works of the break, the transitional works and the mature works (cf. *For Marx*, pp. 32-35). He contrasted the ideological works of Marx’s youth with the scientificity of the texts after 1845, a classification that Althusser renounced in 1973 as a “theoreticist error”, because it implied an equation of science with truth and ideology with error, cf. “Elements of Self-Criticism”, p. 119.

of speech, obliging everybody who reads it to constantly remodel his or her thought, he provides two insights that are useful for an investigation of the post-workerist reception of Marx: firstly, to pay attention to the questions that can be found to Marx's answers; secondly, to investigate how the relationship between economy and politics can be understood, which oscillates in Marx's thought between a primacy of the economic form (universal dissemination of the value-form) and a primacy of the political content (the true essence and the actual reality of human labour). With the question of the question to which Marx answers, Blanchot varies the central motif of Althusser's symptomatic reading of Marx. In *Reading Capital*, Althusser declared that Marx had created a new theoretical problematic by finding, in different places, the question that would already be present in the gaps of the national-economic answers, but would be unthinkable for the classical economy. Thus, for the answer of the labour theory of value, Marx found the question of the difference between labour and labour-power. With this distinction, the economy becomes criticisable as a space of segmentation constituted by separations: separation of the producers from their means of production, separation of the potentiality-for-work from the conditions for the realisation of work. However, for Althusser, the crucial question that Marx produces – though still in the old Hegelian terms of inner essence and outer appearances – is the question of the effect of a structure on its elements. On the basis of this question, the reproduction of a capitalist society would, for Althusser, become analysable, and the economic would finally become thinkable as a structure that has no substance and no subject, and only exists in its effects.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Marx beyond Marx

But what are the questions that post-workerism finds to the answers that Marx gives? How does it think the relationship between economy, labour and politics? How does it go beyond

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Althusser's remarks on this concept in *Reading Capital*, 2 vols. pp. 28-30, 170-174, 184-189.

the dialectical and teleological idealisations of Marx? Let us begin by clarifying what it means, with Marx, to go beyond Marx. This is a challenge that Negri himself took up in *Marx beyond Marx*,<sup>17</sup> and which, as Balibar pointed out in the 1980s, implies at least two methodological aspects related to materialist thought: firstly, Marxism participates in the overcoming of its future perspectives since it starts from the historical specificity of a discourse, including its own, and is thus able to reflect the temporal conditionality of its thought, while on a non-discursive level the worker's movement, the class struggles, the construction of the Soviet Union and the real socialist states contributed to the shift of capitalist strategies of valorisation and control so that they no longer correspond to the conditions analysed by Marx in the middle of the nineteenth century; secondly, Marx's theory contains passages that deconstruct its philosophical fictions and dialectical idealisations. Particularly Marx's institutional and historical analyses on working-time legislation, the formation of big industry and the mechanisation of production in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* reveals a thinking that is based neither on an evolutionary development of predetermined forms, nor collective forces embedded in the history of being, expressing the right content that will make the wrong capitalist form explode. Instead, one encounters a social theory that investigates the effects of antagonistic strategies: "strategies of exploitation, domination and resistance, constantly being displaced and renewed as a consequence of their own effects" (Balibar 1991: 164). Hence, with the development of Marxist discourse and its critical reflection within post-structuralism, society becomes thinkable as a configuration of configurations, or as an arrangement of reciprocally displacing relations in which relatively autonomous instances and practices exist. Their mechanisms of effectivity are articulated in their own instance, as well as being translated to the site of other instances; they have micro- and macro-

17 Cf. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*. Balibar develops his post-Marxist thought by "borrowing Negri's phrase for my own purposes": "to take Marx's concepts 'beyond Marx'" (Balibar: "From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle", p. 168).

political dimensions that do not represent the miniaturisation or projection of a basic definition, but a mechanism of double conditioning<sup>18</sup> in which practices find their point of support in the smallest and most everyday social situations, and, at the same time, are combined into big total strategies through which they gain continuity. In structuralist Marxism, considerations of this kind led to the concept of structural causality, or to the effect of a complex structure on its elements, in which an economic determination in the last instance was assumed. A number of Althusser's students have expanded this approach to that of regulation by replacing the idea of complex relations unified by a dominant contradiction (the economical), with the idea of unstable relations between the elements of the social, which cannot be reduced to a totality. Hence, the significance of the crisis was strengthened in regulation theory; the category of the subject reintroduced.<sup>19</sup> Foucault's distantiating from Marxism began earlier and was more radical, even if, in many cases, it remained schematic, treated earlier and later works by Marx as one, and avoided a distinction between different currents of Marxism. The decisive and precious interventions in relation to Marxism lay in the development of a non-juridical and a non-economical conception of power as a strategic relation of forces to which no law of form is immanent. Thus, Foucault deconstructed the thesis of economic determination in the last instance put forward by Althusser and Balibar in the 1960s and 70s in which an aspect of a priori necessity is retained in the thought of the social as a set of complex and contradictory relations. At the beginning of the 1970s, with the development of this deconstructive approach, Foucault also abandoned the notion that he developed in "Discipline and Punish" that the prison is the general model that is inscribed in all power relations, whereby he argued along the lines of an expressive causality (the parts

18 Cf. Foucault's methodological description of the micro- and macro-political in *History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, pp. 99 -100.

19 On the transition from structuralist Marxism to regulation theory, cf. the summary by Lipietz from 1993.

express the whole), which he consistently opposed in his writing. In the same period, Foucault translated his considerations about a nominalist concept of power<sup>20</sup> into a series of methodological rules: the immanence of knowledge and power, the continual variations of their distributions, the double conditioning of micro- and macro-political mechanisms, the polyvalence of regulating practices that are discontinuous and transformatory in their effects, which merge together into various big strategies.<sup>21</sup> For Foucault, the political coexists with these power relations; it is a matter of two practices that mutually provoke, incite, shun, penetrate and attack each other. A social break is the improbable and eventual result of a strong connection of different political practices, an idea that Balibar had defined in relation to a “becoming-necessary of liberty” as a “becoming-contingent of resistances.” In “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter”, one of his last texts, Althusser swings with a sudden crystalline clarity to this position of a contingent and relational thought of power and the event, a potentiality that was present in his thought, but remained closed due to the idea of a unity of social complexity determined by the economic.<sup>22</sup> He

20 “One need to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 93).

21 Cf. once again Foucault’s seminal methodological remarks in *History of Sexuality*, pp. 92-102.

22 Laclau and Mouffe describe how, with Althusser’s and Balibar’s acceptance of an economic determination in the last instance, the deconstructive element was gambled away that was connected with the notion of the overdetermination of the social conditions: “If the economy is an object which can determine any type of society in the last instance, this means that, at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination. [...] And, if society does have a last essential determination, the difference is not constitutive, and the social is unified in the sutured space of a rationalist paradigm. Thus, we are confronted with exactly the same dualism that we found reproduced since the end of the nineteenth century in the field of Marxist discursiveness” (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 99). G.M. Goshgarian points out that Althusser had already developed elements of aleatory materialism in the 1970s, a time when he read the atomists, Epicurus, Democritus etc. (Cf. “Translator’s Introduction”, 2006).

points out that, in the history of philosophy, an almost totally overlooked materialist tradition exists:

*“The ‘materialism’ of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take. [...] To simplify matters, let us say, for now, a materialism of the encounter, and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency. This materialism is opposed, as a wholly different mode of thought, to the various materialisms on record, including that widely ascribed to Marx, Engels and Lenin, which, like every other materialism in the rationalist tradition, is a materialism of necessity and teleology, that is to say, a transformed, disguised form of idealism. [...] We shall say, then, that the materialism of the encounter is contained in the thesis of the primacy of positivity over negativity (Deleuze), the thesis of the primacy of the swerve over the rectilinearity of the straight trajectory [...], in the thesis of the primacy of ‘dissémination’ over the postulate that every signifier has a meaning (Derrida), and in the welling up of order from the very heart of disorder to produce a world [...] In other words, not just anything can produce just anything, but only elements destined to encounter each other and, by virtue of their affinity, to ‘take hold’ one upon the other [...].”*

(2006: 167-8; 189; 192)

With Marx, to go beyond Marx, means, in this sense, to extract the sublimated idealism from the materialist project and to end all attempts at explaining the social, conclusively and without gaps, as totality, distinguishing a constitutive cause or a form-giving law in the reciprocal play of its parts with which either the Hegelian division between inner essence and outer appearance (law of value) or the idea of a force preceding all historical occurrences (potentiality-for-work) would be reintroduced.<sup>23</sup>

23 Balibar formulates this requirement at the end of his considerations on the status of the concept of ideology in the works of Marx and Engels, see: *Politics and Truth*, pp. 173 - 174.

This post-Marxist field of a *Marx beyond Marx* is determined by a strong tension between an early Althusserian rationalisation and a late Derridean ethicisation. How then is the post-workerist discourse, which circles around the liberation of a generalised force of production, to be located in the post-Marxist field?

## 7. The Preconditions of Communism

In the 1990s, post-workerism situated itself in this field with the announcement of bringing together Marxist, post-structuralist and feminist argumentations, and to open Marxism to non-dialectical thought. Despite strong references to the concepts of Deleuze and Foucault, it stands diametrically opposed to post-structuralist thought through an ontologisation of labour. It affirms what Derrida in *Specters of Marx* tirelessly deconstructs: the being-present of a force in which communism is already alive, whereby it is inscribed into a meta-political tradition of thought, to restore the political act to the truth of a potentiality immanent to the being of the community.<sup>24</sup> While an extreme distance to Hegelian dialectics and its thinking of contradiction connects post-workerism and Althusser, from whom it inherits a number of Machiavellian and Spinozist inspirations, as well as the analysis of capitalism as the reproduction of production relations, they are categorically separated by the reference to the young Marx and the idea of a constituent power of labour. For Althusser, the concept of the human being in Marx has no theoretical function. With the “Theses on Feuerbach” in 1845, he breaks with the humanism of the Young Hegelians and the call for man to return to the possession of his real essence.<sup>25</sup> For Althusser, Marx is a

24 Cf. Rancière, “Peuple ou multitudes?”, pp. 95-100, or Derrida’s serene suggestion to Negri, to act as if one was talking about ontology, since: “Ontology involves, indeed is, in my view mourning work [...] – carried out with a view to reconstituting, saving, redeeming a full presence of the present-being, where that present-being, in accordance with what is not merely a lack or flaw, but also an opportunity, appears to be lacking: differance.” (Derrida: “Marx & Sons”, p. 261)

25 Cf. primarily Althusser’s section “Marx and Theoretical Humanism” in *Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?* from 1976, pp. 195-200.

theoretician of social reproduction, who, with time, left behind every idealism of labour and the idea of an original human creativity, which brought him, in the “Paris Manuscripts”, to speak of a relationship between Smith and Hegel, since one founded the political economy in the subjectivity of labour and the other understood labour as the human essence. In contrast, post-workerism adopts a no-less anti-Hegelian reading of Marx, but an otherwise subjectivising and ontologising one, diametrically opposed to Althusser’s thought, which, in part, brings it close to the interpretations of a phenomenology of life, such as those found in the work of Michel Henry who sees Marx as a theorist of individual corporeality and of being as production and praxis.<sup>26</sup> Thus, post-workerism didn’t radicalise structuralist Marxism in the sense of a post-structuralist methodology, which would lead to the acceptance of a non-totalisable complexity of the social and hence to the question of how strategies of economical valorisation, institutional administration and corporeal disciplining are displaced in their effects and stand in relation to dissidences that escape or attempt to attack them. Instead, Negri articulated the post-workerist split from structuralist Marxism with the formula “from the structure to the subject” (1996: 172-3).

Unlike the theoretical praxis of the intellectuals of workers’ autonomy between the 1960s and the 80s, the post-workerist reading of Marx remains cursory.<sup>27</sup> Hardly anywhere does it become deconstructive or symptomatic. Three main traces are actualised in it: firstly, the early Marx’s idea of an all-sided unfolding of labour-power constituting the humanity of the human being, which leads to an anthropological and ontological thinking of communism; secondly, the meta-political idea of class as a revolutionary mass whose force and positionality immediately supersede the existing order; and

26 Cf. Michel Henry’s phenomenological reading of Marx published in 1976, *Marx. A Philosophy of Human Reality*.

27 An exception is made by the long reflections on Marx’s thought in Negri’s book *Insurgencies*, cf. here, for example, the section “The Constitution of Labor”, pp. 212-230. See also the brief notes “In Marx’s Footsteps” in *Multitude*, pp. 140-153.

thirdly, the anticipation undertaken by Marx in the *Grundrisse* from 1857 of a socialisation of production encompassing the whole sociality, subsuming it under capital. Here, we are faced with an extremely specific, heretical connection to Marx linked with strong practical experiences in which two texts occupy a prominent position. While the reading of the “Paris Manuscripts”, in which the young Marx, still inspired by Feuerbachian themes, understands labour as self-realisation, remains implicit with only a few exceptions,<sup>28</sup> the reinterpretation of “Fragments on Machines”<sup>29</sup> in the *Grundrisse*, which already played a central role in the workerist theory of the 1960s, is undertaken explicitly and represents the most visible reference to Marx in post-workerism. With this conflictual reading of Marx, the trans-historical theses of the young Marx on the creative vitality of labour are combined with the historical works of the late Marx on the socialisation of production and projected into each other. This leads to a high tension in the post-workerist discourse, in which, on the one hand, the human mode of cooperative being-active, and on the other hand, historical transformations of the conditions of production and reproduction of the social are investigated. Hence, the question is revealed that post-workerism gave to Marx’s answers, and which Blanchot had demanded that one search for if one wants to understand how Marx is received within a discourse. It is the question of the preconditions of communism in the history of being and in the historical development of social regulation. In this meta-political question of the preconditions of communism, post-workerism’s two perspectives of analysis converge: in imperial capitalism, the human of humans, the potential of its mode of being, its fragile potentiality to act, are included in the valorisation. Marx’s diagnosis of the real subsumption of labour under capital,<sup>30</sup> which he had developed in the *Grundrisse* and a few preparatory works to *Capital*, begins

28 Cf. for example Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 76-80

29 Cf. Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 690-706.

30 Cf. Marx’s remarks in “Results of the Direct Production Process”, and in part IV of *Capital. Volume 1*, “The Production of Relative Surplus-Value”.

to apply for all forms of human expression. Post-workerism calls this biopolitical production.<sup>31</sup>

We thus encounter the prophecy of an extreme alteration of a maximal socialisation of capitalist regulation into an arrival of communism, which is blocked from capital with the means of police war. From this point of view, labour ultimately becomes the production of the political itself, the production of antagonistic subjectivity. Post-workerism thus founded the political in a twofold manner (1): in the historical tendency of post-Fordist mode of production, to bring about a mass-intellectual, self-reflexive, affective and cooperative force of production, and (2) thereby to generate what surpasses it, namely a trans-historical potentiality of the human being embedded in the history of being, to cooperatively and freely organise its sociality. This projection of a trans-historical potentiality in a historical development leads to a paradox that is typical of the philosophy of history: that which was embedded comes into existence,<sup>32</sup> a becoming-necessary of freedom.

With the corresponding reference to the *Paris Manuscripts* and a thinking of the total, universally producing human being (Marx wrote in 1844: “Man appropriates his integral essence in an integral way, as a total man” (1975: 351)), the revisions that Marx had begun to work on more intensely in the British Museum after the collapse of the Revolution of 1848/49 are ignored. Already around 1845, Marx understood the social as relation, and gradually distanced himself from his theoretical humanism. From the announcement in the *Grundrisse* that – “to develop the concept of capital it is necessary to begin not with labour but with value” (1993: 259) – Marx advanced to an analysis of the praxis of capital as the subject of self-processing

31 Cf. Negri & Hardt, *Multitude*, p. 109. Here both authors substitute the concept of immaterial for that of biopolitical labour.

32 “[...]; it [capital] confronts the totality of all labours  $\delta\upsilon\nu\chi\mu\epsilon\iota$  [potentially]”, writes Marx. “Here it can be seen once again that the particular specificity of the relation of production, of the category – here, capital and labour – becomes real only with the development of a particular material mode of production and of a particular stage in the development of the industrial productive forces.” (*Grundrisse*, p. 297).

contradictions without fully departing from earlier or diverging aspects of his thought such as alienation from human species-being. In the post-workerist reading of Marx calling for “the freedom of living labor” (Negri & Hardt 1994: 21), we reencounter aporetic elements of Marx's thinking such as the postulate of an immanent telos, the idea of a homogenisation of class relations through the becoming-abstract of all labour, the assumption that communism is already at work in the collective forces of humanity and the corresponding equation of activity, reality, being and communism. Hence, the question of this text becomes: What does it mean when the political is understood as the realisation of the human in the course of the socialisation of production, when “the affirmation of labor in this sense is the affirmation of life itself” (ibid.: 1) and history, one day, will not be able to do anything other than, in the light of a new dawn, be conscious of its own dissolution in the potentiality of the multitude to bring about the world?

## 8. The Poor Militant

Let us examine the limits of this figure of the political with the poor as prototype of the communist militant who owns nothing but what he embodies and *is*: potentiality, material of innovation and production.<sup>33</sup> The conceptual starting point of this materialistic politics of creative joy<sup>34</sup> is Marx's idea of living labour, which, in 1844 in the *Paris Manuscripts*, was still implicitly expressed as the creative power of labour that gives things their form and life: “For what is life but activity?”, Marx asked, and remarked “that the life which he [the worker] has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien” (1975).

33 “The beauty of Spinoza's thought consists in just this: the divine is not outside us. [...] it is the whole difference between modern and ancient materialism – between Spinozist or Democritian or Epicurean materialism. [...] To be a Spinozist, by contrast, means to believe, that it is given to us to experience this moment of innovation and to accede directly to eternity: We are the clinamen [...]” (Negri, *Negri on Negri*, pp. 147).

34 Cf. Negri & Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus* (1994: 1).

The term appears explicitly in 1848 in the “Communist Manifesto” in the contrast between subjective potentiality (living) and objectified product (dead): “In bourgeois society, living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor. In communist society, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer” (Marx & Engels 1998: 499). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx finally found a formula that liberated the idea of living labour from the context of the critique of alienation and the promise of reconciliation, and grasped it as radically poor, value-constituting potentiality belonging to the corporeal worker-subject. This idea of living labour as potentiality of a cooperative subject is the central Marxian point of reference of the post-workerist idea of constituent power. Its transcription into a biopolitical potentiality-to-act encompassing all human forms of expression is achieved by grafting Foucauldian and Deleuzian concepts onto Marx’s idea of labour-power (biopolitical production, labour-power as desiring *potentia*, the multitude as differentiated whole in infinite differentiation).

Through the reference to Marx’s early anti-utopian idea of the presence of a communist act in which the proletariat surpasses and dissolves all relations, the contents of the terms biopolitics, desire, infinite differentiation are emptied out. Until 1848, the proletariat is given in Marx’s thought the force of a pure act;<sup>35</sup> it is a universal class that inherits the leftist tradition of the French Revolution, Babeuf and the Montagnards. From the “Holy Family” to the “Communist Manifesto”, class represents for Marx a revolutionary mass of “mere workers”, “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Marx & Engels 1932: 49), whereby material being and political praxis are directly equated. The proletariat, radically dispossessed and thereby radically individualised, distinguished by nothing but its potentiality-for-work, embodies the “estate which is the dissolution of all estates” (Marx 1844: 186). Fifteen years later, Marx reformulated these thoughts of the potential of poverty of the mere worker in the *Grundrisse*, this time in relation to the creation of value: “Labour as absolute poverty: poverty not as shortage, but as total exclusion

35 Cf. Balibar (1983: 92-96)

of objective wealth. [...] Labour not as an object, but as activity, not as itself value, but as the living source of wealth. (1993: 296)” Post-workerism re-attributes to the multitude, as the maximal extension of the proletariat, this ontological privilege of “humans without qualities” (Marx 1993: 296), “the general possibility of wealth as subject and as activity” (Negri & Hardt 1994: 14), this means the embodiment of the universal force of production and social transformation itself. In the Catholic-Marxist tradition of Jesus via Saint Francis of Assisi to the sans-culottes, the poor person becomes the paradigmatic figure of the communist militant: “The poor person is then not someone constituted by pain, but is *in reality* the biopolitical subject. He is not an existential trembling (or a painful dialectical differentiation): he is the naked eternity of the power of being” (Negri 2004: 194).

With this concept of the poor person as bare life – *the* theoretical discovery of classical workerism – the political identification of labour-power with the working classes<sup>36</sup> is actualised and ontologised in the framework of a new concept of class. In the concept of multitude, central characteristics of the “socialised worker” can be found<sup>37</sup> – the class composition that, in the mid-1970s, Toni Negri and Romano Alquati used to diagnose a historical rupture in the development of political subjectivity. The analysis of socialised labour was based on two theses: firstly, all activities, irrespective of kind, are subsumed under capital and incorporated into the reproduction of the social relations of production; while secondly, they are autonomously coordinated to an increasing degree by the workers themselves. This means that while the capitalist mode of production encompasses the whole of society, labour is autonomised; from heteronomy grows autonomy. At this analytic threshold between abstraction, socialisation and self-valorisation of labour, the concept of the socialised worker as well as, fifteen years later, that of the multitude was obtained. Hence, the autonomisation of class is based on a third thesis: the incorporation of the mode of production in the body of the producers. Since the struggles of 1968, living labour has been

36 Cf. Tronti, *Arbeiter und Kapital*, p. 77.

37 Cf. Wright, “Storming Heaven”, pp. 152-176.

autonomised, according to Negri, by incorporating the knowledge and the means of administering production: “Historically, capital places the instrument of production at the disposal of the worker; as soon as the human brain re-appropriates this instrument of production, capital loses the possibility of articulating the command by means of the instrument.” (2007: 21). For Negri, this autonomy of a mass-intellectually composed labour-power represents the terminus of the socialisation of production. Labour does not create the means of social life, but this itself; the economical, the political and the social become one; productive forces are immediately translated into production relations.<sup>38</sup> This means that labour is substantialised, capital desubstantialised – it is no more than a parasitical mechanism that appropriates inventive productivity. The multitude, on the other hand, represents the precondition and result of social transformation; it embodies the active process of the dissolution of the existing order and the production of the new; its radical subjectivation is carried out exactly at the point where the social process of change changes, whereby its potentiality in post-Fordism is given the highest actuality, one that will bring about the transition to communism; in short, it is the last class, last content of a false form of capitalism. It is the ontological and biological entrepreneur of itself and of communism, “an entrepreneur of fullness, who seeks essentially to construct a productive fabric” (Negri 1998: 185). In this way, the post-workerist idea of the political is given an eschatological colouring and is clearly distinguished from other post-Marxist positions, from hegemony theory, from regulation theory, from Rancière’s or Badiou’s considerations based on the specificity of a political act that is not grounded in a subjective force determined by its position in production, but whose subjectivity is retroactively produced in the event that the political act follows.<sup>39</sup>

38 Cf. Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx”, p. 152: “There is an immediate translatability between the social forces of production and the relation of production themselves.”

39 Cf. for example Laclau/Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 84-85: “[...] There is no logical connection whatsoever between the positions in the relations of production and the mentality of the producers.”

## 9. The Paradoxes of the Political

The post-workerist idea of the poor as the materialisation of creative potentiality represents the precise opposite of Foucault's idea of the relation between power and resistance. For Foucault, the practices of transformation are from the same matter as the conditions to be transformed. They are forces that act upon forces, or as he wrote in "Subject and Power", "a set of actions upon other actions" (2003: 138). Power and dissidence do not assume the form of an antagonism, but an agonism, "of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation" (ibid: 139). While Foucault's strategic starting point takes power not as a substance but as an assemblage of mechanisms and procedures that are neither autogenetic nor autosubsistent, and are therefore not founded on themselves, post-workerist authors such as Negri, Virno and Hardt take bodies to be materialisations of creative power that organise the change of change when they manage to capture the power of the instant. The political is thus self-production, self-change and world-change in one, referring back to the Marxian aporia of defining the subject as transformatory praxis in order to unhinge it from the idealist category of consciousness, self-consciousness and spirit while a central idealistic category is carried over with the idea of subjective activity.

Post-workerism loosens this figure of subjective praxis from its dialectical mediatedness. The praxis of the proletariat is not, as with Marx, thought of as an effect of the social structure that will dissolve this structure. With the thesis of the end of the dialectic of the instrument of production and its incorporation in the body of the producers, living labour is referred back to itself. The brain, the affect, thought are conceived of as autonomous forces of production belonging to the human and corporeal. Hence, for Negri, living labour only stands in a marginal exchange with a desubstantialised, parasitical capital. Foucault resolved the dialectical circle of Marx's analysis in a diametrically opposed manner. He thinks power mechanisms as an immanent component of

familial, sexual and productive relations; they traverse these relations as their cause and effect; they anticipate, mobilise, block and displace acts of resistance by attempting to anchor new procedures of control, while these acts of resistance simultaneously escape or oppose them. With the concept of biopower, he named the historical threshold in which the corporeal is included in the procedures of power and begins to represent their privileged point of anchorage. The thesis of the indissoluble connection between autonomy and heteronomy, and the warning that the irony of the biopolitical dispositif consists in making us think that life needs to be liberated from the clutches of power, is contrasted by post-workerism with the idea of a late capitalist “naked life”<sup>40</sup> that – poor but productive – embodies the being of being. Finally, forfeiting all specific skills, it represents pure potentiality, the ability to do this and that. If, in Foucault, the subject was the first effect of power, power is now effect and inventive act of the social subject.

Objections have been raised against these theses from the most varied places. From the position of autonomous Marxism itself, Massimo De Angelis has argued that the messianic immanentism of the multitude discourse assumes that the political is already given in the form of the commonality of social cooperation, and needs only to be realised instead of produced (2006). For Rancière, the paradox of this position is that the idea of the potentiality of the multitude negates the political because it presents a being without will and without conflict that develops according to an immanent telos (2002: 95-100). Balibar similarly criticises the trace of Marxian argumentation that post-workerism draws on. The proletariat as presence of a communist act and immediate dissolution of bourgeois society is, for him, by definition a negation of politics (1983: 95). For Agamben, however, potentiality does not mean to do this or that, but to be in the position to not do something. Potentiality is crowned by the fact

40 Negri & Hardt: *Empire*, p. 366: “In other words, capitalist prehistory comes to an end when social and subjective cooperation is no longer a product but a presupposition when naked life is raised up to the dignity of productive power [...]”

that something possible is allowed to become not actual, and the great dualisms of being and non-being, activity and passivity are put out of action (1993: 258-61).

Conceived as a positive force of life, the drama of post-workerist politics comes from it not being able to keep a distance to itself, whereby the political is understood in a Christian tradition as common being, as an active becoming-one of a multiple subject that wins back its living potentiality-for-work, and thus – by completing the human – its sense. Conflict, difference, asociality, not-doing and death no longer have a place in the political. Instead, let us assume that the political is a name for the militant connecting of different practices, which has no ontological, anthropological or groundless grounding, but is the effect of their connections. Militant connections are made where acts are committed to for the freedom of the different, while they simultaneously incorporate this freedom, and thereby insist that the different does not count – which is to say that it is not coupled with the attribution of predicates, social rights or possibilities. The relation between the commitment to and the incorporation of is very fragile; it quickly collapses, to be transformed into representation (when politics is pursued in the name of the other or the cause) or calculation (when only the application of one's own interests are followed). If the representative becomes too strong, the happiness of the moment disappears and the act is reduced to producing effects of resistance. This means the minoritarian intensity, everything that makes the act singular, is abandoned. If, on the other hand, the singular becomes too strong, the acts are no longer connected with each other and to the possibility of organising change. That is to say, the political inevitably encounters a number of paradoxes: firstly, it is exposed to contingency, it wants to produce a radical change of change, which cannot be directed because the connection between rationality and necessity that had once been imagined has been broken for ever; secondly, it is exposed to normalising or disciplinary displacement, its powers are permanently reintegrated, disappear or are destroyed; thirdly, as the effect of connections, the political never appears purely, the politics-effect oscillates between a too-much and a too-little. On the one hand, acts of dissidence

are not simply a particular intervention for the universality of the radical break. On the other hand, they are also not absolutely singular, since as pure singularity, they wouldn't make any connections; they wouldn't point beyond themselves and would go out like tracer shots in the night. This means that they cannot help to bring about the improbable or the constitution of a field of force through the connection of heterogeneous acts that would allow a fundamental interruption and transformation of the situation. To initiate these radical forms of interruption requires a mobilisation that is opposed to the possibility not to have to choose between doing and leaving, expenditure and sleep. Thus, an effect of the political can dangerously consist of subordinating revolt and dream to the economic primacy of effective doing. "The organisation which we are able to give to ourselves"<sup>41</sup> would have to do both: coordinate and keep a distance to the process of a radical break; it would have to reject the romantic tradition, by not equating the political with the living and a common to be produced.

Translated by Ben Carter

41 Holderin, "Hyperion Fragment",  
quoted in Laclau & Mouffe  
(1985: 145).

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**Arendt's Critique of Marx, and Post-Fordist Socialism:  
What is the Sense of Economy?  
by Gorazd Kovačič**

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## Introduction: Challenges and Shortages of the Socialist Theory of post-Fordism

Theories of the post-Fordist mode of production have raised several theoretical questions that cannot be answered by means of the traditional socio-economic concepts that were developed when a stable industrial system prevailed. Post-Fordism has ambiguously effected the situation of labourers: it created new opportunities for satisfactory flexibility, but also eroded social security, strengthened external surveillance and self-surveillance, colonised self-identity and all the psychical abilities for heteronomous purposes, and last but not least, deepened class inequalities. Some of the utopian thinkers of the post-Fordist changes have been trying to expose the function of cognitive means of production that individual labourers and networks of labourers possess in order to project a reachable socialism via the really-existing socialisation of productive forces. But this hypothetically emancipatory dimension has been perverted by a contradiction within a 'privately' controlled organisation. The flexible organisation of economic activities that externalises risks at the expense of weaker participants of economic networks and enables a continuous capitalist accumulation of the surplus value has probably been the crucial innovation of the post-Fordist regime.

Critical theories have attempted to analyze some serious conceptual challenges of the post-Fordist situation regarding the status of labour and work: new conceptualisations of labour and work from the perspective of losing the distinction between paid labouring time and unpaid free time of consuming, and the need for a new theory of value that would properly authorise an economic (and not a 'welfare') justification of the distribution of the socially produced goods and values. But in the neoconservative post-Fordist reality it seems that the three elements of contemporary economic life – the production of surplus value, the disciplining regime of labour, and justification of personal incomes – have parted and are moved by three different logics. Huge numbers of individuals have become superfluous when it comes to accumulating capital and the economic ruling forces acknowledge above all the challenges

of how to control them and their personal time, and of how to procure enough purchasing power. Even if the thesis about the increasing socialisation of means of production is correct, one cannot overlook the fact that the capitalist economic system has been alienated from the needs of the majority of humankind to the greatest degree ever.

This article is not about post-Fordism as such. It aims to critique certain analytical gaps in the socialist theories of the post-Fordist regime. The scope of this text does not allow me to develop a detailed overview of these sets of ideas so I will address a general problem of how they are part of the modern productivist paradigm of thinking. Another problem, bound to the first one, is the paradoxical way in which the notion of society is understood.

This gap is not new; it has derived from Karl Marx's categorical framework for a critical analysis of the tendencies of capitalism. Before I develop my analysis, I have to explain two definitions or meanings. By the terms "critique" and "critical" I understand a mode of comprehension that analyses its objects from the perspective of a normative measure and has the pretension to achieve an alterative practical aim. By the term "socialism" I understand a theoretical and political view that aims to socialise the economic and other human practices as alternatives to the capitalist domination. Socialism is the ideology of society in the sense that nationalism is the ideology of nation and egalitarianism is the ideology of equality. Although they are said to be materialistic, Marx's as well as the contemporary Marxist critiques of capitalism are based on the normative reference of the notion of society as a whole. What will be discussed in this text is society as a normative, not as a descriptive notion.

The meaning of the notion of society has been quite unclear and has been used in heterogeneous ways even in the social sciences. It has been extra controversial in the socialist approach, due to the mixing of two categorically different notions of society and the social, viz. an empirical and a normative notion. The notion of society should serve as the basis for theoretical constructions and they should construe the widest field of empirical research in the social sciences. In other words, their

status should be theoretically fundamental, i.e. axiomatic. But in discursive practices of the social sciences society partly serves as a generalist concept to be invested by the main social and political ideologies, like conservative systemic ideology or socialism, and partly it is used as an improper replacement of specific concepts – specific in terms of history, class or field. One such concept is the modern state with the whole spectrum of its legal, political, social service and regulatory institutions. Social scientists often take territories of the existing states for granted as primary socio-geographic units of data-collection and comparisons, but it is popular to avoid mentioning the state-related terminology and to write about “national societies” (e.g. French, Belgian, Luxemburg society) instead. Another misconception is writing about society when the subject is actually the public and public opinion, as Habermas described and historically defined them (Habermas 1962). Talking about “socially important issues”, “social discussions and decision-making”, “social responsibility”, “social engagement or activity”, and the like has become popular in academic, publicist and journalist discourses, but without consideration of the existing social order, the unequal distribution of power and hegemony.

In socialist academic and popular discourses the notion of society partly designates the axiomatic whole, partly the normative reference to be followed (i.e. the future harmony which the conservatives see as occurring as early as now). Partly it replaces specific political concepts which in their original forms make the idea of equality in the public sphere operational. The problems of a wished-for equality and of factual inequality make socialist discourse less than consistent, as both are projected in the catchword of society. Even more difficult is the oscillation between the socialist project of full socialisation as emancipation and the belief that everything that humans can do is always already socially determined. This inconsistent span of the notion of society, including the empirical field of inter-human relations and the utopian potential of the universalistic and egalitarian regime, was already developed in Marx’s work.

Hannah Arendt was one of the rare theorists or thinkers who critically grasped the notion of society, especially the implications in Marxist thought and consequently in the tradition

of socialism. According to her analysis capitalist modernity imposed on people the law of immense increase of productivity and of accumulation of surplus value. Marx tried to grasp this constellation scientifically and to theorise emancipation outside of capitalism. He interpreted the modern world by applying Hegel's dialectics and discourse of the (natural) sciences. His key category was a reproductive, cyclical process that he linked to his comprehension of labour and of history. According to Marx, and this goes for the social sciences in general, humanity is subjugated to three cyclically reproduced systems: consumable labour products maintain the labourer's body, children regenerate the population, and the accumulation of surplus value reproduces social structure. The purpose of labour, which Marx saw as a humanising activity, is breeding and expanding the collective life of biological species and of society in general. The evaluation of labouring activities and their products is affected by the functional needs of social exchange and social structure. Marx then developed a utopian, normative notion of society that would designate the content of historical emancipation and justice. This goal of socialist society is to accomplish the process of bringing human existence and activities under the control of the social life process. This process is truncated in capitalism because only part of society benefits from the socialised process of production.

Arendt had two problems with this worldview. The first one concerns the holder and the addressee of the sense (*Sinn*) of the labouring activity. Arendt was famous for making rather rigid distinctions between different kinds of human activities that were often criticised for being disused, which is correct if taken as formal descriptions. The key thesis of this text is that the crucial dimension of her distinctions lies in the different senses that belong to different sorts of activity. Thus, labour is the activity aimed at survival and abundance in life, and man collectively benefits from this life. Marx properly understood the law of collective life as the social extension of natural laws. The problem for Arendt is that the reproduction of the collective life process cannot be the only possible meaning of human existence. One of the distinctive human practices was, according to her, to create a lasting world, and she highly respected the exclusively human

abilities to think and act freely. Human individuals possess these faculties, not as collective subjects, not as a species or society. Marx's socialism saw these activities as labouring activities that added up from the point of view of society as a whole. For Arendt, this implied that individual humans were exchangeable in their social roles and as such superfluous as unique beings. This was her second scruple, based on her experience with totalitarian regimes that massively exterminated superfluous human beings. If social usefulness were an unrestrained criterion to treat individuals, it would be difficult to defend the rights of the ones who happen to be economically and socially useless.

Reviewing Arendt's critique of Marx's socialist philosophy (this will take the major part of this text) would stimulate raising several basic questions regarding post-Fordism as well as a wider capitalistic economic life that have been mostly unasked by socialist analysts of post-Fordism. What is the sense of economic life? What are the implications of analysing capitalism by means of modern scientific categories of process, reproduction, and the social whole? Has the socialist theory of the capitalist system been critical or fundamentally apologetic? What kind of emancipation implies social emancipation? These questions will be elaborated on in the concluding part of the text.

### Arendt's Analysis of Marx's Notion of Society: Process, Exchangeability and Reproduction

Hannah Arendt has been most frequently interpreted and classified as a relevant thinker in the field of extreme political phenomena like genocide, totalitarianism and war. A dimension of her work that has much less received critical reviews is her critical concept of society or the social. Yet, it forms one of the key axes of her treating modern and contemporary problems. Without considering her critical concept of society her works – including the most famous and referential one, viz. the description of mechanisms of totalitarian rule, (Arendt 1951) – are impossible to understand, either on the level of historical analyses, or in terms of the critical motivation for her intellectual ventures. The reason why the academic world has

largely neglected this concept may be that it so radically queried some of the axiomatic categories of social sciences and their ideological background.

The scope of this text requires to limit the overview of Arendt's explication of the concept of the society, and of her interpretations of Marx's comprehension of society, labour, capitalism and history to three texts: the posthumously published manuscript "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought" (2002), and the books *The Human Condition*, especially the chapter "Labour" (1958) and *Between Past and Future* (1961). Her reflections of Marx's work were developed after the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Arendt here basically focused on the issue of Nazism, although in the final stages of her writing she added comparative elements of Stalin's version of the totalitarian form of government. The author as well as some of the reviewers expressed the need for a more complete analysis of Stalin's regime and an estimation of the role (not cause) of Marxism in the Bolshevik regime. The first, at that time unpublished, product of her research into this topic was the mentioned manuscript, written in the early 1950s (2002).

This chapter summarizes Arendt's writings about Marx in the first (2002) and the third texts (1961) since their intellectual interest mainly focused on Marx's philosophical categories and their political implications in the light of the run-away Western post-Plato political philosophy. The framework of her discussion of the materialist body of thought of the capitalist world was not materialistic. Arendt's concern was linked to political philosophy. In more exact words: it was linked to the transformation of the traditional philosophical political categories within the modern world and the challenge of justifying new categories for fruitful political thinking. The next chapter will resume Arendt's critique of Marx in her text on labour (1958) that was more grounded in material matters.

The manuscript started with the statement that the two most important novelties arising from the industrial revolution were the problems of labour and history, and Marx grasped both radically. Arendt wrote several passages about Hegel's and later also Marx's comprehension of history as a

process. The law of movement, she said, was a more important element of Marx's establishment of his world-view of the scientific socialism than his critique of bourgeois economy (2002: 309). The same dialectical law of process was said to move all human activities, even the logical, as well as all natural functioning. The same argument she articulated in *Between Past and Future*: "Hegel's basic assumption was that the dialectical movement of thought is identical with the dialectical movement of the matter itself" (1961: 38). Thus he hoped to overcome the abyss between Cartesian man as a thinking being and the world, the abyss that has been characteristic of the modern spiritually homeless man. In her view, Hegel's identification of two fields into one regular mode of movement "makes the terms 'idealism' and 'materialism' as philosophical systems meaningless" (1961: 39). After Hegel, Marx recapitulated this philosophical merger into his scientific project. The ambition expressed in the German Ideology was to embrace human history and natural history as one movement, and to grasp them through the united science of history.

Marx's anthropological definition of labour as the distinctive human ability was adequate for this project, as labour was an activity closest to the natural law of life reproduction, which humans share with some of the animal species. In the manuscript (2002) Arendt did not widely discuss the distinction between labour – a repetitive, tiring and uncreative activity in terms of production of lasting things – and work – an objects-producing, world-creating and authorial activity. She extensively researched this later, in *The Human Condition* (1958). Here she mentioned that Marx's blurring of the two categories that had been separated in the Western philosophical tradition concurred with the factual labourification of all the practical activities in modern labouring society. Marx's genius was that he conceptualized the "social contract" proper for this society, based on the "lowest common denominator: ownership of labor force" (2002: 288), a convertible human ability that made human beings convertible and disposable for utilitarian purposes. Marx, and after him the social sciences, were correct to describe human affairs via the axis of labour: "We live in a society in which men consider all their activities as laboring activities, in

the sense that their end is 'the preservation of individual life,' and themselves primarily as owners of labor force. [Those] who do not earn their living through labor, are in a society of laborers judged to be parasites" (Arendt 2002: 311). Marx's greatness as a thinker was "that he discovered the positive character of this equality in the nature of man himself, that is, in his conception of man as labor force" (ibid: 300).

Arendt interpreted the two elements of Marx's theory, the processes of history and labour, in continual interrelation with nature, as interconnected. Both share the logic of reproducing a holistic system. Nature is a system that recycles living beings through the processes of birth, living, reproducing and consuming. Another system of reproducing the economic processes of labour, consuming and the accumulation of capital was in Arendt's terminology called society. What she named society was historically rooted in capitalism. Her notion of society is neither a transhistorical, nor a neutral term for descriptive purposes. Rather, she developed it as a critical concept, and the key perspective of her critique was her concern for the meaning of human existence and for the continuity of the human world. In her view the sense of both was naturalised and given away to the very running of an immensely reproduced process. The economic definition of humankind as a universal and exchangeable labour force leaves little space for comprehending and estimating man as unique and plural.

The problems of labour, history and worldliness were, besides other themes, discussed also in the collection of essays *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Arendt 1961). In the chapter "Tradition and the Modern Age" Arendt discussed Marx's and the social sciences' concept of value as embedded in the utilitarian framework of the capitalist society.

Values are social commodities that have no significance of their own but, like other commodities, exist only in ever-changing relativity of social linkages and commerce. Through this relativization both the things which man produces for his use and the standards according to which he lives undergo a decisive change: they become

entities of exchange, and the bearer of their 'value' is society and not man, who produces and uses and judges.

(1961: 32-33)

Arendt stated that Marx was one of the earliest developers of the modern social sciences with his mixing the categories of thinking with those of economy and social exchange. "The birth of social sciences can be located at the moment when all the things, 'ideas' as well as material objects, were equated with values, so that everything derived its existence from and was related to society" (1961: 33). Before the industrial revolution the conviction did not prevail that every result of human productive activity was of economic value and that everything was bound to society. "The notion of 'socialized people', whose emergence Marx projected into the future classless society, is in fact the underlying assumption of classical as well as Marxian economy" (Arendt 1958: 135). Arendt repeated the argument at the end of the chapter: through the forces of the industrial revolution that successfully demonstrated how "man's doings and fabrications prescribe their rules to reason", the ideas as the philosophical tradition understood them were replaced by "mere values whose validity is determined not by one or many men but by society as a whole in its ever-changing functional needs. These values and their ex- and inter-changeability are the only 'ideas' let to (and understood by) 'socialized men'" (1961: 40). According to Arendt the problem of the modern discourse on society, including Marx's, lies in its functionalist implications that have tended to embrace the apparent meaning of all human activities.

The chapter "The Concept of History" in *Between Past and Future* (Arendt 1961) discussed the epistemology of Hegel's comprehension of history, and of modern social sciences, from the phenomenological perspective of sense. "To think, with Hegel, that truth resides and reveals itself in the time-process itself is characteristic of all modern historical consciousness" (1961: 68). "What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal meaning, have parted company. The process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance"

(ibid: 64). Marx, striving for a radical change, turned the Hegelian *a posteriori* revealed sense of the whole history into the teleological goal of acting. Thus he blended human action which, according to Arendt, starts unpredictable processes, and the “making of history” or fabricating it. Consequently, he “dissolved all of the particular into means” (ibid: 80) that serve as ends in an immense chain of means and ends. In such epistemology, “single events and deeds and sufferings have no more meaning here than hammer and nails have with respect to the finished table” (ibid: 80).

### Arendt about Labour, Society and Marx

In the chapter “Labor” in her book *The Human Condition* (1958) Arendt described the reasons for and the consequences of the reputation of labour that has increased in the modern era. While the Indo-European languages have had a clear separation between the notions of labour and of work, the modern theories did not reflect this distinction, but they early introduced the distinction between the productive and the unproductive labour (Arendt 1958: 80-85). Arendt was interested in the characteristics of the productivity of labour that brought such an importance to it. She found out that the productivity of labour was not bound to material products of labour, as they were produced in order to be quickly consumed and annihilated, and not in order to last for a longer period of time. What has been comprehended as being productive as regards labour was an economic value expressible in money.

The main stress of her interpretation of Marx’s labour theory was put in the naturalistic dimension of labour and to its consequences. According to Arendt, Marx’s introduction of the notion of labour power (*Arbeitskraft*) was his most important contribution to the theory of labour. Arendt’s interpretation of Marx’s labour power was first very physical. (In her last book *The Life of the Mind* she changed this rigid standpoint and treated labour in its worldly dimension too (Major 1979: 147-150).) The German word *Arbeitskraft* is preferably translated as “labour force”, since “power” is too bound to human interrelations, while “force” has singular and corporal connotations. Regarding the

notion of labour power Arendt developed two arguments. The first one concerned the source of economic value that could be accumulated. Part of the outcome of labour is distributed to the labourer in order for him to reproduce his labour power and in order to raise his family, i.e. to reproduce the labour class from one generation to the next. What surplus labour generates besides the individual and class reproduction is the surplus value, which could be accumulated, invested or spent to make the owner's wealth grow. Only surplus labour produces surplus value and is productive. But the measure of labour's productivity is the labourer's life and not any proper characteristic of the products: "[L]abor's productivity is measured and gauged against the requirements of the life process for its own reproduction" (Arendt 1958: 93). The second argument concerned the bodily and lively characteristic of labour and its measure. The very activity of labour is aimed at reproducing life, which is cyclic and consists of the human body consuming energy and the consuming of products of labour to refresh the body. The product of labour "is immediately 'incorporated,' consumed, and annihilated by the body's life process" (ibid: 103).

Arendt's treatise on labour was part of a treatise of life as a biological (and afterwards pseudo-biological) process. Marx's thought is to a high degree presented through his "understanding of labouring and begetting as two modes of the same fertile life process" (ibid: 106). He derived satisfaction of both bodily activities from nature: "The reward of toil and trouble lies in nature's fertility." Who labours, regenerates his life and procreates and thus "remains a part of nature in the future of his children and his children's children" (ibid: 107). Marx saw fertility, i.e. species producing offspring by reproduction, as the essence of labour power, because he treated humans as an integral part of nature. His labour philosophy also coincided with the contemporary evolution and development theories, and it was not accidental that Engels called him "the Darwin of history" (ibid: 116).

Arendt parallelised the law of biological reproduction with the laws of economic accumulation and social reproduction. Biological and social reproduction follow a purpose that is naturalistic in form: producing consumer goods and achieving

surplus aim at the multiplication and extension of life. Both have the law of fertility in common, i.e. reproduction of the population and a continuous, trans-generational working of that very process. The minimal intergenerational goal of a natural species is survival and its maximal ambitions are its increase of the number of descendants and an extension of their living space. The same purpose propels the economy of society, whose measure of success is an increase of its life force, i.e. multiplication of wealth and extension of its power across its environment (other societies and nature). In the capitalist mode of production this surplus social fertility or productivity is alienated in economic value, which is accumulated as capital. The capital is invested into new cycles of production, which procures means of reproduction of the biological life of the human species, and the surplus value which re-accumulates into capital again. The economic growth is a pseudo-naturalistic goal, for the sake of which the society demands from its “labouring animals” to deliver productive surplus labour power.

A harmonious running of all the three processes, of individual, biological and social reproduction, in Arendt's interpretation designated Marx's notion of a “generic being”:

Only when man no longer acts as an individual, but as a ‘member of the species’, a *Gattungswesen* as Marx used to say, only when the reproduction of individual life is absorbed into the life process of mankind can the collective life process of a ‘socialized mankind’ follow its own ‘necessity’, that is, its automatic course of fertility in the twofold sense of multiplication of lives and the increasing abundance of goods needed by them.

(1958: 116)

Arendt interpreted Marx's utopian society that he wanted the communist movement to reach as a very correct detection and prediction of the tendency which had already been going on in the modern era. The society was in her view the subject of an immense life process that had been extended from merely biological reproduction to economic and behavioural ones. The role the species play in natural life, the holder of the interest in

trans-generational collective reproduction and growth, is played by society in capitalism as well.

For Arendt the key phenomenon of capitalist productivism was not a private property: she was even anxious whether this “as a privately held place within the world” would survive at all: “What the modern age so heatedly defended was never property as such but the unhampered pursuit of more property or of appropriation” (1958: 112). The social estimation of one’s wealth in such a society reckons one’s earning and spending and not one’s property. The reason for this defence was the interest of living labour, living appropriation, and living social process against the interests of “dead”, inactive property, “the ‘dead’ permanence of a common world”, or public institutional control of economic life. Fighting these “battles in the name of life, the life of society” (Arendt 1958: 110) was shared by liberals like Locke as well as by Marx who consistently carried the socialisation of economic life into abandonment of private property for the sake of an unchecked social appropriation of surplus value. The sense of the modern economic life in the view of the capitalist as well as the socialist ideologies is productivity, and its subject and its normative reference is the society understood as the all-capturing machinery for producing and accumulating wealth.

## Society as the Sense of Human Existence

The problem with capitalism for Marx was that the life process of the majority of people was reduced to the level of a mere survival of labourers and their families, while the goal of socialism was to canalise the summed surplus value so as to extend and enrich the “life process of society”. In Arendt’s view this was his most problematic standpoint, since she argued that only life and reproduction, even if under the condition of abundance, could not be the only meaning of human existence.

The question of meaning was in Arendt’s body of thought firmly connected with the problem of immortality. Labour assures the labourer to reach only a kind of natural immortality, which means being included into the continuity of the reproduced species. The term *animal laborans* (working animal) that was so

frequently used by Arendt and was associated to the mode of existence, pointed at the activity of the reproduction of life of the species, what the humans share with the animals for which the species-life “is the very essence of being” (1958: 119). The critical message of this term was that the humans who were aware of their individual mortality had been striving for achievement of a different kind of a lasting status: by the creation of a world or by winning eternal life.

Arendt’s standpoint was that a durable world consisting of objects and memories was what can transcend the reduction of human existence to only the life of species. The category of the world was in Arendt’s writings strongly opposed to the category of life. Since labour is the activity needed to reproduce life, it is not aimed at creating or maintaining the world. Even more, since Arendt, together with Marx, treated labour and consuming as two phases of the same cyclical process, she warned about the tendency in capitalist society to transform all the things of the world into short-lasting consumer goods. From the point of view of the life expansion of society things do not have any sense apart from being means of social reproduction. What cannot quickly be consumed and profitably produced is socially senseless. In the fully developed rule of society, the world would disappear. The loss of the world “has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass.” In a mass society men live together “but have lost the world once common to all of them” (Arendt 1961: 89-90).

The same transformation of sense affects various human activities: from the point of view of society they are all understood as labour. “Within a completely ‘socialized mankind,’ whose sole purpose would be the entertaining of the life process [...] the distinction between labor and work would have completely disappeared; all work would have become labor because all things would be understood, not in their worldly, objective quality, but as results of living labor power and functions of the life process” (Arendt 1958: 89). Society is not willing to tolerate the activities that are not socially (re) productive. Labour became the supreme norm and “the origin of

all social values”, which produced an obstinate conviction that “no one would have any rights, not even the right to stay alive, who was not a laborer” (Arendt 2002: 278-279). “Since under modern conditions every occupation had to prove its ‘usefulness’ for society at large” (Arendt 1958: 92), recipients of intellectual callings are pressed to abandon their primary aims, like curing patients or teaching students or creating art, and to legitimise their activities as being socially (re)productive in terms of making money or in terms of keeping up the ideological and bureaucratic apparatuses of the society. Even so unproductive activities as acting, speaking and thinking are forced to undergo commodification or reproductive socialisation, or they are socially marginalised.

When Arendt wrote about the similarity of society and nature, about the regularity of social processes, she implied that a necessity had prevailed over human behaviour and that a capability for free acting had been abandoned. The formal status of individuals should not be mistaken for their objective and subjective subordination to the social law of necessity. Spare-time activities like hobbies, shopping, and tourism are no exceptions since they must serve the life process of society. While pain and effort as “the outward manifestations of necessity” become, due to technological progress, less and less noticeable and as life becomes easier it is more difficult “to remain aware of the urges of necessity” (Arendt, 1958: 135) that force men into consumptive collaboration with the life process of society. A subjective sign of the social necessity at the cost of freedom of individuals is consumers’ never appeased yearning for being happy. Its structural inducer is the industry of marketing which tries to solve the discrepancy between immensely increasable productivity of labour multiplied by machinery, and limited capacities of human consumption. “The problem therefore is how to attune individual consumption to an unlimited accumulation of wealth” (ibid: 124), which means how to multiply the feelings of need and how to financially enable people for a surplus consume.

Arendt’s critical standpoint about productivity did not assert that welfare and economic equality are not important. It is wished for goal, but it is not enough. The historical event

which inspired Arendt's rethinking of the whole philosophical tradition and her judgement of the modern social phenomena was the extermination of the European Jews. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she emphasised that this crime was absurd and anti-utilitarian from the perspective of military and economic interests of Germany. But if such an economically useless and even harmful extermination could occur, the guaranties for the rights of any group of people that would become economically superfluous or socially undesired are still more fragile. The danger coming from modern society, the danger uncovered by the event of Shoah, is that anybody who becomes dysfunctional for productive interests in society is rendered superfluous. Economic surplus is the status that is shared by all those groups whose human rights are systematically violated in the rich countries (not to mention the developing and the poor countries): the Roma, *sans-papiers*, the suburban underclass, the handicapped, etcetera. These are the reasons why Arendt warned about the paradigm in which society and its productive process define the sense of human existence.

### Marxian Impossible Emancipation

Was Marx in view of Arendt's interpretation a critic or an apologist of capitalism? Arendt seems to reproach Marx for having come up with a perfect and deep apology of capitalism, seeing that Marx adapted his basic theoretical categories to the structure of capitalist society as if there were no alternative to it. Furthermore, Arendt accused the Marxian socialist alternative of being an accelerated and fully developed stadium of the social process which had subordinated humans to increasing productivity and which had deprived their existences of any sense of their own. Numerous passages in Arendt's writing warned that the socialist view of the property accomplishment of the process of socialization of economy started by capitalism together with the full socialisation of all the aspects of human life would not solve the problems created by capitalism, but rather accelerate them. Fatal for the socialist regime would be a destruction of certain elements of "the human condition", like being capable to act, spaces of privacy and of public, and

perhaps also plurality. Was Marx in Arendt's view pleading dystopia? Not entirely.

Arendt deemed Marx a great thinker because throughout his work he bred also a paradoxically opposite idea: "he insisted that the aim of a revolution could not possibly be the already-accomplished emancipation of the laboring classes, but must consist in the emancipation of man from labor." As this would mean emancipation from necessity "this would ultimately mean emancipation from consumption as well" (1958: 130-131). Simone Weil in her book *La condition ouvrière* estimated that this was "the only utopian element of Marxism" (1958: 131). The paradox consists in the fact that for Marx the anthropological essence of the human being was labour, which he claimed to have abandoned. Man should be liberated from the activity that makes them human beings. The fact that Marx entangled himself in such a paradox, together with another appraisal that he "was the first to discern certain problems arising from the Industrial Revolution" (Arendt 2002: 277) made him a great theorist. "Such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work" (Arendt 1958: 104-105).

In the manuscript she stressed that for Marx the problem regarding labour, which he did not conceptually separate from work, was its necessary character in the existing modes of production. Marx was aware of "the incompatibility of freedom with the necessity that is expressed by labor [...] conditioned by need and exterior usefulness" (Arendt 2002: 294). Arendt respected Marx's aspiration to re-establish a sensible human control over the change of the world, but she estimated that his project was paradoxical since his concept of revolution was scientified by the Hegelian dialectic (ibid: 282). Marx was aware that an extension of political equality and freedom to the mass labour class would be possible only in a radically changed world (ibid: 299). But what would that world be like? Marx foresaw the modern enlargement of "the realm of natural necessity" both in the sphere of labour and via "gigantic multiplication of needs, the fulfilment of which is felt to belong to the necessities of life" (ibid: 311). Marx's failed hope "was that somehow this absolute rule of necessity would result in, or resolve itself into, an equally

absolute rule of freedom.” In Arendt’s opinion, under such conditions “freedom indeed becomes a meaningless word unless it is conceived in an altogether different sense,” what later did Lenin, who solved Marx’s trouble by a conclusion that “freedom is only a prejudice or an ideology” (Arendt 2002: 305-306). In the chapter “Tradition and the Modern Age” in the book *Between Past and Future* (1961) Arendt wrote an even clearer statement, namely that the modern age “saw labor elevated to express man’s positive freedom, the freedom of productivity” (32).

From this perspective in which the categories of freedom and emancipation on the one hand and of labour and productivity on the other are blurred, the Marxian openness of the future history between socialism and barbarity (accelerated alienation, exploitation and domination within the capitalism) was less important than the fact that they both were set in the common horizon of an endless process of social (re)production. As Arendt did not adhere to the Hegelian dialectics she judged that the theory of Marx turned out “with the rather distressing alternative between productive slavery and unproductive freedom” (1958: 105).

### Arendtian Reflection on the Socialist Theoretisations of Post-Fordism

Which critical judgements of the socialist theoretisations of post-Fordism could be distilled from Arendt’s critique of Marx’s social categories? Although Arendt half a century ago only occasionally noted the structural changes of the labour system that would later become known as post-Fordist, her reflections are still topical since the Marxian categorical apparatus has been *mutatis mutandis* applied to contemporary capitalism.

Analysts of the post-Fordist mode of production have researched new characteristics of labour and entering of elements of some other human activities into labour, including those that Arendt treated as categorically distinctive, e.g. creativity, political acting, public speaking and thinking. Paolo Virno presented a relevant sketch of how these elements had transformed the forms of labour and challenged the so far valid borderlines between the concepts (2004). Therefore

there is a question whether Arendt's distinction between the labour and the work together with all the characteristics she attributed to them is still valid, since the contemporary post-Fordist labour is obviously not basically corporal, not-creative and thus it is not reducible to simple manual labour, singularly executed, and worldless. Is it still possible to analyze the inter-relational, communicative, thinking activities which produce immaterial goods like knowledge, culture or human relations, as Arendtian labour? Is Arendt's critique of Marx's concept of labour historically obsolete? It may be so if we read these texts of Arendt as a guide for a formal description of certain types of human practices. In my interpretation, Arendt's theoretical relevance is not exhausted within this level.

Arendt's fundamental concern in the post-Shoah modern world was putting questions about the sense: the sense of human existence, of the world, of politics, of thinking, of life, wealth, labour, etc. This aspect made her writings so difficult to be combined with positivistic, descriptive sciences like political science or sociology, and with their schematics. Two assertions come out of this perspective on her phenomenology of labour. Firstly, Arendt's elaboration needs to be understood as a project basically inquiring the sense of certain human activities in the meaning of their general purpose. It is not a project of an objective, formal description of things that are conceptually ready-made for a scientific measurement. Therefore one should clarify what was in Arendt's view the sense of all those activities she classified as belonging to the category of the labour. The following step is an analysis of the historically specific attributes of what could be treated as labour in the Arendtian sense inquiring perspective. Secondly, Arendt's critique of Marx's theoretical adoration of society as a whole concerned the way in which Marx, according to Arendt's interpretation, tried to solve the task of developing his answer to the question of the sense of the modern process of increasing productivity and of alienated wage labour. Society was an idea that served as Marx's solution of the problem of sense of the modern economy.

In Arendt's elaboration on labour it was clear that the sense of this activity was to maintain life. It is not freedom or remembrance or understanding or any other thing but living. Even

in the conditions of abundance, technological automation and prevalence of cognitive occupations, the sense of the economic activities is associated with a richer and easier life. The direct concern is the life of the labourer himself. In a wider, naturalistic perspective it is also about the survival and strengthening the life power of the population. The modern economy has developed mechanisms of stimulating the surplus labour which has been producing the accumulative surplus value, but the sense of those modes of labour organisation remained to belong to the pseudo-naturalistic framework: an immense increase of power and productivity.

Marxist descriptions of the post-Fordist mode of production correctly tie in speaking, thinking, imagination, emotions, breeding of human relations, and the like with the regime of producing surplus value. The arguments in favour of replacing the measures coming from the labour theory of value with the new ones justified by a life theory of value are plausible. But from the Arendtian point of view we are here still referring to the field of activities of which sense is the accumulation of capital. Regardless of how untypical these new post-Fordist forms of labour seem to be in comparison to the Fordist conveyor belt material production, their ratio is still the economically recognised (paid) productivity, their products are made in order to be consumed in the productive process, and their sense remains to be heteronomous: it is alienated for the benefit of capital growth. The spare-time activities that before post-Fordism did not seem to be labour, can now, even by the most radical post-Fordist theory, be treated as being productive only when a capital-controlled business model recognises them as surplus value production. This is why it is sound to treat them as only new forms of (paid or unpaid) labour, rather than as a kind of a new synthesis of labour, creativity and political action as Virno suggested (2004).

From the Arendtian point of view the cardinal shortage of Marxist analyses of post-Fordism is that they do not put the question of the sense of contemporary economic activities clearly enough. Virno, for instance, who was quite aware of the ambiguities of “the new forms of life”, came in his book *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004) to the observation that

“communism of capital” is anything but an ideal situation as it launches opportunism, cynicism, and personal hiring subordination, all these resulting from harnessing the cooperation of intellect for the capital’s purposes and from a lack of a multitude-like public sphere. But his work and the whole paradigm of critical studies of post-Fordism keeps being stuck within the productivistic perspective, as if it was occupied by the problem of bare survival, although this is no more the case in the countries in which the post-Fordist varieties of labour has developed at all (2004). He does not consider whether various sorts of human activities should have different senses, nor clearly articulates the problem.

When the perspective of the sense of economic activities appears in Marxist thought, including the post-Fordist one, it usually refers to society. But there are several strange aspects in the Marxist uses of the notion of society. The first one is that there are two different notions of society: a descriptive one present now and in the past, and a normative one practically projected into the righteous future. The first one is worth-neutral and is shared with the other paradigms of social sciences. The task here is Durkheimian: explaining human facts as social facts and explaining these through the other social facts. The second one has a somewhat unusual relation to the first, positivistic one. When Marxist writers come to the point of their critical reference, either expressed in a clear utopian way or inscribed into a jargon, the addressee in whose interests the desired structural changes will occur is also the whole of society. Society is said to suffer and society’s interests are to be fought for. Even the problem of misery and deprivation of certain groups of people is said to be a social problem, and the distributive justice, treating everybody equally what concerns needs and provided opportunities, is called social justice. The society as a whole is a term for which Marx under the influence of the Enlightenment believed that it designated the universalistic inclusion of everybody (Neocleous 1995: 404-405). But since both notions of society are mingled, Marxism claims that the normatively understood society is what shall be liberated from the present, unjust society.

The second problem is one of the statuses of individuum and of society in the Marxist debate on alienation. The question

of the sense of economy under the capitalist conditions occurs mostly negatively, as senselessness, which has been subsumed into the problems of alienation and class-division. In the projected socialist society the second aspect would die out since that society has been said to be egalitarian. As regards human de-alienation within the future society the projections were more ambiguous, since socialism has firmly belonged to the progressionist stream and it has hardly advocated a return to simplicity. As every human activity is said to be socially mediated, it is dubious whether the socialist society would manage to assure a return to a kind of authenticity. The real question is who or what should be de-alienated from whom or what. The Marxist answer to this question is not individualistic. It gives also the moral, not only the ontological preference to society over individuals. Consideration of the double meaning of the Marxist notion of society can give the following comprehension. De-alienation is not a project for human beings, but for society: namely, society should meet itself in a unified mode. Society as a whole, i.e. class-undivided society should re-appropriate the sense of economy and the surplus life power, which now belong to only one part of society. Therefore, the aspects of class division and of alienation are considered together: the core of the second is leading away productive power for the benefit of the exploiting social class. Bridging the class gap would harmonise socialised practices of humans with their social sense. Social de-alienation is the same project as the abandonment of the class division.

Crucial for Arendt's perspective, marked by a brutal experience of abandonment of human beings, is what counts within this socialist debate on sense, alienation, equality and justness, is society, not humans, since individual men and women are treated to be exchangeable in terms of occupying certain structural positions. Arendt showed in her analysis of Marx that as soon as the question of the sense of economy is transposed to the systemic level, taken from the domain of an individual judgement and beside that also influenced by a tradition of processual scientific thinking, the instance of defining the sense arises to be the very process of economic and social life as it runs under the given historical conditions. These are productivistic:

the modern social sense of economy is bound to increasing productivity. A moral epistemological problem of the socialist view on the post-Fordist situation is that, if the not-yet-whole society is the sufferer and the post-class society is the solution, it is not clear how much space is left for investigative attention on the conditions and the experiences of real people. Are people treated only as paid, underpaid or unpaid labourers or is there also room for respecting their eventual counter-productive and anti-social choices and judgments? Will social forces tolerate those people who either by their traditions or because of individual decisions do not share the dominant productive economic culture? The Marxian answer is hardly positive.

All these problems occur in the most utopian contribution of socialist thinking about post-Fordism. Among the optimistic interpretations of the supposed emancipatory potential within the post-Fordist changes, the concept of “the general intellect” occupies a distinct position. This concept is derived from one of the Marx’s key theses, the one about the antagonism between the socialized complex means of production, and the partial and private accumulation of surplus value. Especially some of the writers inspired by the Italian post-operatism (Virno & Hardt 1996) argue that the capitalist privatization of the cognitively produced products has already lost its material grounding, since the key productivity has become developed within social networks and should therefore belong to all, i.e. to society. Communism is said to be already here (Negri & Hardt 2003). Since every labouring activity has always used the benefits of corporal, material, technical and cognitive cultural heritages, the pretension of the belief that socialisation of labouring products is at hand concerns more than the obvious fact that every individual has been made inculturated or socialised. It concerns the collective, totalised subject which should exercise re-appropriation, i.e. the society that Arendt wrote about. What is theoretically still worse, an uncritically adorned mode of sociability is sometimes even mistaken for the society as historical subject (Negri & Hardt 2003).

The present structural crisis of capitalism has spread because of financially unsustainable economic growth, not to mention out-sourcing of costs of abundance, burdening future

generations and the planet. Contemporary economic theory proved unable to predict or propose solutions and alternatives to the current mode of capitalism in a state of crisis. These solutions swing between further neoliberal stimulations for business, and the old Keynesian policies of nationalising debts, consuming and getting ownership of bankrupt sectors. What is missing is a radical proposal, given in the historical moment of capital's economic and ideological weakness, a counter-productivistic proposal that would for instance include reducing labour, production and consumption together with a more egalitarian distribution of abundance for the sake of a sustainable development and liberation of human time. It is obvious that what was once called bourgeois economics cannot be expected to come up with such proposals. But also the socialist critique of post-Fordism seems to be unable to elaborate any such programme, since it is theoretically stuck in adoration of productivism. Productivist normative reference of society is probably also an obstacle to stake a clear critique of tuning various social practices and socialisation, as every critical analysis of social phenomena is in the end rendered theoretically powerless since it serves the existing social structure. As regards disciplinary and desire-inducing socialisation, contemporary socialist thought does not seem to be able to offer any radically different programme from the one of liberal humanism whose maximum is vindication of integration of the excluded into the society as it is, i.e. inclusion into exploitation.

Marx is famous for his statement that philosophers only interpret the world that should be changed, while Arendt's pungent answer to the question whether Marx was an apologist of capitalism was that he was a great philosopher. Is the current socialist analysis of post-Fordist capitalism just another philosophy similar to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach?

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# On the Actuality of Communism<sup>1</sup>

by Jacques Rancière

1 This is an elaborated version of a lecture given at the conference "Indeterminate Kommunismus" that took place at the University of Frankfurt from 7th till 9th November 2003.

Jacques Rancière is a philosopher and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris (St. Denis) (FR) who first came to prominence when he co-authored "Reading Capital" (1968), with the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Rancière later split with his mentor, Althusser, over the proper response to the student revolt of May 1968. Today, Rancière is mostly known for his aesthetic philosophy and books on politics.

## What is the Meaning Nowadays of “Actuality of Communism”?

Actuality means two things. Something is actual, firstly, insofar as it is put on our agendas – either as a problem or as a solution – in view of the current situation. But it does not suffice to be actual in that sense. Something is actual, secondly, when it is not only an issue “on the agenda”, but when it has a reality, an effectiveness “here and now”. The syntagm “actuality of communism” means that communism is not only a desirable response to the injustice or irrationality of capitalism; it is not only a task but a process as well.

How can we think of the equation of these two types of “actuality”? The Marxist tradition has made the question dispensable since it has, from the outset, posited communism as its identity. Still today the debate about the actuality of communism is based on two Marxist axioms. Firstly, communism is not an ideal; it is an actual form of life. While democracy means freedom and equality *represented* in the separate forms of law and state, communism is the sensory reality of freedom and equality, embedded in the common world as it is. Secondly, the form of living that is based on freedom and equality does not materialise through gathering well-meaning individuals who attempt to establish a communal life by fighting selfishness or injustice. This form of existence puts into practice a structure of universality that is at work in the bourgeois world too. It achieves a collective rational power that already exists in capitalist production, albeit in the form of its opposite, the particularity of private interest. The collectivisation of human capacities already exists. What is needed is their collective and subjective reappropriation.

This step in turn is successfully taken thanks to two more axioms. Firstly, there is a dynamic intrinsic to the actualisation of these collective forces. The power of the ‘unseparate’ that is at work in them tends to explode the form of capitalist ‘privateness’. Secondly, this happens to an even greater degree as this dynamic shatters all other forms of community, all the forms of ‘separate’ community, i.e. State, Religion or traditional social bonds. As such the collective

reappropriation intended by communism turns out to be the *only* form of community that is still possible when all other communities have collapsed.

This is the classical response to the issue of the actuality of communism. I think that the dominant approach to that actuality today still finds its basis in these axioms. In that respect, communism is neither more nor less actual than it was in 1847 or in 1917. Those who affirm a specific actuality of this actuality cannot be satisfied with the statement that the effects of capitalism are more unbearable or nonsensical at present than they were thirty years ago. The financial crisis of September 2008 certainly invalidates the assertion that capitalism is able to regulate itself. But the inability of financial capitalism to cope with its own effects does not suffice to define the actuality of communism. It must be demonstrated that communism is more actual, more effective, as part of capitalism. It must be made obvious that communism is actual both as the materialisation of a common world and as the achievement of an immaterial form of rationality.

The problem soon gets a tailor-made solution that reads as follows. Communism already exists in capitalist production due to the new forms that production takes. Capitalist production, it is said, produces less and less material goods and more and more services or means of communication. As its production is increasingly less material, it growingly escapes the status of appropriated commodities and deceptive fetishes. Capitalist production tends to become the production of the global network that is the tangible materiality of immaterial collective intelligence. Today capitalism mostly produces, rather than goods for private appropriation, a network of human communication where production, consumption and exchange are no longer separated but fit into the same collective process. So the content of capitalist production breaks through the capitalist form. It increasingly turns out to be consistent with the communist power of cooperative immaterial labour.

In such a way, it is possible to dovetail two statements of the *Communist Manifesto*: the bourgeois produce their own gravediggers and “all that is solid melts into air”. The

becoming-immaterial of everything is said to frame the actuality of a sensory world identical to the manifestation of collective intelligence. Further, the power of the capitalist network is said to make the power of the nation-states and of the forms of political action they make use of increasingly ineffective. Its actuality is eventually posited as the form of the non-separate life of the multitudes, identified with the ultimate manifestation of the History of Being. Communism today, we are told, has to be ontological.

As far as ontology is concerned, I think that it should above all break away from the *onto-technological trick*. The onto-technological trick consists of two major operations. Firstly, it identifies the complex set of processes and contradictions that frame our historical world with the fulfilment of an ontological determination, with the fulfilment of a promise – or threat – involved in the History of Being itself. Secondly, it identifies the medium of that fulfilment with the operation of some specific technology carrying out the materiality of that ontological determination: in such a way, electricity, radiography, broadcasting, television, computers and cellular phones have been representatives of an immaterial Intelligence in our solid and prosaic world.

It appears to me that the presuppositions of this 'actual' communism should be questioned in more detail. The very 'actuality' of the formula "all that is solid melts into air" and the fact that it has functioned for more than twenty years as evidence of a 'post-modern' world of narcissistic individualism dismissing the old dreams of collective emancipation may, at least, bring about some suspicion about the narrative of the global immaterial network. As long as we are not immaterial beings ourselves we consume food and use clothes or even computers whose production implements the 'collective intelligence' of capitalism in a very specific form – i.e. the form of underpaid factory work, underpaid labour at home or in clandestine workshops of 'illegal' immigrants – much more than that of immaterial communication. Immaterial production is far from being the whole of capitalist production. Artist Allan Sekula has recently used the means of art to remind us in *Fish Story* that the global network of

capitalism was not so much a matter of computers as it was a matter of ships and containers circulating not only goods for consumption but also pieces of factories and forms of work processes, transported here and there according to the collective intelligence of profit.

There is no more obviousness in the argument that equates *dematerialisation* with *de-commodification*. Let us take an example borrowed from the field of artistic practice and intellectual property. Thirty years ago, conceptual artists claimed to break away from commodified art by no longer making solid objects that private owners could purchase. Rather, they made material inscriptions of ideas: breaking through a building, a line in the desert, and so on. Intellectual and artistic property did not vanish. What occurred was that the idea of artistic property itself shifted. Nowadays artists are increasingly regarded – and paid – as owners and sellers of ideas as such. Intelligence as such has replaced its products. Instead of dismissing private appropriation, the immateriality of concepts and images turns out to be the best refuge.

It thus appears that there are several forms to implement collective intelligence. The global network of computerised intelligence is one instance. The global intelligence of Capitalism is another. The socialisation of anyone's intellectual capacity is yet another.

If a *communist* power of intelligence exists, it is not cyberspace. It is the capacity of the people who makes the pieces of the computers and of those who piece them together to have their say – not only concerning computers, but concerning all issues of collective life. It is the collective embodiment of the capacity of individuals, the power of the ones who are not 'entitled' to exert power being privileged by birth status, wealth, science or otherwise. It is the specific and paradoxical power of 'unqualified' persons. It is this power that is the principle of politics. If politics is to be distinguished from the state institutions and the struggle for power, it implies that a specific 'totality' is configured that supplements any collective body – the collective implementation of the equality of intelligence or the implementation of an intelligence that is any individual's capacity. This implementation always comes after other forms

of 'collectivisation' of intelligence: military commandment, monarchy, priesthood, trade, and so on. This is why it takes on the form of *dissensus*.<sup>2</sup>

Dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values. It is the conflation of two forms of sensible implementation of collective intelligence. Politics, as the implementation of anybody's capacity, frames a sensible world of its own, within and against the sensible worlds framed by state powers, military, economic, religious or scholarly powers that all are *privatised* forms of appropriation of the resources of the collective intelligence. Politics actualises the 'communism of intelligence' in the construction of dissensus, a construction that frames a network of discourses and practices, but frames it in a world otherwise structured by all the forms of incorporation of privatised collective intelligence.

Marxist communism came into being as a critique of this precarious form of communism. It is based on the diagnosis of the failure of political dissensuality to achieve the construction of a world that would have equality as its sole and common law. It bore the promise of a sensory community, superseding the separation between the various worlds of common experience. It came about in the interval between two political revolutions: the French Revolution of 1789 and the European revolutions of 1848. The *Communist Manifesto* was written one year before the 1848 Revolutions. But the theoretical framework from which its idea of communism springs dates back to fifty years earlier, to the time when some German poets and philosophers set themselves and the nation the task to give a response to what they considered to be the failure of the French Revolution. They assumed that the French Revolutionaries had been unsuccessful in shaping a new world of freedom and equality because they had tried to find it in the 'dead forms' of laws and state institutions. The issues of freedom and equality had to be set on concrete grounds, in the configuration of the lived world. True Revolution for them was a revolution achieved in the materiality of the lived world, opposed to the supplementary and dissensual

2 For a more concise argument, see my book *Disagreement* (1998).

political community. According to the schema of the aesthetic revolution, separation is the root of domination. Subsequently, the full implementation of freedom and equality is closely related to the reunification of the various forms of collective intelligence into one and the same form of sensory experience. This means that the collective intelligence has to reconfigure the whole of the material world in order to turn it into the product of its own immaterial power.

This was at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the programme of the 'aesthetic' revolution that opposed the 'failed' political revolution. The programme is best illustrated in the few pages of the "oldest systematic Program of German Idealism", written by Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling, which resist to the dead mechanism of the state through the living body of a people animated by a philosophy that is expressed in a new mythology, i.e. a new fabric of common life. This opposition of the true living community to the failure of politics is the ground on which fifty years later Marx opposed the "human revolution", the revolution of the producers against the lie of formal democracy. It is still the same ground that sustains, two centuries later, the living communism of the multitudes carried by the irresistible expansion of the global network.

The actuality of communism still is the actuality of that primary setting. It is the everlasting actuality of the paradigm of the 'aesthetic' revolution. Unfortunately, the programme of implementing the collective intelligence through framing a world of its own never led to a free and equal society. It generated either the world domination of the collective intelligence of capitalism or the absolute power of a state hierarchy purporting to embody the collective intelligence of cooperative labour. Today these two forms of domination have been reunited in the power of the Chinese Communist Party managing the triumph of capitalist globalisation.

This is why it could be better to turn the problem around, to start from the *inactuality* of communism, from the everlasting *intempestivity* of the implementation of the egalitarian power of collective intelligence with respect to any 'objective' process, to any process of unequal implementation of collectivised intelligence.

Being *intempestive* means that one belongs and yet does not belong to the same time, just as *atopia* means that one belongs and yet does not belong to the same place. An *intempestive* or *atopian* communist thinks and acts so as to enact the unconditional equality of each and everyone in a world where communism has no actuality except for the network framed by communist thoughts and actions. This means that there is no 'objective' communism already at work in the forms of capitalist production, no communism anticipated by the logic of capitalism. Capitalism may produce more and more immateriality, yet this immateriality will never be more than the immateriality of capitalism. Capitalism only produces capitalism. If communism means something, it means something that is radically heterogeneous to the logic of capitalism, entirely heterogeneous to the materiality of the capitalist world.

This heterogeneity does not suffice to give it a place of its own. Being an *intempestive* or *atopian* communist means being inside and outside at the same time. It means framing with one's thoughts, acts and struggles a world of material and immaterialism communism. This 'separate' communism may seem very restrictive, but I think that we have to reassert the radicality of the communist power of separation rather than forever predicating communism on the basis of the development of capitalism – which means predicating the eternal actuality of communism on the basis of the eternity of capitalism. It is a restrictive communism, but we have to test the powers of that restriction. At any rate, it is the only *existing* communism. The global economy creates no communism at all. Nor does its crisis, which is one of the lessons of September 2008. The crisis may have put an end to the pan-capitalist utopia that had been launched in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire – I mean the utopia that the free market can regulate itself and become the global law that governs all the spheres of human experience all over the world –, but what appeared as the solution to the crisis was a return to some forms of State regulation of the economy. The actuality of State regulation is not the actuality of communism. So far it is only a shift in the oligarchic government of the global world.

The 'actuality' of communism is the actuality of its critique. It is the actuality of the critique of the idea of actuality that was based on the presupposition of a communist power inherent in capitalism itself. Our world will not become immaterial; capitalism is not likely to dig its own grave. However, Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach remains unquestionable: the emancipation of the working people can only be achieved through their own doing. There is no other communist world today apart from the network framed by our affirmations and demonstrations of the capacity of anybody.

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Three Theses on Post-Fordism  
by Zdravko Kobe

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I was invited to write down some points of departure to reflect on post-Fordism, a task that I accepted despite my personal uneasiness. First, and as a kind of apology, I would like to call attention to the reasons of this uneasiness. I believe that writers should have some knowledge of the themes they write about. Philosophers who always seem to know what is just because they are philosophers have always raised suspicion in me. Nevertheless, what happened was precisely this: I found myself in the situation that I was to write about a theme – the economy in general and post-Fordism in particular – that I do not know plenty about. At least, not enough to enable me to adequately discuss it. My contribution is thus intended as a series of observations, which may or may not be pertinent to the issue and which ultimately have no serious ambitions. I muster the hope that my position of an outsider-observer may reveal some trivialities which might have escaped the experts precisely because of their proximity to the matter.

The invitation to write this contribution included also a proposition, a suggestion about what it should discuss. On the one hand, it should bring up liberal servitude, on the other, post-Fordism. I was further advised to consult the following books: Paolo Virno's *The Grammar of Multitude* and Jean-Léon Beauvois's *Treatise on Liberal Servitude*. As someone who is well aware of the meaning of limitations, I accepted the invitation in precisely such form.

I.

Let us first look at post-Fordism.

A personal opinion follows. It is a more or less indisputable fact that great structural shifts have occurred in the field of the economy in the past twenty years and consequently – since economic activities are principally social activities – in the very organisation of society in general. The causes for this are numerous. On the one hand, technological progress and the development of information technologies increased the productivity of labour. On the other – partly also because of the downfall of existing socialism as something that was considered a potential alternative at a certain moment – the economic

doctrine of neoliberalism and the neoclassical school prevailed as the sole guideline in the organisation of economic activity – all over the world, so to speak. The world became one single economic community.

Different authors attempted to discuss these changes in different ways; one of the most penetrating expositions was given precisely by Paolo Virno. Virno explains how numerous dividing lines have fallen in, as he puts it, contemporary post-Fordist society, for example, the dividing line between labour and non-labour. Virno says that production took over numerous traits of what was once characteristic of political activity, which was considered a direct opposite of production activity. He describes how the traditional form of labour is disappearing and how it is increasingly transforming into something else: into immaterial labour, which does not require special or specific abilities in men, but more and more concerns man's generic capabilities, ultimately the language, the ability to comprehend, or even one's existential attitudes, the way in which the subject positions her/himself in the world.

Clearly, Virno successfully grasped a significant aspect of this transformation. Something is going on; something is actually unfolding before our eyes. Nevertheless, I have some reservations about the fact that what the label post-Fordism hides might ultimately not be as new as is generally believed. In other words, what is new in post-Fordism should be put in a wider context that comprises a considerable amount of old rests.

I think that Virno would have agreed with this, at least partly. When the transition from one phase of capitalist progress to the other occurs, the characteristics of the former do not vanish over night. Moreover, it is possible that the old forms present a major part of what appears in the new order. However, this is not important. What counts is that the new regime has become a new impetus for changes, a fundamental organisational matrix, to which all other activities have to, willingly or unwillingly, conform. For example, agriculture and the organisational mode characteristic of traditional agriculture have by no means disappeared with the emergence of industrial society. Rather, they had to incorporate the principles of industrial society and industrial organisation, so that in the end

agriculture became one of the common branches of industry – agrofood processing is a good instance of this.

My reservation therefore does not question the accuracy of Virno's analysis. It only underlines that there might be a flipside of the coin. What we are dealing with is that – and this seems rather unusual – post-Fordism is predominantly discussed independently of other, equally massive phenomena. Interestingly, the authors as a rule have a lot to say about both phenomena, although they somehow do not manage to consider both at once. I am referring here, of course, to globalisation. Where is the problem then? In my opinion, the description of post-Fordism firstly holds true for the developed Western economy, for our world, and far less for other worlds. At the same time, the thesis about globalisation emphasises that the world economy has become an integrated system, which should not be discussed as a separate, isolated unit but as a single, integrated whole. The first question to be asked then is: how are the theses about post-Fordism put forward if the phenomenon is not discussed separately but is bound into the world economic system? And the answer should give us many a thing to think about.

Generally when post-Fordism is discussed it involves statements about the end of labour, as if to say, in contemporary economy productivity increased to such an extent that it may dispense with extensive use of labour power. I think that this statement is downright false. Although I am not acquainted with the precise statistical data, I would dare to presume that never in the history of man have so many people been bound to wage relations, while a great majority of waged workers work in a way that is by no means immaterial, but conversely highly material – i.e. Fordist. In other words, what if the main reason for the disappearance of labour in prosperous societies lies precisely in the fact that the work is being done elsewhere?

A similar thing could be claimed about immaterial labour. Surely, knowledge, manipulation of information and immaterial production in general occupy an increasingly significant place in developed economies. However, so-called immaterial labour expands against the background of a parallel development of another form of labour, which is very much material, to say the least. And if this other side is taken into

consideration it might turn out that this connection is not entirely accidental. It just might turn out that the expansion of immaterial labour is possible precisely because of the fact that material labour, which was once mainly performed here, is now largely performed elsewhere.

These observations, as already mentioned, do not refute Virno's conceptualisation of post-Fordism. Their aim is to open up another perspective on the same events, a scruple on the backside of the same, which nevertheless brings about other accents. If we look at these events from another, far more traditional perspective, we might come to see that post-Fordism is not so much a question of producing surplus value or wealth, but that post-Fordism is a type of organisation that primarily answers the question of how to distribute this surplus value. Perhaps it should be established that post-Fordism does not answer the problem of production, but primarily the problem of the distribution of wealth.

To move beyond this simple thesis, I propose a thought experiment. Let us attempt to delineate some borderline conditions of the initial situation, and look at the consequences that emerge according to an altogether traditional perspective on economy. Let us imagine then – as a pure hypothesis – that production labour is still primarily material labour, differently put, that we are still in the grips of traditional economy. With this supposition and with regard to the current state of affairs, the production of wealth, also of surplus value, would largely take place somewhere in the Third World, for example in China or India, or in other developing countries. Industrial production there would be so much more profitable since the price of labour force is much lower there than it is here. However, if this model were valid, two problems, which are essentially economical but at the same time also political, would have to be resolved. On the one hand, the invaluation of surplus value would need to be taken care of – especially, of course, in the developed world. On the other, certain occupations would need to be invented here for the ones who are excluded from the economy because their work is non-competitive. These people have a surplus of leisure time and no means to participate in the process of surplus value created in the Third World. In other words, the

surplus value created in the Third World should be distributed within the developed world in a way that would be acceptable both economically (that is, in accordance with the legitimate principles of economy) as well as politically.

How can this be done? One option is to expand the field of economic activity to areas in the developed world that are secure from the competition of the cheaper labour force from the Third World. This would include primarily those activities that require physical presence of the worker in our space. In short, what would happen is that a great part of commodity production would be transferred to areas with low-price labour power, while activities that are impossible to trade with at a distance would mushroom in the developed world. Service activities, for example, are of this type; since the movement of the labour force is limited, workers from Asia simply cannot compete with Western workers in service activities. A market should be created for these activities and it should also be expanded to the areas that have thus far been excluded from the economic sphere. Activities that have been part of leisure time should now be included in the economic sphere. At the same time, these activities would have to be highly valued, so that the salaries would suffice to buy goods from the Third World. Thus, it may happen that someone who is, for example, specialised in walking dogs would be ten times more productive and would earn ten times more than someone who, let's say, makes her/his clothes.

What then would result from this hypothetical case? If the frame conditions and the rules of comparison of our thought experiment are not overstretched, then we might experience, hypothetically, a world that uncannily resembles the world in which we already live. We would have a world that is relatively clearly divided into two spheres. The developed, financially wealthier part displays pronouncedly post-Fordist traits – without necessarily having to query the categories of traditional economy theory.

I want to remark at this point that within this model the post-Fordist society may also overcome the problem of the so-called class antagonism, which, according to the theories of historical materialism, traverses capitalist societies and emerges from the opposition between social production and

private distribution of wealth. This antagonism may be resolved as long as it, given the physical dislocation of the production class, discards or shifts the opposition inherent in the production class, i.e. in the working class. In this hypothetical case, capitalist society would resolve its paradox by way of externalising its inner paradox, transposing it to some other end of the world, the Far East, for instance. At the same time, I want to point out that the contradiction, which in industrial society presented itself as the opposition between the capitalists and the working class, would – in our hypothetical case – increasingly adopt the manifestation of an external interest opposition between different countries. Further, this would mean that the majority of us, living in post-Fordist societies, are not on the side of the workers within this contradiction but on the side of the capitalists.

To conclude this remark, let me just point out a coincidence. In his *Le salaire de l'ideal* (1997), Jean-Claude Milner raises the question of the condition of the classes in contemporary capitalist system. In view of the fact that today every individual is more or less bound in wage relations (today there are almost no capitalists of the good old kind: big bellies, cigars, top-hats and a substantial annual income), the present system undoubtedly differs from traditional capitalism as it was discussed, for example, by Marx and other authors. Does this mean that we have all become part of the working class? Does it still make sense to speak of the opposition between the capitalists and the workers at all? Is there a class of exploiters on the one hand and a status of the exploited on the other? If yes, how do we grasp this opposition? Milner, of course, insists: if capitalism exists, then there are relations of exploitation. I would rather not look further into his thesis or the definition of capitalists and workers. However, I want to argue that, according to Milner, the working class at present includes those who are paid according to their productivity, namely, those whose pay is proportional to the contribution in the creation of (surplus) value. Conversely, the class of capitalists includes those whose income is, so to speak, arbitrary – arbitrary in the sense that it does not depend on the actual contribution to the creation of wealth. I mention this because this thesis surprisingly coincides with the implications of a thought experiment, the hypothetical case

discussed earlier, insofar the model implies that post-Fordism, or rather, the post-Fordist society, is principally a system of social distribution of wealth and not a system of creating wealth. Only thus can pay be independent of contributions to the production of wealth. I will conclude at this point my first observation on the economic structure of post-Fordism.

## II.

My second general observation refers to the historical genesis of this phenomenon. Namely, to the question how this phenomenon came about and what roles individual social actors performed in the making of today's post-industrial, post-Fordist society, the society of knowledge, the network society. Virno advocates that the Operaist movement, also known as the movement of '77, played a crucial role in its historical constitution in Italy. Its key importance lay in the fact that it performed the *exit*, the breakaway, the massive withdrawal of labour force from wage relations. Virno has it that a certain revolution took place but was equally lost at that time in Italy. A failed revolution, which was, on the one hand, extensive enough to stir the until then established rules, but on the other, far too weak to truly achieve its goals. A revolution that failed and sunk, and that has brought about, concurrent with its collapse, what is today called post-Fordism.

Since I am not sufficiently familiar with the situation in Italy, I can only direct the reader to the foreword to Virno's book written by Igor Pribac (2001: 105-144). It is rather common to associate the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s with the formation of a new image of modern capitalism; the thesis not limited to Italy only. Several books have been written about the theme, especially about the events in France<sup>1</sup> in the late 1960s and particularly about the movement of '68. Let me first mention the book by Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *May '68, The Impossible Heritage* (1998), which describes the course of events and attempts to provide a forthright account of what truly went on at the time. The events were intriguing, charged with numerous diverse elements. However, Le Goff treats this story from a very

1 But also in America (Frank 1997).

particular perspective. He is questioning how it was possible that the revolutionary charge of May '68 mutated into the conformism of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The other book worth mentioning, is a work by Luc Boltanski and Eva Chapiello with a telling title *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999). Here, the authors discuss from a similar perspective the formation of a phenomenon they do not call post-Fordism but “the new spirit of capitalism”. Both studies establish connections between the protests of the time and contemporary production relations. However, both studies – and their point lies precisely here – present this connection, especially the one mentioning the new spirit of capitalism, as a kind of *continuity*. To put it in sharper terms, “the new spirit of capitalism” is rather an *expression of the success of the revolution and not of its failure*.

It could be claimed that what we are dealing with is a misunderstanding, an error, a mistake in the self-perception of the actors during the then events. As Luc Boltanski and Eva Chapiello correctly stress, the 1960s were not only the years of student protests. At the time, *two connected processes* occurred in France and in the wider world of developed capitalism. First, capitalism itself supposedly faced a serious crisis at the time, which was first and foremost ideological but in a certain sense also spiritual. To put it in simple terms: as soon as the basic existential demands were on the whole met with, people became less and less willing to play the role that the capitalist system demanded and expected of them.

The authors attempt to substantiate this thesis with two lines of argumentation and two kinds of empirical material. For one thing, statistical data of the time show that an increasing number of working hours as well as an increasing amount of power were lost due to different forms of boycotting – passive boycotting, with workers present at the working place but doing a lousy job, and active, such as strikes. The workers simply did not work or were not willing to work as hard as they “should”. The interesting thing is that the trade unionists repeatedly came up with new demands and that the employers were always willing to

2 The generation that was twenty years old in may '68 was in 1998 about fifty years old, and was the very same generation that was at the time leading society.

meet them. The hourly wage was constantly on the rise; however, this had no visible effects on the performance and presence of the workers at their working positions. Why not? The answer is of course hypothetical, but Luc Boltanski and Eve Chapiello state that although the worker *ceteris paribus* surely prefers to work for a higher pay, money is not everything – to use a hackneyed phrase. Ultimately, a more fundamental question is whether the worker is willing to work at all. Does s/he see in her/his work an acceptable way of (self-managed) living? No system can survive only on instrumental conditioning, payment, awards. In order to survive, it needs to make its members cling to it, to win them over, create a spirit that attracts them. And capitalism, such is the thesis of both authors, was at the time losing its mobilisation power. Its spirit was waning.

The authors were not only reading the statistical indicators that showed what was actually going on in the companies at the time. The other material they employed is of even greater interest. It consists of expert *management literature* of the time and is predominantly American in origin. In the book they quote extensively from different organisational and management manuals of the era. These excerpts show very clearly that the then theoreticians and practitioners of capitalist management were perfectly aware of the fact that capitalism was in a state of crisis and that it could be revived only through modernisation and a transformation of its spirit. Their proposal was to do away with the strict hierarchy at the working place and in the company, to make the company more humane, to give it a human face. Capitalism with a human face – that was the project. They emphasised that the work should not be humiliating, that it should not consist of the same daily routine that makes the individual feel an accessory of the machine. Quite the reverse, work should make workers feel active and give them space for self-initiative, free choice, etc. The true, new manager – as we know her/him today – should not give people directions and concrete tasks. Rather, the new manager needs to be more and more a motivator and an animator, able to fascinate the workers, win them over to partake in a joint endeavour. The ultimate goal was for people to consider their working place their second home – possibly even their first and

true home. In short, the workers should not regard their work and their working place as an external obligation but as a place of self-realisation, *the place of the enactment of their freedom*, an opportunity for personal growth. It is simply necessary to incite the workers' personal engagement. If the workers are engaged, their work is far more *effective*. This is the wager upon which the project of the theoreticians of new management rested. And it still does.

Thus, in the 1960s, capitalism faced a crisis simply because it no longer attracted people. Consequently, the process of organisational and ideological transformation needed to happen within the system of capitalism, the aim of which was to replace the old and apparently outlived, exhausted spirit of capitalism with a new spirit of capitalism. This spirit would meet with the demands of the times and perform the same task as the previous one in altered circumstances. In short, capitalism needed to be attractive again.

This is one of the movements the authors call attention to. Simultaneously, another movement developed outside the economic sphere, which did not present itself as a capitalist movement or a movement for the modernisation of capitalism, but as a straightforwardly anti-capitalist movement. This movement was against the standardisation brought about by the capitalist system and its mass production. It promoted resilience against alienation, against reification, which was supposedly a component part of the capitalist production process. The movement protested against restrictions that stifle individuality and originate in the demands of the capitalist system. Instead, it demanded recognition of the multitude of diversity, personal freedom, recognition of creativity. "Power to imagination!" it proclaimed, or "Prohibited to prohibit!", "Enjoy freely!", "Live without dead moments!". Such were the slogans against capitalism.

All these images ring a bell. We are also familiar with the fact that the protesters understood that the paroles struck at the very heart of the capitalist system. They were convinced that freedom, individuality and desire were tokens for something that directly opposed the capitalist system and that they were, with their anti-conformism, attacking capitalism at its most fundamental point. Desire will undermine capitalism – capitalism

suppresses desire, and when desire is released, capitalism will cease to exist.

We know now they were mistaken. The capitalism the protesters fought against, viz. the capitalism that is characterised by a fixed career, hierarchy, serial production, uniformity, and the like was bound to disappear. That was the capitalism of the old spirit. Vice versa, what was set up as an alternative to capitalist production, imagination, life, diversity, freedom, individuality, were the very features *offered by the ideologists of new capitalism to form the new spirit of capitalism*. In their struggle against capitalism, the protesters of the movements of May '68 actually, objectively, took the same position that the modernised capitalists had already taken. They even used the same arguments. Instead of undermining capitalism, they objectively acted as *allies* of the capitalist system. They acted as a welcome external support and helped establish a new spirit of capitalism quickly and successfully. Their demands for flexibility and occasional employment without regular pay in contrast to rigidity, became a common request within the system precisely because the modernisation was so successful. It was a demand that everyone had to accept, even those who would have preferred to work in the framework of the old conditions. Their dreams became our nightmare.

It is precisely this structural similarity of standpoints that explains – at least, such is the thesis of both books – the extremely smooth adoption by the followers of the May '68 movement of the new spirit of capitalism of the 1980s and 1990s. The answer lies in the fact that this did not happen because they sold themselves to the system or because the system somehow managed to integrate them or they would co-opt, but because they in a sense succeeded in their struggle because they are a successful generation. If today's post-Fordism *is what it is, it is not despite their protests but precisely thanks to their protests*. If this was a revolution, not many revolutions were as successful as theirs.

At the same time, this also calls attention to the fact that perhaps we should observe more closely the thought structure that prevailed in the protests. I have already pointed out that the conglomerate had wide ramifications, was extremely colourful, showed influences from different sides. Surely, the protesters

considered themselves anti-capitalist. At least partly, they were Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyites who based their endeavours on economic analyses.<sup>3</sup> However, in my opinion, the Marxist revolutionary element was not a structural element but rather a reflection of outside colouration, which was relatively widely accepted simply because it was somehow at hand at the time. The more important motive was *non-conformism as such*, non-conformism as a mode of *affirmation of individuality*, of stressing that part of oneself that moves away from rigid schemes, that is, from freedom, life, pleasure, imagination, diversity, etc.

Let us consider the following: “Live without dead moments!”, “Enjoy freely!”. These are hardly the slogans of a workers’ revolution. They are rather catchphrases of a vitalist individualism – and, of course, also catchphrases of contemporary consumerist propaganda, which offers us at each and every step precisely that which the protesters struggled for. I cannot stress this enough: this revolution was far from unsuccessful; it was an extraordinary success.

As a way of illustrating these observations, I would like to cite a scene from the exceptional documentary by Chris Marker, *The Base of the Air is Red*, which also deals with the question of how it was possible that the revolutionary ferment of the 1960s imploded so quickly during the 1970s. A typical image of the time was a procession of students, carrying slogans and shouting the names of Ho Chi Ming and Che Guevara. This typical revolutionary scene with young people, full of energy and zeal, is in the film played against the solemn, monotone and cold voice of the author, Chris Marker, who claims: “It is not difficult to be part of the avant-garde, walk the streets and cheer, Ho-Chi-Ming! Ho! Ho! Che-Gue-va-ra! Che! Che! What is difficult is to be a worker in an automobile factory for twenty years and do the slow and invisible work of the trade union organiser.”

3 It should be mentioned that this element of historical materialism was rather marginal; the workers joined the strikes relatively late, and even when they did, they had their reservations that later on proved to be entirely justified.

In a similar gesture, Marker later on engages with the figure of Che Guevara himself and, in my view, very convincingly presents him as an adventurer and not as an advocate of the revolution. What else would have brought him to Africa, which he was not familiar with, and what else could he have been doing in Bolivia? True, first he set up a successful revolution in Cuba, even became minister there, but later he pathetically and bombastically bade farewell to Fidel Castro in a public letter as if to say, "I have to undertake a high mission somewhere else". He went on to 'make revolution' in Congo, Africa, where the circumstances were entirely different and also utterly unknown to him. The plan was, of course, an outright failure. Since Guevara could not return to Cuba, he proceeded to make a new revolution – moving from one failure to the next –, this time in Bolivia. If he were a Marxist revolutionary, he would have examined the objective circumstances and first constituted a support network that would include the communist party. He did try to establish contact with the communist party of Bolivia, but the party did not support his plan, arguing that the conditions were not advantageous enough for the revolution to succeed. What did Che Guevara do? He set up a revolution with some followers in the Bolivian jungle and met a tragic end.

To complete this line of thinking, something definitely opened up in May '68. Many positive things that emerged then are still present in society as we know it today. However, I believe that we have to stop mythologising this movement, since what happened then was about so many other things too. In any case, what needs to be considered is the fact that many of the demands have become ideological cornerstones of contemporary society. What the protesters demanded is at present expected and demanded of each and every individual: to affirm one's individual freedom. In our world diversity is widely spread and non-conformism has become the new social norm, which prevails to such an extent that no one dares question it. If there is something worth passing a judgement against today, it is the claim that someone is a conformist, that in these non-conformist times someone non-conformistically does not want to be a non-conformist, that someone does not prioritise his personal freedom. A general belief prevailed, in which every one

of us, regardless of what s/he does, is treated as a singular and infinitely precious personality, as someone who is not defined from the outside at all, who lives in his/her world, and who can thus achieve absolutely anything if only s/he truly wants it.

To cut a long story short, the common ideal is that everyone acts as a state in the state or, in Spinoza's words, as an empire in the empire. What was once regarded as a product of objective laws (losing one's job, for example) and as an expression of social injustice, is today taken as the result of personal failure. Former social contradictions, which were once recognised as necessary, are subject to psychologisation and are increasingly presented as expressions of psychological interiority.

### III.

In the third part, I shall discuss some traits of the above-mentioned ideal based on reading of *Treatise on Liberal Servitude* by Jean-Léon Beauvois. Beauvois is primarily concerned with social psychology, with experimental social psychology even, a science that measures the reality of the mentioned ideals. As a scientist, Beauvois conducts experiments and, based on these experiments, observes how people behave in specific circumstances. Thus, he can establish in what ways altered circumstances define human behaviour. At a general level, Beauvois points out that we are – especially in our world – inclined to depreciate the causal role of external factors and to too often regard our behaviour as free. That is, as behaviour that is entirely or to a great extent the result of our own convictions and decisions. This is, of course, in line with the present ruling norm. Beauvois points out that there are circumstances in which we are objectively forced to act in a particular way, even though we may think that we are acting in full freedom.<sup>4</sup>

However, this is not all. What we are dealing with is not that we are not always free, that there are circumstances in

4 If this fact were not known, we would not have the right to return a product purchased directly from the seller. We would not have had this right if the legislator did not presuppose that we, in fact, were not free. Beauvois proves that this is in fact largely the case.

which our freedom is very much limited. Beauvois says that *this restraint has greater and more lasting consequences if we truly believe in our freedom*, if we are caught in the belief that we are free and if we believe that we have manifested with a certain act a certain own personal trait, our nature, for example.

To illustrate this, let me present two extremely instructive experiments that Beauvois did. The first involved pupils in primary school fourth-graders. Primary school pupils are serving his purpose because they show how the processes of choosing the right behaviour take place without making use of the customary cosmetics. The fourth-graders were put to the test before the actual experiment in which they were asked what they thought about the duration of summer holidays. Predictably, all pupils agree that summer holidays are too short. When they are asked to evaluate the statement, "Holidays are too short", on a numerical scale from one to twenty-three, they on the average choose the value four.

This is when the experiment actually begins. The pupils' teacher introduces a woman to the class as an employee of the Ministry of Education. The woman invites the pupils to have an individual conversation in her office – a specific situation in which her position of authority is very obvious – and informs them that the minister has decided to shorten the summer holidays. However, she continues, the minister does not want to do this without consulting them, so he would like to know how the pupils feel about the issue. He would like them to write a letter in which they state reasons for having the summer holidays shortened. The woman stresses that there is no pressure involved. The decision is entirely theirs: "Do as you like. The minister is asking you to write the letter, but if you do not want to, you can, of course, decline to do so. The minister is explicitly asking you to do this of your own free will." Nevertheless, a pupil – we shall call him Peter – writes a letter in which he states some reasons why he thinks summer holidays should be shortened. This is pupil No.1.

Then, another pupil comes who we shall call Johnny. He goes through the same procedure. He, too, is supposed to write a letter to the minister. However, this time, the woman does not say what she had said before – she does not give him the

freedom to do so. On the contrary, she makes Johnny think that writing the letter is obligatory. Sure enough, Johnny, too, writes the letter.

Then the results were compared. First, it was shown that the granting of freedom has practically no influence on a person's actual behaviour. Both pupils, Peter and Johnny, wrote the letter, and both letters were, according to the assurances of the author, written equally well. (In both cases, the letter was *abstract* in nature and stated possible arguments for shortening the summer holidays). Pupil No. 1, Peter, *did not have the freedom* to refuse to write the letter in the given circumstances. His act of letter writing was thus obtained by force; he was forced to write, which is ultimately understandable, given the circumstances. The formal statement that he was free was apparently a fiction.

However, this *fiction has interesting effects*. When the test about summer holidays was taken again, Johnny stood by his decision, namely, he chose four on the same scale. Peter – and this is interesting – changed his stance. Now he thought that although there might be some reasons as to why the holidays should be shortened, the holidays nevertheless might not be too long. He indicated ten on the scale. He still thought that holidays were not too long-lasting, but he was not as convinced as he was before.

These results are reproduced with such regularity that they are, according to Beauvois, among the most proved effects and laws in the field of social sciences. Why do they come about? Why does a person in a situation of coerced submission, to which s/he apparently agreed of her/his own free will, change her/his mind (since freedom had been granted to her/him, it was pointed out to her/him that the choice is hers/his)? Beauvois mentions several possible explanations and, if we simplify somewhat, ultimately chooses as the decisive one Festinger's *theory of cognitive dissonance*. According to this theory, Peter realises that he did something of his own 'free will' that does not comply with his convictions. His behaviour surprises him. He does not think that the holidays last too long and yet he voluntarily comes up with reasons to have them shortened. He asks himself why he did that. A dissonance occurs between his actions and his convictions. And since Peter cannot change actions that already

happened, he establishes a harmony between his thoughts and actions in that he simply coordinates his convictions with his behaviour. He reasons as such: Since I wrote a letter stating of my own free will that holidays ought to be shortened, I obviously do not think that holidays are too long – I obviously think that holidays are too short. Thus, his problem is resolved – no cognitive dissonance and no more tension; man is in harmony with himself, which is extremely important.

In contrast to Peter, John did not experience cognitive dissonance. The cognitive dissonance did not occur because he was forced to write the letter, because he had an external reason that made him do what he had done. Consequently, there was no need for any subsequent rationalisation and adjustment of belief.

These results show that in a situation of coerced submission, both Peter and John have no choice but to submit. However, the very fact that Peter did this 'of his own free will', on the basis of his own decision, later on influenced his beliefs. *He did not submit with his actions only but also with his thoughts.* In contrast to John, *he submitted sincerely.* And here we can see what 'wonders' can freedom do.

The second experiment is more complicated, but also far more instructive. The group in question was prior to the experiment appropriately prepared and engaged; it was manipulated so that the included persons apparently freely consented to something that they would never have done otherwise. The point of the experiment is that the experimenters inform the participating individuals that the computer assigns by chance which person will have to perform which task – for instance, solving the labyrinth or eating earthworms. The experimenters had made prior inquiries and found out that certain individuals consider eating earthworms extremely unpleasant and would only do so in exceptional circumstances. Of course, the computer 'randomly' destined these individuals to eating worms. Such were the conditions at the beginning of the experiment. After some time a confused experimenter announces there has been a mistake; the protocol does not provide for the computer to assign tasks to individual people. The protocol is that every individual can choose whether they solve the labyrinth or eat the earthworms. What happens? Surprisingly, a great number

of participants decide that they will eat the worms, which means that they will do something they earlier described as disgusting. Why? Similarly to Peter, these individuals freely agreed to take part in the experiment. When the computer assigned them to eat worms, a process similar to what Peter experienced was triggered in approximately one third of them. Since they freely chose to take part in the experiment, they made an effort to find good reasons as to why they were doing this. Although they found worms disgusting, they thought it good to test themselves. They were doing it for science's sake; worms might not be so bad after all, they might even be healthy since they contain a lot of protein. When the computer decides that they are to eat worms, they induce a process of rationalisation and prepare themselves to eat. *When someone decides to do something of their free will, they will surely find reasons to justify what they are doing.* When they are told that the computer will make no decisions, that it will be up to them to decide, they simply want to prove their own consistency. Since they made a free choice to eat the worms and since they have already rationalised the decision, they merely want to prove to themselves that they are reliable people, that they keep their word and act according to their beliefs.

Such rationalisations are made by one third of the group. The other two thirds do not rationalise the act but *internalise* it. The internalisers consider the situation they are in a manifestation of their own inner nature; not as an objective external situation but as something only they can control. They think either that they are born winners, that they can always cope with the situation and that eating earthworms is far from impossible; or that they are losers and that something like this can happen only to them: "I am destined to unpleasant things. It seems I have no choice. I will eat those worms if I have to". However, ultimately and despite the exact opposite argumentation, both the winners and the losers behave in precisely the same way: they all eat the worms.

This is the first part of the experiment. One way or the other, each of the mentioned subjects eats the earthworms. Until this point, there is no visible difference between rationalisation and internalisation. However, there is another step in which the perversity of freedom fully reveals itself. Namely, it turns out

that those who rationalised only did so regarding the specific act of wormeating. When the experimenter asks them whether they would be willing to get electroshocks, they obviously refuse, “No, thank you. I have eaten the earthworms, but I would prefer not to get electroshocks”. Why do I mention this? The remaining two thirds actually agree to the shocks. When electroshocks are offered to the internalisers, both the winners and the losers freely consent to it. The winners say, “I can rise to every challenge. If I have eaten the earthworms, I can also be given electroshocks”. They consider them another challenge, another opportunity to show their winning nature. The losers think in a similar way. They, too, see in the occasion another opportunity to have their unfortunate nature reveal itself, and similarly accept electroshocks. It is precisely because the internalisers, be they winners or losers, see in every choice they make – even when it is explicitly enforced – an expression of their own true nature, that they freely submit not only with individual acts but also with their entire nature.

What do these examples point to? First, the findings of experimental social psychology as well as common sense show that our freedom is not limitless. There are situations of objective submission in which we simply cannot do certain things. We are told that our acts are largely determined from outside, that we often do not perform certain things because this was our free choice but because this is the way one acts given the circumstances. However, this also means that the idea of freedom – or the idea of equality – is in numerous instances actually false. Peter from the fourth grade could not have said to the woman from the Ministry that he wished not to write the letter because it would not match his belief. Similarly, we are not free not to do some things, especially in cases related to authority, even if your superior would say, “As you wish, the choice is yours”. Such is this granting of freedom, which is ‘killing’ us even more if we do not have the freedom – and often we truly do not have it. If we make this choice, even if it is allegedly made freely, this does not change the fact that the situation and the decision were, in this case, objectively coercive and enforced.

This is lesson number one. There are situations in which there is no freedom, despite appearances. And in fact, such

situations are rather common. On the other hand, the mentioned examples show that what is even more dangerous is the lack of recognition, the repudiation of these external determinations pertaining to our actions. If we cling to the idea of our own freedom, if we believe that through certain actions we will realise ourselves, be true to our nature, we will be – as the examples show – even more effectively caught in the trap of submission. To paraphrase, freedom enslaves. Literally.

To conclude, let me add one more thing. The described accents, especially those of the second part of the text, present a more or less accurate illustration of a philosophical debate that emerged when contemporary, i.e. romantic, subjectivity appeared in the historical arena for the first time. Although the freedom of choice may be an attractive notion, philosophically it is rather weak, as Hegel posited in his *Foundations of Philosophy of Law*. What is hidden behind the freedom of choice is in fact twice determined from the outside. First, with that which is given to be decided upon and about which the subject of the freedom of choice actually has no choice. Second, with that which is given as a criterion of choice. Considering these two things at once, the freedom of choice is, according to Hegel, an entirely empty notion, and the subject a mere place where external defining factors collide.

However, as I already mentioned, it is not only about this weakness. It is more about the fact that although this subjectivity is absolute, it is at the same time also abstract and indefinite. The more the absolute subject persists in its absoluteness, the more the subject swears by her/his freedom, the more s/he will be exposed to external contingencies. And because s/he will be without any depth of her/his own (from the same reason), her/his entire subjectivity will be at stake with each new determinant and will thus become infinitely fragile. In other words, the subject will consider every determinant that is not set up by her/himself alone as an external limitation and will thus perceive every such determinant as an attack on her/his entire personality.

However, the point is, of course, inverse: the subject is free only within certain limitations. The limit, the recognition of limitations is a condition for the realisation of freedom. The subject is free insofar s/he acknowledges her/his limitations

and does not treat objective determinants as limitations for the enactment of freedom, but rather as an area where her/his freedom can ultimately be manifested. For the subject – and we said the absolute subject – to do this, a certain gesture of self-disavowal, self-negation has to take place, which is necessarily difficult for the subject precisely because of her/his absoluteness. It can contain nothing but what the subject has set up in her/him in the first place. However, the subject still has to renounce the possibility that s/he is the sole source of all determinants. S/he needs to recognise the validity of something else in her/him, even when this other is – as it should be – thinking. Only on the basis of this self-disavowal, self-negation can s/he rise to a firm standpoint and claim something not because s/he feels like this but because the objective determinant character of thinking forces her/him to do so. In other words, the subject can rise toward generality only through a certain submission, through submission to the necessity of thinking and to the necessity of the thing itself.

This is what I was aiming at from the beginning. Namely, that the subject is free only through this necessity. If freedom makes sense at all, it makes sense only against the background of a recognition of certain objective determinants. Likewise, activity under specific circumstances, ultimately political action, should originate precisely from an analysis of these objective determinants of the situation and the thing itself.

Translated by Katja Kosi

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## Section II

### 'Use of Conceptual Framework: Case Studies in the Post-Fordist Horizon'



# The Sense of Coalition<sup>1</sup>

by Sergio Bologna

1 This is a translation of the chapter “Il senso della coalizione” from Bologna’s book *Ceti mezzi senza futuro?* (2007:11-49).

Sergio Bologna is one of the leading intellectuals of the Italian 'operaism' (workerism) Marxist movement and has maintained a sympathetic but critical stance towards the social movements of autonomous workers, self-organised students, radical feminists and countercultural youth that made up Autonomia in the 1970s. He published a series of books and articles that are of major importance for post-Fordist theories.

*Frustrated, harassed, devalued, demoralized and ready for a change in how employees (professional or not) are treated.*

Anonymous post at the site [www.unitedprofessionals.org](http://www.unitedprofessionals.org)

Surfing on Internet sites, blogs, etcetera, entering the folds of the web, with a minimum of accuracy, one can detect the voices of those who talk about their present labour condition. In all possible languages. At the beginning the noise seems indistinct, but progressively it acquires the force of a scream, stronger and stronger, until it switches off, incapable of becoming a thunder and a threat. This is one of the few places in which the fragmentary and isolated conditions of the post-Fordist worker reach a collective dimension, a choral expression. Whoever wishes to say something meaningful about work has to start off here, has to listen, stay connected to the web for hours and hours and record the tales of lives, the testimonies of women and men about what it means to work today.

### Voices from the Blogosphere

There is of course a big difference between various Internet sites and one needs to learn how to recognise them and how to evaluate their degrees of significance. The ones we have decided to focus on here belong more or less to the category of “free expressions of rage” (collected accounts of life, selected pieces of daily news, individual stories and connected comments). Yet, the articulations also come from structured sites and clearly contain a precise intentionality and expression of a project. Although they belong to two different genres and are thus very difficult to compare, I would like to demonstrate that they both stem from a common trend in post-Fordist society: the slow and yet insecure journey towards the point where the identity of the post-Fordist work is clearly assumed, toward the condition that was named class consciousness in times of communism. It is a beautiful and clear expression that has currently been reduced to a cacophony because the term has been used and abused by generations of party and trade union bureaucrats and by cohorts of newspaper opinion intellectuals.

The assumption, the acceptance of identity begins exactly with the free expression of rage. It begins with the need to share an existential condition that produces suffering and unease, or even simply with a need to testify to a lived experience which is not necessarily negative, but is influenced by a specific mode of organisation of the contemporary world of work.

Therefore, what we have here are acts of testimony in which work is the central theme, the impending problem that shapes or deforms rhythms of life, human relations, places that we inhabit, family relations and so on. I do not care if the anonymous protagonist puts forth, declares weird or naive political ideas, even ideas completely opposite to mine. I do not care if his understanding of the world is the one of a complete idiot. What interests me is the frequency with which certain circumstances appear, the repetitiveness of some experiences, of numbers concerning time and pay, the experiences of how long he works and how much he earns. I care about the duration of the work contract, the quality of work, forms of discipline. Dependent, para-subordinate or independent – this is a problem that comes later. I would even say that it is a secondary problem. What really counts is, rather, his age – because it is necessary to disturb the evidence of the idea that precarious work is a synonym of entering the labour world, that it is a problem restricted to young people, and therefore a transitory problem, a problem of adjustment, of “flux” as sociologists of work like to say. Or, even worse, a problem of work apprenticeship.

Anna writes on 17th December, 2006 on <http://blog.libero.it> about her experience in a *call centre*:

Me too, I worked in Atesia from 2001 to 2006 as an *inbound call handler* and, after five years, they just kicked me out for no reason, and the trade union man in the company that I contacted – I even took the union membership card – simply made a fool of me by saying that he would call me back as soon as possible (this happened at the end of May). I really feel embittered, and being 52 years old I find myself jobless and with the typical difficulty of someone who has passed the limit of the ‘right’ age. But even before, I’ve never been

supported or helped by the trade union, so you can imagine now... We just want a bit of justice about this cowardly behaviour of the company and of the trade union, so that the dignity of the worker is no longer crushed by the behaviour of those who respect no one.<sup>2</sup>

M.C.F. writes to Beppe Grillo on 28th February, 2006:

(...) I am 41 years old, and I have been 'flexible' since more or less forever. I have a degree in Italian Literature and one in librarian studies – yes indeed I have also been a biblio(a)typical – I entered into a long series of public job offers that I will not mention here *in extenso*. I passed through all possible types of contracts, from vacancies to temporary jobs, from external collaborations to the status of an independent worker (to which I have been obliged because they did not want to renew my contract as an external collaborator). I have also been an employee with paid holidays, Christmas bonus, etc., but unfortunately it was a position of an accountant, which did not at all suit me. I thus left this job, aware of the fact that I would fall back into a state of precariousness (is it courage or irresponsibility?). I have also been a subordinate partner and co-leader in a start-up firm. I changed work and typologies of work several times. I now finally have a temporary yearly contract, which has already been renewed twice, and I feel extremely lucky if I compare myself to other persons, or if I compare it to my previous state. I do like my work, and there is a good working environment, but on the other hand I have no more ambition, enthusiasm, horizons; they have taken all this away from me: nowadays I only think about getting paid at the end of the month, as long as it lasts, and about playing with my baby when I get back home. I refuse extra hours, I do no longer work 'for free' (of course in the past I also took voluntary free jobs – the so-

2 Taken from *Schiavi moderni. Il precario nell'Italia delle meraviglie* [Modern Slaves. The Flexible Worker in 'Wonderland Italy'] from the blog [www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it).

called apprenticeships – in order to acquire professional experience). The salary is the equivalent of the one I had ten years ago, and luckily I have a husband who – although he is ‘flexible’ too – earns more than me, and after a life waiting to ‘get settled’, I finally decided to have a kid when I was 39, at a time when I was jobless and my husband was about to lose his job. But at least we have done something great: please have the courage to do something for yourself.

The frequency, the iteration, the similarity of the stories give us a sense of how the problem has to be understood as a ‘structural’ one, as a problem intrinsic to post-Fordism – because it is an element of managerial practices: not simply as a result of bad practices, but of practices *tout court*. One might almost say that this attitude has taken the place of the scientific organisation of labour typical of the Taylorist era. Yesterday there was a timekeeper following you, today you are followed by one of the many hierarchical figures of the company, an expert in the thousand shortcuts to manage flexibility, substituting an unlimited-term contract worker with a short-term contract worker, and then this with a temporary worker, further with an external worker, then with an independent self-managed worker, and so on. This is a managerial attitude that is not only practiced by marginal companies or by micro-companies that are not doing well, but also by large groups and first and foremost by the public authorities.

But let’s get back to the topic of the assumption of identity. The expression of rage, the act of testimony can tell us more than the story itself or the individuality behind it. What is revealed in these accounts is useful to understand the distance that has to be traversed in order to build an identity that can become a form of self-defence. These stories, almost in their totality, tell us how deeply the idea is entrenched that there is no other possible solution than that of skills, the will of the individual or a stroke of good luck. One has to be able to rely on one’s own resources, and words such as “luck” or “lucky” appear with an impressive frequency, thus revealing two themes: the acknowledgement of the evidence of a complete absence of

public rules, and a very limited belief in the possibility to unite people who live in similar conditions. It is as if the idea (or the culture) of collective actions had been eradicated after a genetic mutation. If the image of a protest appears, it is in the shape of *una tantum*, the shape of a collective scream that invades the air for a second and immediately vanishes. The woman from Rome (cf. [www.trentennedisperata.splinder.com](http://www.trentennedisperata.splinder.com)) first offers her body for a night of love in exchange for a decent job, starts an animated debate, thousands of people write to her, some laud her position, others insult her, newspapers mention her, she has initiated the idea of a strike of the blogosphere, and the last time I visited her site I found out that she had written a very cultivated letter to the director of the newspaper *La Repubblica*. It is a way of saying that “we are in a dead end”, but at least she tried to do something. But most of the people confine themselves to a sense of powerlessness, some react by offering advice on good morals such as “maybe you did not have enough faith in yourself” or “one needs to be humble and committed”.

In the tradition of the nineteenth century, the coalition between workers has emerged at the working place, between persons who have similar jobs, similar timetables and similar salaries. The working place is the most elementary ground for a coalition, and the colleague is the first ally. It is very rare to find nowadays testimonies of what in the workers’ movements all over the world has been called “solidarity”. It even seems that the main feature of the current management system of work is to create the conditions of difference in such a way that each one perceives, in the first place, the *non-affinity* with the person he or she works with.

S. D. writes on Beppe Grillo's blog on 20th February, 2006:

She is a graduate, she has a contract as an external worker, her working time is fixed, and everyday she goes to the same workplace where she receives the same task. There are other colleagues who have the same work as she does, but they have a regular internal contract. When they fall ill, they are paid; if they have to go to the doctor, they are paid; if they have a child, they are paid and they have a lot more rights of which she can just

dream. If they have a holiday, they are paid; if they work extra hours, they are paid. They are not forced to finance their (supplementary) pension, for the time being the State still thinks about it. They do not have to pay for a fiscal advisor, they can pay their taxes via associations, which are less expensive. At the end her colleagues are paid more for each hour of work; but she works for the same amount of hours (including the extra hours). She would like to buy (Why not rent? But it is more expensive than taking a mortgage!) a two-room apartment, live on her own, but with her contract no bank wants to give her a loan, while her colleagues can have it without any problem. Each year at the end of the contract she shakes like a leaf ... they never tell her clearly and well in advance if it will be renewed. Usually she is called the same day to sign. This has been going on for three years. And I can tell you about many similar cases. The issue concerns not only the precarious condition of the jobs, but also the fact that other persons who do the same work have different rights. In fact, there is a discrimination vis-à-vis workers; they are divided into first-class and second-class workers.

It is self-evident that the colleagues of S. D. who are employed with regular contracts will see in her a threat to the stability of their positions, their rights, their salaries. It is highly probable that the trade union, if by chance it decides to examine this situation, decides to take up the defence of the regular workers, who are more likely to become union members. The working place is nowadays no longer a place of solidarity and coalition. It is therefore useless to keep on trying to blindly create the dynamics of a coalition according to the old schemas and models of Fordism. Finding and building new affinities via the Web is a state of necessity.

It appears that the post-Fordist system has automatically turned the Fordist management parameters upside down, with the precise goal of eradicating the conditions that enabled the existence of coalitions. During the first period, the idea of business was based on the concept of cooperation, on the surplus

value obtained from the synergies produced by the coexistence of several working energies committed in the same productive process. With the awakening of the working class in the middle of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the cooperation, which is a source of surplus value, was replaced by the coalition, which defends the interests of workers, thus becoming a source of self-organisation. It appears that the post-Fordist system wants to leave behind the idea of cooperation, destroying it systematically and substituting it with the perverted mechanisms of animal competitive behaviour – *mors tua vita mea*. Nevertheless, the post-Fordist system will never be a system of total flexibility or generalised precariousness. If it were so, the unity of the workers would be constituted on new bases. The post-Fordist system needs to maintain a large quantity of 'guaranteed', hyper-protected labour power so that this typology of workers can take on the role of permanently destroying the class unity. Usually the 'flexible' workers are considered the destabilising factor, the main cause of the weakening of the contractual power of stable workers. The trade union not only does not protect them, but also considers them a fatal disease. In fact, it is by *combining* the two types of work that the idea of the coalition has been subjected to corrosion. It is the constant imbalance between the acquired rights of the former ones, and the non-existing rights of the latter that guarantees the balance of the company that constitutes its main disciplinary glue. One might even say that the more the combination of the two types of work malfunctions (e.g. lazy public employee vs. hardworking temporary worker), the more the stability of the apparatus in which they are employed is guaranteed. This is why the post-Fordist managerial methods can be so perfectly applied to the State apparatus, to the public or semi-public system in general. These systems keep up the façade of the apparatus while emptying them of their meaning. Post-Fordism rips the meat off the State structure and at the same time it consolidates its skeleton, transforming it into a substance resistant to all social forces. The massive introduction of elements of work flexibility in the public authorities sector, explained as a method to render it lighter, more efficient, and less expensive, entails in fact a multiplication of new branches and bureaus. Just consider the increasing number of public structures created

by the de-centralisation of powers from the Italian State to the regions. The same applies to the proliferation of local branches of universities and new study curricula. From this it results that the public authority, although it employs a great amount of flexible labour-power, is becoming more and more expensive and often renders services to the citizens that are below standards.

But let's return to the coalition system. The post-Fordist system has managed to suppress almost completely the conditions via which a coalition was possible in working places. This is because it enhanced the differences between various parties of the labour force. In fact, what is immediately visible from the outside – generating therefore debates and complaints – is the absence of a culture of solidarity between colleagues. This is regarded by the trade unions as a generational problem (“Today's youth is too individualistic”). But the situation, at least in Italy, is quite different. If working places are no longer places to set up coalitions, if they are no longer places for the construction of practices of political democracy, this is due first and foremost to the trade union pacts of July 1993, pacts that have marked the centralisation of the trade union bargaining. If the workers of a company can no longer count on the wage bargaining, on what bases is an idea of coalition then supposed to emerge? On the basis of the maintenance of the green areas? The flowerpots at the reception? The cutting off of workplaces from the exercise of democracy as part of the union's activities has been a political decision jointly taken by the unions and by the Italian Manufacturers' Association (*Confindustria*). Today one can sense the same atmosphere in the working places as in the 1950s; the fear of hierarchies is interiorised, and in this climate conventionality destroys creativity and innovation. The cause of such a situation resides in the political choices taken by the same ones who today pretend to judge the limited sense of solidarity of new generations. And how is a democratic spirit supposed to emerge when the State no longer imposes rules?

S.M. writes on Beppe Grillo's blog on 29th May, 2006:

(...) I started working as a secretary in a big real estate company, then as a hardware technician, then finally I started to think about a serious job position, a renewable

three-month collaboration contract. I am employed by three companies, in the sense that I am paid by a firm, which is paid by another one, which is paid by the final “customer”. To cut a long story short, the customer pays €50 per day, only 60 of which end up in my pocket, without any paid holidays or sick leave. This is absolutely normal in this field. When I ask about my future they tell me that I do not need to worry, because the client has signed a long-term contract, at least 2 years. If it is so, why do I have a three-month contract? Impossible to find out. As an answer to my question, at the end of the 3 months, they gave me a one-month contract. I have too many examples to fit in this mail, but there is one thing I need to say out loud: all the guys with a short-term contract would have to sue them. Sue them and have no fear. An “external collaboration contract”<sup>3</sup> that sticks you to a chair for 8 hours a day is not legal! When you have an external collaboration contract you are supposed to be free from hierarchies and times, as long as you fulfil the task you have been appointed: how would a secretary have a “project” to fulfil? Read carefully your contracts, because the Rome Court has affirmed already twice that I am right! And those idiots of the firm are now paying and shutting up, because they know they are wrong.

How can a democracy survive if the only face of public regulations is the attorney’s? How can a worker think that the only way to be protected is through suing the company he or she works for? A lawsuit for each contract would mean four lawsuits each year. The sense of coalition – solidarity, as it was once called – tends indeed to vanish from the perspectives of the younger generations, but the fault is on the part of the

3 *Contratto a progetto* is literally a “project contract”: companies in Italy are allowed to hire freelance workers for specific tasks, but often what is hidden behind this type of contract are ordinary long-term tasks and positions. (Note of the translator is placed in the footnote and as of now indicated as T.N.)

founding fathers of the Second Republic. Nevertheless one must have deep respect for all the voices, for all the expressions that, although confused and weak, speak out loud and clear about a situation that is becoming intolerable and incompatible with a civilised country. One has also to respect the less committed voices, as in the case of these two young persons who created and put online ([www.generazione1000.com](http://www.generazione1000.com)) a sort of a novel, an autobiographical fictional narrative that is in fact a survival handbook and provoked several reactions. For instance, as a way of response, three young women have published the story of how they live off a pay that amounts to €433,80 – their dream would be to earn €1,000<sup>4</sup> for work they do at the National Civil Service. The web is not only a fast tool, but *it is also a tool adapted to the isolation of the individual*. A blog or site can in fact be created by a single person without the need of an organisation backing up and legitimising his or her actions. On the contrary, Internet sites and blogs are self-legitimised tools. This is why they can mobilise energies that otherwise would remain unexpressed and inactive, and this is why they allow the individual to contribute in their own way to the construction of a virtual coalition. A man called Arnald, who edited [www.diversamenteoccupati.it](http://www.diversamenteoccupati.it), had in mind something more than a simple complaint about his conditions. He wanted to offer a service, a platform for discussions. In his culture, there are remembrances that seem to show a past of political activity (“One step forward, precarious people, let’s take the mouse and our future into our hands”). And little by little his site started to gather voices of several workers.

On 7th June 2007, Rufus writes:

With this post I want to carry the flag of millions of new companies which emerged in Italy. If one puts it in these terms, it sounds as a comfortable and nice picture: a mass of little entrepreneurs opening their ateliers (small hangars in Emilia-Romagna, something bigger more up North), people tired of taking orders

4 In Italy there are many debates about how difficult it is to live on €1,000 per month (T.N.).

from the boss, seeking emancipation by setting up new companies, working and offering work... But if one takes a closer look, all these new companies, always quoted as a matter of pride by both the left-wing and the right-wing governments, are nothing but millions of persons forced to create fictive companies. We are FORCED to create them. Far from creating new activities, we are just forced to become independent workers and pay more than 40% taxes (if you do not believe it, ask your friends who are in the same situation). I am one of those newly independent workers. Why have I done this? Because as an independent worker I have more chances of seeing my rights respected than when I am a short-term worker in a company. Or at least, one has to say that no one is screening the companies who use in an almost criminal way this type of contract. We are blackmailed in different ways, and we have no choice: either you manage to survive as an independent worker, or you are obliged to work according to their conditions, with no Christmas bonus, no sick leave (and we are not only talking about a few days off to recover from flu; talk to those who were hospitalised for a longer period, talk to pregnant women). This is the scream of an unstable worker who thinks his scream will be followed by an echo.

The left-wing intelligentsia are irritated by these expressions of rage. They think they show not enough cultivation, that they are indications of a childish attitude. Of course, I can clearly see orthographical errors in the text, and we all know that today people with a poor command of language manage to obtain MA degrees, but are the students the only ones to blame for this? Who should you stand with here, with the one who shows openly the existence of an intolerable situation, even if he uses a wrong *consecutio temporum*, or with the one who has been repeating over and over for 30 years his high-brow opinion on the pages of an important newspaper, calling it "information"?

But it happens that in the press someone supports the workers without rights, either by proposing a platform to collect materials that help understand the problem, or by using their

blog not only as a place to express rage, but also ideas and proposals, because they are aware of being themselves victims of flexibility. Such is for instance the case of a journalist of // *Messaggero* who in her blog ([www.angelapadrone.blogspot.com](http://www.angelapadrone.blogspot.com)) proposes a collective protest against Damiano, the Minister of Work, because of the way in which he handled the so-called dialogue with the trade unions on pensions: a 'dialogue' in which the problem of the millions of persons who will not have a pension that will allow them to survive has been totally ignored. As we will see, groups of "second-generation independent workers" have joined this protest.

One must be really dim not to see that a wave is rising all over the planet via the Web, a wave in which a new identity is being shaped. For the time being, this identity still looks like a mere generational one, but in fact it is progressively assuming the shape of a class. There is no such thing as lucky or unlucky countries. "Notwithstanding the economical elevation, the status of graduates in China has declined dramatically during last years, the *Shanghai Daily* reports. One Chinese student in three considers a university education a waste of time."<sup>5</sup>

Only a true son of a bitch can keep on ignoring the Web and its true representative value. An organised Internet site works as a real association, even if the idea of the coalition is not explicitly declared. It is a component of civil society. It is one of the contemporary forms of democracy, and maybe one of the few that are lasting. At least as far as work-related problems are concerned. In their earliest days, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first artisans' unions and the first workers' societies were looking for a place to meet, for spaces where a certain number of persons could gather, spaces sufficiently private so that the police and the spies of the companies could record their discourses. It was often the backroom of a pub, a place where a meeting could look as a simple dinner among friends or a gathering for a birthday celebration. Only later, parallel with the consolidation of the process of

5 Mentioned on the Internet site [www.selbt-staendig.de](http://www.selbt-staendig.de).

self-organisation, did it become possible to build facilities, apartments and entire buildings specifically conceived to host the representative structure of the workers, the *union*. Such places became the very symbol of a new power, opposed to the administrative, the ecclesiastic and the financial powers. Today people organise themselves in different ways, in different forms, but this has the same purpose: to create a coalition in order to defend oneself and each other, in order to find solidarity and places of encounter. And if nowadays there are less physical places and more virtual ones, if people talk when physically at a distance, if “see you” becomes “c u”, “beaucoup” “bcp” and “che” “ke”, this is nothing but the result of present times, the human condition of 21<sup>st</sup>-century man.

But, of course, so-called western democracy does not take into consideration these realities. Each time the governments are faced with work issues, “they convoke the social parties”, such as the unions and the manufacturers’ association. By doing so they simply re-stage a useless old ritual that has no longer the legitimacy to give an answer to the problem of a labour force held captive by short-term, unstable work. The unions do not represent this labour force; they never wanted to represent it. How can they presume to be entitled to speak in their name?

## The Visible Protest

Whenever someone mentions public protest, immediately and vividly the French movement that grew in the spring of 2006 comes to mind, a movement that opposed the law of the “first employment contract” (CPE) of de Villepin’s government. A movement that actually started a few months earlier in smaller towns such as Rennes and Poitiers and then progressively spread throughout France. This is not the right place to give a detailed account of this movement, but there are nevertheless several elements that can be useful to enrich our understanding of what a coalition is today. The first observation concerns the ‘traditional’ forms of protest, such as gatherings, demonstrations and occupations of ‘external’ places. In other words, the form of *visibility* is a necessary condition to make the protest perceptible for those who are concerned about getting through

to the institutions. This consideration renders more relative the efficiency of the Web. Although the power of such an instrument, if well used, is a fact, it is nevertheless not sufficient to start a dynamic process that leads to a negotiation with public powers. The government systems deal with the logics of patronage (to be in power means to be able to have access to public funds in order to use them for one's own party or party politics) and of visibility. It is certainly true that mass media are a support for politicians and their governments; they are probably even the fundamental instruments of their stability. Yet, at the same time, the politicians and the governments are held captive by the media. A thousand Internet sites cannot produce the same effect that a demonstration does in the centre of Paris – that consequently results in battles with the police and severely injured persons. Unfortunately the deaf ear that politics turns to civil society is such that only the reality of the demonstration seems to draw the attention of governments. Therefore, the use of the Web cannot take the place of the public, visible and tactile dimension of the protest, although it is a powerful instrument of the constitution of a consciousness of identity and of coalition. But the public dimension, the mass dimension of the protest needs to have a certain amount of characteristics, the first one of which is *continuity*. If the CPE protest had been merely a single massive demonstration, the news would have been in the press for only a few days, after which everything would have gone back to normal and the government simply would have ignored it. But after three months, during which time Paris was regularly jammed due to peaceful student demonstrations, the government was forced to add the CPE problem to its agenda.

There is another series of observations that one must make concerning this movement. The majority of participants, including the most active ones, had no previous political experience. How can such a majority come about out of nowhere, undeniably showing political maturity? Why did the young French succeed in an attempt that young Italians seemed incapable to accomplish? A failure that is more impressive when one considers the hundreds of actual initiatives in our country leading towards an assumption of identity of the post-Fordist workers movement. Movements do not rise out of nowhere, there

is always an accumulation of experience that passes through underground connections and then appears in full daylight. It is very probable, against the *vulgata* of the opinion-makers, that the fast evolution of the French student movement has not been rendered possible by the *banlieue* riots (autumn/winter 2005) but by the long, continuous (here lies the value of continuity) protest of the *intermittants du spectacle*.<sup>6</sup> People working in theatre had an unstable professional life even before the Fordist era. In France, the legal status of those who work in the fields of arts and entertainment used to allow them to have an income in periods of non-activity. The French government – by attacking the system of “guaranteed income” as part of the reform of the unemployment benefit system in 2003 – provoked a reaction of these workers, who started a protest movement with peculiar characteristics. Apart from the main demonstrations and the boycott of important theatrical events – such as the Avignon theatre festival – they gave the protest the form of dance or mime performances, exploiting their own professional techniques in order to reach a higher level of visibility, which gave the protests a peculiar aesthetic feel, enhancing their communicational strength and thus gaining the sympathy of the citizens. Although they have a very ancient profession, the status of precariousness that is typical of the theatre workers has connected them with the actuality of the general problem of precariousness in the post-Fordist era. The movement of the *intermittants du spectacle* therefore contributed more to the development of the consciousness of young French people than the *banlieue* revolts, which had a different language. The step that followed was the movement of protest of secondary school students against the Fillon reform, a protest during which some of those young people who would later be the promoters of the anti-CPE movement made their first move.

6 See their Internet site [www.cip-idf.org](http://www.cip-idf.org), which in fact represents a far larger reality of types of occasional work. *Intermittants du spectacle* is the definition of the workers in the field of entertainment who can benefit, in France, of a peculiar social protection system: according to the amount of hours of work in one year, they receive a monthly payment in the following one. This system is financed directly by the artists' incomes (T.N.).

If one reads the testimonies that have been widely posted on the Internet site [www.generation-precaire.org](http://www.generation-precaire.org), it appears that the most important contribution to the assumption of identity in the post-Fordist working world comes from those – and they are really a significant number – who denounce the practice of unpaid work, proposed with the specious excuse of offering a *stage*, an apprenticeship training period. Young French people, starting from a quite abstract denunciation of flexible and precarious jobs (abstract because it was not based on concrete experiences, but denounced a possible and probable future) initiated a discussion which brought to light an extreme condition of post-Fordist work – the unpaid work – especially amongst the labour force with a university degree. By doing so they have shaken our tendency to consider as normal the idea that a university graduate can work for free for years in public institutions or private agencies whose owners earn millions of Euros each year.

Since its launch – more as a functional space than as an official site of the movement – the site [www.generation-precaire.org](http://www.generation-precaire.org) hosted thousands of testimony acts that sometimes have engendered intense debates, for instance when people (and they are many) write to attack either the act of protesting as such or its goals.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, the stories told by French people, if compared with the Italian, seem to come from younger persons, rarely over 30 years of age: in these stories one can detect a sense of dismay faced with the absence of public regulation (perhaps because the State is not as absent as it is in Italy), and they often display a “tendency towards exodus”, a will to leave a country that despises its own human resources. As an example I have chosen the following testimony:

On 26th March, 2006, Emi138 writes:

(...) It has been 10 years now that I have strayed. First I was in London, then I seized an opportunity and obtained a contract in Scandinavia. I was there for 4 years (in two different institutions), then in Luxembourg (a country that I did not like much). I found a husband via the Internet. At the time, he was in the USA. A series of events brought me to the USA, and then two years later we returned to France, which has been a real catastrophe for me, profes-

sionally. Then I left for Canada two years ago. I did not want my son to be born in France. I consider a double nationality as something essential. In a couple of years I will obtain the Canadian nationality. At the moment, I work with some interesting types of contract, as an employee or self-employed. Of course it is not at all the desired stable job, but when you have a little child it is more practical like this. In a year's time I'll get a stable job, which my husband already has. I meet a lot of people and I gain experiences that would not have been possible in France. 10 years ago I did not match any specific category, and therefore my profile was not competitive. These are just examples, but I could produce a whole list of persons who live very well abroad... it is different. Of course things are not as one would expect them, but still it is an opportunity to face reality, to make experiences that France cannot offer. This is enough to say: *je ne regrette rien*.

Exactly as it happened a century ago to millions of semi-literate proletarians, the tendency of the literate generations of the post-Fordist world to emigrate is a justified reaction to the feeling of not having a place, but at the same time it is an attitude of surrender that takes the opposite sense of the necessity to create a coalition. The Internet site [www.generation-precario.org](http://www.generation-precario.org) has recently proposed to add the *stages*, the apprenticeship training periods, to the Labour Law in order to render mandatory a payment of the working time related to the SMIC (the minimum legal salary, equivalent to €8.44 hour), but primarily to give these training periods their original meaning, which is to train and to form. To this extent it is necessary to get rid of the abuses through which they are transformed into the substitution of paid work with an unpaid one.<sup>8</sup> Will they be able to reach their goals now that

7 They also edited *Sois stage et tais-toi*, La Découverte, April 2006 [wordplay mixing "Be wise and shut up" and "Do an unpaid apprenticeship training period and shut up"].

8 The issue of unpaid work has been raised in Germany by [www.generation-praktikum.de](http://www.generation-praktikum.de), and more recently in Austria by [www.generation-praktikum.at](http://www.generation-praktikum.at).

Sarkozy has been elected president? Meanwhile, their Internet site constantly sends reports of traineeships that pretend nothing has happened:

Leading European publisher of traveller and consumer guides.

In the framework of the editing of its next guide, the publisher Le Petit Futé offers an apprenticeship position. Functions: management and unification of the addresses database (classification, retyping, layout), collection of addresses, search and control of information, re-writing and copy-editing of texts, proof-reading and corrections, photo editing.

Required skills and profile: attentive and methodical, trained in software use, good analysis and synthesis skills. Interested in the publishing field, good editing skills and excellent grammar and orthography knowledge.

Area of work: Ile-de-France

Starting from: immediately

Wage: none

Place: Paris, 15th Arr.

Let me end these notes on the young French movement by stressing a problem that presents a particular difficulty to the spontaneous protest movements, those that grew from initiatives by small groups and then progressively have expanded themselves, turning into mass movements, acquiring visibility and thus becoming a problem for the government. The problems are the trade unions and the official parties, which have the feeling of being left aside and delegitimised by the spontaneous movement. Starting from that moment, they jump into the situation headfirst in an attempt to perform what is currently called a "recovery operation". These professionals of failure always use the same codified procedures. At first they manifest their solidarity to the new spontaneous movement and take part in demonstrations taking on a secondary position. Then, relying on the fact that they are more trained in politics than the spontaneous leaders,

and counting on the fact that they have a different goal (often simply the failure of the movement), they enter into the decision-making assemblies, where they start a constant action of delegitimisation of the spontaneous leadership. Thirdly, little by little, they impose a different language, the extreme left-wing worn-out language, the cheesy bureaucratic procedures of the small bureaucracy of the party (of the sect, in fact). Their enemy, to be honest, is not the movement as such, but *political innovation*. If they are members, as it often happens, of parliamentary or governmental parties, or if they are trade union members, they often act in agreement with their counterpart, serving as mediators or opening negotiation without asking the authorisation of the movement. It is a bloodsucker strategy, a strategy that leads to tiredness and disillusionment in those young people who for the first time are engaged in a spontaneous movement.

The remaining Stalinist genes are nowadays mixing with the worst form of opportunism. Seen in this light, the most recent history of the Italian left-wing parties is more about a destruction and dissipation of energies than a production of new ones. This is why one must say loud and clear that the strategy of open protest, of street demonstrations, of a continuous and structured mass movement is a dangerous path. This is not because of the possible reaction of the State forces (we are talking here about peaceful protests that have no interest in lighting up violence) but because of the covert control, of the blood-sucking attitude of the so-called allies. Unfortunately, so far there are no available forms of protection against such a virus.

And this is a particularly devastating virus, because the assumption of identity of the post-Fordist workers can only grow and affirm itself in political innovation, i.e. when those paradigms and schemata of thought change which are typical not of the neo-liberal part of the Left, but of the part that affirms its communist identity. For the latter, in fact, the main reference is the Fordist worker type, and therefore they think that the worker's rights concern only those who have a classical status of dependent worker.

Also those who in 2001 invented, promoted and organised 1 May demonstrations such as the Mayday Parade had to face these kinds of problems. In the framework of the reflection on the

problem of the coalition, one needs to make a difference between the 'event' of the Mayday Parade and the complex, multi-faceted, and vital movement that is part of this event, but which in fact for several years now has generated long-term action regarding other plans in which the theme of work is one of many aggregative subjects and not always the most important.

I do think that the 'event' of the Mayday Parade is important for at least two reasons. The first one is that it has given back to 1 May (Labour Day) its original symbolical strength, a strength that in contemporary history is tied in with the dignity of the workers and the liberation of the labour force. 1 May is a symbolic date in the history of civilisation, a date that in the last twenty years has reduced the culpable lack of memory of the Left to a sort of holiday and to a series of senseless commemorative rituals celebrated in public, on stages full of official authorities. One should not play with symbols: they have the role of the flag, they keep memory alive and they stress fundamental values. The fact that this initiative comes from young people who are not indebted, neither to the official Left, nor to small sectarian groups, young people who made their intellectual experiences in completely different realities – such as self-organised social centres, workers' cooperatives, common initiatives of survival, sometimes across the Ocean – signals the fact that the Left is no longer entitled to bear this name. Its historical time is over. The most ancient values – the most sacred ones, I would say – of the workers' movement (work as a value in itself) are better represented nowadays by a demonstration structured as a carnival parade – following the structures of the Gay Pride or the Love Party – than by a march of people singing "Bandiera Rossa" and "Bella Ciao". This is the second reason why I do believe that the Mayday Parade was indeed a significant demonstration: it gave a clear impulse to change the aesthetics of protests. The idea of San Precario<sup>9</sup> emerges as part of a general taste for paradoxes and irony, but through it the demonstrations find again, at least partially, the strength and the authenticity of

9 The invention of a saint protector of the flexible workers (T.N.).

popular celebrations of the Saint Protector. And I have to admit that I prefer such popular manifestations to some trade union demonstrations that look more like the processions that carry grandma to the grave than like a class struggle. It is in Milan that the Mayday Parade started off, and this is where it grew, with its parade of trucks loaded with sound-systems and beer barrels. But why did it start in Milan? Most likely, because of the class structure and the advanced post-Fordist system of the city, a city which is dependent on the market of signs and images, a city built on the media and entertainment industry, on fashion and its infinite articulations, on design, advertisement, informatics, and on services for enterprises. The city of logistics, surrounded by storage and distribution spaces, which have boomed out of the blue all around the metropolitan area on a territory that nowadays goes from Piacenza in the south, to Novara in the west and to the Swiss border in the north, with a concentration which bears few resemblances in Europe. A city, therefore, of flexible, temporary jobs in all possible typologies of work, from the most basic tasks up to the most sophisticated skills, with immense wage differences. A city of independent workers, both in the traditional way and in the form of “second-generation independent work”. A city of deregulation, of the absence of public control, city suffocated by three pachyderms: that of capital, real estate and the university. A city in which the pauperist complaint is not habitual. A guinea-pig city, enduring the roughest capitalist experiments, always trying to cope with them, always trying to get from them something more than a fistful of breadcrumbs.

The impulsion toward the necessity of a coalition in post-Fordist work started in self-organised groups, it was initiated by persons (and they are not always young persons) who have understood for twenty years now that in a city like Milan – where there is a lack of public regulation and where most of what should belong to the domain of public services and public institutions has been progressively taken over by a trust of companies – it is useless to ask what you need, for no one will listen: you have to take it yourself. In France, the protest did not take its first steps at universities, but in the field of entertainment. In Milan – in a similar way but much earlier – everything that is creative and vital in the framework

of the assumption of identity of the post-Fordist work does not come from academia. The university student as a political actor is no longer a reality in Milan, since thirty years at least, and this is probably the most important success that the capitalist stabilisation has obtained in this part of the country. Instead, the very heart of the initiative is constituted by people who work in the media, in information technology and similar branches. This labour force is professionally skilled, although it often has no university training, but comes from technical or professional schools. It is a labour force that can navigate into the labour market, finding its way between temporary and autonomous jobs and work experiences abroad. It is a labour force that takes pride in independence and is therefore free from the illusion of the life-long work position. I think that the reminiscence of the workerist experience of the 1960s and of the 1970s means something important to this class category, and that a journal such as *Primo Maggio* (we did not choose the title for no reason, what the hell!) is a part of its DNA.

Mayday Parade is an initiative of a group of media workers, a group of media-activists who are part of important Milanese self-managed independent political groups. They are active on a double level: on the one hand, on the level of the existential condition of flexibility, in which they try to obtain the rights and protections declared in the Constitution. On the other hand – and this is probably the most important aspect – on the level of the *production* of new symbols and new languages through nets of communication of reciprocal acknowledgement.<sup>10</sup>

Mayday has later become Euromayday, a set of more or less successful initiatives in various European cities. It is not easy to understand what the future of such an event will be; but nevertheless one has to see it as an important part of the long march towards the assumption of identity of the post-Fordist work. Far more important than this will be the evolution

<sup>10</sup> See [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org). It is interesting to note that the Mayday event has been studied by sociologists and by researchers of the social movements. See Mattoni (2007); Dorr & Mattoni (2007). [www.precarity-map.net](http://www.precarity-map.net) is building a database of collective research projects.

of the class structure that has given life to such an event. The possibility for the coalition to take a leap forward or fail to do so depends exactly on this.<sup>11</sup>

It does seem to me that the Italian flexible workers movement, which started in 2006, is of a different kind. It is different because of the central role of university researchers, of flexible workers in the public sector, and of university students. It is also different because it has been strongly conditioned by the centrality of the fight against the law No. 30.<sup>12</sup> It is different because it adopted the theme of the stabilisation of working positions as a predominant one; because the tendency it pursues is an illusory abolition of flexibility, rather than a system of guarantees that would allow one to live with flexibility. It is different because it looks for success by means of governmental actions. This last element is crucial and has to be considered with special attention. If we are talking about flexible workers in the public sector, then the government is the appropriate interlocutor, because with regards to the matters of wages, normativity and manpower, the problems are approached through administrative and legislative acts. But for what concerns the private sector – the sector in which the large majority of the labour force that gave life to the Mayday event is employed – the problem is different, and it is quite unlikely that an action on the plan of legislation can produce a change in terms of wages and work conditions: these are results that can be obtained through a series of negotiations with the employers. The government on the contrary is the unique possible counterpart whenever the fundamental rights and the protection of the citizen are at stake. From the point of view of the generalisation of the problems of the post-Fordist conditions of work, the 2006 flexible workers movement has doubtlessly been

11 Nets and fora, such as [www.chainworkers.org](http://www.chainworkers.org), [www.autistici.org](http://www.autistici.org), [precog@inventati.org](mailto:precog@inventati.org) and [www.globalproject.info](http://www.globalproject.info), [www.sanprecario.info](http://www.sanprecario.info), [www.socialpress.it](http://www.socialpress.it) present some of the protagonists of a far more complex "multitude", a constantly evolving "multitude", that one can hardly recognise as such from the outside. Some attempts to read these phenomena have been made in Gigi Roggero et al (2005) and in Agostino Petrillo et al (2006).

12 The Law No. 30 (2003) is the most important legal reference for short-term contracts in Italy (T.N.).

an important step: after these demonstrations no one doubts any longer that it is necessary to create a coalition in order to be considered. For what concerns its political maturity, my opinion is that this movement has partially been a step back, and has partially opened a new perspective. A step backwards, mainly for a reason which is framed by a far more complex problem, the problem that one might call “the anti-Berlusconism’s flat encephalogram”. *Anti-Berlusconism*, indeed. After the 2001 victory of the right-wing coalition no attempt has been made by the defeated in order to understand the situation in terms of a serious analysis of the ways in which society was changing; and, before and after the victory at the local elections – not a single day was spent to conceive a new governmental programme. All the efforts were used to demonise the adversary, and all the positions which were not an invective were considered useless: this produced a *new political illiteracy* amongst the diverse “left-wing people”. A population which was relieved by the invitation to hate the adversary without thinking, thus running blindly into a conformation with the attitudes of the “Berlusconian people”. In this atmosphere of hatred, enhanced by the victory at the 2006 elections, the law No. 30, incorrectly dubbed “Biagi’s law”, was blamed for all major choices in the domain of deregulation of work. Choices of deregulation often promoted by the former centre-left governments, e.g. through the set of legislative acts known as the 1997 *pacchetto Treu*.<sup>13</sup> One has to point out clearly that work relations did not become precarious as a result of a set of laws, but through the reorganisation of the capitalist system: it slowly but surely became a reality, with the help of trade union politics which consisted in the mere defence of the achievements of certain categories of work-labour, ignoring completely all the others. The Treu law itself, to be honest, tried to redress the inadequate efficiency of the public employment agencies by introducing a private system of professional training based on the extension of the legal framework of temporary work. This law was based on a conceptual framework in which the standard

13 The set of laws submitted by the government to be approved by Parliament or a set of decrees is often called *pacchetto*, which means package (T.N.).

model of work was still the classical lifelong contract worker. Its goal was not to establish a general reform of work but to make work in big and middle-size companies and in the public authority sector more flexible. It did not care about the microenterprises, the contract workers or the “second-generation independent workers”. It addressed – and this was essential for the Prodi government programme – the big fish; in other words, its goal was to attack the rigid form at the very core of the Italian work system. These laws were approved after a phase of negotiations with the unions, a phase during which the government faced strong reactions. The law legitimised what in several working areas was already a state of fact. In this sense it simply worked as an enlargement of the cracks in the embankments that had collapsed since long. Nevertheless it gave a strong signal of deregulation, so strong that the market felt free to take a yard instead of the inch it was offered.

Marco Biagi's initial intention was to give a set of rules to a series of new situations and new work typologies, those work typologies that the dominant leftist culture still called ‘atypical’, persistently mentioning them as marginal phenomena, as if they were destined to transform themselves sooner or later into standard forms of work, and as if they were therefore not worthy of a specific juridical framing. “Working positions accepted without a contract, only through an oral agreement? Why not, this is a way to get a working experience, then things will arrange themselves, while if we impose some rules the risk is that these oral agreements last longer, and we also risk to have to cancel the laws because there is no concrete case corresponding to it” – this was the way to think at the time. In contrast to this, and this is the point, what the law No. 30 does, even in the version proposed by Maroni – a version that Biagi did not live to see<sup>14</sup> – by the simple fact of creating a legal framework for these new worker typologies, is to acknowledge their existence, and in this it represents a small step forward if compared to the stupid negation of the existence of such a new reality. What is at stake here is not the creation of

<sup>14</sup> Maroni was the former Welfare Minister. Marco Biagi was murdered by the Nuove Brigate Rosse on 19 March 2002 (T.N.).

rules for flexible work, but the acknowledgement of the fact that in this damn post-Fordist system there is a part of the labour force that is almost always in a condition of uncertainty, unsteadiness, a condition which has become a normal status. It is useless to deny this reality by trying to force these persons into the framework of classical Fordist dependent work. At the same time it is in the interest of the assumption of identity of the post-Fordist work to acknowledge that such a flexible condition is not only a condition imposed by the “hard laws of capital”, but is at least partially a *choice* operated in order to protect a certain autonomy and independence, or in order to reconcile the work for a third party and work of personal care. If one wants to create a coalition, he or she has to bear in mind that post-Fordism is a result of a double drive; on the one hand, of the capitalist reorganisation of work, on the other hand, of the refusal of dependent work, a refusal that for instance played a role in the 1977 movement. This making work flexible and precarious is also a product of our will. Therefore one must erase from the language of the coalition any victimising attitude. The women’s movement is giving a good example in this sense, when it criticises the form of feminism that depicts women always and only as victims (of discrimination, of abuse, of violence, etc.) and is thus asking the government for special protection. It is part of post-Fordist reality that women are able to act not as passive figures but as active subjects that can build – also through discontinuous work – “strategies of freedom”, as the title of a collection of accounts edited by Cristina Borderias states (2000).

But let’s get back to Biagi’s law. I consider it a deeply dishonest intellectual and political attitude to claim that the laws and decrees approved during Berlusconi’s government are more responsible for the deregulation of work contracts than the laws and decrees approved during Prodi’s government in 1997. And it is always counterproductive to disfigure the facts.

The 2006 flexible workers’ movement, whose origins date back much earlier, had on the contrary opened new perspectives for the coalition, because it openly revealed several modalities through which the public authority – and more widely the public sector – functions (or does not function) in Italy. It is a system, a common good, which is in itself a value, an irreplaceable legacy

of civilisation, a system in which lone individuals who have an extraordinary sense of ethics and professional competence work; a system inhabited by a series of characters – in different positions of the hierarchical structure – that can be considered as the true “heroes” of our time, as persons who support a miserable and collapsing dwelling that shelters an ever-increasing amount of persons who have been correctly described as *nullafacenti* – people who are “doing-nothing”, “idle” (Ichino 2006). The combination of these two extreme situations, as mentioned, reveals the true characteristics of post-Fordist work. Only the flexible researchers’ movement, for instance, would be able to reveal in a *visible* way – and it has partially accomplished this task – the treachery that concepts such as “research centre” or “excellence pole” often shield. It would suffice to consider critically the problem of innovation, all along the chain from university laboratory to leading experiment to product development to factory application, in order to substantively contribute to what one can call, using Marxist terminology, a “critique of the economy of knowledge”. The same applies to the healthcare system, the school system, the public institutions of art and culture, and the like. This is the way to produce real *elites*. We do have to face the fact that one day a new managing class will be needed, a managing class different from this confused net of personal ambitions produced by the actual party system. If this country still exists at that time.

I have emphasised the difference between the class structure of the self-managed “Milanese” organisations and the “Roman” requests, as if the entire private sector were in the north of Italy and the public sector in the south. The reality is slightly different, both from a geographical and a social perspective, but today, in order to reaffirm certain principles and conceptual schemas one has to (this is my modest opinion) use strong colours.

### Attempts of Coalition

In these last ten years, some of us – in order to understand what was happening to us and what was happening in the work world – have re-enacted the

original feminist attitude to gather in small groups and talk about work, questioning its sense with other women, *starting from own experience*, and also questioning its foundations (...) a story-telling attitude is the right tool in order to break the paradigmatic framework (which consists in transforming the work and the workers into objects of analysis, instead of letting them speak) with a new experience, an experience that also reflects the strict relation that female politics has with life.

(Cigarini 2006)

There is no need to quote the statistics on the “feminisation” of the work market in order to show that nowadays the work of women is not just an easy part of the work market, but is work *as such*. This has nothing to do with percentages or parts: it is rather a question of mental attitudes, of management techniques, of selling strategies. Today a full mental and physical commitment is required, and the walls of private family life are breached; this produces a new *domestication*, and new immaterial goods require intellectual, neural energies (rather than muscular ones). Work is organised so as to maximise the exploitation of women’s productivity of work, for instance, by integrating women’s tendency to be committed to caring work and relying on the fact that women will “make a difference” due to their sense of responsibility. We briefly mention – but this would be another topic – the use of the female figure in the industry of signs and of imagination, in the entertainment industry and so on. Woman as capital and woman as item of merchandise. Women are thus the real protagonists of post-Fordist work. It is also quite evident that they are the sparks of the dynamics of the coalition, and in a lot of cases they are the important decision-makers in this context. First and foremost, the idea to start off from direct accounts of lived experiences is the sign of a solid political practice; it is a gesture of emancipation and solidarity. On top of this, it can also be a good practice for research: the theme of this text is not the research ‘into’ work, but the coalition ‘of’ post-Fordist work.

In her introduction to the small volume entitled *Tre donne e due uomini parlano del lavoro che cambia* (2006) Adriana Nannicini reports on the existence of a series of initiatives on the

subject of work, initiatives which, starting from 2000/2001, were led by women's groups. Within this framework she quotes several Internet sites which host testimonies, thoughts and proposals. She writes:

In the development of complex and fruitful practices of knowledge, how is the problem of the connection with transformative practices posed? Several women acknowledge the fact that the existence of a group can alone modify, for single women, some of their conditions of life in the working place. Therefore the questions are: to which extent an individual transformation can become a collective one? How is it possible to produce a change in those working situations that cannot be modified by an individual all by herself?

What happened at a demonstration in Milan on 14 January 2006 is highly significant. This demonstration gathered more than 200,000 persons who were called to participate by a word-of-mouth chain initiated through a series of e-mails sent by a journalist. On the one hand, the slogans of the demonstration were influenced by the historical inheritance of the 1970s feminism (pro choice and so on); on the other, the young generations stressed the importance of the fact that the choice of maternity is conditioned by the precariousness of the working conditions – as several testimonies show that were posted on blogs and quoted in the beginning of this text.<sup>15</sup>

The fundamental contribution that women can give to the assumption of identity of the post-Fordist work produces two lines of organisation, which are both highly important.

The first one can be expressed in a very simple way. If nowadays feminine work is equal to work *as such*, then the actions of self-defence, the strategies of freedom, the strategies that allow us to live with growing work insecurity, in other words, the strategies necessary to survive in the new organisation of the

15 Adriana Nannicini has written several texts on the relation between women and transformations of work (2002, 2006, 2007).

labour market are the ones created by women's practices. This is the one and only mode of coalition which has a general value, the mode which men have to confront.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly: women are assuming a central role in the movement, starting from the positions that they have in the labour market today, i.e. starting from their important role in highly qualified professions, in which they are often the majority. This produces a power relation which is completely different from the one which typified original feminism, whose primary target was to produce a change in the relations with men on the level of sexuality and on the symbolic level. Several contents of the feminism of the 1970s – and more specifically, their distorted translations into some typical demands of the 1980s and 1990s (“equal opportunities”, “positive discrimination”) – can be put in question, but what cannot be put in question is the very political practice of starting from oneself, a practice whose primary goal is to liberate oneself in order to produce a change in work relations.

Of course, I am more interested in the first aspect, although it is strictly connected to the second one. I start from the belief that the similarities and the differences of gender do not erase the internal connections of class structure: in other words, the pressure to create a coalition is in direct proportion to the lacerations generated in middle-class society by the post-Fordist system. What is at stake here is the necessity to re-establish a society that guarantees the self-protection of work, a society which is able to negotiate with politics not through a constellation of groups, but via a real social lobby. Therefore there is a serious need for the human resources of those who take up a strong market position. If it is true that history can teach us something, we can see that the same thing occurred in the factory-workers' movement: those who could read and write were the ones who initiated the process of coalition, but in the end it was the “mass worker” who dictated the conditions.

If the feminine practice of coalition is equivalent to the coalition *as such*, and if therefore all the other models have to be connected with this one, then a new mode of recruitment

16 Cf. Touraine (2006); AA.VV. [Women World] (2003).

of the *elites* seems possible, through an abandonment of the manner of political acting and governing typical of actual parties. If I understand this correctly, this means to go beyond the feminism of pink quotas,<sup>17</sup> which is simply a mechanism of co-optation created in the framework of contemporary politics. The affirmation of the centrality of work issues produces a series of earthquakes in actual political culture and praxis.<sup>18</sup>

Let's get back to the theme of coalition, in order to reflect upon concrete examples and ask ourselves whether these are the sign of an irreversible tendency, or whether they are just temporary phenomena.

It might sound strange, but all these examples come from the universe of "second-generation independent work". Given that I invented this expression ten years ago, I feel obliged to render its sense more palpable. As it was for the other term that I invented, *operaio massa* or mass worker, the intention here was to create a symbolic universe related to the specific mode of organisation of the productive labour in the given historical epoch. In other words, *operaio massa* and *lavoratore autonomo di seconda generazione* are conceived as expressions which condense both the coercive reality of a given mode of organisation of capital, and the potentiality of emancipation and liberation intrinsic to certain values of such types of workers. I never thought that the "mass worker" should be an incarnation of the Fordist working class, nor that "second-generation independent worker" should represent the majority of the post-Fordist labour force. I just wanted to stress that these figures carry specific values: egalitarianism for the "mass worker", self-determination for the "second-generation independent worker". As is known, egalitarianism represents the truly scary monster for the neo-liberal ideology; it is considered as the most poisoned fruit of

17 "Pink quotas", *quote rosa* is the Italian name for practices of positive discrimination for women in politics. The discussion revolves around the possibility to oblige the parties to have an equal amount of female and male candidates on their lists (T.N.). Some left-wing parties already have a *quote rosa* policy in their statutes.

18 See "Via Dogana" (March 2007) *Questo femminismo non ci basta*. [This Feminism Is Not Enough For Us]

'68, as *the* book to burn. I still consider it a positive value. Self-determination is a path, that stretches a long way through various conditions, a challenge that one can win or lose, a challenge that requires all the disposable energies. Self-determination – to paraphrase Foucault – is bio-work, it is something that constantly demands new relational and cognitive instruments, a constant change of human capital, in order to be able to face instability and globalisation, thus going beyond the borders of citizenship with an intellectual attitude that has no State boundaries. Self-determination is an in-between figure, there is no doubt about it, and it will never subvert the actual system (go on, if you think you are able to!). When ten years ago I tried to draw a precise profile of this figure, trying to imagine a concrete example, a name, the first image that popped up in my mind was Drucker's *knowledge worker*, someone who has a *formal education*, who has completed his learning curriculum, who has specific knowledge certified by university degrees and diplomas, and who at the same time has a very solid training in fundamental matters, and can thus frequently change profession, going from one field to another, who has a positive flexibility, a flexibility that he can freely manage and which is not something imposed on him. The second figure that came to mind were the young people of Milan's *autogestione* movement,<sup>19</sup> a group of persons who had their apprenticeship in the field of information technologies through concrete experience, as autodidacts. The generation of the late 1980s and 1990s, the so-called Web generation, did not receive IT training at school; it was self-trained. And this applies both to those who would later take a degree in industrial engineering, and to those who would always refuse to enrol in university. It is precisely this self-training in the field of information technologies and in new communicational media that forged the distinctive character of the class composition that we mentioned in the

19 *Autogestione*, literally "self-management", is the name of the left-wing movement that from the 1970s onwards organised – whilst openly refusing the authority of parties or leaders – communal activities and activities of resistance (and ideally also productive structures), via the support of a squatted facility open to everyone (T.N.).

previous chapter.<sup>20</sup> The reason of the political maturity of these persons – persons who have no university education, whose studies ended when they left technical high schools, but who have a high cultural level because of their intense use of the Internet, and who are certainly more up to date than those who use only traditional means of communication – is not to be found in the reading of classical texts or of ideological texts of the 1960s and 1970s, but in the teaching of the fathers of the Net, persons who started from a communal, egalitarian, and liberal perspectives (free information for all). The “second-generation independent worker” had of course a university training, but is also formed in the Milanese “centri sociali”,<sup>21</sup> places where hundreds of young (and not so young) persons manage the language of symbols far better than university professors do.<sup>22</sup> These persons are committed to the open source movement, and self-determination is crucial in their behaviour; they face openly – and with the necessary intellectual tools – postfordism and the precariousness of work, and therefore they do not endure them passively as a curse. They are deeply inspired by the American reality (although they are paradoxically accused to be “anti-American” when they demonstrate against Bush). They often have inside experience with the “movement” of hackers. The American hackers have turned into something similar to what Bruce Sterling describes in this funny introduction to “CyberView”:

The term “hacker” has had a spotted history. Real “hackers”, traditional “hackers”, like to write software programmes. They like to “grind code”, plunging into its densest abstractions until the world outside the

20 The history of the introduction of the communal attitude of the fathers of the Web in Italy has not been written; it might be useful to read the preface to Fred Turner (2006). In this perspective see also Ross (2003).

21 The *centri sociali* are occupied and self-managed facilities in which persons belonging to the area of the *autogestione* organise political activities, classes on different topics, free libraries, concerts, art events, centres of IT, etc. (T.N.).

22 “Decoder”, the most influential magazine of the first *cybernaut* generation was selling around 8,000 copies per issue already in 1998 (source: Raf “Valvola” Scelsi). For their reference readings see *Cyberpunk. Antologia* (1990).

computer terminal bleaches away. Hackers tend to be portly white techies with thick fuzzy beards who talk entirely in jargon, stare into space a lot, and laugh briefly for no apparent reason. The CyberView crowd, though they call themselves “hackers”, are better identified as computer intruders. They don't look, talk or act like 1960s M.I.T.-style hackers. Computer intruders of the 90s aren't stone pocket-protector techies. They're young white suburban males, and look harmless enough, but sneaky. They're much the kind of kid you might find skinny-dipping (looking into someone's else computer)<sup>23</sup> at 2 AM in a backyard suburban swimming pool (...) One might wonder why, in the second decade of the personal-computer revolution, most computer intruders are still suburban teenage white whiz-kids. Hacking-as-computer-intrusion has been around long enough to have bred an entire generation of serious, heavy-duty adult computer-criminals. Basically, this simply hasn't occurred. Almost all computer intruders simply quit after the age of 22. They get bored with it, frankly. Sneaking around in other people's swimming pools simply loses its appeal. They get out of school. They get married. They buy their own swimming pools. They have to find some replica of a real life.<sup>24</sup>

Yes, of course, but how many of them have become “second-generation independent workers”? How many are now freelancers and, once in the labour market – in their thirties or forties –, how many of them have thought about creating a coalition? Many of them started when they were 16 with theories on cyberspace and open source and when they are 35 they deal with Richard Freeman's theories on open source unionism.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bologna's note.

<sup>24</sup> Available on different Internet sites (for instance <http://lib.ru/STERLINGB/cybervie.txt>). A useful text on life in Silicon Valley from Auerhahn, Brownstein, Darrow, Ellis-Lamkins, available at <http://www.wpusa.org>.

<sup>25</sup> Diamond & Freeman (2002).

The first example of coalition that I would suggest to reflect on is the New York “Freelancers Union”. In 1995 – more or less the same years in which in Milan we were preparing the project of “second-generation independent work” – Sara Horowitz, a New York lawyer and granddaughter of trade union leaders of the 1930s and working in the field of labour rights, set up an Internet site called [www.workingtoday.org](http://www.workingtoday.org). Her intention – as she states in one of the several interviews that she gave in the last ten years – was to “listen”, to collect personal accounts of simple work experiences, exposing the lights and the shadows of these daily life stories.<sup>26</sup> The oral account of work experience has a long tradition in American literature, which produced masterpieces such as Studs Terkel’s *Working*. But beyond the interest that workers themselves have in her work, Sara Horowitz’s project also attracted the attention of private foundations – such as the McArthur Foundation and the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship – who now finance her project, considering it a “genius” initiative, by means of which it is possible to create a social network of relations. A few years later, she created the “Freelancers Union”, the “second-generation independent workers” trade union, which states to have more than 40,000 members in the New York area. People speak about her as a new hero of the workers’ movement, as a “21<sup>st</sup>-century Mother Jones”.<sup>27</sup> On 27 January 2007, she states in the *New York Times*:

More and more people are not going to get their benefits from an employer. Our ultimate goal is to update the New Deal. It is to create a new safety net that’s connected to the individual as they move from job to job.

26 I remember that in Milan at the *Libreria delle Donne* [Women’s bookshop] there was a “listening place” on post-Fordist work typologies.

27 Mary Harris, Irish, known as “Mother Jones”, was one of the most popular and active trade union leaders of the United States from the end of 19th century to the 1920s. See *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (2004).

The four main goals of this union are: healthcare protection, fiscal pressure, retirement pensions, actions against insolvent purchasers. Sometimes Horowitz's ideas produce doubts and perplexities, as for instance when during the last election campaign she posted the following on the Internet site <http://www.dmiblog.net>:

What we need, now that fewer people are getting insurance through employers, are new intermediaries. Professional associations, community groups, and even religious congregations could aggregate their members and negotiate with insurance carriers for lower rates and better coverage.

The *new deal* that she proposes seems to be simply limited to the new emergence of a sense of coalition and to the building of a trade union which can represent the new labour force; it does not seem to imply the reconstruction of the *welfare state*. Horowitz seems to accept realistically the necessity to live with neo-liberalism. This attitude is reflected with a sense of superiority by most of the left-wing politicians (with the exception of the D'Alema movement), who speak out proudly how much they dislike the fact that the Freelancers Union abandoned strike as a tool. But can they tell how *precisely* is a freelancer supposed to strike? I am interested in this union because of the sharpness with which it intervenes in the American middle class crisis. "*Welcome to middle-class poverty!*" was the recruitment campaign slogan: a recruitment campaign led in bus stations and in the underground. One has to surf regularly and attentively their Internet site [www.freelancersunion.org](http://www.freelancersunion.org) in order to capture its communicative skills: it proposes juridical, legislative and fiscal information, a section on self-help, the presentation of the "member of the week", which becomes a tool of promotion of his or her professionalism, an advice section on how to invest savings, advertisement of vacant individual offices; in other words it proposes whatever goes from the union representation of the worker's interests to the survival handbook. Of course there is not only virtual communication in it, but also the promotion of

direct meetings via the tool of the networking parties. In January 2007 the Office of the New York City Comptroller published the results of an analysis on the Big Apple freelancers.

Data published by the U. S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) confirm that self-employment is a growing factor in our City's labour market (...) The BEA data indicate that the City's overall job base is actually nearing 4.5 million, rather than the 3.7 million figure often cited. Since 1975, the job base has grown by about 700,000, and self-employment has accounted for nearly two-thirds of the increase. (...) The number of self-employed workers in the City hit a low-point in 1976, and since then has grown at an average annual rate of 3.3 %. According to the BEA, the City had 720,000 self-employed workers in 2004, an increase from 8 to 16 % of total labour force. (...) One of the fastest growing categories of self-employed workers is providers of computer systems services, including software design and systems maintenance. In 2004, there were 10,704 such self-employed consultants in the City, a 76% increase from 1997. Their average reported income from such independent employment was \$35,900.

Far more numerous in 2004 were independent artists: 38,810. But the most impressive increase is the one in the field of personal care, more specifically in that of childhood care. If one includes this last category in the field of "traditional services" the augmentation of the "second-generation independent work" does not look major. On 16th April 2009 the City Council had an extraordinary meeting during which the representatives of the union were received and a discussion on the UBT, the city's tax on companies' incomes, was planned, as well as a discussion on the problem of the services that the public powers can offer to *freelancers*.

But in fact the crisis of the middle class also opened a space for other types of organisation, as demonstrated, for instance, by the fact that in 2006 Barbara Ehrenreich, a journalist known for her commitment against war and a militant feminist,

decided that it was necessary to bring another initiative into life, the Internet site [www.unitedprofessionals.org](http://www.unitedprofessionals.org), whose aims are explained as follows:

UP is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organisation for white-collar workers, regardless of profession or employment status. We reach out to all unemployed, underemployed and anxiously employed workers – people who bought the American dream that education and credentials could lead to a secure middle class life, but now find their lives disrupted by forces beyond their control. Our mission is to protect and preserve the American middle class, now under attack from so many directions, from downsizing and outsourcing to the steady erosion of health and pension benefits. We believe that education, skills and experience should be rewarded with appropriate jobs, liveable incomes, benefits and social supports.

Is it not clear? This is not only a problem of “second-generation independent workers”, but, more widely, a problem which concerns the work in the post-Fordist era. And this problem affects the middle class in a particularly strong manner. In this case too, it is very instructive to surf on the Internet site. Conceived in the most sophisticated manner, and aesthetically more accurate than the Freelancers site, it shows a great vitality, a remarkable will not to give up, revealing in full light the conditions of dependent *work*.

At first, the inventor of this Internet site asked the users to answer the following question: “What is the most useful, the most important thing that an organisation like this one could do for *professionals* like you?” The answer was very clear: advocacy, i.e. “someone who can speak for us, who supports our cause”. Sociologists would say that this shows a lack of representation. Do we realise that something new is happening in social processes? Classes, parts of society that traditionally behaved individualistically, that in the best-case scenario gathered in order to defend the interests of their own professional category, today identify themselves as a class, and they organise

themselves in the manner in which workers used to organise themselves a hundred years ago.

Let's now consider a third example of coalition, which was created in Milan in 2004:

*Acte (Associazione di Consulenti nel Terziario Avanzato – Association of Consultants in High-Tech Tertiary Sector)* is an association of representation constituted by a pool of free-lance professionals working in the high-tech tertiary sector, whose costumers are mainly private enterprises and public companies. This association was primarily created in order to collect all those professional activities which are not represented by professional associations or which are represented by professional associations which cannot offer welfare services; nevertheless it also welcomes members of professional associations who do have their own welfare system,<sup>28</sup> especially if they belong to those associations which have a majority of dependent workers amongst their members and are not yet very active in the protection of the interests of independent workers.<sup>29</sup>

This is what is stated on the main page of their Internet site. A “second-generation independent workers” association, which makes an explicit reference to my work from 1997 (Fumagalli 1997). Such an experiment is still minoritarian, but it contributes to laying bare the post-Fordist work condition, denouncing the worst cases, structuring a set of demands and goals, keeping alive the debate on government decisions, warning about problems introduced by the new fiscal or administrative norms

28 With the notion of “associations provided (or not) with their own welfare system” we translate the Italian expression *ordini professionali con (o senza) cassa*. An *ordine professionale* is an association of professionals of a given sector, which has the public function of evaluating whether persons with certain necessary educational titles are apt to becoming professionals in that field. Such *ordini* are often provided with their own welfare system, the prerogatives of which have been negotiated separately between the *ordine* and the State (T.N.).

29 From the Internet site [www.actainrete.it](http://www.actainrete.it).

that seem to be written in order to complicate the lives of independent workers (and in particular women's lives), making a survey in order to know how many professionals work without any framework of rules – an attempt which is particularly difficult due to the chaos of numbers, the lack of classificatory and statistic criteria, the senseless suspicion of certain institutions that do not want to render public their own databases. And of course such an experiment also contributes to the collection of testimonies of real cases.<sup>30</sup> Often, such cases concern women who chose to have an independent position in order to reconcile the necessity of an income and the care for family and children. These women are in most cases satisfied with their choice. But the most demanding work of the Association is in the clarification of the status of these professional profiles, in the fact that it takes them out of that swamp of prejudices and common opinions which masks the condition of the “second-generation independent worker”. This type of worker is often painted, especially by the Left, as a tax evader, and therefore as a negative, subversive character. And the Left holds on to this opinion even if you explain to them that the “second-generation independent worker” does not have individuals, but private and public companies for clients – structures who have a clear interest in keeping track of their outcomes. Therefore, even if he wanted to evade taxes he would not be able to do it, because the first ones to control their fiscal position are the clients themselves. For ten years now we have been trying to explain this to them in vain.

Prodi's government and minister Damiano, despite some declarations of good will, have in fact made the conditions of the “second-generation independent workers” lives' worse through a series of tax augmentations that were not followed by an augmentation of the services for this work category. The idea behind their actions – an idea with which the unions agree – is double: a decrease of the cost of dependent work, which

30 *Partita IVA e dintorni. Riflessioni su vite vissute a suon di fatture.* [Independent Work: Reflections On Lives Lived on the Rhythm of Invoices]. Freely downloadable at [www.actainrete.it](http://www.actainrete.it).

would encourage the enterprises to hire more persons via regular contracts, and a parallel augmentation of the cost of independent work, which would discourage enterprises to use these types of workers. This is a wrong and counterproductive idea. It is wrong for several reasons: a) it treats as similar on the one hand the situations of those workers who are independent on paper, but who work for one company at its premises and with fixed working hours and on the other hand the situations of real independent workers who have several clients and who themselves chose their autonomous status and therefore do not want to be hired – this applies particularly to women, who can thus have time for family care; b) it is thought that through this idea it is possible to produce an effect on the market, but in order to change its behaviour the market requires different inputs. As an example one might consider how in my area of competence, the attempt to increase the cost of truck transport in order to push the enterprises to use railways for the shipping of their goods has been vain; even the extraordinary increase of oil prices did not push companies to change their behaviour. Why? Because the problem is not the costs, but the availability of resources. Companies hire flexible workers via different forms of contracts not because of a lower cost of the labour power unit, but exactly because they are flexible, because they can be used and thrown away. In a similar fashion, companies use trucks because they can have them in front of their own gates in the blink of an eye, while trains demand a very structured organisation; c) there is a certain tendency to keep on believing that the unlimited dependent work contract is the best possible option; the research presented on 12th May, 2007 at the International Forum *Economia e società* by the Centro sull'Organizzazione Aziendale of the Bocconi University [Centre of Studies on Enterprise Management] directed by Anna Grandori, entitled *Il lavoro contemporaneo: nuove dimensioni delle relazioni e dei contratti di lavoro* [Contemporary Work: New Dimensions of Work Relations and Work Contracts], shows extensively what we already knew, i.e. that classical dependent work is becoming even more flexible in comparison to time-based dependent work or internal independent work,<sup>31</sup> and that people, as soon as they

can, move from one company to another.<sup>32</sup> But the framework of action of Prodi's government, of his Minister of work and of the trade unions is counterproductive, and it is an obstacle for employment and development.

### 'Lady Italy's' Measures

What is 'Lady Italy's' bosom size? And her hips' size? Those who govern Italy would have to know it by heart, but sometimes they act as if they didn't have the faintest clue. I quote here a passage from a text that I put online on the occasion of the 2007 Mayday Parade and which is not part of my book.<sup>33</sup> "According to an official note from ISTAT (the Italian National Institute for Statistics) released on October 2006, 47% of labour power in the market area<sup>34</sup> – i.e. 7,683,000 persons – work in companies with less than 10 employees, and 6,179,000 of them work in companies who employ less than 2.7 workers. If we add the 1 million persons who work in companies that have no more than 15 workers to this, we obtain more or less 8.5 million of persons, on a total of 16.5 million, who are not protected by the Article 18 of the Labour Statutes.<sup>35</sup> Therefore the unlimited time contract is a system of protection that applies only to less than 50% of the workers of the market area (i.e. excluding the public sector workers). If we adopt

31 The position of the worker who is formally independent but in fact working inside a company (T.N.).

32 Subordinate work in Italy, also in terms of average income, is not particularly convenient if compared to "atypical" forms of contract. According to an enquiry quoted in [www.lavoce.info](http://www.lavoce.info) on 21 March 2006, the average net income of a time-based subordinate worker is €12,438, €10,191 for a short-term subordinate worker (contract theoretically related to a specific project), €15,342 for an unlimited time contract worker, and €23,277 euro for an independent worker (Mandrone, Massarelli 2006).

33 *Uscire dal vicolo cieco! (on occasion of Mayday 07, Milan)* available on [www.lumhi.net](http://www.lumhi.net) [How To Escape this Dead-End Road]. By "this book" Bologna means *Ceti medi senza futuro* (2007). (T.N.).

34 All workers except the ones who work for public institutions and public companies (T.N.).

35 Article 18 protects the workers of enterprises with more than 15 workers in case they are made redundant without stating a reason (T.N.).

the perspective of the welfare system, the number of those who can benefit from the *Cassa Integrazione*<sup>36</sup> is even less important, because it concerns only the 5.3 million workers employed in companies with more than 50 persons.

Therefore the Italian labour market – even if we do not include the public and para-public sector – has an important component of flexible work as part of unlimited-time work contracts. It is on the basis of this substratum that unstable precarious work grows.

But let's take a closer look at this substratum, because we will never be able to understand the nature of precarious, ultra-flexible work if we do not fully grasp the terrain where it is cultivated. One might like it or not, but the real “black hole” of this substratum is made of the 6 million who work in enterprises with 3 or less employees. Why “black hole”? For two main reasons. The first is that an organism with less than three dependent workers cannot be called an “enterprise”. Even if one has only read a school textbook on economics, one knows that an enterprise is an institution constituted by three separate figures or roles: capital, management and labour power. In family enterprises, capital and management are almost always the same. One can call “enterprise” a structure composed by three or less persons only for ideological reasons, i.e. in order to integrate into the capitalist bourgeoisie the heterogeneous universe composed by those realities of work which have an elementary level of organisation: an ancient reality, which has become massive within the post-Fordist world. These 6,179,000 workers are in fact composed partially of the so-called “individual enterprises” (another absurd and mystifying expression), and partially by independents workers who have one, two or three employees – often employed with unlimited time contracts. The second reason for which this is a real “black hole” is that this universe and the one closest to it – i.e. the enterprises with less than 10 employees – *generate the most important demand*

36 Unemployment benefit given in the case of a reduction in production which leaves a certain number of employees unemployed for a limited duration of time (T.N.).

*of labour force*, that is, they produce the highest employment. The middle and big enterprises in fact – and in particular the 2,000 extremely competitive enterprises which compose the hard core of Italian capitalism and which are analysed in the 2006 Mediobanca research (the research that anyone who wants to have a good idea about the Italian capitalist system should learn by heart) – have *constantly* reduced the number of employees in the decade 1996/2005.<sup>37</sup>

But this is not all. In 1993 in Italy the unions signed a horrible agreement about the cost of labour, after which for ten years the wages in both the private and the public sector were hardly raised, a fact that did not occur in any other country of the European Union. Notwithstanding this stagnation of salaries, the enterprises did not stop taking their production abroad, externalising services, shrinking more and more the “core manpower” field, and expanding the sectors of the microenterprise and of independent, minimally structured, work. The salary freeze was supposed to encourage the growth of companies, which would hire more persons on a ‘stable’ basis. What happened was the exact opposite: they became increasingly fragmented, smaller and more fragile. Confindustria’s (Italian Manufacturers Union) minions define this situation as “molecular capitalism”. Give us a break! This situation simply means that six million persons are working in a pre-capitalist situation, persons who never had the possibility to have 1 cent of a loan from a bank, while the enterprise that was until recently owned by Tronchetti Provera had 43 billions of Euros of debts with banks. Everyone – except Beppe Grillo, thank God – thinks this is normal. There are millions of persons who never had access to benefits and subsidies that are conceived for the workers of big enterprises. All these so-called microcompanies do not have access to capitals and to subsidies such as the Cassa Integrazione. They only rely on their human capital, i.e. the know-how of their workers. But even in such a position of absolute inferiority within the market, this is the area that produces the highest results in terms of employment.

<sup>37</sup> *Dati cumulativi di 2010 società italiane. Edizione 2006*, available freely on [www.mbres.it](http://www.mbres.it). [Global Data of 2010 Italian Companies]

Big companies that are making the largest profits in their history – this is documented in Mediobanca’s survey – do not contribute to an increased employment; often they contribute to a reduction in employment. Italian capitalism is really odd and the Italian capitalist structure is clearly an anomaly. But who is paying the price for this? It is, of course, human capital, with its knowledge and skills. In November of 2006, the governor of the Italian Central Bank, Mario Draghi, speaking to the students of Roma’s University, stated:

Starting from the middle of the last decade, in Italy work productivity has increased one point less than the average of the other OCSE countries. This phenomenon is at the origin of the actual crisis of competitiveness and growth in which Italy currently finds itself (...) On top of this situation there is also a worsening of the conditions of global efficiency of the economic system. This situation is synthesized by the recent reduction of the level of total productivity of the factors, *and this is a unique case amongst the industrialised countries* [emphasis added].

Work productivity, as is known, increases proportionally with the way in which human capital (i.e. people’s intelligence and competence), their physical labour, the production of working human energy, are combined with fixed capital, constituted by technologies, machines, managerial systems, material and immaterial nets of infrastructures, etc. The Italian capitalist system either leaves human capital in a state of desertion, putting the entire costs of its reproduction on its shoulders, and depriving it of fixed capital (the universe of “microenterprises”, which I prefer to call the universe of independent work with a minimal level of organisation), or it concentrates its financial resources in the fields that require minimal human capital, i.e. in low-technology fields, areas which are typical of the Italian production typology and of a large part of what are euphemistically called “industrial districts”. But there is more. The Italian capitalist system is not only a low-tech system, it is also a system in which the gain derived from an acquired

position prevails over the profit generated by competition and investments. In Italy the biggest companies are not those that are active in highly competitive areas of the world market – areas that are more or less “developed”, such as the automobile and chemical industries, electronics, publishing, etc. – but those which can count on their monopolistic position, a position which produces an immediate gain (ENI, ENEL, Telecom, Autostrade, banks, insurances)<sup>38</sup> and all these companies are in one way or another “protected”. Whenever there are companies that are able to compete on an international scale in highly developed areas, they are in most cases public companies, such as Finmeccanica (weapons) or Fincantieri (cruise liners), rather than private ones.

Therefore, the political decision to increase the fiscal pressure on second-generation independent work makes life more difficult for the whole universe of independent workers “with a minimal level of organisation”, and for all those microenterprises that all together represent not only an important source of employment, but also a giant reserve of flexibility that benefits the most solid and structured part of the system. On top of this, there are fixed administration and bureaucratic costs that are equal for big enterprises and microenterprises and that are therefore proportionally far more important for the little ones. This transformation of the Ministry of Work – which is an office for investments – into a branch of the Central Tax Bureau is probably not a very smart idea.

## How to Go on?

In my opinion, the model one has to keep in mind is the one of the American choices of coalition, not only because of their style in communication, but also because they present fundamental

<sup>38</sup> ENI is the major Italian gas and oil company, held for 30% by the Italian State; ENEL is the (partially privatised) major electric energy Italian provider; Telecom is the (formerly public) telephone and telecommunication provider, which has been almost totally privatised. Autostrade is the group that manages the largest part of the Italian high-ways network.

problems (middle class crisis, protection of human capital) in a clear and simple way. The small group called ACTA, thanks to its president Anna Soru, has constructed a series of alliances that are formed on a local basis, but can be reproduced on a national level. This can happen to the Libreria delle Donne [Women's Bookshop] for reasons that I already expressed (the central role of women's work in post-Fordism) and with specific groups of workers in those fields in which independent work plays an important role (such realities are typical of towns, and therefore they are an important part of the class composition in Milan). Concerning this topic, I would like to quote another passage in the Mayday document:

It might be useful to reflect on the research made by workers of a major publishing house, the RCS group (newspapers, magazines, books, videos, etc.), an area – the strategic area of information – which is a typical example of the new transformations in the economy, an area which is considered to be a part of the creative class. This research was exclusively concerned with magazines, i.e. the journalistic profession (a profession which still looks like a dream to many young people). In five years (2001-2006) with regards to the total amount of the workers, the percentage of traditional employees has decreased from 23.3% to 7.9%; the percentage of different types of flexible workers has decreased from 20.9% to 11.1%; and the percentage of independent workers – real freelancers – has increased from 55.8% to 81%. For what concerns the income of the *freelancers*, 40% of them earn less than 1,200 Euros (gross) per month, and 18% less than 600 Euros (gross) per month, but there is also 30% that earn more than 2,500 Euros (gross) per month. The largest part of the interviewees (of both sexes) prefer the status of an independent worker than that of an employee.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Many thanks to Cristina Morini for making available the results of this research, realised directly by the persons involved.

In an attempt to escape its isolation, the ACTA has of course contacted the academic world, the three Italian trade unions and several members of the local and the national political world. And this attempt received numerous acknowledgements. But at the moment, the central direction of the unions – and particularly of the CGIL – appears to be completely deaf to this. The ACTA has also promoted, in parallel to other initiatives lead by individuals and by associations, a protest campaign against the way in which the talks on pensions between the unions and the government were conducted, i.e. with a complete overlook on the discussion of the problem of those generations who might have a pension below the level of poverty, or who might not have one at all. A discussion was set up with the local authorities to study how to create *ad hoc* services for freelancers. But the central, most important point is that it is not acceptable that a large amount of citizens are left without basic protection, without the most essential rights. This is something that is declared also by members of Prodi's government. However, they just declare it, and things will really change only when strong and persistent pressure, a pressure that nowadays does not exist, is exerted. The "second-generation independent workers" are often between 35 and 45 years of age, while in New York only 47.8% are under 45. They do not belong to the category of "youth" and therefore it is difficult to find a common point for dialogue with the flexible/precarious workers' movements, movements that consider themselves as proletarian, while I think that they are actually a part of the middle class crisis, or – if this expression cannot be accepted (how can one define what the middle class is?) – one can say that they are part of the disintegration and marginalisation of human capital.<sup>40</sup>

40 I was told that a Eurisko enquiry (2005) elaborated by Prospecta (2006) was presented in Milan. It appears from this study that the structure of Italian society seems to be composed of the following social categories: economical elite 13.1%, rich bourgeoisie (in part with a professional activity) 33.9%, traditional middle class 21.3%, those in situation of marginality 31.7% (traditional poverty, quinquagenarians and more who have lost their jobs and cannot find a new one, young persons having continuously precarious work, parts of the retired, and parts of the employed and underemployed population). It seems that in the →

Notwithstanding this, it would be of the highest value if different areas of the post-Fordist world manage to speak to each other, if they were able to find some common means of reflection. Those who tell young people how things really are in the world are rare. But those who are already inside the labour market could be able to teach them something. At the same time the second-generation independent workers will have to learn from youngsters how not to close themselves into an attitude of merely defending the interests of their own category. They will have to see the necessity of a constant reflection on the present. They will have to keep up as closely as possible with innovations in thought and understand that the more the paradigms of collective thought change, the better it is. They should not be afraid to confront history.

Translated by Bruno Besana with Ozren Pupovac

→ previous decades the traditional middle class represented more than 40% of the population. "Today its percentage importance has been almost divided by two, it passed in a minimal part into the highest sector of the professional bourgeoisie, but in larger part it has been expelled into the marginal class, into the lowest tier", as stated in *Lettera Anesti*, June 2007, available on <http://itenets.org>. I do not fully agree with the concept of the rich bourgeoisie (in part with a professional activity): a high-level manager within an enterprise and a university professor can be put only to a certain extent in the same category, because the former can be fired, whereas the latter is untouchable. What counts more, flexibility or yearly income?

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Political Practices at the End of Capitalism  
by Rastko Močnik

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In this text, I will explore what possibilities political action can create as a consequence of the recent dramatic transformations within the world system. What are the chances that mass action targets fundamental relations of production, wage relations and other relations of exploitation, under the conditions that economic processes create atomised individualism and juridical-political apparatuses operate as obstacles against political organising? Is politics possible when an ideologically unified political caste collectively acts as a general technocrat coordinating technocracies that dominate particular professional domains? Is politics possible when law and market are promoted as the exclusive instruments to coordinate social activities: the bourgeois law (Althusser 1995) and a pervasive deregulated market enforced by international organisations under no (direct) democratic control (WTO, EU, NATO)?

Certainly politics is not only possible, it is actually happening: one only has to look at Latin America or India (Gregorčič 2008). I will, however, examine a less spectacular and a closer instance of politics that deserves some attention due to its paradoxical nature. I want to explore an apparent anomaly: the political success of Slovene trade unions that, having created a united front, blocked radical neo-liberal reforms the government planned in 2005, and imposed their own agenda that centred on the wage relations in 2007 (Močnik 2008 and Perpette 2007). How is it possible that an industrial organisation performs a leading political – and to a certain extent also a hegemonic intellectual – role at a time when the end of industrial capitalism has become an unquestioned cliché?

## The Perspective of Social Formation

To examine this question, we should look at the present position of industrial wage-labour within the new social context created by the post-Fordist modes of production and regulation. The structure and effects of post-Fordism have extensively been investigated: less attention has been devoted to its articulations with other modes of production that simultaneously operate within the present world-system, and to the specific effects generated by these articulations. To put it in Marxian terms: it

may now theoretically be productive to transfer the analysis from the level of the mode of production to that of social formation, of *Gesellschaftsformation*<sup>1</sup>.

The political consequence of such an approach would be that capitalism should be challenged not simply as a mode of production, but should be confronted on the level of the dominating mode<sup>2</sup> of production. The dominating mode of production has to be broken. The workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils made the October revolution: the exploited class of the dominating mode of the world-system, the exploited class of the subordinated mode, and those that were the mass of society under the repression of the state of the ruling class-coalition. As a consequence, resistance cannot efficiently be organised within the limits of one mode of production, even if it is the dominating mode. Limited to one mode, resistance can only be the resistance of the labour force within a trade-union type of organisation. Political class composition<sup>3</sup> cannot remain closed within a certain mode of production; it only becomes political when it challenges the specific articulation of the modes of production within a

- 1 Or, perhaps in a more adequate translation, economic formation of society: "In großen Umrissen können asiatische, antike, feudale und modern bürgerliche Produktionsweisen als progressive Epochen der ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation bezeichnet werden. [...]" (Marx 1859).
- 2 "In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it. [...] Among peoples with a settled agriculture [...] as in antiquity and in the feudal order, even industry, together with its organization and the forms of property corresponding to it, has a more or less landed-proprietary character [...]. In bourgeois society it is the opposite. Agriculture more and more becomes merely a branch of industry, and is entirely dominated by capital" (Marx 1993).
- 3 In the conceptual sense that was given to the term (*composizione politica di classe*) by the Italian *operaismo*. The problematic of the 'technical composition of labour force' / 'political composition of the working class', to which we will return in the sequel, was referred to during the 1960s and 1970s by the theoreticians-activists Romano Alquati, Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna and others. See Turchetto (2001).

social formation – i.e. when it directly or indirectly attacks the domination of the dominating mode.

An example by default was May '68 in France: the biggest industrial strike in history – and the first cognitive revolution. The two epochal events occurred simultaneously, in the same country, but did not connect. Industrial labour remained closed within the trade-unionist logic, and the cognitive proletariat was only going through its Luddite phase. As a consequence, both movements failed.

### Destruction of Yugoslavia as Theoretical Case

Another case that can be interpreted from this vantage point is the dissolving of the Yugoslav federation. Although self-management did enforce workers' control on the management in industrial enterprises, and thus forced the managers into an alliance with the workers, the higher-ranking partner in this coalition remained the managers as they controlled the intellectual productive forces. In a certain sense, 'social property' of the means of production and self-management in factories did return the control over the material production means to the immediate producers. However, under the industrial technical composition of labour force, immediate producers were still separated from the intellectual productive forces. When it comes to cognitive production, the means of production are predominantly intellectual and are controlled by the producers (health, education, social services, media, 'intellect-intensive' activities in general); hence self-management actually enabled producers to control the production process. Important political breakthroughs were achieved precisely in the domain of public services.<sup>4</sup> Complicated

4 In 1966, the executive of the Republic in Slovenia fell after a vote of no confidence, organised by the delegates of the health workers. In the early '80s, an educational reform with strong industrialist and orthodox Marxist inspiration was stopped by a mobilisation of workers in education. In the mid-eighties, freedom of expression was won in large parts of Yugoslavia as a result of the federation-wide mobilisation (mostly promoted by journalists and younger academics) to oppose the last mounted trial against six Belgrade intellectuals who organised a 'free university'.

mechanisms of control over the cognitive labour force were established by the party-state apparatus that particularly tried (mostly successfully) to bind the management in the media and in the cognitive branches in general to the party-state and sever the ties with labour. When mobilisation of economically and culturally expropriated youth established a strong alternative culture during the eighties, and the mass alternative movements started to blend with cognitive labour activism (especially in the media and at the universities), the time seemed ripe for a radical transformation of socialism: a socialism that would be able to integrate the classical human rights was almost in place<sup>5</sup> – with the exception of the freedom of association which, at that period, meant freedom of unionising (Kuzmanić 1986; 1988).

In the same period, the increasing pressure of neo-liberal capitalism pushed Yugoslav society into a deep crisis. If, by some improbable political effort, the industrial labour movement had been brought into an alliance with the coalition of the cognitive labour (journalists, teachers) and the alternative mass cultures (rock, punk-rock), a possibility of transformation within the socialist horizon might have emerged. However, this is not what happened. A coalition of top political cadres and superior management mounted the tide of neo-liberal attack, changed the political system and privatised national wealth. This was the usual post-socialist scenario. However, the specific difference in Yugoslavia was triple:

1. *Social property* of the means of production: not the state was the proprietor of the means of production, but the people – meaning the people of Yugoslavia (Samary 1988; 2008). One of the implications of the institution of 'social property' (that was itself an important step towards the abolition of property) was that there could not be any direct privatisation of the means of production: in order to be privatised, they first had to be turned into the property of the state, i.e. the means of production first had to be nationalised.<sup>6</sup>

2. *Statehood of federal republics*: the originary statehood resided with the federal republics. Ruling political groups had been organised along the national-republics lines long before the crisis broke out. Any radical state intervention into the relations of production was consequently necessarily an intervention by the

federal republics. The dissolution of the federation was inevitable once the privatisation project was decided on. The liquidation of Yugoslavia was a direct effect of the disposing of socialism and of the new ruling coalition's orientation towards a non-mediated integration into neo-liberal capitalism. The 'independence of nations' was a necessary step towards the expropriation of peoples. The ideology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century assisted the birth of neo-liberal exploitation. The literary intelligentsia not only was the ideological vanguard of the massacre needed to dispossess the people, it also wedged apart the alliance that could trigger an emancipating historical process – the alliance of the industrial and the cognitive proletariats. While following the siren chant of nationalism, the industrial proletariat had the national economy in mind and believed to be defending its Fordist class compromise. In fact, they were undoing the very possibility of an emancipating alliance with the cognitive proletariat, and were massively supporting the neo-liberal compromise (Duménil & Lévy 2006) among party-state high *aparatchiks*, superior managers and capitalists that emerged from both groups.

3. *Socially integrative cognitive proletariat* and their emerging alliance with the culturally expropriated youth of the working-class suburbs and small industrial centres all over Yugoslavia were the emancipating forces of the 1980s and could have been the agents of a historical transformation of socialism. This alliance could achieve the re-appropriation of the cognitive means of production by the working-class youth whom the simple class-reproduction started precisely at that historical moment to turn into a superfluous industrial reserve army.<sup>7</sup> Forces of the neo-liberal compromise, however, did not

5 In Slovenia, the death penalty was officially abolished (it had not been passed for decades) in 1988, still within a socialist context.

6 I owe this point to Geoffroy Géraud Lacalmontie who is presently working on class analysis of the destruction of the socialist project.

7 Yugoslav socialism had the potential to solve the problem of the *banlieues* before it actually occurred. Instead, class reorientation and partial re-articulation of the ruling groups who opted for liberal capitalism in order to remain in power not only forsook this historical chance, but above all transformed young working-class people into the social background of radical right-wing militantism and cannon fodder for their wars.

opt for what would seem to be a logical strategy of the new dominating classes – a compromise with the labour power of the emerging cognitive mode of production. Instead they recruited the services of national 'cultural' bureaucracies (administrators of the ideological state apparatuses), formed during socialism as the junior partner of the political bureaucracy, in order to paralyse political composition of the cognitive class, and sent the working-class youth to die for the new comprador bourgeoisies' motherlands.

Destruction of federation and war among the national ruling coalitions can politically be explained in terms of alliances that were reaching beyond particular modes of production and operated within the social formation as an overdetermined ensemble of contradictory processes. Tactical alliance of the neo-liberal coalition (high political bureaucracy and high management) with the ideological bureaucracy (belonging to the peripheral Fordist mode the neo-liberal coalition was about to destroy) lured the industrial proletariat to embrace the comprador bourgeoisies' project of 'national independence'. In this way, any political re-composition that would bring together the industrial and the cognitive proletariat was made impossible, and the emerging link between the cognitive proletariat and the industrial working-class youth was severed. Transformation towards neo-liberal capitalism was possible because of specific re-structuring within the social formation where certain new and old elements were articulated and certain old and new elements did not coalesce.

### What is 'Political' in the Political Class Composition?

We will conceptualise the present transformation on the level of the dominant production mode, usually described as transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, in terms of class struggle. For this purpose, we will rely upon the concept of *class composition*, developed in the works of Italian operaism<sup>8</sup> by analogy to Marxian concept of 'organic composition of the capital'.<sup>9</sup> Marx's concept shows how the *historical* logic of the capital, its history as permanent technical revolution, is overdetermined by structural submission of the worker as labour force and, consequently,

as variable capital, to the domination of the capital, itself reproduced by the class struggle of the capitalist class. Marx's concept allows for a theoretical grasp of the articulation between structural relations and historical processes; the analogous concept developed by operaists makes it possible to consider technological transformations not abstractly as introducing 'innovations' into capitalist production, but concretely as episodes in the historical processes of the class struggle.

A historically given *technical composition of labour force* (as living labour submitted to the capital under the double aspect: firstly, of being, as variable capital, only a particular mode of existence of the capital; secondly, of being able to act only under the direct constraint of 'dead labour' materialised in machinery as constant capital) is confronted by a *political composition of the working class* historically produced by the workers' class struggle. Composition of workers into a *class* only results from the workers' political composition. Political composition is itself an achievement of many things: of ideological and organisational efforts, of negotiations and conflicts among the workers, of conflicts and alliances with other social groups. Workers put themselves into a class through struggles under the conditions determined, primarily by the particular historical domination of the capital which is crystallised in the technical composition of the labour force *within the dominant mode of production*. Although, in every particular historical moment, class struggle is determined by the particular technical composition imposed

8 See note 7.

9 "The composition of capital is to be understood in a two-fold sense. On the side of value, it is determined by the proportion in which it is divided into constant capital or value of the means of production, and variable capital or value of labour-power, the sum total of wages. On the side of material, as it functions in the process of production, all capital is divided into means of production and living labour-power. This latter composition is determined by the relation between the mass of the means of production employed, on the one hand, and the mass of labour necessary for their employment on the other. I call the former the value-composition, the latter the technical composition of capital. Between the two there is a strict correlation. To express this, I call the value-composition of capital, in so far as it is determined by its technical composition and mirrors the changes of the latter, the organic composition of capital" (Marx, *Capital*, Part VII, Chapter XXV; 1887).

upon the labour force by the dominant mode of production, class response to such a technical composition is the response of the working *class*, not of the particular labour force trapped in its given historical technical composition. It is in this sense that class composition is *political*: it effectuates a *re-composition* of the entire *class*, of all the various sectors of workers involved in various historically existing modes of production, dominant or not. Class composition is political as far as it challenges the 'technical determinism' of various historical technical compositions and reaches beyond the divisions imposed upon the labour force by the technical existence of the capital as constant capital. By destroying the fragmentation of the working class resulting from the existence of various technical compositions of labour force as various historical types of capital domination and exploitation, political class composition not only produces the political unity of the working class, it also challenges the domination of the dominating mode of production. The political composition of the working classes produces an antagonistic effect of totality against the totality produced by the class struggle of the capitalist class, as crystallised in the domination of the dominating mode of production. It is therefore able to challenge capitalism on the level of social formation, i.e. in the very form that the domination of the capitalist class assumes in concrete historical circumstances.

### Cognitive Composition of the Labour Force

If the political composition of the working class results from the class struggle of the working class under the conditions primarily determined by the technical composition of the labour force (within the dominant production mode), then the technical composition of the labour force results from the class struggle of the capitalist class combating the working class political composition. Accordingly, the technical composition of the labour force is the response of the capitalists' class struggle against the historically *antecedent* political composition of the working class. This would mean that working class has a historical advantage over the capitalist class under the condition that they succeed in their political class composition. Permanent

technical revolution as one of the basic features of the capitalist mode would then not only be the consequence of the competition among individual capitals to appropriate extra-profit (whose origin is the monopoly of a technical innovation), it would also be the result of the permanent struggle of the capital to break down the political class composition of the working classes.<sup>10</sup> In other words, competition among individual capitals as a mechanism of the formation of class solidarity of the capitalist class (via the formation of the general profit rate)<sup>11</sup> and the capitalist class's class struggle against the political composition of the working class may have various effects, but they both result in the same effect, the permanent technical revolution.

This hypothesis seems to work in the case of Fordism: Henry Ford prohibited trade unions in his factories in 1904, and introduced the assembly line between 1908 and 1915. The new technical composition de-qualified the labour force and enormously increased the workers' submission to machinery. The hypothesis that the new technical composition is a stratagem

10 According to the operaist theory, each phase of capitalism is marked by a specific class composition of the working class whose main agent is the hegemonic group within the working class. Phases of capitalism can accordingly be determined as follows: during the period 1848-1871, the hegemonic group are urbanised mass workers at the beginning of big industry; during the period 1871-1917, the hegemonic group are professional workers of precision industries; 1917-1969, the hegemonic group are the mass workers of the Fordist industry; after 1969, the hegemonic figure would be the 'social worker'. The hegemonic group within the political composition of the working class would be, as we have tried to show, the particular segment of the working class that have to compose themselves politically against the technical composition of the dominating mode of production.

11 "It follows from the foregoing that in each particular sphere of production the individual capitalist, as well as the capitalists as a whole, take direct part in the exploitation of the total working class by the totality of capital and in the degree of that exploitation, not only out of general class sympathy, but also for direct economic reasons. For, assuming all other conditions — among them the value of the total advanced constant capital — to be given, the average rate of profit depends on the intensity of exploitation of the sum total of labour by the sum total of capital. [...] Here, then, we have a mathematically precise proof why capitalists form a veritable freemason society vis-à-vis the whole working class, while there is little love lost between them in competition among themselves" (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part II, Ch. 10; 1887).

in the class struggle of the capitalist class to break down the existing workers' political composition may shed interesting light upon the present technological transformation.

While the structural condition of industrial capitalism was the separation of the producer from the means of production (both from the material means – machinery – and from the intellectual means as intellectual potential of the production process), in cognitive production this separation does not occur since the cognitive worker possesses the intellectual means of production and the material means are easy to acquire. This means that, in principle and abstractly speaking, the cognitive workers would be able to engage the process of production without the mediation of the capital, that is, without needing to submit themselves to exploitation. Unless they are forced upon the market of labour force by means other than their separation from the means of production. This is precisely what juridical and political representatives of the capital (states and various inter-state organisations like EU, WTO, etc) are presently doing with arrangements like intellectual property rights and various conditions upon an individual's productive activity. But then, if juridical arrangements are forcing individual cognitive workers to join the market and consequently work under the exploitive domination of the capital, the particular capitalist mode of exploitation by purely economic means and without extra-economic constraint is presently at best only a consequence of extra-economic arrangements that make exploitation possible.

If cognitive production is at present gradually becoming the dominant production mode (Vercellone 2002; 2006) and if exploitation in cognitive production is secured by extra-economic means, then what is presently happening is not merely the substitution of one dominant mode by another, but the transformation of a social formation, in other words, the end of capitalism.

In the past, the labour force of the dominant production mode of the period was successively assuming the hegemonic role in the process of political class composition. Accordingly, cognitive workers would now seem to be historically in the position to assume hegemony. However, the technical composition of the cognitive labour force is very specific. It

possesses the means of production, but is unable to put them to use because of juridical obstacles that force it to pass through the market and thus to submit to a 'capitalist' type of exploitation. The cognitive worker, being in possession of the means of production, is thus *separated from the social conditions of production*. This position is mystified by the ideology according to which a cognitive worker is her or his own entrepreneur, marketing her or his 'social' or 'cultural' capital. In an ideological way, the result of separation is presented as socialisation that is achieved upon the market. This ideological 'illusion' has material effects: it establishes the individual as an autonomous enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

The 'autonomous worker of the second generation'<sup>13</sup>, established as independent entrepreneur, no longer sells her or his labour force, as did the classical wage worker, but sells the product. She or he is no more hired as a 'factor of production', but engages in business relation between enterprises. Juridical relation is no longer a labour contract, it is now a business contract. The autonomous worker no longer receives wage, but sells her or his product for a price. If there is a transfer of surplus value from the autonomous worker to her or his business partner, then it must take the form of an undervalued price<sup>14</sup>. Since the stronger partner can lower the price because of its monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic position, the surplus value it draws from its junior partner, the individual entrepreneur, resembles rent rather than profit.

12 This is actually the realisation of the neo-liberal utopia. See Foucault (2004). For an analysis of this process in its historical concreteness in Italy, see Bologna (2007).

13 Sergio Bologna calls this central figure of post-Fordist capitalism *lavoratore autonomo della seconda generazione*. Autonomous workers of 'the first generation' are workers in agriculture, commerce and those protected by the 'orders' (advocates, physicians, architects). See AA.VV. (1997) and Bologna (2007).

14 In certain cases, this undervaluation can be calculated: at a Slovene university, an associate professor working with contracts earns three full salaries of her or his fully employed colleague per year for the same amount of labour (and does not enjoy the benefits that come with holding a permanent position).

In their capacity of individual entrepreneurs, contemporary autonomous workers compete for the 'contact' with the capital – as once did, and still does, the industrial labour force. Capital still controls conditions of their production. Here, however, the analogy between the industrial labour force and the contemporary autonomous worker ends. While in the industrial situation, capital controls the conditions of production itself; in the case of the contemporary autonomous worker, it controls the social character of the workers' production, its *sociality*. Under the conditions of the generalised commodity economy, the social character of production is ratified by, and appears as, the realisation of the product upon the market. The control exercised by the capital upon the sociality of the autonomous worker's production appears as the monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic position occupied by *any* partner with whom the autonomous worker can possibly establish a 'business' relation as individual 'entrepreneur'.

The autonomous worker is subordinated to the capital for structural causes that differ from those that account for the subordination of the industrial worker. For both, subordination results from their being pushed upon the market. However, while the classical worker has to offer her or his labour force because she or he is being *separated* from the means of production – the autonomous worker possesses the necessary means of production. Since the autonomous labour is typically cognitive labour, the autonomous workers' means of production mainly consist of their cognitive competence, while the 'hardware' is easily accessible. What the autonomous cognitive workers are separated from are not the means of production but the conditions that make their work socially necessary. As soon as these conditions appear as 'the market', they become accessible to the autonomous worker *and* start operating as the mechanism of his or her subordination to the capital. In this way, the market operates as a mechanism of subordination (of labour) and domination (of capital).

The problem of socialisation, of production and reproduction of social relations is thus enclosed into the sphere of circulation. Social relations immediately appear and are subjectively experienced as relations of circulation and

exchange, not as relations of production and reproduction. This is the world of *verwandelte Formen*, of Marxian 'converted forms'. The violence of separation from social conditions of production immediately appears to social agents as regulation of exchange.

The great achievement of the *verwandelte Form* of the cognitive worker as 'her or his own entrepreneur' is to blend the condition of exploitation (separation from social conditions of production) with regulation of equivalent exchange. It dissolves the constraint that forces the cognitive worker on the market into just another provision of fair exchange. Regulation of the cognitive labour market flatly integrates and thus makes banal its own condition of possibility.

If the industrial proletariat was the result of dissolution of all classes<sup>15</sup>, the cognitive proletariat is the social ensemble where separation from social conditions of existence, the process at the foundation of contemporary relations of exploitation, is brought to its paroxysm, where it no more just separates individuals from their social existence, but hits and splits individuals themselves. In cognitive workers, the process of separation divides individuals against themselves: it plays the exchange-sociality against the production-sociality.

How important the role of cognitive workers will be in the new class-composition is still largely an open question. However, we can analytically determine the lines along which their participation to the political re-composition of the working class may be organised if, of course, it ever occurs. If cognitive workers are to challenge the specific composition of labour force that is imposed upon them and which subjects them to the process of exploitation, they will have to attack the mechanisms of separation that are separating their productive potential from social conditions of its actualisation. These mechanisms are mostly of juridical nature and operate as an extra-economic constraint. However, since the composition of the cognitive

15 "[...] the communist revolution [...] is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society [...]" (Marx and Engels 1932).

labour force pertains to the dominating mode of production, any attack upon this composition is an attack upon the domination of the dominating mode.

The specific articulation that structures the dominating production mode overdetermines other modes, those over which it dominates: it is in this overdetermination that 'domination' resides.<sup>16</sup> In order to see how the resistance of the cognitive workers may contribute to a new class composition of the working class, we need to grasp how the dominating cognitive mode determines other modes of production in the contemporary social formation. We can determine the ways in which the dominating mode of production dominates over other modes by presenting processes of transformation that led from Fordism to post-Fordism.

## From Industrial Welfare to Cognitive Misery

The crisis of Fordism has been explained in many ways: as much as explanations may vary, they seem to agree that a basic feature of the crisis has been the decrease of the productivity of capital. To this, the capital has responded classically, i.e. by turning against production and towards finance.<sup>17</sup> This re-orientation itself led to an increase in exploitation: institutional investors that managed financial capital exercised enormous pressure to

16 In the Introduction to *Grundrisse* Marx discusses, still in an abstract way, the relations among production, exchange, distribution etc. He states that the articulation of production determines the internal articulations of other spheres and their mutual articulations. We should add that, within the social formation, it is the articulation of the dominating mode that exercises this determination. Marx touches upon the problem of the dominating mode further in the text in the passage quoted in note 6. Marx states the determining role of the articulation of production in propositions like the following: "The structure [Gliederung, articulation] of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production [*bestimmt durch die* Gliederung, articulation, der Produktion]. [...] the intensity of exchange, as well as its extension and its manner, are determined [*bestimmt*] by the development and structure [Gliederung, articulation] of production. [...] A definite production thus determines [*bestimmt*] a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different moments" (1993).

increase profit rates and partly by force partly by bribing gained the superior management's interest in their cause and succeeded in their intent.

The novelty of this last financial 'phase'<sup>18</sup> has been the opening of the international financial system that resulted in destruction of national economies, in radical transformation of the nature of nation-state, and in basic transformation of wage-relations across the whole world system.

The overall outcome has relatively early and succinctly been summed up by Anton Brender: "What moves in world economy draws into competition what does not move" (1996). Capital that now freely moves across the world draws into competition local conditions of its accumulation. The emerging new mode of regulation inverts the terms of the Fordist<sup>19</sup> type

17 The two features may well indicate the last phase of the systemic cycle of capital accumulation that began in the last third of the 19th century; in the sequel, we will work under this hypothesis, especially since there are other indicators that support it (the advent of a new dominating mode of production that can only be integrated into capitalist exploitation by extra-economic means which itself may be an indicator of a major historical transformation that could bring the end of capitalism). For the concept of systemic cycle and the present world-system conjuncture, see Arrighi (1996).

18 This may open a bifurcation where one direction leads towards a new systemic cycle of capitalism – and the other towards a new historical formation that would no more be capitalist.

19 In this context, Fordism has to be put in quotes, to underscore the absence of any 'internal', even less 'necessary', connection between the Fordist mode of production and the welfare state. In itself, Fordism is a strategy of individual industrial capitals to fight the political composition of the qualified professional industrial labour class. Elements of the future Fordism such as the assembly line (see Turchetto 1999) have been in use already in the late 19th century. However, these elements have only been systemised into a coherent 'composition of labour force' (de-qualification, atomisation, submission to the rhythm of machinery ... in short, completion of the real submission of labour to capital) at a certain point of the class-struggle and as the effect of the class-struggle of the capitalist class. As we have already mentioned, Henry Ford prohibited trade unions in his factories in 1904, and introduced the assembly line in 1908. The welfare state, on the contrary, was the outcome of the state policies under the pressures of the class struggles of the labouring classes: policies to save capitalism at the core of the system, policies to replace it with socialism at the periphery.

of regulation which organised its specific coherence by putting social constraints upon capital accumulation: now the social conditions are submitted to the imperative of accumulation.

To a certain extent, the new situation has changed the classical pattern where the capital followed extra-profit and the labour force followed the capital. Now, the capital still seeks extra-profit, but finds on the spot the labour force, precisely as one of the sources of the extra-profit. This confronts the wage-earning classes in post-welfare states with an aporetic dilemma concerning the mobility of the labour force: either to prevent the mobility of the labour force and to see their industries displaced to countries where labour is cheaper or to have cheap labour move in and compete with the locals. The dilemma seems to be between losing jobs and losing the acquired level of direct and indirect wage.<sup>20</sup>

This choice seems to be only between short-term and longer-term agony: institutional investors require extremely high profits, reduced wages and the dismantlement of indirect wage. But the dilemma is actually an illusionary one: the opposition between 'sedentary' and 'migrant' labour belongs to the ideology of the ruling classes and blocks the political class-composition of contemporary working classes. The theoretical critique of false alternatives here assumes a direct political relevance. The point of view of 'competition' assists the capital at imposing competition among the working classes of different regions of the world. This is the argument of governments that oppress their people and serve the capital. Not only do such policies push down direct and indirect wages, they also obfuscate the basic reality that it is not only particular working classes that are pushed to compete with one another, but that entire local societies compete to obtain the favours of the capital, that is, compete against each other so as to establish which one would offer more obliging conditions for capitalist exploitation.

20 The German strategy has long been the defence of negotiated class-compromise, even at the risk of a long-term massive unemployment; the British reaction was fast and straight: the Thatcherite liquidation of the welfare state.

At the heart of the system, the general trend since the mid-seventies has been a steady opening of the fork between wages and profits: profits have been increasing their part within the BDP in the US and in the EU, while the part of the salaries has been decreasing. A slower decrease of salaries in the US has allowed a slow but sustained increase of consumption – thanks to the credit schemes whose breakdown has triggered the present economic crisis. In the EU, salaries have been decreasing faster, while consumer figures have stagnated.<sup>21</sup> In both cases the increasing discrepancy between the actual consuming and the real capacity to consume fixed by the salaries, has intensified the strain upon economies until they have finally broken down in a general solvency crisis. This may be the definite end of the Fordist system based on mass consumption: the ensuing crisis will most probably resolve itself in the way that big crises have historically resolved themselves in the past – by imposing a new dominant mode of production. Whether it will only be a further transformation of the capitalist mode or an opening towards the abolition of exploitation largely depends on collective action on the processes of transformation.

Within contemporary processes, we should note two historical inversions.

1. While in the industrial era it was its separation from the conditions of production (especially from the means of production) that constrained the labour force to enter the market, it is now the market processes that separate the labour force from social conditions of production. The composition of the cognitive labour force that we were examining earlier proves only to be a specific, albeit condensed and drastic, case of this general trend: what the composition of the cognitive labour force makes particularly obvious, though, is the juridical extra-economic constraint which establishes and reproduces the imposition of market mechanisms.

21 On the decreasing trend of wages and the increasing trend of profits since the mid-seventies, see Husson (2008).

2. While competition to realise extra profit among individual capitals has classically propelled the permanent technological revolution typical of the capitalist mode, now technologies of information and communication move the accelerated global mobility of capitals. Two consequences follow. The first is that technical invention is now directly and obviously breaking down the political composition of the working classes and imposing new technical composition to the labour force. The second is that technical innovation not only introduces ways to produce relative surplus value, but now also supports the re-introduction of the production of *absolute surplus value*<sup>22</sup> by extending the working day (work at home and various arrangements pertaining to autonomous labour). Cognitive work as examined above now appears as a special category of *autonomous work* that presently comprises also types of work that have traditionally been integrated into 'Fordist' big production units and hierarchies (accounting, research, development, design). Not the 'contents' of the working process classify it as autonomous, the relations of production do or, more precisely, relations of production and circulation. For it is the juridical extra-economic constraint, mostly masquerading as regulation of exchange that forces autonomous workers to enter the market – immediately as 'entrepreneurs', but structurally as labour force.

The second inversion (from the movement of the capital propelling technical innovation to the technical innovation propelling the movement of capital) not only gives further credibility to the illusion that it is the movement of the capital that yields surplus-value – it actually realises it to the extent in which capitals, by the sheer virtue of their global mobility, can efficiently seek and find advantageous niches of undervalued conditions of capital accumulation.

22 "The surplus-value produced by prolongation of the working-day, I call absolute surplus-value. On the other hand, the surplus-value arising from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working-day, I call relative surplus-value" (Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part IV, Chapter 12; 1887).

The reason why conditions of production are being offered at low prices lies in the first inversion noted above: individual territorial jurisdictions (the states) compete among themselves to attract capital investment by offering their social textures as positive conditions for capital accumulation. 'Positive externalities' (or in the terms of *Grundrisse* 'general intellect' and appropriate social *Gliederung*, social organisation) are being offered to the capital as a kind of differential advantage, source of extra-profits. The 'external wage', provided by the 'Fordist'<sup>23</sup> welfare state to the social labour force has been supplanted by 'external rent' for individual capitals. In *Grundrisse*, Marx anticipated that a progressive socialisation of the conditions of production could lead to the self-abolition of capitalism. It is the opposite that is occurring at present: domains of social production that have not been part of commodity production (social services, associative co-operation and the like) are being integrated into capitalist production indirectly (as favourable 'externalities') and directly (by privatisations). Direct and indirect integration of social activities into capitalist production is achieved by juridical constraint: the Fordist state that had been guaranteeing class-compromise has been replaced by a juridical-political construction instrumental to the class struggle of the capitalist class.

During the period of nation states, national social collectives were developing their social articulations (Marx's *Gliederung*) and their *general intellect* as so many social capacities of their living together within the frame of a class compromise. They are presently being expropriated of their achievements: the capitalist state is subordinating them to the process of capital accumulation.

## The Market as a Mechanism of Domination

The present 'marketisation' of social relations is actually twofold: it is extensive, as market relations penetrate social

<sup>23</sup> The inverted commas mark the absence of any necessary connection between the Fordist mode of production and the welfare state.

spheres that have hitherto been exempted from the logic of profit (public services, social assistance, etc) and it is intensive, as former integrated production lines of great Fordist firms are being broken down into networks of medium and small enterprises clustering around the often transnational central firm, and market relations, external to the firm, replace its former internal hierarchical relations.

This process is not just a linear extension of the market relations, typical of the expansionist logic of the capitalist mode. Within this particular historical conjuncture, the market starts operating in a way that has only been implicit during the former stages of capitalism. After the initial juridical operation that launches social relations upon the 'market' (and which can be either the legal autonomisation of a division of the firm or the privatisation of a public service like education or health or the introduction of 'outsourcing' and 'subcontracting' into services like public transport or social assistance), the market starts operating as a mechanism of social domination.

The market operates as a mechanism of domination by separating direct producers from social conditions of production. This is how the dominating mode of production overdetermines other modes within the social formation: the specific way in which the market effects the cognitive production is generalised across social formation.

During the initial post-Fordist developments, market relations were introduced into the former integrated production line by mechanisms like outsourcing and subcontracting: this importantly lowered production costs (no storing, no waste, enhanced quality control) and increased the rate of surplus-value by over-exploitation in small and medium sub-contracting enterprises, often organised on family or ethnic bases. Already in such situations, non-symmetrical market relations between the big firm and the small enterprise operated as means of external constraint upon the small enterprise and combined with its internal 'pre-capitalist' kinship and/or ethnic, eventually religious, repression.

It is not only that newly established market relations between enterprises, spun off the formerly unified production lines and the mother firm are asymmetrical and press towards

the increase of exploitation in subcontracting enterprises. What is more, the process of the fragmentation of the production lines is only one dimension of a larger and deeper historical transformation of the technical and social organisation of the labour process. This historical re-articulation of labour has first been noticed in its juridical dimension, and apprehended from the now atavistic point of view of the former mode of production that crystallised around the permanent labour contact. Accordingly, it has been viewed as an anomaly, as something transitional, and was summarily brought under the aggregate category of 'untypical social contracts'. The expression blocks the understanding that the new organisational forms actually tend to abolish the labour contract: with new technical and organisational designs they impose a new technical composition of the labour force and introduce new modes of production of the surplus value. On their part, ideological and political representatives of the capital welcome and propel this process under the label of 'flexibilisation of the labour market'. This apprehension, although introducing new forms of exploitation, blocks the understanding of transformations that tend to replace the traditional market of the labour force with historically novel and specifically structured markets of goods and services.

New forms of the relation between labour and capital have first been detected in the new sectors of production – in the cognitive production and its 'new economy'. Our present interest, however, is not to consider the 'content-nature' of the labour process (e.g. cognitive vs. manual labour), but its new structure, since it is the new structure that is increasingly over-determining other kinds of work that have historically preceded it.

The privatisation of the public services is a more complex historical phenomenon. Basically, it is the breach of the welfare-state class compromise on the part of the capitalist class. In the eyes of individual capital agents, it expands profit-making activities into new social domains, and appears as a sort of internal capital-colonisation. From the point of view of relations of production, however, it introduces a new relation between social labour and social capital. It may well be that the future transformation of the system is being struggled over

in the present conflicts concerning the remains of the public welfare systems.

Present difficulties in defending the social state may have their origin in the historical circumstance that it has been constructed in juridical terms. The social state has basically consisted in various 'rights' that citizens or workers or particular groups have legally possessed. The existence of the social state seems to depend on how these extra-economic arrangements are interpreted: they may be interpreted either from the point of view of the wage or from the point of view of the capital. Which of the two perspectives will prevail is a matter of class struggle. In the perspective of the wage, the 'rights' provided by the social state are viewed as 'indirect wage', or, to use a more adequate term in this context, as 'social wage'; in the perspective of the capital, they non-symmetrically appear as income that neither originates in capital investment nor can be attributed to some other production factor, but arises from a juridical entitlement: they appear as 'social rent'.

In the perspective of the wage, social relations were conceived upon the model of social contract, and social contract was conceived upon the model of labour contract. Social contract was then a contract that stipulated under what conditions any labour contract could possibly be contracted. Public education, public health, public pension systems, labour rights, social rights were consequently not conceived as a contract concerning the distribution of social product: they were understood as a contract concerning the general conditions of the production of social product. They were appearing as a kind of transcendental labour contract or, perhaps, as basic terms of social co-existence. From the point of view of the working classes, the social state re-interpreted the liberal social contract into a transcendental collective labour pact.

At present, the ruling classes have imposed the view that considers public services and other dimensions of social state arrangements concerning the distribution of value. In this perspective, these arrangements inevitably appear as providing 'social rent'. Within this ideological scheme, such arrangements are doubly irrational: they withdraw a large part of value from the process of capitalisation and park it in a sterile off-side where it

does not produce profit; they withdraw extensive dimensions of social life from the grip of the capital, i.e. from the profit-making activities. At a moment when the role of the state is no longer to institutionalise social or class compromise but to attract capital investments to its local jurisdiction and to guarantee a safe reproduction of capital, public services, labour rights and the like appear as juridical-political regulations concerning the distribution of social product. Social spending appears as inversely proportional to profits. Spending appears as 'rent', as a deed of an alien force<sup>24</sup> which appropriates part of the social product by way of extra-economic juridical constraint and in a non-productive mode. These deeds appear as such since they are conceived as withdrawing funds from being channelled towards capital accumulation.

From the point of view of the producers of value, the privatisation of the public services has a different meaning. It does not appear merely as an extension of the capital relation into new social spheres (as it does in the eyes of the agents of capital), but marks a basic transformation of class relations: it means that the agents of capital, the *Träger*, refuse to invest into the long-term reproduction of the labour force and into the reproduction of social conditions of productivity in general. The capitalist class refuses to invest in the networks of social solidarity precisely at the historical moment when a general articulation of social relations, a social articulation in general or, in the terms of *Grundrisse*, *die Gliederung*, has itself become a decisive productive force; it refuses to invest in education at the moment when the 'cognitive' production is assuming a predominant role.<sup>25</sup>

This properly a-social character of the capital indicates that what Marx considered the basic contradiction of the capitalist mode (the contradiction between the social character

<sup>24</sup> Marx's term: *fremde Gewalt*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the already quoted passage from the Introduction to *Grundrisse*: "In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others" (Marx 1993).

of the production and the private character of the appropriation of the product) has now achieved a critical point. It shows that the capital has actually disconnected itself from historical processes. However, it does not necessarily nor automatically mean that the rule of the capital is over: for the time being, it is only in the process of transformation.

The privatisation of social *Gliederung* and of *general intellect*, an event that Marx did not foresee in his anticipation of the eventual self-abolition of capitalism in *Grundrisse* not only means privatising what has already been socialised in a statist way by the social state (public services) or what has historically been developing as an always-already-socialised public wealth (general intellect) – it also means cutting the mass of population off the very conditions of their sociality. This separation is the dramatic novelty of our times, since it intervenes on the level of production: it is the constitutive separation, *Trennung*, of a new relation of production (Balibar 1996).

The statist character of socialisation that had been provided by the social state now offers adequate support to privatisations: although privatisations are actually acts of class violence against the whole of society, they can politically be presented as simple substitution of one legal arrangement (that of social rights) by another (that of the free market) in the name of a presumed increase of efficiency. However, there is a difference between the ways in which the law operates in the case of the social state and in the case of neo-liberal privatisations. While social rights were additional conditions appended to the labour contract, the present generalisation of market relations produces differentiated effects: in certain areas it abolishes the labour contract and substitutes an 'inter-enterprise' contract to it; in other areas, where there would otherwise be no wage-relation and consequently no capitalist exploitation, it institutes the necessity of a labour contract and imposes the wage-relation. While the classical capitalist labour contract has been heterogeneous to the historical process of expropriation of the labour power, the present privatisations and connected legal interventions themselves create the process of expropriation.

The introduction of market relations into formerly integrated production lines does not only increase the pressure

on the labour force and the rate of exploitation, it also liberates the capital of the concerns for the reproduction of labour power. As a strategy of individual capitals, outsourcing is the pendant to the privatisations of the public services as the strategy of the capitalist state: the capitalist state gives up providing 'social wage' as individual capitals escape their involvement in the struggle around the amount of the 'existential minimum'. In this way, both individual capital and the social capital by the means of its state shake off the concerns for the reproduction of the conditions of production and of society itself. The organisation of production by individual capital and the organisation of society by the capitalist state institutionalise the a-social character of the capital. They only produce and reproduce relations of exploitation and transfer the burden of social reproduction to the individual.<sup>26</sup>

It follows from this description that, under these conditions, the most adequate labour force for contemporary capitalist production is migrant labour. Migrant workers only come into contact with the capital for the time of the production, i.e. of exploitation, and are then rejected beyond the horizon of the state-and-capital concerns themselves to take care of the reproduction of their productive capacities and of other conditions of production (education, health, old age pensions for themselves and their families). Another advantage of the migrant labour force for the capital is that it can be recruited seasonally, according to the oscillation of the market of products and services. The composition of the labour force that suits best the present institutionalisation of capital is *seasonal migrant labour*<sup>27</sup>. In presently subordinated modes of production, especially in industrial production, post-Fordism introduces the type of relations formerly characteristic of marginal activities in non-industrialised sectors of agriculture.

26 Possible consequences: identity constitution of society and 'post-fascism'.

27 By attempting to legalise the occasional extension of the working time, European Commission's directive on the working time (recently rejected by the European Parliament) actually attempted legally to generalise the seasonal work.

## Political Consequences of the Domination of the Cognitive Production Mode

The first and the most obvious political consequence of the transformations we tried to sketch is that there is no divergence between the still surviving classical 'Fordist' unionised labour and the groups and individuals engaged in the new 'post-Fordist' or cognitive relations of production. There is no contradiction among various segments of the working class, since the dominant mode of production over-determines other modes that are subordinated to it,<sup>28</sup> and is presently reshaping their conditions to the detriment of workers.

Capital, as we have seen, presently tends to transfer the burden of social reproduction upon the worker: this strategy tends towards an ideal limit figure of the labour force – the seasonal migrant worker. In the seasonal migrant worker, capital, while exploiting her or his labour force, with it and in it exploits the social conditions of its production and reproduction to which capital does not contribute. When profiting from 'positive externalities', from the social *Gliederung* of the hosting country, the capital again exploits the sociality to which it has not contributed. When separating the social conditions of production from the labour force in possession of the means of production, the capital dislocates social relations in order to exploit sociality to which it has not contributed. The capital sponges on social *Gliederung*, upon sociality that has produced itself, and is able to reproduce itself, without its intervention. The capital increasingly operates as a redundant, unnecessary and parasitic formation. This is the structural base for a re-composition of the working

28 Cf. the already quoted passage from the Introduction to *Grundrisse*: "Among peoples with a settled agriculture [...], as in antiquity and in the feudal order, even industry, together with its organization and the forms of property corresponding to it, has a more or less landed-proprietary character; is either completely dependent on it, as among the earlier Romans, or, as in the Middle Ages, imitates, within the city and its relations, the organization of the land. [...] In bourgeois society it is the opposite. Agriculture more and more becomes merely a branch of industry, and is entirely dominated by capital" (Marx 1993).

classes that could attract all sections of society to a common effort to abolish the capital relation.

Finally, the reproduction of the capital relation is increasingly secured by juridical and para-juridical arrangements. Capitalism is being reproduced by an extra-economic constraint: it has not only lost its historical vitality – it is only surviving by abandoning its historical originality (the organisation of exploitation by purely economic means). Capitalism survives by ceasing to be capitalism. As the production of surplus-value more and more relies upon extra-economic constraint, the revenue on capital loses the character of profit, of the 'entrepreneur's revenue', and becomes rent, revenue on a juridically safeguarded monopoly (Vercellone 2002). As a rentier class, the capitalist class is becoming unnecessary and destructive. This again is a structural condition that favours the revolutionary gathering of society with the aim to do away with the parasitic class. Since it is the rent-generating juridical construction that has to be abolished, the issue is in advance posed within the political horizon. This facilitates an eventual revolutionary political composition that could create a large class coalition able to perform historical abolition of capitalism. 'Only' certain national and international juridical arrangements should be abolished: it would seem that political means should suffice for the formation of a revolutionary coalition.

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From the Primacy of Partisan Politics to the Post-Fordist  
Tendency in Yugoslav Self-Management Socialism<sup>1</sup>  
by Gal Kirn

1 The text was inspired by Boris Buden's discussion in RESET seminar organised in Mostar (February 2008). Special thanks go to Angela Facundo and Lev Centrih for their valuable comments.

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## 1. Introduction: Post-Yugoslav Ideological-Theoretical Conuncture

Socialist Yugoslavia is not a very hot topic nowadays, but if it does hit the headlines, various experts and dissidents present it by way of personal memoirs or as 'totalitarian studies'.<sup>2</sup> Yugoslavia is presented as a political failure, a 'prison-house of nations' with an inefficient economical system, which endured due to the strong hand of dictator Tito. The 'gloomy totalitarian past' account finds its double in a popular perspective present in everyday post-Yugoslav life, viz. Yugonostalgia or Titostalgia, which glorifies the 'good old times' and commodifies the socialist symbolic and Tito.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this ideological constellation two fundamental interpretations can be distinguished about the 'specificity' of this historical period. The first reading reduces the existing socialisms to state capitalism,<sup>4</sup> in which the Communist Party plays a key role in directing the whole of society. This position argues for the following formula: *totalitarian rule (Party-politics) and state capitalism (planned economy) are inextricably bound*. In contrast to this view, official ideologues and socialist theoreticians of that time would speak of the specificity of socialist society, proclaiming the end of class struggle<sup>5</sup> and the inevitable arrival

- 2 For a critical reading of influential historical studies (e.g. Ivo Banac and Mirjana Kasapović) see Buden (2003), Jovanović & Arsenijević (2007), Centrih (2008). The key thesis of these critiques shows how the dominant historiographies legitimise new ethnic divisions in the post-Yugoslav context, where the central point of demonisation is communism, which was lacking political pluralism, legal framework and economic stability. For a critique of totalitarian studies, see Žižek (2001b).
- 3 See Mitja Velikonja (2009).
- 4 In the West, a critique of real-socialism from a socialist perspective appeared already in the 1950s, in France with the group *Socialisme ou barbarie*, or in the US with James et al. (1958). For a more detailed view of critical debates internal to Marxism's critique of real socialisms see Katja Diefenbach's article in this book.
- 5 The political practice of socialists from Stalin's constitution of 1936 onwards calls for the abandonment of the concept of the class struggle. Class struggle completely lost its political weight. In real socialisms it became →

of the communist *Heaven on Earth*. The first argument operated with the identification of capitalism and socialism, the second one identified socialism with communism. Both narratives share a blind spot that prevents them from really thinking 'socialist' social formations. It reduces their complexity and neutralises the class character of socialist social relations. The future, the result of their theoretical model, is known in advance. This ideological gesture eliminates the transformative character of politics that touches the Real, the 'not-yet-existing' dimension.

In opposition to this binary ideological-theoretical constellation we would like to shed new light on the complexity of socialist societies.<sup>6</sup> We would like to put forward a condensed thesis, sketched by Althusser: *socialism = capitalism + communism*.<sup>7</sup> Inspired by this, we will analyse Yugoslav socialism in two ways: in the first part we will briefly address the issue of political rupture that the new Yugoslavia generated and how it transformed social relations, its *communist politics*, while in the second we will show how the economic contradictions and ideologems of socialist self-management contributed to the exhausting of the revolutionary Yugoslavia and started the *restoration of capitalism*. The contemporary post-Yugoslav model of transition situates the rupture of the old totalitarian regime in the year 1991 and frames it as the event that triggered the transition. This model presupposes a certain progression within a linear time schema, which always already contains a result (market and democracy). However, the modality of

→ extremely rare to think and practice revolutionary politics that targeted the destruction of the bourgeois State and Law on the one hand and exploitation on the other. Apart from Stalinist political practice, a well-documented and controversial theoretical debate took place in the French Communist Party (see Balibar 1976). The Chinese cultural revolution and the Yugoslavian model developed specific socialist paths that meant a precise break in the international workers' movement, both showing different shortcomings.

6 Also some non-Marxist research projects prove to be much more exact in showing the articulation of different historical processes, which characterises socialism. See Sabel & Stark (1982) and Sampson (1987).

7 See Althusser (2004), especially his "Marx in his Limits".

transition<sup>8</sup> that we employ is more complex and shows how in the specific historical conditions of Yugoslavia processes unfolded in a contradictory fashion. Yugoslavian development was full of detours, displacements and condensations that embodied specific contradictory movements called tendency<sup>9</sup>, which will be named *post-Fordist tendency*. At the end we will sketch paths to rethink this post-Fordist tendency, as a tendency of late capitalism, within socialist self-management. Isn't the identification of a socialist form of self-management with a capitalist form of post-Fordism a heretic political statement? How can one even compare the most developed form of the late capitalism, post-Fordism, with a socialist social formation?

## 2. Contextualisation of Self-Management and Post-Fordism, Capitalism and Socialism

How do post-Fordist theories define the post-Fordist tendency? They situate it correctly in the times of late capitalism, where they pinpoint the fundamental changes in the mode of production, especially concerning the organisation and nature of work. One of the focal points of their analysis is the novelty of immaterial, cognitive labour, which became the most productive and is paralleled with new technologies. Their theses have far-reaching theoretical effects for conceptualising the mode of exploitation and production of value,<sup>10</sup> which are arguably the

- 8 Our model of 'transition' is informed by Balibar's theory of transition (1970) and Bettleheim's (1975) conceptualisation of a concrete analysis of socialism(s). In this regard we have to specifically expose one of the fundamental contributions that Althusser brought to Marxism: his rethinking of time as non-homogeneous and structural causality as a critique of Hegelian and mechanistic causality. See Terray's (1993: 155-9) and Ichida's (1997) discussions on time.
- 9 In his analysis of the capitalist mode of production Karl Marx shows it is necessary to think tendency in terms of peculiar movements of contradiction. A fundamental characteristic of capitalism is precisely the point of unity of two contradictory tendencies, *combination* of the tendency rate of profit to fall and a tendency of the rate of surplus-value to rise. For further analysis of tendency, see Balibar (1968) and Lipietz (1993).
- 10 See the difference between 'labour force' and 'invention force' in the work of Yann Moulier Boutang (2007). About immaterial labour in general, see Lazzarato (1997).

most important concepts of Marxism. All post-Fordist theories detect a substantial transformation that was in progress in developed core countries. Amin Ash (1994) classifies these schools as the flexible specialisation school, the technological/neo-Schumpeterian school and the 'Regulation' school. To this list we add the 'optimist' post-Fordist school. Even though the theoretical focus of the schools lies with a different social force/agency of changes, they depart from the development in the capitalist core (Italy, Japan and USA). In other words, the tendency as such is taken as the alpha and omega of history; moreover, the tendency embodies the movement from the less developed to the more developed mode of production.<sup>11</sup> Schematically, all three approaches could be criticised because they all prioritise one 'agency': they put their faith in technology (the technological school), class compromise/state (the Regulation school) or multitude (the optimist post-Fordist). It is one of these agents that 'directs' or even determines the development of social relations and new regulations. Nevertheless, their critical theoretical analyses of the new forms of political economy are extremely important for our study and historical materialism in general.

Despite acknowledging their relevance our theoretical focus departs from the opposite angle: *post-Fordist elements were also at work in Yugoslavia from the mid 1960s onwards*. This thesis is influenced by Lenin's reflection on the Russian revolution: according to Lenin, a crystallisation of a tendency does not necessarily appear in the centre, quite the opposite, it is emphasised in the margins of the centre, at the juncture of different modes of production. Specific to the Yugoslav development was precisely its formation that was bordering on different types of economies, at the cross-section of capitalism and socialism. *In concreto*, post-Fordist characteristics can be

11 A highly problematic presupposition of this approach is its evolutionism. If the tendency is the most important referential point to understand time and development, we have to pose a question about the limitations of this theory to understand the structural conditions of the capitalist mode of production.

found in the 1965 market reforms, which attempted to respond to the crisis of the 'productivist' model. These reforms stressed the role of technocrats (managers) as leaders of the production process, innovation and knowledge in the industry (later reform of educational system), the role of 'participation' within the socialist enterprises and 'politicisation' of all social spheres. In other words, we are interested in the discovery of the post-Fordist elements, as analysed by post-Fordist theoreticians, but not in the capitalist core! Not only was there a crisis of the Fordist model in the capitalist centre, but there was also a crisis of the "productivist" model (socialist type of industrialisation and Taylorist organisation) within socialist (semi-)peripheries. This claim has to be read together with a work of Immanuel Wallerstein who consistently argued that the fall of 'communism' coincided with the demise of a Keynesian, social democratic capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s. The end of socialism immensely affected the end of the welfare state. Much more than a result of neo-liberal restructuring, it is above all a case of the collapse of socialism and the historical defeat of real socialisms. We are living in a post-socialist world and as such thinking socialism requires a serious theoretical effort, which might prove helpful in thinking and criticising totalitarian studies and the neo-liberalist monad of the end of history.

The following sections will provide analyses of the different instances of politics, ideology, law and economy.

### 3. Politics of Rupture

The Yugoslavian politics of rupture brought novelty, constructed a new world, a new Yugoslavia. It started something that was radically different from European politics of that time. We should think of Yugoslavia as an encounter between a new political subjectivity and a specific historical conjuncture. It broke with the existing order and it thought and activated itself in the direction of something 'not-yet-realised'.

We can reconstruct this political event via three historical moments (Riha 1993) that had considerable consequences for the world, not only for the specific Yugoslavian context. The emergence of the new Yugoslavia took place during

World War II when three historical sequences happened from 1941 till the late 1950s: 1941-45 (partisan politics, People's Liberation Struggle), 1948 (self-management, critique of Stalin) and 1955 (non-aligned movement). It is important to note that the first event had the strongest effects and made the new, socialist and multinational Yugoslavia materialise.

#### a.) People's Liberation Struggle

The partisan struggle was mainly organised by communists, apart from the struggle in Slovenia, where the Liberation Front gathered various antifascist forces that joined communists in the struggle for National Liberation. The partisans did not only fight against Nazi and Fascist occupation – Yugoslavia was divided between Italy, Hungary, the German Reich, Romania and Bulgaria –, but had to fight the political authorities of the old Yugoslavia, the local collaborators, Ustaša, Chetniks, Domobranici and other bourgeois forces. The formal recognition of partisans as the sole antifascist forces in the coalition came quite late, in 1943,<sup>12</sup> which is why the partisans had to concentrate on their own capacities. This historical situation 'forced' them to practice 'autonomist' politics.<sup>13</sup> The goal of the partisans was to organise a people's armed struggle against the occupation, but already during the war a social revolution took place. The partisans had a programmatic vision, which demanded a transformation of social relations and it was inscribed in the planetary socialist revolution. In the temporary liberated zones, as in large parts of Serbia (the republic of Užice was the first liberated zone in Europe, in August and September 1941) and parts of Bosnia and

12 Before British forces supported also royalist forces; Mihailović's Chetniks and also the Komintern (Moscow) ordered the partisans to join their struggle with Chetniks.

13 The Yugoslav communists already before that time started to organise politics detached from the dictate of Moscow. Yugoslavia was one of the few states in Europe that succeeded to autonomously liberate itself from the Nazi occupation. The Yugoslav resistance struggle grew into a Yugoslav army. At the end of the war the forces numbered more than 800,000. These military and political efforts can be seen as crucial for the continuation of the communist politics that autonomously transformed social relations during and after war.

Slovenia, local committees of liberation struggle were formed. These committees as new political forms practiced popular politics<sup>14</sup> and organised educational infrastructure, culture events, political meetings for the mobilisation of the masses and basic economical conditions. It was in these impossible conditions that art flourished; partisan poetry, graphic art, theatre and painting were the most important forms of artistic production with massive involvement of non-intellectuals.<sup>15</sup> The partisan struggle produced a revolutionary encounter between mass art and communist politics. Yugoslavia was one of the few states in Europe that was liberated from the Nazi occupation by its own forces. When Belgrade was liberated in 1944, the Soviet Red Army had to ask the partisans for permission to enter Yugoslav territory. The international recognition and autonomy of the partisan struggle was significant for the events that would follow World War II. We should dissect at least three referential points of this event that were internal to the new Yugoslavia and partisan subjectivity. Firstly, national liberation was conceived as a manifestation of solidarity of the masses as part of the international antifascist struggle (Buden 2003). Secondly, a social revolution, which entailed the introduction of new class relations and a transition to a communist, socialist Yugoslavia (see Kirn 2009 and Pupovac 2008). Thirdly, there was a cultural revolution, which meant the break with the bourgeois canons and art autonomy and the masses finding their way to the sphere of culture (Komelj 2009).

14 Instituted in the liberated territories, it existed under the domination of Communist Party, which was not the sole political force. It had to mobilise masses of farmers and intellectuals. The case of the Slovenian liberation struggle was even more complex. There was a broad coalition of leftist political groups that were united in the Liberation Front. Only in 1943, with the Dolomite declaration, groups agreed to the domination of the Communist Party.

15 The Communist Party, which was the leading force in the partisan struggle, supported art for the masses by the masses. Words became weapons when the masses took part in artistic practice and traditional literary canons were questioned. For an account of the relationship between partisan art and politics (see Komelj (2009) and Močnik (2005)). The partisan-resistance poetry in Slovenia was later collected in four massive volumes that testify to the immense literary production of the masses (Paternu 1998).

## b.) Self-Management as a Politics of anti-Stalinism

Most historians situate the beginnings of 'self-management' in the late 1940s.<sup>16</sup> *Self-management signified a definite break with Stalinism*. It emerged as a political form of anti-Stalinism, an alternative socialist development. After the consolidation of political power in the 1920s, Stalin established a socialist model that was to be used as a universal model for all future socialist states. This model amounted to socialism within one state, with special aid from the Soviet Union. The conflict between the Yugoslav Communist Party and Stalin's leadership had already existed during WWII and only grew stronger after the war. In 1948, the infamous *Informbiro* struggle took place and Yugoslavia was expelled from the socialist camp.<sup>17</sup> Facing a difficult international situation, from the civil war in Greece and the open question of Trieste (borders with Italy) to economic isolation, Yugoslavia was left to its own devices. After numerous debates in 1948, Party officials and the intelligentsia came up with a first systemic answer that formulated a different socialist politics. Interestingly, and not without irony, the Yugoslav socialist self-management was arguably the only successful case of socialism within one state and developed a substantial 'autarchic'

16 It was introduced in the legal documents from 1950 onwards.

17 To discuss the reasons for the conflict is not within the scope of this essay. We will just mention one of the most important reasons. There was a strong movement in the Balkans to set up a Balkan Socialist Federation. Yugoslavia, as the name already suggests, entailed a common denominator of "South Slaves". The Balkan Socialist Federation would unite the Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian and Yugoslav communist parties and working people. This process was thwarted by Churchill and Stalin, who during the Yalta conference (1945) divided the Balkan into two spheres of interests. Effectually, the Yalta agreement tended to stop any regional bottom-up development. For some historical background of the Socialist Federation, see Samary (1988).

economy (though it was never completely closed).<sup>18</sup> The Yugoslav economy was not only organised as the planned economy, as we will later show, new forms of production units emerged. Self-management had unanticipated political effects: ranging from a new way of work organisation and workers' participation to a new relationship between politics and economy. This meant a first radical break within the socialist movement that was manifested at an international level. One of the global and long-term consequences of the rupture was the non-aligned movement.

### c.) Non-Aligned Movement as Alternative to the Cold War Map

Most historical textbooks characterise the period between 1945 and 1990 as the Cold War era, which divided the world into two camps. This historical account is misleading, because a third camp, a different political formation, existed. This camp did not want to be ascribed to either of the imperialist blocs. The international politics that launched a non-aligned movement came into existence in Bandung 1955 and Yugoslavia was one of the key founders. The non-aligned movement promoted anti-colonial struggles. This was a political movement that was subtracted from the 'block' politics and produced a disruption in the Cold War map. It advocated a non-imperialist world constitution and a just organisation of international relations (Rubinstein 1970).

These three moments constitute the only revolutionary event that took place in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Yugoslavia. Yugoslav self-management politics meant a definite and final rupture with the existing social order. It is true that the most important part of these tri-partite politics is situated at its early stages. If the radicalness of the project started as a revolutionary war that transformed social relations, it was only the formulation of an anti-Stalinist critique and the non-aligned movement that

<sup>18</sup> Illegal paths between neighbouring countries existed throughout socialist times. More importantly, the Yugoslav economy started opening up to the West.

produced lasting consequences that transformed the shape of the globalised world. *Universalist politics brought global effects.*

#### 4. Fundamental Deadlock(s): Elements for a Critique of the Self-Management Ideology<sup>19</sup>

*Dictionnaire critique du Marxisme* (Labica et al 1999: 69-75) defines self-management firstly as the rejection of a bureaucratic form of management and secondly as the rejection of the Bolshevik model and social democracy. The entry in the *Dictionary* provides us with an analytical model that evaluates the ways in which the principles of self-management correspond with social reality. Yugoslav self-management passed the test on the first two moments, i.e. transforming society and social relations, whereas the third moment, the anti-institutional axis of the workers' politics, was in reality not part of the struggles, but only a formal guarantee. The beginnings of self-management had a strong political charge; its future development took quite a different and 'regressive' course. We name this shift the *self-managementisation* of society. The edginess and the politics of

19 Why the difference in naming? The discussion on the roots of the concept of *autogestión* is important. The word *autogestión* has a Greek and Latin etymology. The word *auto* comes from the Greek *autós* (self, same). *Gestión* comes from the Latin *gestio* (managing), which in turn comes from *gerere* (to bear, carry, manage). As Marcelo Vieta argues, drawing on Farmer's argument: "one can conceptualize it as 'self-gestation'—to self-create, self-control, self-provision, and, ultimately, self-produce; in other words, to practice *autogestión* means to be self-reliant. Tellingly, the English words 'gestate' and 'gestation' evolved from the word *gestion*. Taken together, *autogestión* alludes to an organic, biological, and process movement of creation and conception, having social political relevance in its implicit notion of immanence, becoming, and potentiality. Together, the words *auto* and *gestión* yield the perhaps inadequate English term 'self-management'" (2008). Self-management is connected to a workers' bottom-up organisation, desire to self-organise and self-create, but can be embedded in the capital itself. There is no need for romanticisation and the Yugoslav historical experience shows the dialectical turn in full light.

working people were lost through the process of consolidation of socialist power. Self-management became an official ideology that was promoted 'from above' and can be regarded as a bureaucratic reform, but nevertheless an important reform, that laid the foundations for new institutions. This reform had unanticipated effects, since a greater autonomy of production units meant a different development, which was not in line with the hard-line version of planned economy. Even though the politics of self-management opened up political space for economical innovations, its most stressed and intended political element, the dominance of workers, was not realised through the process. The politicisation of all aspects of social life occurred from 1950s onwards.

This formal framework does not tell us much about the concrete situation. By analysing it, we would like to extract the point of deviation. The latter was not a consequence of the inhumane ruling of communist bureaucracy (moralistic critique) that supposedly alienated itself from the masses, rather the regression is found in its humanistic core that advocated the happiness of individuals. We argue that *the self-management ideology revolved around the humanist ideal of the generic human being, which, quite paradoxically, got realised only in the post-Fordist reorganisation of late capitalism.*

Where can we situate this humanistic nexus? The latter can be easily exposed in the texts of the key Yugoslav ideologue, Edvard Kardelj (1979). The self-manager in the self-management society should strive for a specific goal, that is, for the realisation of the *generic man*. This troublesome presupposition is derived from the early Marx, which was ironically a reference to communist hard-line leadership and to communist dissidents – Praxis Marxism.<sup>20</sup> The heart of self-management consists of an identical ideal, which can be admittedly reached in different ways. Praxis philosophers advocated socialism with a human

20 Žižek correctly criticises 'Heideggerian' Marxists who believed that the essence of modern man can be found in the essence of self-management (2000: 13). This ties in with our thesis that official ideology and its unofficial critique became a double of the same ideological universe.

face, criticised the Party bureaucratic handling of power and wanted to employ only intellectual means so as not to get their hands dirty. Party functionaries lead society towards this identical ideal, but with other, i.e. *real-politik*, means. Both positions share a common goal, which is to realise generic man in a society without class conflicts.

The self-management vision of society definitely differed from the bourgeois ideology, even though both held generic man as a goal in future society. Bourgeois ideology sees society divided into the autonomous fields of economy, politics and culture. Also, in the liberal view, each individual is responsible for his happiness. In contrast to this, the self-management ideology does not posit the origin of happiness in human beings. Further, it does not recognise the autonomisation of social spheres. In self-management politics, the self-manager would not operate only in the economic sphere, but in society in general. The worker becomes a central reference, which cuts society and makes sense of the imaginary relation between individual and society, to put it in Althusserian terms. Instead of the avant-garde role of the bureaucracy, which would assign workers their places, we get a totality of self-managed workers, who would be able to 'inhabit' all structural places. The enlightenment touch of the self-managed society seconds a basic ontological claim: all workers are thinking beings. The new institutions such as the workers' council and local spatial communities are assigned an important role in political decisions. But we should ask ourselves, what was the basis of this ideological superstructure?

The material basis of self-management was the economic unit, a self-managed type of enterprise called Basic Organisation of Associated Labour (BOAL).<sup>21</sup> Every worker was supposed to take part in decisions about the economic actions of BOAL. This ideal economic subject was seen as a political model to be instituted in the whole of society. New

21 This production unit differs from cooperative kolhoz (Soviet Union) or Chinese people's communes. However, it is not in our range to analyse these difference. For a detailed definition and the functions of BOALs, see Kardelj (1979).

institutions were designed to facilitate the worker's autonomy in the sphere of production and in general. However, the self-management presupposition was unable to escape the condition of a genuinely humanist ideology. Man had to be prioritised in society. And how should we attain the so-called generic man in more concrete terms?

The centre of socialist emancipation remained stuck in the theory of alienation. If we look carefully, we cannot miss a central stake that was at work in this narrative, the stake that was loyal to a certain way of reading young Marx. Marx criticised Feuerbach on the point of religion: a critique of religion and God is not enough; a critique of real material relations is necessary. Only in that way can we consider real, human emancipation. In short, Marx's *German Ideology* (1845) sets the origins of alienation in the division of labour. Impersonal social domination is at work in the labour process and the worker is separated from his product. The relations among individuals get objectified through the production process and the overall division of labour.<sup>22</sup> The abolition of the division of labour was one of the principal goals of self-management and was read in line with Marx's romanticisation of 'generic man'. This 'generic man' will be able to undertake many activities, as a famous passage from Marx's *German Ideology* goes: "society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner".<sup>23</sup> Once the division of labour is abolished,<sup>24</sup> a true de-alienation

22 An elaboration of the theory of alienation can be found in the theory of 'commodity fetishism' in *Capital*. Our project, inspired by Althusser's critique of the humanist Marx, dissects precisely the humanist kernel of self-management.

23 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>.

24 It is curious to see that even a firm communist line adopted by Balibar in his *Dictatorship of proletariat* (1976) advocated the goal of the abolition of division of labour. Can we not argue that the insistence on the abolition of division of labour paved the path for human emancipation (post-Marxism) and the abandonment of the revolutionary project?

would happen and a new self-managed subject would emerge. The productive potential of each worker would be freed from the objectified processes at work in capitalist production. Thus, the self-managed worker became everyone, or rather he could occupy all social positions ('structural places'). He was a *total Träger*: worker as bureaucrat, worker as technocrat (manager) and worker as worker. At first glance we can find an egalitarian maxim at work in this idea, namely all community members can do anything. But as we will see later, the fundamental condition of alienation in socialism has not disappeared. Despite the redistribution of wealth the structural conditions that reproduced inequality and class relations were not abolished. Thus, the self-management maxim is based on the presupposition of the abolition of the division of work, which was not the key target set by Marx. Self-management ideology hypostasised an ideal figure of the self-manager that necessitated the emergence of the new Man: not only a shock worker, but also a shock bureaucrat and a shock manager.

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, we do not want to do away with a maximal engagement in communist politics, but we insist to look for the primary contradiction that was created in the socialist social conditions. Afterwards the maximal human engagement can spread its wings. Making the worker figure universal has to be considered together with the abolition of the division of labour – and not the abolition of commodity labour itself –, which was one of the most substantial humanist goals. The theory of socialist emancipation concentrated on the aspects of alienation and remained blind for the perspective of class struggles within socialism. Its intervention into social relations – the reorganisation of the labour relations and redistribution of value – meant that the socialist state produced conditions for a social just society. This makes it different from the capitalist welfare state, but in no way makes it qualify for a communist society.

When reading the humanist imperative of 'generic man' closely it simply makes us associate it with the contemporary post-Fordist perspective. We can rightly ask ourselves if today's situation is not similar, since each of us has to acquire new knowledge all the time, since we have to develop our potentials

in order to come closer to self-realisation and happiness.<sup>25</sup> We have to be skilful and we can become anyone. We will illustrate 'self-management's *condition humaine*' by taking the example of a typical researcher today. The researcher does not only undertake research at an institute, university or a firm, but has to develop multiple organisational skills: establishing an academic network, becoming a manager (apply for funding, organise conferences, publish extensively) and also taking on bureaucratic tasks, the most important being to justify the research's usefulness. However, this is not typical only of researchers in academia, because innovation, creativity, intellectuality are the imperatives of post-Fordism for anyone entering the labour force market. The utopian potential of the generic and creative subject that came into existence in the bosom of self-management socialism reached its peak and realisation in the post-Fordist regime. The self-realisation of the contemporary cognitive worker is attained in one way or another: either through financial incentives or through fear of losing one's job. If the ideology of creativity works impeccably, then workers enjoy their jobs. Every day they are becoming more creative and efficient.

Let us return to our original criticism of the division of labour. This division did not disappear in times of self-management. The distribution of tasks and functions has become even more specialised and refined in the new network of institutions and experts. Not only was there a division between and within production units, this labour division was interiorised in the producer too. *The so-called abolition of the division of labour led to new forms of exploitation in the self-*

25 Happiness has been about investment of politics for a long time, since Jacobins but today as well (see Žižek 2001a). It is necessary to include a Foucauldian perspective, because it is almost impossible to conceptualise contemporary phenomena such as 'happiness studies' and psychology research that deal with 'burned-out' people in terms of the imperative: how to stay productive and happy. The relation between power and knowledge has become very transparent and obviously characteristic of cognitive labour conditions.

*management system*. Thus, the abolition of labour division was the necessary illusion of self-management that parallels the abolition of labour division in post-Fordism. In the late 1960s<sup>26</sup> the abolition of hierarchies was called for as well as a higher level of freedom in enterprises by workers and students. In Yugoslavia, the 'enlightened' communist leadership started this project almost two decades earlier, with similar results. The demands of social critique in 1968 were translated: they wanted enjoyment and they got regulation of enjoyment. The regulation/post-Fordist regime brought more freedom, but also produced new forms of exploitation. One of the key post-Fordist theoreticians, Boutang, excellently shows the demise of both Taylorist organisation and Adam Smith's notion of the division of labour (a reduction of complex to simple labour, division of intellectual and manual labour, specialisation): any rigid or general division of labour blocks the coordination of complex operations and cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, production is much more organised in the framework of new cognitive criteria, whereas the old conceptualisation of surplus value has been transformed (Boutang 2007: 87-92). Within the new post-Fordist regime parts of cognitive criteria such as participation, knowledge sharing, networking, managing, and cooperation, which intend to realise human potential and abolish the formal division of labour, are in fact exploitative moments of production.

To sum up, self-management and post-Fordism have at least two common characteristics: humanism and new forms of exploitation, with cooperation and participation becoming crucial in the (self-)managing of the production process. While self-management could not realise the ideal of the 'generic man', post-Fordism 'succeeded' in this mission.

26 See Brian Holmes' analysis of flexible personality in times of post-Fordism and especially his understanding of May '68 (2002).

27 We have to say that the division of labour still exists. Are we not today witnessing a truly global(ised) division of labour (see Arrighi 2007 and Harvey 2000)? When we contextualise the 'post-Fordist' tendency in the world-system perspective we can claim that the abolition of labour remains only an illusion.

## 5. Self-Management and the Role of Law: Property

We are interested in law, because precisely this instance and its (non-)theorisation was crucial in rethinking the transition towards a communist society. This is exposed in the socialist understanding of expropriation and the concept of social property. Our thesis is that the socialist interpretation of the constitution of the community remained rooted in the tradition of social contract theories, where politics and law stand in a very close relationship.

Beside the humanist ideology, one of the major restrictions of historical materialisms is the absence of a consistent theory of law.<sup>28</sup> Scholastically, Marxism placed the law on the level of superstructure, which consists of political-juridical institutions and ideology. I would like to refer here to a vulgar Marxist assumption: *the (economic) infrastructure determines superstructure and the primacy is assigned to the productive forces* (one part of the economic base). This thesis presupposes a definite concept of development, industrialisation, with technology as the most important force. This thesis was in Yugoslavia reflected in the advocacy of the 'productionist' model (massive industrialisation). The sacred mechanism of alienation on the level of the human being received its complementary mechanism on the level of the community where the law entered the stage with all its mechanism. The abolition of private property is a signal of communist society. However, the 'socialist' reading implied a peculiar identification: it equated economic and legal property, reducing law to the epiphenomenon of economy. Although we cannot expect more from a scholastic scheme of society, we have to ask ourselves whether this argumentation is not in contradiction with its own departure. The change of property relations – the abolition of private property – was implemented in Yugoslavia by the politics of nationalising the means of production and the collectivisation of the land after

<sup>28</sup> There are some Marxist thinkers of the theory of law, such as Pashukanis (1980), but generally the theory of law is shed insufficient light on.

World War II. It was hoped that the transformation of private property into state property (via nationalisation) would resolve and abolish capitalist contradictions.<sup>29</sup> Self-management took a step further when expropriating the state of the property over means of production. In Yugoslavia, property became social; formally there were no proprietors.<sup>30</sup>

If ideologues remained loyal to their scholastic position (infrastructure determines superstructure) it would be a little awkward to keep insisting that the change in property relations (law as superstructure) will change the base. How could merely the abolition of private property result in communism? This simplified framework did not shed light on production relations in its entirety. New legal relations and social property did not mean that Yugoslavia entered communism. There was no formal proprietor of the means of production, but this did not mean there were no class relations.<sup>31</sup>

Socialist theoreticians in Yugoslavia (and elsewhere) completely disregarded the most important issue of historical materialism: the problem of exploitation and class struggle. They focused on the question of property. Their reasoning was mechanistic: the agents who appropriate value are no longer the private capitalists. Therefore, capitalism is no longer effective. In the case of Yugoslavia, it is true that nationalisation was firmly established after World War II, as a result of which the state became the biggest owner and socialist theoreticians could rightfully make mention of state property. State property would later be replaced by the social property in self-managed society.

29 For a substantial and extensive critique of socialist economists and ideologues in Yugoslavia, see the excellent analysis of Bavčar, Kirn and Korsika (1985).

30 One of the key Yugoslav legal theoreticians, Bajt (1988), explained the contributions of self-management in the field of property. See also Brborić-Likić (2003).

31 That is why Althusser's reading of law as a specific instance is fruitful. According to historical conditions law is always differently articulated to other instances (overdetermination; determination). Even though Althusser never developed a theory of law, there is some sketch in his *Sur la reproduction* (1995) that I have tried to reconstruct in another article (2007).

The objective was that property would belong to everybody. However, the expropriation of private owners is not a communist, but socialist political practice, which does not make an end to class contradictions. The means of production were not under the workers' control. Instead of continuing the long-term revolution, it was stopped. The politics of expropriation lead to a greater socialisation of capital and the distribution of property and riches, which was definitely more 'just' and humane in socialism than in capitalism.

However, as Marx already analysed in the third volume of *Capital*, the tendency of the socialisation of capital is internal to the development of capitalism. Capital permeates all social spheres. Activities that belonged to other spheres/modes of production, such as affective labour, communal work, are more and more 'hijacked' by capitalist valorisation. On the other hand, socialisation means the emancipation of capital from capitalists to some degree. With the development of credits and financial capital comes the rise of the managerial fraction, which manages/organises the enterprise. The managerial revolution introduced a strategic place in the capitalist mode of production. Balibar's scheme of capitalist social relations demonstrates the part of the worker, where workers and also managers are not owners of the means of production, while on the part of the non-worker, the capitalist is the owner (1970). This scheme shows that managers do not self-evidently belong to the side of the capital. On the contrary, he sides with the work, structurally. Nevertheless, due to his knowledge and his position within the production process, this scheme should be extended when talking about specific political struggles/alliances. The rise of financial capital, the reorganisation of the work regimes and the new form of exploitation put the manager in line with the capitalist. It is the struggle between capitalists and managers that becomes a capitalist class struggle, or more precisely the struggle of the ruling class. It is only through political struggles that the ruling class is formed. It cannot be derived from a pure economic scheme. The coalition between managers and workers is a naïve and economist presupposition, which does not happen through a socialisation of capital. Let us add that in Yugoslavia there were not many cases of this presupposed coalition. The socialisation

of capital is a tendency internal to the capitalist development, whereas the socialist politics of expropriation aggravated this development. In socialism this transformation was at certain historical points dominated by labour and not just by capital.

## Contract and Self-Managed Social Contract

The legal (contractual) dimension is intertwined with a particular economic and political determination. Marx was well aware of the legal horizon as constitutive to the bourgeois world, its cornerstone resting on the division of civil society (*bourgeois*) and state (*citoyen*). This cornerstone is sutured by contract, which is the key reference that guarantees the equality and freedom of the abstract individual. Contract as the key instance in bourgeois society – can something similar be claimed about Yugoslavian socialism? Undoubtedly, the contract did not disappear from society or from the reproduction of production relations. The contract remained a document between the free and equal self-managed worker and the enterprise (BOAL). This directly has to do with the question of wages, which was of a collective nature. After the initial strict regulation of prices and wages, level market reforms in 1965 granted the worker a more favourable position in the negotiation process. Ordinarily the politics of wages were discussed by many different agents (working organisation, trade unions, councils) on many levels (federal, republic, local), which eventually led to a collective contract in a branch. Another quite fascinating perspective can be traced back to the beginnings of the Yugoslav cultural industry. Pavle Levi describes the situation of flexible contract in the film industry 1950s in following way: “Workers’ councils were thus introduced as decision-making bodies overseeing film production, distribution, and exhibition, while the creative personnel associated with the process of filmmaking (directors, cinematographers, screenwriters) were given the status of freelance professionals” (2007: 15). The law on the collective and individual levels of freelancers played an important part in articulating workers relations. It remained a key reproductive mechanism of socialist economy.

On a more political level Yugoslavia was famous for its constant reforms and new constitutions, which defined

socialist relations. The League of Communists of Yugoslavia during its general congress accepted a programme which was then implemented. The programme was translated into legal material. Once accepted, there was no possible discussion; any deviation would be severely criticised. The principle of democratic centralism was firmly in practice during the whole period of self-management. The correct interpretation of the legal material was taken by the main ideologist Edvard Kardelj. This makes us wonder how it was possible that against the background of self-management – that was based on Lenin's idea of the withering away of the state – enormous production of legal material was made. By implementing this vast body of legal documents, the belief in the law was established. Let us not forget that the Yugoslavian 1974 constitution was the longest constitution ever written. Why are law and state so important if the self-management idea wants their abolition? Legal instruments should have enabled the dispersion of political power on various levels to many self-management interests groups. But how could the idea of 'withering away of state' that was attempting to construct community beyond law, fail so bluntly behind its initial push and revolutionary beginnings of Yugoslav community? The logic of the law continued to be a necessary reference to socialist ideologues and practices. The more it tried to avoid it, the more it continued to be bound to it.

The main Yugoslav communist ideologist Edvard Kardelj<sup>32</sup> was aware of the ideological function of the law. He knew that an exclusively 'legal' solution would not suffice to realise the transition to communism. He made a step into the right direction by pointing to the crucial problem: how to produce self-managed subjectivity, or rather, how to attain the working class consciousness? This goal needs to be fulfilled for workers to control prices and the production process, to decide what products to purchase, how to coordinate activities. One way

32 His major texts came as a 'quilting point' of the League of Yugoslav Communists' Congresses, and even more importantly, after the inauguration of new Yugoslav constitutions, Kardelj was setting the correct reading for future interpretations.

was to institute the working council within the BOAL, where workers could effectuate decisions through the council. But the other question was, who will delegate the councils and how are these delegates supposed to take pertinent decisions? Without this 'subjective' moment, the constitution of the self-managed community is unthinkable. Kardelj offered no solution to this issue; he just inferred the problem. When we take a closer look at this central question, we can detect a typical problem of the social contract theory.

Already Rousseau was aware of the problem that the *social contract* posed: how can a community be constituted of nothingness? Or rather, who enters into the contractual relationship? What is the relationship between the members and the future community? Even though this original act is imaginary, it has effects on understanding the sheer nature of authority and continuation of revolution. The continuation of the revolutionary project can happen with non-legal means. The 'not-yet-existing' of the (coming) community, the Real, was not explicitly thematised in the theories of the social contract. Each political theory that wants to rethink the rupture in the light of its consequences has to target this dimension of the Real and work with it.<sup>33</sup> Kardelj never found an appropriate answer, as he remained within the scope of legal ideology. The rupture with the state of nature, with pre-war Yugoslavia, meant novelty, something unimaginable in that conjuncture, 'not-yet-realised', but that political act was later transformed into the legitimisation of the new socialist order. Was at any point in the self-managing Yugoslavia this origin of contract or legal instance undermined or transformed? The pure legal approach comes at the point when it presents itself as abstract, neutral, non-contradictory (effacing the struggle), and as the only possible way for thinking politics.<sup>34</sup> But the issue of any progressive political theory is to 'unmake' the law as the ultimate horizon of politics (*fait accompli*).

33 The problem of politics of rupture and maintaining this rupture, a novelty in the constituting state, is a problem posed by Machiavelli. The latter should be closer to socialist tradition than Rousseau.

34 On the non-reflected legal horizon of the constitution, see Negri (1999); on the nature of law, see Althusser (1995).

Admittedly, the theorists of the social contract addressed the question of property, which is not explicitly the question of production relations, but still targets them. The social contract presupposes an egalitarian principle: everyone has to give up everything in order to have it returned. According to Rousseau this act is called total alienation: its “clauses, properly understood, may be reduced to one – the *total alienation* of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community” (SC I, VI, 1966: 12). Even though the conditions of this leap into the realm of the social contract are egalitarian, it still serves the richer, because once the social contract is implemented, the rich are guaranteed that their property is protected. Some are more ‘included’, but equal rules apply for everyone. The individual becomes free and equal. This differs from the feudalistic conception of social positions which would be acquired with birth. The natural inequality was abolished, but other inequalities sneaked in, as Marx already hinted at. And socialist Yugoslavia was no exception in this rule.

Althusser indicated that the real *discrepancy* of the contract can be situated in the hidden presupposition: at the moment of signing the contract there is no community (RP2) with which the individual (RP1) makes the contract:

The ‘peculiarity’ of the Social Contract is that it is an exchange agreement concluded between two RPs (like any other contract), but one in which the second RP does not pre-exist the contract since it is its product. The ‘solution’ represented by the contract is thus pre-inscribed in one of the very conditions of the contract, the RP2, since this RP2 is not pre-existent to the contract. (1972: 130)<sup>35</sup>

Also, in the case of the Yugoslav self-management model, the existing contract contained a paradoxical entity – the paradox

35 Althusser did not yet address the issue of ‘not-yet-existing’ when reading Rousseau. This problem is fully exposed in his reading of Machiavelli (2000).

Self-managed worker (RP1)	Type of exchange ← →	Self-managed community (RP2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Original act: Total alienation of <i>means of production</i></li> </ul>	Transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>State property</i> (later social property)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schema of social-economic relations Worker: labour force (production)</li> </ul>	Appropriation of 'surplus value'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucracy (plan)</li> <li>• Technocrats (organisation)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schema of political power Working people</li> </ul>	Re-presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist Party</li> <li>• Bureaucracy - political representatives</li> <li>• Technocracy - economic representatives</li> </ul>

Table of the Social Contract of the Self-Managed Community

between non-existent self-managed workers (not self-governed) and pending self-managed community.

Exchange is constitutive of every contract. Members have to alienate all means of production to the community. The operation of equality is reversed in the self-managed schema. The means of production are expropriated from the ones who had assets; in other words, they will lose their property. This 'unequal' principle guarantees the future social equality in the new community. Thus, the former expropriators were expropriated by the socialist state, which facilitated the transition and distribution of the means of production and products within society. In the self-managed society, a new contract (and constitution) was established to take one further step. The property would become completely social; both the means of production and the products would be at the disposal of the workers.

Notwithstanding a formal guarantee there was a hidden element in this constellation since this mediation between the community and the individual does not unfold on its own. What were the actual agents that made contracts and laws? Were these in the power of workers' councils? The historical facts lead us in a different direction, the League of Communist of Yugoslavia (LCY), was the agent that embodied *volonté générale*. The LCY first prepared and, once it was agreed on, interpreted the contract.

Ideally, the contract would imply the realisation of worker control over the means of production. However, this general contract did not prevent further legislation from taking place. It is quite naïve and typically liberal to presuppose that the existence of an enlightened constitution and moral responsibility will make the ruling class respect these laws. This shows a fundamental incomprehension of the political reality and a failure to take into account over-determination: politics is a field of struggle, whereas the legal form is embedded in political and ideological struggles (interpretations). In socialist reality this meant that the outcomes of the class struggle for the dominant class were synthesised in an additional legislative corpus and in political struggles within the apparatuses. The effects of class struggle in the Yugoslavian socialist formation exposed contradictions at work within the legal-political foundation of the self-managed community.

Let us return for a moment to the capitalist mode of production, to the articulation of law and economy, which might help us understand the role of law in socialism. As indicated by Marx, each historical epoch realises a different relationship between law and property relations. We very much agree with how Balibar interpreted the distinction between (legal and economic) property and (political) appropriation. Starting off from this distinction in the production process, property can be described as the “operation between things, which the capitalist purchased” (1970: 214) from the perspective of the capital and as a separation of the direct producer from the means of production from the perspective of labour (property-less). The non-worker, the capitalist, is the owner (property) in the production process, in which he appropriates the surplus-labour:

capital is the owner of all the means of production *and* of labour, and therefore it is the owner of the entire product. But the first does not designate a property relation: it belongs to the analysis of what Marx called the ‘labour process’, or rather it situates the analysis of that labour process as part of the analysis of the mode of production. Nowhere in it does the capitalist intervene *as an owner*, but only the labourer, the means of labour and the object of labour. (213)

Lipietz elaborated on some of Balibar's theses. As he quite rightly asserts, there is a substantial difference between "property/juridical property, borne by the same *supports* (means and things), but in places inscribed in two *different* and relatively autonomous instances" (1993: 108). Moreover, "the relation of 'economic ownership' has as a condition of existence (was over-determined by) the relation of juridical ownership" (ibid: 111). The juridical right of property is logically different: legal relation deals with the contractual relationship between persons (legal subjects), whereas property relations codify relations between persons and things.

Appropriating surplus value, it being a political form of exploitation (class struggle) is one thing, legal support (property of the capitalist) and economical property is quite another. In self-management socialism many different forms of property coexisted: private, municipal, state and social, to name but a few. How were they translated into economic practices? Even though remaining within the horizon of the bourgeois law (property), legal forms were the outcome of political struggles in the political-economic sphere. Appropriation is not necessarily in the domain of the capitalist. With the growing power of technocracy/management the *organisation of production* itself became an actual form of appropriation of surplus value. In Yugoslavian socialism the surplus value was divided between two factions: the technocracy and bureaucracy and they decided upon further distribution. The technocracy became an important agent of appropriation, as it dominated production units – BOALs. Conversely, a portion of surplus value was still appropriated by the bureaucracy for planning and funding central financial agencies.<sup>36</sup>

36 Charles Bettelheim also contributed to considering this articulation between politics, economy and law. He distinguished three different moments in the production process: holding, possession and property. Their specific combination then defines a type of property. The relationship of immediate producers and means of productions with a possible use of products is taken into account as a basic matrix of his distinction (1975: 57-96).

## 6. Class Struggle in Yugoslav Self-Management Socialism

In this part we are firmly relying on the book *Delo+Kapital v SFRJ*<sup>37</sup>, the only real critique of Yugoslav political economy. We extrapolated the following thesis, which we will elaborate: *class struggle as part of the self-management model continued to exist, although in different forms: the primal contradiction remained the one between labour and capital. The primal aspect of class struggle took place between bureaucracy and technocracy, which formed a ruling class, while the workers were a secondary aspect.*

A specific step forward in the development of socialism conceptualised the transfer of state property to social property, under which conditions workers would take over the control of the production process. This great leap never took place. A central reason for the failure of the self-management model lies in fact that the social relations among workers within production units and in the political sphere were not dominated by the (working) masses,<sup>38</sup> but by representatives of state political apparatuses and BOAL's management, both of which participated in economy and, as said, appropriated the surplus value produced by workers. In the Yugoslav self-management model, the most visible form of economic class struggle occurred among bureaucrats and technocrats. A typical objection would be that despite the formal guarantee of workers participation, the actual (political) reality was very different. The socialist critique of western human rights and formal democracy could be turned against existing socialism. The working people were absent from the political and to a certain extent also from the economic decisions. Let us make clear that we do not consider self-management as a direct democracy of working people and their total control of society. This would be a naïve belief in transparency of everything and

37 The study *Work and Capital in SFRY* was written by Bavčar, Kirn and Korsika (1985). We refer to them as the authors of SFRY.

38 See also Bettelheim (1975: 96). There are three moments of mass politics, which involved broad participation from the part of the masses: World War II, the late 1960s and mid-1980s.

everyone. *Yugoslav politics of rupture consisted of a specific encounter between communist activists (Party) and the masses.*<sup>39</sup>

It was this encounter that formed the spontaneity of the mass movement and triggered the socialist revolution. As we already showed in the first part, the self-management model did not exist in the international workers' movement. It was something new, opening up the possibility of something 'not-yet-there', unimaginable, handling this tension between the possible and impossible. Self-management is an encounter between the communist leadership and the masses and does not prevent political experimentation that is in line with communist goals.<sup>40</sup> The workers' self-management does not mean 100% cooperation of the masses and complete control of the whole of society, which some dissidents could easily deem as totalitarianism of the masses. The complete cooperation of the masses on all levels of economic activities is not even possible; it could become destructive and life-threatening. We rather not imagine what would happen if there was a constant debate about the train schedule by all railroad workers. Certain economic and social processes need to be concisely and centrally managed due to the specialisation of procedures. The failure of the Yugoslav self-management model lies somewhere else. Firstly, after the WWII the relation between masses and Party started weakening. Secondly, how open and accessible were functions in enterprises and political institutions? What did the communist leadership do in order to open up and incite critical discussions? How did the Yugoslavian authorities implement a development model for attaining greater equality between nations and working people? Were there some genuine cases of workers'

39 Partisan struggle was from the beginning a popular phenomenon, but one cannot say that 100% of the people took up arms and fought against the occupation. As said, also collaborators were active in war-time Yugoslavia.

40 Admittedly, the communist goals and the ways in which politics are formulated need to be decided on in political practice. To prescribe the programme in a democratic centralist way has not been an instance of very successful politics. These questions have a long and complex history in popular struggles, discussions on the Left and far Left, between anarchists, communists, socialists and others.

self-management and if so did the authorities back or reject them? To simply adhere to and support the former policies of communist leadership would in the last instance mean to remain conservative Marxist. To rely on the directives coming from the top did not really mean to practice workers' self-management or to incite workers' participation. The political principle of the Yugoslav communists remained democratic centralism, which advocated the vanguard role of the Party. One had to enter the established political apparatus, which at the end of the day prevented an encounter with working people. There were historical moments when masses entered the stage. But this happened rarely and with very different, even tragic results.<sup>41</sup>

Our critique of self-management is not merely formal as we would like to refer to the point where class struggles took place in the socialist formation. The most visible struggle took place between bureaucrats and technocrats. Bureaucrats represented the 'social capital' (state property), whereas technocrats represented 'autonomous capitals' (BOAL).<sup>42</sup> The latter were in charge of innovation and planning on the level of enterprise, because they possessed the 'know-how'. Conversely, bureaucrats regulated the macro-economy by directing flows of investments and deploying big strategic projects (planned economy). Economic class struggle was the principal aspect of this contradiction, whose effects synthesised in a compromise within the ruling class. The temporary outcomes of the struggle

41 This raises the problem of the politics of the masses. As Balibar has shown in political philosophy there was always fear of masses (1994), which in many ways theoretically blocked even thinking what the entering of the masses in the field of politics would mean. Also, one cannot just idealise the masses and think the politics of masses are from the start more emancipatory. The handling of mass movements was quite symptomatic in the Yugoslav history. If in the 1970s some of extreme nationalistic tendencies were repressed by the communist leadership (in a definitely problematic way), a much graver tendency could be detected in the 1980s, when the Left opposition was repressed, while the rightwing gained momentum within and outside of political apparatus.

42 A similar analysis could apply to other countries of the socialist block, with the specific difference taken into account. As was already stressed, the Yugoslavian model implied different production units, a political organisation of the economy and more political participation in society.

were secured in new constitutions of Yugoslavia, which entailed a further institutionalisation via economic legislation and a re-organisation of political institutions. This aspect is essential to understand the economic policies of the socialist formations and the new modes of regulation in specific historical moments. These processes were manifested through establishing and closing down financial institutions (fund for development, fund for investment...).<sup>43</sup> In the period of the 1960s technocrats started dominating different institutions. Let us briefly touch upon the example of banks, as the most symptomatic institutional loci of power struggles. Smaller banks were given a greater role vis-à-vis the Central Bank that was in control of the federal bureaucracy. Banks became more autonomous and had more money to circulate. This meant more credits for economic activities of the BOALs and, consequently, economic expansion of 'autonomous capitals'. More and more, technocrats were getting involved on the level of the republics, via different political institutions that represented the self-managed interests. Struggles occurred between factions of bureaucracies, whereas the federal bureaucracy had to struggle against the bureaucracy of the republics. The latter supported the technocracy and its liberal programmes to open up and direct the Yugoslav economy toward the West, to build infrastructure for tourism, motorways, to sponsor economic activities in the parts of Yugoslavia that were already developed. The situation was affected by the market reform in 1965 which got famous for its 4-D motto: *de-politisation, decentralisation, de-etatisation and democratisation* (Brborić-Likić 2003). The technocracy further gained political power and advocated 'market' against 'plan'. In the beginning, the Yugoslavian bureaucracy was a dominant part of the ruling class, but from the late 1960s on, the dominance shifted in favour of the technocrats. Through these struggles the ruling class came into existence.

Yugoslav socialist economists based their analyses on a particular interpretation of value-form supposedly independent

43 For a historical analysis of institutions, see the authors of SFRY (1985), Horvat (1985) and Samary (1988).

of capital. Symptomatically, they centred on the first chapter of *Capital*. Socialist economists, according to the authors of SFRY, “elevate value form of product in a specific kind of transhistorical determination of all modes of production or more precisely of all modes of exchange of products” (1985: 14). As the famous Yugoslav communist ideologist Kardelj used to say: “commodity production and market are a form of free exchange of labour between self-managers” (Bavčar et al 1985: 14). However, authors advocate the thesis that any determination of value has a historically specific character, regardless of whether we are talking about capitalism or socialism. In contradistinction to the socialist economists, the authors of SFRY argue that “only in capitalism commodity form of production and exchange started dominating over the whole economic scene” (ibid.: 22). Characteristic of capitalism is not only that people exchange, but that they are placed into the position of inequality. But in Yugoslav socialism, the reality of commodity relations, overtly recognised by the official ideologue, was also dominant in the economy. Kardelj claimed that commodity production or the market itself is not a source of inequality or capitalist relations, while the authors of SFRY replied that the individual commodity is inextricably bound up with labour force. The latter can only be established on the basis of an unequal distribution of conditions of production, therefore it remains rooted in the relationship between capital and labour (1985: 10-35).

According to Marx the fundamental separation/*Trennung*<sup>44</sup> within capitalism is a separation of the worker from the means of production that are in the hands of the capitalist class. In Yugoslavia’s socialist formation, this separation is suspended by the state, which should eventually lead to the workers controlling their means of production. This separation was ‘relativised’ by the state, because it was not the ‘capital’ but the state that possessed the means of production and the process of appropriation of value continued to exist. In the socialist economy two separations occurred. The first separation took place on

44 For a detailed analysis of the concept of *Trennung*/*Scheidung* in Marx, see Močnik (1999).

the level of the market, the separation between *production units* (enterprises), while the second separation was between managers (technocrats) and workers within the enterprise.

The first separation – between different BOALs – engendered a class struggle that materialised in various ways: through competition between various BOALs, growing differences between the republics of Yugoslavia and fights for setting product prices and the level of money-circulation (crediting). This was the *Kampfplatz* of the ruling class. It is true that the state (bureaucracy) with the help of the Central Bank could maintain the level of prices to a certain degree; prices of the most important products were particularly regulated by the central authorities. However, state agency instruments coexisted with the mechanism that was dominated by the technocracy, but was also market-orientated and could not be controlled. The conditions of production were more favourable in the more developed parts of Yugoslavia: certain BOALs were technologically more advanced; the authorities of some republics brought about a larger fluctuation of money and a higher level of investment. This resulted in differences in the economic capacities of the BOALs generally, and in prices differences specifically (competition). As figures show, there was massive non-development in Yugoslavia: the differences between republics did not remain status quo or diminished as was expected. Quite on the contrary, the striking economic gap between Slovenia and Kosovo continuously increased (see table of incomes and living standards in Bavčar et al 1985: 64). The industries in more developed regions ‘exploited’ the less developed. This structural gap was constitutive to the reproduction of the regional inequalities. The economic crisis in the 1980s also hit the undeveloped part of Yugoslavia to a much bigger extent.<sup>45</sup> Even stricter measures of the state political apparatus could not prevent this expanding gap, whilst commodity production still dominated planned production.

45 These policies were implemented by a dictat of international financial institutions (IMF, WB) and only deepened the crisis. It was one of the reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia. See comprehensive studies of Magaš (1993) and Woodward (1995a).

The second separation cut through the socialist enterprises. As shown in the departing thesis of the section, the secondary aspect of the principal contradiction is that of the self-managed workers. Yugoslavia was proclaimed a state of 'working people(s)', yet there were at least two deadlocks that thwarted political participation in the emerging self-managed community. We already exposed the logic of (liberal) *contractualism* as part of the legal-political foundation. Another central limitation of socialist political theory and practice can be found in the central liberal ideologem and logic: the representation of the people. The representation did not work in a typical parliamentary fashion, but was mediated on many levels. We could say a certain mix of corporatism and a complex system of delegation represented as many social segments as possible. Even though local political organisations in some regions enjoyed a quite active political engagement from the workers, the majority of vital decisions was still coordinated and directed by the consolidated political apparatus, the League of Yugoslav Communists. In the last instance it was precisely this 'quilting point' of Party and the State that blocked *mass* politics (Badiou 1998). To paraphrase Mastnak's evaluation of Yugoslav self-management (1982): the Communist Party's representation of the proletariat became the Party's representation of capital (individual and social). In the sphere of production, specifically within the BOAL, the technocracy dominated and acquired a majority in all workers' councils. Apart from the dominance within politics and economy, the technocrats organised and hegemonised the production of knowledge (new universities) from the 1960s onwards.<sup>46</sup> Instead of an encounter

46 It would take us too far to analyse cultural hegemony in Yugoslavia. We can only refer to an interesting account of the aspect of cultural hegemony analysed by Lev Centrih (2003). For an analysis of the ideological domination of the technocracy, see the authors of SFRY (1985). The ideological domination of technocracy over bureaucracy and the complex dynamic of different instances expose the problematical claim of mainstream theories of totalitarianism that try to portray bureaucracy as a new class. This new class supposedly determined economical, political and ideological domain. Thinking class without class struggle is impossible. One of first advocates of this type of reasoning was Milovan Đilas, a former hard-liner of the Communist leadership (1962).

between the communist Party and the masses (mass politics and workers' control), the mature period of self-management saw the rise of a professional political and economical class.

The official ideology proclaimed the *integration of capital and labour under the control of the workers*. However, the analysis of the authors of SFRY claims correctly that it is the other way around. There was a basic disintegration, which is “irreconcilable contradiction that is embodied in the workers' class and working people on the one hand, and technocracy and bureaucracy on the other hand” (1985: 66). The workers were supposed to perform the same tasks as the capitalists, but how were the workers going to prepare the regulation and planning of the production process? The workers found themselves in a paradoxical position: instead of struggle against wage labour and capital, they should hold the structural place of the capitalist. The worker is in a schizophrenic position and fights, like Don Quixote did, against himself, whilst the windmills keep on milling. Even if the worker assumes the position of the capitalist, this does not entail that the capital is abolished. Only the social relation changes and with it a new form of exploitation emerges. In the best case the new form of exploitation is a form of self-exploitation in which workers exploit themselves. They remain bound to wage labour despite their domination over capital.<sup>47</sup> But when the technocrats dominated the class struggle in enterprises, the technocrats dominated the workers and the relation between labour and capital shifted back.

After the reforms of 1965 workers could influence the level of their wages. Hence, a mechanism of self-valorisation was established. The workers could directly negotiate the levels of their wages within their BOALs, although the majority of workers or trade union organisation did not follow the development of their wages (Vukmanović-Tempo 1982). The reproduction of labour force was formally under the workers' control. But the most important question did not concern the redistribution of surplus value. The latter remained a mere socialist reformist strategy; the extraction

47 In the capitalist model in Argentina after the crisis, the development of self-management was introduced from below. Given the brutal circumstances, this meant a huge political rupture. See Vieta (2008).

of surplus value continued. The BOALs' profits (at that time called 'extra income') were re-invested in political institutions to promote other economic and non-economic activities, but also invested to reproduce independent capital (the BOALs themselves). The discrepancy between labour and capital remained the principle contradiction according to the authors of SFRY: "socialist self-management is a form of control and management of capital after labour" (ibid: 48). Let us upgrade their conclusion with our thesis on the separation within self-management socialism. *The dominant separations were the ones between production units (market) and within production units (managing or non-managing the production process)*. The typical capitalist separation between the means of production and workers was displaced. The historical advent of the new faction (technocracy) is concurrent with the rise of the managerial fraction in post-Fordism. The key separation in self-management socialism is crucial in understanding the novelties of post-Fordist regime.

## Political Class Struggle

These conclusions open up an interesting political perspective on the history of the struggles. 1950s saw a consolidation of the self-management system; reproductive mechanism of socialist power were set in, or in terms of Rancière, the police worked to suspend revolutionary sequence of politics.<sup>48</sup> Despite the direction toward the eroding of the state, numerous functions and institutions accumulated and became specialised. The more the socialist power tried to disperse the power, the more their effects were felt across society, where a true micro-physics of power was at work. How did this socialist counting take place? Who was the *part-sans-part*, who was excluded from the counting? Who was not heard or seen? Nowadays a dominant 'dissident'<sup>49</sup> answer

48 We borrow some concepts from Rancière's excellent book *Disagreement* (1998).

49 In Slovenia, and in the post-socialist context in general, a dissident position is considered the most pure and authentic position to fight socialism. The most typical representative of this cultural circle in the 1980s gathered around the journal *Nova Revija* [New Review].

reconstructs a *part-sans-part* in a specific way. Dissidents claim that socialism excluded the genius, artist, intellectual or someone who did not fit into the grey landscape of mediocrity, of averages, of equal and uniformed individuals. The terror of equality was enforced upon these individuals who stood like lighthouses in a cruel society. The reality in Yugoslavia could not be more distant from the one painted by dissident intellectuals. Not only were intellectuals well-respected, they were even feared by the communist regime. Their activities had political effects.<sup>50</sup>

A Rancièrian answer could be: Kosovo Albanians or Roma as second-class citizens of Yugoslavia were the ones that were not heard or recognised. This holds water to a certain extent, because these people were indeed excluded from many political institutions. But along the lines of our analysis we will try to pinpoint another exclusion that is linked to the exploitation. A tacit presupposition of Rancièrè's theory equates non-visible/non-heard with a passive element, running in accordance with the order of the police, whereas the active force is precisely the one that breaks with the police, with its logic of counting, which makes some invisible and unheard. But even those who take up an active position in society are sometimes not counted. Precisely through their activation they can become passive. Non-visibility cannot be linked only to a role of victim or exclusion, but also to exploitation, which is not necessarily silent, not heard, or non-represented. It can be even presented as a very active part of society. In the Yugoslavian self-management model the politico-aesthetical lenses need to be sharpened: it was precisely the workers, the ones who were supposed to be most included in the order, who were absent from many aspects of decision-making. The formal logic of counting included them in

50 My thesis is in line with Žižek's (2001b): the socialist regime was 'enlightened' in that it believed in the power of ideas. Thus, to refute new artistic movements or theoretical readings of Marx, it did not suffice to censor them. Frequently, critics wrote treatises to fight against the 'incorrect' or 'decadent' deviations in art, theory and science.

the political processes, but they were economically exploited. And this is a pre-eminently political question, which is difficult to expose in a Rancièrian position. The most blatant case of political and economic exclusion could be situated with the youngsters and the unemployed. Although communist leadership was aware of the problem (as we will see in concluding section), it still nourished the myth of full employment in Yugoslavia. It was only through collective struggles by students and workers (1970s and 1980s) that self-management politics emerged. The ones that were not counted made themselves heard and seen in mass strikes and occupation of universities. The following table provides reader with a clearer historical overview of the Yugoslav class struggles.

## 7. The Analysis of Post-Fordism in 'Mature' Self-Management

In the last part of this analysis, we will try to pinpoint some comparisons of Yugoslavian self-management with a post-Fordist tendency within capitalist social formation. The analysis of the authors of SFRY basically shows that a crisis triggered two processes: firstly, a class compromise between the technocrats and the state bureaucracy and secondly, political decisions that produced a new regulation mode of capital within socialism. The synthesis of plan and market caused a new equilibrium. The constant struggle of the ruling class engendered the over-politicisation and *self-managementisation* of the society. Reforms produced the opposite of what party functionaries wanted: rather than enthusiastic workers, expert technocrats ruled in the economy and professional functionaries in politics. This omnipresence of political participation is very similar to the post-Fordist introduction of the politics of communication, participation and cooperation. The major shift in the post-Fordist type of organisation, according to Virno (2004), can be detected in the imperative of participation and the introduction of speech. Arendt claimed that the factory had become a model of politics, whereas Virno claims the exact opposite: work itself has taken over the traditional connotation of political engagement/action. Has political action turned into

Historical period	Agents	Place of struggle	Problems
1941-45 Revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partisans (masses)</li> <li>• Communist Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revolutionary war</li> <li>• Encounter of masses and Communist Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break-up with old Yugoslavia</li> <li>• National Liberation Struggle</li> <li>• Socialist revolution</li> </ul>
45-52 State socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International stage: anti-Stalinism</li> <li>• State: social capital vs. autonomous capitals –</li> <li>• Autarchy: planned economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationalisation</li> <li>• Collectivisation</li> <li>• Expropriation *self-management</li> </ul>
'54-'63 Workers' self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucracy (BC) VS. Technocracy (TC) (constitution of ruling class)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundations for development, federation against republics</li> <li>• International stage: non-aligned movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First serious crisis Constitution</li> <li>• Opening up to the West</li> </ul>
'65-'73 Market socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC, TC, student revolt (ruling fraction vs. revolutionary politics from below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities</li> <li>• Banks VS Central Bank Federation VS Republics</li> <li>• Regulation: increase of debts</li> <li>• No equilibrium production and consumption</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Directed education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management over investments, circulation of money, credits, taxes</li> <li>• Effects of global crisis: unemployment, inflation, debt,</li> <li>• Nationalisms</li> </ul>
Agreement socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New social movements, art, theory, civil society, workers (trade unions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund for Development</li> <li>• Factories</li> <li>• Regulation: IMF, rationalisation, savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General crisis: state of exception (army, status of regions); crisis of socialist state; democratisation</li> </ul>
After '80			
Alternative Neoliberalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TC and national BC against federal BC</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensification and translation of social conflict into national conflicts; break-up</li> </ul>

Table of political processes:  
historical periodisation from Likić-Brborić (2003: 88)

a poor experience of communicating in the working space?<sup>51</sup> One of Virno's weaknesses consists in his non-distinction of 'real' politics from (*self*)*managerialisation* of production relations. What used to be the sphere of the private, bourgeois civil society was transformed into an overtly public and political sphere in socialism. The ideal figure of this suturing of private and public was the self-managed worker, who is structurally holding the same place as the flexible personality of post-Fordism (Holmes 2002). Surely, the cognitive worker's flexible personality is under the complete domination of the capital and thus not much remains of real politics. This means that even if work assumes a public character it does not make it political, as Virno seems to suggest.

The politisation of the production relation does not need to follow from the workers' demands, but quite on the contrary can be in perfect consonance with the capital. Managerial innovations in the West were preceded by official politics of Yugoslav self-management. Workers were asked to help improve their working conditions, negotiate their wages and participate in the production processes. If the cooperation was structurally inscribed in the model of self-management, can we claim the same what concerns speech? One could object that the role of speech has not been of key significance for the development of the Yugoslav economy. Nevertheless, there were many new professions and the cognitivisation of certain branches was already at work in the 1960s. Admittedly, this happened on a much smaller scale than in the West, but was present nevertheless in some successful enterprises that exported products.

Post-Fordism was established as an answer to the failing of the Fordist model of organisation and the revolts of May '68. As was already emphasised, self-management as an event appeared in a radically different historical situation than post-Fordism did. 'Mature' self-management was closely linked with socialist economies in the East, but also in the West. After the relative economic stability and prosperity of the 1950s

51 For a detailed analysis of Virno's theses, see Ciril Oberstar's text in this book.

and the beginning of the 1960s (market elements, motorways, tourism), cyclical major crises in the 1960s and 1970s exposed the vulnerability of the Yugoslav economy to external movements (oil crisis, crisis of the Welfare model), but more importantly to its internal contradictions. *The crisis of the Yugoslavian self-management model was a crisis of the productionist model*. Both socialist economic theories and economic practices focused on the “productionist paradigm”. School Marxisms and more critical economic theories (Horvat, Korošić) operated within a classical Keynesian framework that promoted typical Fordist requirements: full employment, economic growth, and the balance of growing production and consumption. Through Yugoslav’s cyclical crises, manifested in high inflation, accumulation of debts, and especially unemployment,<sup>52</sup> it became clear that bureaucratic planning of the economy was not the sole reason for the crisis. Yugoslavia experienced globalisation trends and responded to the crisis of Fordism. The goals that were accomplished in the mid-1960s – full employment, rise of wages/incomes and production – were rapidly undermined.<sup>53</sup> Močnik lucidly interprets the general situation of the Yugoslav socialist state:

52 The phenomenon of *Gastarbeiter* emerged in the late 1960s, when Willy Brandt and Tito signed a treaty, and reached its peak in the 1980s. About 1 million Yugoslav workers left their home country and the same number of people was unemployed. For figures and a discussion of the major problems of the Yugoslav economy, see Branko Horvat (1985) and Woodward (1995b). One of the central films of the Yugoslav Black Wave, *Kad budem mrtav i beo* [When I am Dead and Pale], meticulously portrays the development of the post-Fordist tendency within Yugoslav society. A range of new freelance professions emerged: musicians, cultural workers of all kinds, journalists.

53 From the 1960s on workers’ strikes occurred in Yugoslavia. The causes for the strikes were various: decreasing wages, products that were no longer accessible as before and the decrease in production in general. See Horvat (1985) or Korošić (1988). These movements intensified when the Yugoslav leadership adopted IMF measures in the beginning of the 1980s. This implied a liberalisation and rationalisation of the economic practices. In reality it meant a shortage of some basic goods and power cuts; the black market flourished.

The reform of 1966 consisted in the introduction of Yugoslavia to the world market. It seems that Kardelj's concept of free exchange of associated labour was actually an attempt of postfordist alternative in the condition of socialist state and solidarity, that is, equality as a cornerstone of official ideology and not as a neoliberal alternative to fordist capitalism that stepped into crisis. I am pretty much sure that socialist states were social states on the periphery in conditions of relative poverty. They performed the same function as a social-democratic state with more prosperity, which were located in the centre of capitalist system. (2008)

Despite the possibility of participation of the workers in the production units (BOALs) and a new answer to the crisis that was formulated as 'market and plan', the Yugoslavian self-management model could find no successful answer to the economic crisis. The post-Fordist answer was not fully realised,<sup>54</sup> moreover it facilitated the reproduction of capitalist relations. One of the major events that triggered many 'regressive' effects was that the labour force market became more flexible. What used to be a guarantee of a relatively prosperous life in the socialist state (stable employment and housing), became less regulated and less secure. With the rise of unemployment (up to 20% in some regions), the unemployed were forced to seek work in semi-legal or illegal sectors; there was a rise of personal dependence (return of previous mode of production), internal migration (from rural to urban areas) and external migration (*Gastarbeiter*).

54 The Yugoslav self-management system could have been a natural answer to the crisis, since it was quite adaptable through institutional and horizontal communication, but its political process was time-consuming. The most fascinating case of a successful post-Fordist answer is to be found in urban self-management. In the recent study on new Zagreb, Eve Blau (2007) shows how the planning of new housing communities in Zagreb integrated socialist modernist concepts with post-Fordist management that became more pragmatically upgraded. It found new ways in integrating different self-management interests, where local inhabitants were usually quite active agents.

Due to the economic crisis and in the light of the new post-Fordist regulation mode, the ruling class launched another important systemic solution, which touched the sphere of knowledge. In the beginning of the 1970s, the educational reform called “directed education” was enforced in Yugoslavia. This reform can be interpreted as an answer to two ‘events’: huge student uprising in the university centres of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana and in other cities and the general crisis of the Yugoslav economy. Major emphasis was put on knowledge: knowledge was fundamental for the further development of socialism. The reform was basically designed to produce a defined number of cadres that would be more easily introduced in the economy. It had to start fighting growing unemployment and facilitate the entrance of youth to the labour market. Yugoslavia’s “directed education” reform was Bologna’s reform *avant la lettre*.<sup>55</sup> It was a managerial-bureaucratic synthesis, which wanted to make the economy and the labour market function more effectively. Also, via new educational programmes on high schools and prospect involvement in universities, the ideological hegemony of the technocracy (managerial fraction) was instituted. Knowledge became immensely important to innovate self-management production and for political hegemony of the fraction. The reform intended to make the economy more efficient and facilitate the smooth entering into the market of labour forces and opened educational institutions to industrial interest and capitalist cooptation.

## 8. Conclusion

This article serves as an outline for further analysis that intends to tackle a very complex issue: the development of different tendencies in the Yugoslav self-management model that was preceded by a revolutionary politics. We situated revolutionary

55 For a more detailed account of the reform, see Samary (1988). For the analysis of late period of self-management, see Geoffroy (2006). The reform focused more on the secondary school system and the system of examination than on university system.

politics in the period during and after World War II. The political event meant a definite rupture with the existing order of old Yugoslavia. Antifascist partisan struggle entailed a radical transformative moment, which brought a *socialist revolution*. In this respect Yugoslav resistance differs from the resistance struggles across Europe. The Yugoslav partisan struggle was thus not only national liberation but also social transformation, which had strong consequences that materialised in the establishment of a socialist self-management state and non-aligned movement later on. In the following part of our analysis, we pinpointed certain aspects of the internal failure of this project. We proceeded from an Althusserian perspective to analyse all instances: politics (from socialist revolution to self-management politicisation), ideology (humanism of figure of self-manager; economism), law (influence of contractualism) and economy (major contradiction: capital and labour).

The self-management project did not fail due to the inefficiency and inadaptability of its economy. It would further be erroneous to claim that the death of Yugoslavia is connected to the death of Tito. Presumably, this death acted as a sobering up: after a long intoxicated night of prosperity and peace, Yugoslavia needed to repay its immense debts, which put an end to brotherhood and unity. Let us not forget that the external debt of Yugoslavia in the 1980s was not any higher than the debt of other developing and even developed countries. If Yugoslavia had insisted on politics of non-aligned movement and a different model of just economic trade, it could all have been different. Our analysis focused on two moments, which started with the real restoration of the capitalist relation and already announced the death of socialist Yugoslavia. The market reform in 1965 and reform of directed education in 1975 were paving the way towards neo-liberalism.

The project failed because it was not communist enough: it did not continue revolutionary politics in all fields of society. As the authors of SFRY showed, workers did not gain control over the means of production, also commodity relations insistently dominated the economy. We sharpened their analysis of capitalist relations in socialism with the detection of the post-Fordist tendency. The post-Fordist tendency was contained in major

innovations within the economy (new forms of self-exploitation, cooperation), the humanist figure of the flexible self-managed worker and an important stress on knowledge (new regulation mode via reforms). New forms of exploitation, most notably self-exploitation, emerged in this new system. Both economic forms of organisation, Fordist and productivist, succumbed to the major crisis of the late 1960s.

The official answers to the crisis of the self-management model fell short. The bureaucratic answer signalled an insistence on the planning of the national economy in an increasingly globalised world that does not allow for any alternative strategy. This reasoning was stuck in the productivist ideology and consolidation of political power. We could characterise this answer as a reformatory *socialist answer*. The technocrats articulated the second answer, which tried to deal with the capitalist tendency within socialism: opening up to the West, developing tourism, building motorways, introducing modes of knowledge production, participation and efficiency within the production process. This could be called a *post-Fordist answer*. During the major crises in the 1970s both fractions of the ruling class provided a specific synthesis of their responses, which hit hard working people of Yugoslavia.

It was only in the 1980s that the new social movements and the massive workers' strikes (occupations of factories) emerged. But the encounter of these two subjectivities and remaining communists in the Party never happened. In these explosive times of new political forms and subjectivities, in the conjuncture of anti-systemic movements in the anti-systemic state (see Močnik 2000 and Pribac 2003), when the self-management model began to be practiced from below, the social revolution and socialist project were abandoned. The conflicts were translated into nationalistic discourse (cultural and intellectual elites, dissidents) and political questions of insufficient legality of the state (liberal-democratic answer).<sup>56</sup> The media and cultural intelligentsia played an important role in

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed analysis of liberal-nationalist hegemony in Yugoslavia, see Karamanić (2006).

the launch of cultural nationalisation. It was a specific encounter of the technocracy, parts of reformed communist elites and nationalist currents, which produced a counterrevolutionary fusion and announced a precise break with the socialist past. In the times of neoliberal restructuring this counterrevolutionary fusion and new political coalition created conditions for the bloody break-up of Yugoslavian self-management socialism. Thanks to this counterrevolution the people of Yugoslavia completed the transition to capitalism, sometimes more, sometimes less democratically. After the end of Yugoslavia, the only path leads to the family of Europe, to the multicultural logic of plural identities and religions. The same political class tries to convince the Yugoslav people to forget the wars and forget everything connected to the emancipatory moments of Yugoslavia. Twenty years after the fall of Berlin Wall and the break-up of Yugoslavia, when the transition is almost over, we should accept to live peacefully and to be dominated and exploited on the fast trains to Europe. What would the partisans think about this train?

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**'To Die and Leave Silk for Capital':  
Abstract Labour, Art and Reproduction  
by Marina Vishmidt**

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## Genealogies

When researching histories of women's production in the retrospectively wide and contested field of Conceptual Art and reading socialist and Marxist feminist theory published half a decade or so later, one is struck by the parallels of the challenge posed to received ideas. In the one case, it is to established ideas of art, and the relationship of women's labour to these; in the second, it is to established ideas of work and political subjectivity, and the relationship of women's labour to these. Looking at, for example, American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles's "Maintenance Art Manifesto" from 1969, and Italian autonomist feminist Mariarosa Della Costa's 'The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community' from 1972, there is a common emphasis on women as executors of invisible, unacknowledged, devalued and unpaid labour of maintenance, management, care, which is the precondition for what *is* valued, discussed and taken seriously – art, waged labour, class struggle. It is, as the language of deconstruction would have framed it at the time, a *supplementary* relation – the marginalised that constitutes the central in its centrality precisely through its exclusion. In the first case the emphasis is put on the act of infiltrating the institutional havens, both physical and discursive, of art, with the performance of unobtrusive acts of maintenance, in cooperation with museum staff, which are subsequently validated as art with documentation and signed certificates. Ukeles would bustle around exhibits with a duster and glass cleaning fluid, wash the steps of the museum, and hound the administrative staff out of their offices on her cleaning rounds. She was thus not only drawing attention to the inescapable and erased presupposition of the museum's (and any institution, public or private) operations, the physical maintenance, but also the administrative and curatorial routines that likewise effaced themselves off-stage so as not to detract from the authority and enchantment of the exhibition complex. By proposing a world in which such activities were just as legitimately a part of the art as the objects or even the more ephemeral propositions or documentations that announced conceptual art, she was proposing to suspend the morphological, ontological,

grammatical, but also the political situation which constituted the appearance of art and the appearance of work as two incompatible but profoundly imbricated spheres of activity. If the daily uncompensated labour performed by mainly women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no longer self-evident that this labour was any more 'natural' than the kind of work otherwise enshrined as art, and no less public than the kind of work performed in a more or less public context and formally compensated with wages and employment protection. Moreover, the latter had no chance of success without the former.

It was this integral nature of unpaid, devalorised labour to waged labour – what was then discussed in Marxist terms as the relationship of 'reproductive' to 'productive' labour ('reproductive' in the sense of allowing the working class to survive and maintain itself sufficiently to turn up for capitalist work the next day, and 'productive' in the sense of producing surplus value for the owners of the means of production, the capitalists) – that was likewise being questioned by a contemporary strain of Marxist feminism that was exemplified by writers and activists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati and Silvia Federici, parts of whose analysis were subsequently taken up by the Wages for Housework tendency. For the Italian feminists, who had gone through the experiences and analysis of autonomist Marxism, it was necessary to put forward a revision of Marxism that understood unwaged labour such as housework, but more broadly all 'caring' or 'affective' labour, as *directly* productive insofar as it was producing what Marx designated 'that curious commodity', labour power, and as such was directly inscribed in the circuits of capitalist value production. This subsequently became the key point of the Wages for Housework campaign, which drew the conclusion that if household labour was producing commodities, then it should receive a wage just like all other commodity-producing labour performed outside the home. Although radical in its feminist challenge to the naturalised aspect of women's unpaid domestic labour and the oppression resulting from the material dependencies created thereby, this position was criticised for the vague horizon of its emancipatory claim which could be

summed up as a demand placed on the capitalist state that would overwhelm its political and economic resources, leading to its breakdown, much as the more militant proponents of the basic income would argue today<sup>1</sup> – and for promoting the paradoxical outcome of tethering women and children more tightly to domestic labour through the instrument of the wage and the biopolitical monitoring of the welfare state administering it.

However, what is perhaps more illuminating for us in the present about the moves of both feminist Conceptual artists – I have so far mentioned Ukeles, but we can also think of her contemporaries like Mary Kelly and Martha Rosler who also, in individual and collective projects, such as the *Women and Work* exhibition or the *Women of the Rhondda* and *Nightcleaner* films, which, according to art historian Siona Wilson, “analyse the position of ‘woman’ in critical relation to a traditional Marxist understanding of class. They each pose the question of political collectivity” and she also locates the “the tension between production and reproduction” as key to Kelly's work at the time (2007: 80). The *Post-Partum Document*, the celebrated exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London of Kelly's child-raising paraphernalia, was crucial in the feminist debate about the social and ideological aspects of the institution of motherhood – and the analysis of Italian Marxist feminists from the 1970s could be their prescience of the debates happening over the past decade or more about the valorisation of subjectivity in the contemporary, so-called 'post-Fordist' economies in the West. These economies are inextricably tied to a new global division of labour, the outsourcing of manufacturing, and the commodification of previously state-supported or non-marketised services, the economic and policy focus on the production of 'experiences' and 'social relations' as commodities, rather than objects; although, as Marx recognised, this is a

1 In a 2006 text, I analysed both Wages for Housework and the 'basic income' campaign in Europe as 'reforms that presuppose a revolution' – but which may also tendentially recompose class relations through the excess of their challenge to a shrivelled welfare state. See Vishmidt (2007).

tendency already immanent in the emergence of capital as a mode of production from the beginning – we can recall the passage on commodity fetishism:

The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. . . I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

(1976: 165)

This conjunction of creative subjectivity and commodity also underlies the contested legacy of conceptual and post-conceptual art, which viewed the repudiation of the object as an attempt to evade or neutralise an art market predicated on trade in luxury commodities but is now often seen as simply reinforcing or anticipating the economic shift to services and intellectual property, hence triggering or reflecting an expansion of market relations rather than their retreat. Of course many artists of that time did not have a political opposition to the market; already in 1969 Sol LeWitt was saying “I don’t sell the commodity, I sell the idea” (Norvell & Alberro 2001: 1). Maintenance Art, on the other hand, was a rare conjunction of feminist scepticism about the gendered division of labour and the social division of labour that engendered art and labour as an ontological and economic dichotomy. What it also did, linking to the Marxist feminist analysis, was to see the production of subjectivity as the principal outcome of these structures of division and hierarchy, the role they played in reproducing power dynamics and conserving privilege, and how this production could become politically important once its value-producing capacity was disclosed.

The principal contribution of autonomist Marxism as it was theorised and practiced at the time, with its perhaps more

academic and historical repercussions now, was the nomination of subjectivity as key to the political composition of the working-class, in that this subjectivity could be found in the everyday practices of self-organisation, sabotage, absenteeism and non-conformism that were undercutting capitalist discipline ideologically and materially. This was also the point of contact between working class struggles and other social movements – feminism, students, the queer movement, and other social minorities – in that subjectivity was now a contested territory in what was then being seen as a 'post-industrial' terrain where sensibility, cognition and sociability was becoming directly productive for capital and the factory was no longer the pre-eminent site of struggle – it was now a 'social factory'. Further, since in the operaist and autonomist analyses (Tronti, Negri et al) the working-class was not only considered a political collectivity that had no existence prior to struggle, as it would have been in many other variants of Marxist and socialist thinking, but actually as a self-valorising entity prior and more powerful than capital, forcing capital on the defensive with its movement, the production of subjectivity as it manifested itself not just in the re-structuring of capitalist work towards more 'social' and 'abstract' occupations, but in the refusal of such work and in the development of other forms of activity and collective existence, was seen as paramount. The idea of self-valorisation had, for Negri, continuing into his and Hardt's writing on the multitude, the corollary of the erosion of the value-form since an economy premised on the production of affect and the application of mass intellectuality could no longer be measured in labour time.

However, the latter thesis risks obscuring that what has happened is less an erosion of the value form by 'immaterial labour' than its indefinite expansion and sedimentation as 'immaterial accumulation', and this is also obscured in theorisations of the political that seek to re-constitute emancipatory politics, especially in contemporary art, through the medium of social relations, much as the contemporaneous critics writing on Conceptual Art mused that the 'de-materialisation of the art object' heralded a swing to the left in the property relations structuring art markets and institutions. The latter may have been 'objectively' mistaken, but their speculations,

and those of the work itself, still harbour unredeemed potential, given the right political conjuncture – and, given that era's political conjunctures, the mistake was a necessary one.<sup>2</sup> The former, by comparison, operate with a disingenuous pathos which is less excusable. It is rather, as Stewart Martin observes that: “This ironic fetishism also leads to erroneous claims that the service economy or post-industrial society has led to some basic transformation in the value-form. If anything, here the commodification of labour is more immediate and explicit” (2007: 378-9). By extending our analysis of commodity relations in their properly social aspect, we can start to see why the iteration of service work within the art institution as performed by Ukeles was perhaps in advance of much of the practices oriented towards conviviality and participation which tend to be grouped under the banner of Relational Aesthetics. While her activities interrogated the formations of art, services, gender, public and private space with the art institution as one of the symptomatic sites, much of the artistic valorisation of 'service work' which is discussed as 'relational aesthetics' seems to take a step backwards in nominating the art institution and the art market as the ideal containers for practices that purport to question ontological and economic divisions between art and everything else. The objectification of social relations and the sociability of commodities is generated by the 'real abstraction' of capital as the self-valorising subject which moulds all social and individual forces in its productive (or unproductive, if the last few decades of profiteering, privatisation and imaginary accumulation, and the current financial meltdown, is anything to go to by) image. The concept in Marx that encompasses both the extensive and intensive proliferation of the value-form in social life is 'real subsumption': by extensive I mean the permeation of social space by capitalist relations, by intensive the creation and incorporation of the social by capital as an engine of surplus-value extraction. Contemporary economists emerging from the political experience of Italian autonomist Marxism like Christian Marazzi have learned

2 Jacob Lillemose's passage (2008: 14-7) recently drew my attention to these issues.

the lessons of the feminists by depicting housework as the best model to understand the current centrality of service production in capital, which in Marx's time was considered marginal, because it is the “clearest case of 'the production of things as entirely embedded in the production of a relation’” (Read 2003: 191).

From this we can see that tracking the commodification of social relations via the historically, geopolitically, racial and gendered division of labour is more fruitful for analysis and practice than the situating of 'immaterial labour' as a hegemonic figure. Thinking of the self-valorisation of capital, its ineluctable law of motion across social space, as a 'real abstraction' helps us keep sight of 'immateriality' as a factor of the accumulation of capital and novel forms of extracting surplus-value, putting us in a better position to understand what's at stake in the shifts of the production of subjectivity augured by the Italian Marxist feminists, with the political implications of their challenge to the gendered division of labour, and the challenges to artistic labour and value made by artists working around that time. Self-valorisation as a subjective class political strategy is incoherent; it might be better to speak about an evacuation of valorisation, since valorisation is what capital does. Further, the perspective of accumulation rather than labour under the sign of immateriality clarifies the relationship of art and money as both opaque emblems of 'creativity', played out recently in the alignment between objects produced for an overheated art market and the proliferation of what have been termed 'exotic' financial instruments that pumped a lot of their overflow in that market's direction – the family resemblance between inscrutable art works and inscrutable forms of trading as allegories of freedom must have played some sort of magnetizing role, insofar as both art and finance at this level can be characterised as pure exchange value. With the freefall of the market in recent weeks, the efficacy of that relationship looks troubled, but the allegory will be developed later.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight: show your work – show it

again keep the contemporary art museum groovy keep  
the home fires burning.

(Ukeles in Alberro & Stimson 2000: 122-5)

It can likewise be conjectured that by transforming the drudgery of domestic labour into a sort of mobile service sculpture in the museum, Ukeles was offering not only to translate the sphere of 'nature' (reproduction) into the sphere of art (production), she was also translating the sphere of 'nature' as the simply given and non-reflexive into the sphere of aesthetics, which was the disinterested sphere of the free play of the faculties, in the Kantian reading. This was not to make the statement that housework could be fun, but that housework as a woman's role in the home was no more or less arbitrary and performative when taken out of its generic site than any other parallel works of conceptual art, whether we're thinking about Robert Barry's air-releasing pieces, or Art & Language's indexes (though the latter can be more immediately compared to Ukeles's work in staging a social relationship as an art installation, refracting, in a mise-en-abyme kind of way, on the staged social relationship of the art sphere and its institutional container). Additionally, the indeterminacy of aesthetic judgment, the contingency that pervades artistic subjectivity in Kantian, and to some extent Romantic aesthetics, could provocatively be aligned with the concept of 'abstract labour' in Marx as the generic faculty to perform any kind of capitalist work. There are indications, in Marx but also in later writers such as Alfred Sohn-Rethel and Adorno and Horkheimer, that make an analogy between the emerging commodity culture and the consequent shifts in the division of labour with notions of sovereignty and subjectivity, such as the transcendental idealism of Kant's topology of reason, judgment and doctrine of the faculties. Of course this constellation demands a far more comprehensive analysis than would be made possible by the confines of this text. What would chiefly concern us here, though, is to make a suggestive conjunction between the idea of free and indeterminate judgment as exemplified in the dissolution of social relations into the grammar of art and the 'real abstraction' of the dissolution of social relations into capitalist work.

First, there is the abstraction concomitant on the existence of labour power as pure potentiality. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx defines the entering of labour power into the commodity circuit at the point of sale to the employer as: “The use value which the worker has to offer... is not materialized in a product, does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in a potentiality, as his capacity” (1993: 265). This is why he elsewhere calls it “that curious commodity”, as I have cited earlier. Italian political philosopher Paolo Virno elaborates on this undecideability between objectification and potentiality:

Potentiality comes to be thus only where it is separated radically from the acts that it correlates with. The worker sells her labour power because, deprived from the means of production, she can not apply herself to them on her account... Free and expropriated at the same time: juridical independence marches alongside material dependence. [...] Only the intersection of these two conditions makes it such that potentiality affirms itself in the world of appearances as the concrete realization of an exchange...<sup>3</sup>

Although we need to be careful about taking the rather misleading phrase 'world of appearances' literally – if it is to be a critical rather than metaphysical line of argument, it has the same dialectical connotation in Marx as 'ideology' or 'real abstraction', Virno does touch upon an important point here which remains somewhat undeveloped in this essay. This is the point that potentiality, with its philosophical, scientific and commonsense dimension of limitlessness or indeterminacy is crafted at its point of origin by the conditions which allow it to realise itself, namely the horizon of capitalist exchange. We can now briefly revisit the Marxist feminists, although this analysis would likely be shared by most mainstream feminist schools of thought as well, and the feminist conceptual artists, for their insight that the ostensibly

3 Paolo Virno's “Recording the Present: Essay on Historical Time” (1999), translated by Nate Holdren: <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpvirno11.htm>.

natural and free realms of household and caring labour, and the ostensibly undetermined and free sphere of art, are in fact highly structured and regulated by the same hierarchies that operate in the world to which they would provide an exception, and in fact, uses their tenuous and supplementary status to reproduce the exclusions and the conditional freedom. But all this is paleo-ideological critique unless we explore the cognitive and political overlap between the notions of abstraction that underpin capitalist exchange and abstract labour, and potentiality inherent in that abstraction as an antagonistic dynamic.

In Marx, and in later commentators such as Jason Read in his *Micro-politics of Capital*, this antagonism is framed in terms of the distinction between abstract labour as any kind of work performed for wages in a capitalist economy – the generic social condition of capitalist work – and 'living labour' which are the needs, wishes, desires of the sellers of labour-power which pose an excess or a constitutive outside to the dynamic of exploitation.<sup>4</sup> This is the 'living labour' that would have been hypostatized by some of the autonomist theorists as the incalculable, Spinozian powers of the multitude which are ever on the verge of shaking off the capitalist vampire with their superior vitality and networks of self-organisation. With this latter in mind, at least for the moment, I would like to suspend the distinction between abstract labour and 'living labour' and try to look for the impetus of antagonism directly in the relation of abstract labour itself, directly in the commodity relation, just to see if by doing so I can avoid a substantiation of the contradiction between an internally antagonistic, heterogeneous set of forces and its logical form in the 'world of appearances', as it seems to me abstract labour versus living labour would have a tendency to do, and which forms one of the several significant limitations of the 'multitude' category of analysis (though I would tendentially

4 "Abstract labour, as the possible comparison and equalization of diverse activities, and humanity, as the essence underlying any particular identity, appear at the same time historically... Abstract labour and humanity are both grounded on a social relation, on the production of commodities" (Read 2003: 72).

set Paolo Virno, even though he wrote a book called *Grammar of the Multitude*, aside from this problematic). What is disabling about that category, it seems to me, is its abolition of negativity, while preserving the aspect of historical necessity – you could say that is like embracing all the wrong parts of Hegel. I would propose, again very briefly, that without the element of negativity, neither judgment, critique nor emancipation are conceivable, nor alternatives to capitalist life within it, only the specious topology of Empire where there is no outside yet capital is extraneous to multitude. I would also note that it is to a significant degree that this kind of theologically-influenced analysis underlies a lot of the sectarianism and academicism that has ruptured leftist and anti-capitalist social movements, as it is a theology of purity, not an encounter with the contradictions we perform and reproduce, subjectively or ideologically/axiomatically, in our daily lives of work, consumption, or action. But which is not to be unexpected, given how we are divided by specialisation, division of labour and stratified generally etc.

I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also (up to now separately) I 'do' Art. Now I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art. I will live in the museum as I customarily do at home with my husband and my baby, for the duration of the exhibition (Right? Or if you don't want me around at night I would come in every day), and do all these things as public Art activities: I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (I.e. 'floor paintings, dustworks, soapsculpture, wall-paintings')...

(Ukeles in Alberro & Stimson 2000: 122-5)

This additional quote from the 'Maintenance Art Manifesto' is inserted here to recapitulate some of my claims about Ukeles's gesture, and also to elucidate what went into the work. Now around the same time, artists like Tehching Hsieh and Linda Montana were also displacing their quotidian existence into an art context with Montana living in a gallery open to the public and Hsieh with his famous yearlong clocking-in and out

performance (which only was circulated as documentation, he did the performance itself at home). The latter also seems to have some relevance to an epochal shift in the constitution of contemporary art as it reflected or anticipated shifts to a post-industrial organisation of the economy. Even just 12 years ago, the artist Jens Haaning did a piece where he simply relocated a predominantly Turkish-run and employing textile factory from the suburbs of a small Dutch city into its contemporary art centre, thus very literally presenting the economic displacement between industrial production and cultural production, itself industrialised, in a context of culture-led regeneration and nationalist anxieties. What seems to link all these instances is a growing indeterminacy about where the borders between artwork and regular work can be said to subsist, if capitalist culture and capitalist work become increasingly indistinguishable through the inscription of subjectivity and sociability into both echelons through their production of surplus-value, which, especially in Haaning example, frequently sees art spaces and capital coincide on the terrain of the state-facilitated property market of aspiring 'creative cities.' In that sense, free indeterminacy becomes directly productive rather than a rule-affirming exception.

If we can take these four sample statements to evoke the key assumptions of each of the territories covered in this paper: Post-autonomist Marxism says: all is work; Feminism says: this is also work; Conceptual Art says: anything can be art; Feminist Art says: this work is also art, then we can start to see the production of 'abstract labour' as a common thread between these, with feminist positions re-defining the field of exploitation and emancipation alike. The potential of anything to be work, and the potential of anything which is not work to be art, and the dominance of the value-form that produce both as inverted images of the other highlight that the expansion and intensification of both can be traced to capital as the ultimate self-valorising subject which has no ontological, social or aesthetic attributes besides those of indefinite expansion. In this there is also a passing similarity to another precept of Kantian aesthetics, the sublime. The more unfathomable and risk-oriented is the universe generated by financial systems, the more resemblance it bears to the salutary awe described by Kant

and Burke as attendant on glimpses of wild, untamed nature, something utterly not cognisant of human aspirations or habits. The violence done to the sensibility by the Sublime (which, however, in Kant and Schiller is recuperated in the subject's pleasure at being able to marvel at those uncontrolled forces at a safe distance, thereby affirming her independence from them as a moral being) can also be spoken about in terms of the pleasure taken in one's own alienation or exploitation by this is same incalculable and ideologically naturalised system, the perilous freedom imputed to those with nothing but their labour power to sell. Pleasure in alienation or objectification of detached or subjugated human powers is also discussed in Adorno's aesthetic theory, where the autonomy of art is always embedded in its utter commodification, within and against, inasmuch as its identity as the ultimate commodity fetish loses any link to use-value that would still keep other commodities plausible as real needs, thus suspending the determination of use by exchange. In this logic, the more art objects or practices attempt to evade their fetishistic fate, the more thoroughly they become embedded in the commodification that pervades any valence of the social into which they would like to exit, a caveat that always haunts any manoeuvre that would dissolve art into life as both are currently constituted.

Although a more detailed exposition would need to take account of Adorno's programme of 'negative dialectics' in order to spell out what is really at stake, the foregoing seems to me illuminating for the discussion of abstract labour as potentiality that is always already embroiled in the capitalist terms of potential as surplus-value to be realised potential to extract this from any kind of labour versus the potential to exceed these determinations through a displacement and dialectical affirmation of their contradictions. What I mean by that is that the displacement of work into the contexts of art production, exhibition and mediation can disclose not just the all-pervasiveness but also the contingency of the categories of artistic and non-artistic labour; a systematic thinking of 'abstract labour' as the determinant of art and work's disparity as well as contiguity helps to establish the division as social and historical rather than necessary, like the division between mental and

manual labour, and reciprocity of autonomy and heteronomy ever since art emerged as a separate sphere, unconditioned except by its separation. Likewise the feminist intervention in Marxist labour politics revised what was politically significant about unpaid and relational labour. This double recognition would, in the terms employed by Alain Badiou, take precisely the void of the situation as the pivotal point of attack. And the void here could be encapsulated as the abstract labour that synthesises commodity relations as capitalist art and capitalist work while ensuring that a division of labour is observed between the two while mediating the conditions of experience in each. Significantly, this division is also to a large extent guaranteed by the investment of desire, or the functional fantasy, that animates agents in disparate but interconnected realms. After all, it can be argued that art and domestic labour did or do offer respites from abstract labour in its general connotation, i.e. waged work, and the fundamental alienations it portends, whether or not the prevalence of one guarantees the exceptionality of the other. It is this desire which contributes to the tenacity of the relations which are reproduced daily in social life, and not just in the closed-circuit of consumerism's swift gratification and speedy inadequacy. It is also a type of adjustment to what exists; desire can only be actively invested within the constraints of possibility; the impossible can only elicit apathy, even in a system premised on the ideological promotion for all of what is impossible within its terms for anyone but a few, i.e. personal wealth and freedom through competition. Social change would then be a desire for what suddenly seems possible, but not within the status quo. As Jason Read paraphrases Deleuze & Guattari, "Desire directly invests in the flows, and fluxes, of capital, and it is at this level, and not exclusively at the level of "ideology," or the superstructure, that we should look for the production of subjectivity in capital, but in its most quotidian and basic elements. Desire is part of the infrastructure" (1987: 345).

If desire is grasped as a form of surplus-value extant across whatever can be commodified or be converted into work, we can also try and think about the sheer abstraction and vagueness of the types of value produced in cultural work strategically and negatively, as separation, and also as

immanence. Separation, as separation from potentiality from non-capitalist modes of exchange, sociality or thought sought in this specific form of production but which can only collapse back into the heteronomy of the market. Immanence as what is common in resistance and invention of other forms of collective practice, as the dissolution of subjectivity in its encounter with the abstraction of money, and in its existence as abstract labour – as opposed to the messianic reduction to 'immaterial labour' as a determining reading (read: vanguard) of labour in general or mode of producing value that is beyond measure. Rather, the escape from “regular work” into cultural production prompts an exacerbated encounter with work – perpetual work – and far more nuanced and intractable instruments of measure. The feminist conceptual artists I have been discussing pointed out this intractability by switching their work between two ambiguous realms traditionally considered outside the market – housework and art institutions – in the process pointing out that the value-form was flourishing in both, in explicitly disavowed terms.

If the production of subjectivity is considered as key in the reproduction of class relations and the division of labour which shapes the formation of art, work, and their contaminations, it is important to involve desire in the analysis in order to move beyond the privative concept of 'alienation' in radical politics, which is how Marxist theory has traditionally deal with the subjective aspect of capitalist relations. There are very strong de-politicising aspects to the thinking of 'alienation' as a way of describing the capture of subjectivity by capitalist exploitation or social norms. First of all, unlike the thinking of class, which is conjunctural and determined by relationship to the means of production and the balance of social forces, and thus stands as a political category, alienation presupposes a human essence and as such is a religious or metaphysical category with only a tenuous relationship to the political, at best a speculative anthropology. Potentiality, on the other hand, is open-ended and as such is more immanently generative for emancipatory political praxis.

It is the potentiality of human activity as contradictorily inscribed and excessive to abstract labour which reveals the conflictual core of abstract labour in its expansion and

diversification in art and the economy more broadly. While the modalities of broader economic, political and social (this is shorthand, because in critical political economy these cannot be adjudicated as separate realms) are felt in cultural quarters – you only need to look at the currency of terminology like 'flexibility', 'sustainability', 'openness', 'ambiguity', 'ephemerality', 'informality' across art, business and government policy as a way of making a rough sketch of what gets described as 'post-Fordism' – it would be reductive, in my opinion, to establish a symmetry that would put art on the side of the commodity, or as an apology for it, without recognising that labour is ineradicably part of the commodity, and is the only source of value – which is why the bulk of global valorisation happens in labour-intensive industries with large numbers of workers earning minimal wages. Art is a commodity that includes labour and is a kind of labour, commodified in a specific, anomalous way, which is why it is a type of labour structurally able to speculate on a form of social relation in which neither art nor labour would exist, a social autonomy. It would likewise be reductive to see art as a form of free labour that restores the concrete experience and community that has been eroded in the rest of social life, since this labour, like all labour but specially positioned in relation to capital, is already a commodity. As a commodity, it is of course *de facto* productive for capital, and this must be assessed for all its implications, keeping in mind that a lot of the interrogation undertaken by the feminist conceptual practitioners was about symbolic capital, which as Bourdieu always reminds us, bears often an oblique relation to material resources. It is only in the encounter with this negativity inherent in either dimension – the commodity, and abstract labour – that can activate the situation, and revisit the discourse of subjectivity in its political or aesthetic register as a topology of the un-productive.

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The Acousmètres of Post-Fordism  
by Ciril Oberstar

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This essay has been conceived fairly modestly. It is limited to a few brief remarks on something that could conditionally be called a failed encounter of film theory and the theory of post-Fordism. The failed encounter thesis borrows freely from theoretical psychoanalysis where, put plainly, a failed initial encounter does not constitute defeat. Failure does not necessarily lead to a dead end; it quite possibly contains a promise of a productive relationship. In short, this thesis is based on the assumption that the failure of the encounter gives rise to an object common to both theories. Failure becomes the border between the two, henceforth assuming the role of their inner bond.

Because this object cannot be grasped directly – since, as Mladen Dolar has stated, it can only be approached in a roundabout way – this text is organised as a series of letters passed back and forth between two correspondents, namely the film sound theorist Michel Chion, and the theoretician of post-Fordism Paolo Virno. It is a text more suitably compared to a post office than to analysis, more mischievous than serious, more ladylike than gentlemanly.

## Intersections

Since its emergence, the theory of post-Fordism has been far from coherent or comprehensive. Rather, it is considered a theory in the making, an open-ended theory, and this reputation is not surprising if one keeps in mind that it is concerned with describing unfinished social processes and changes. Even the authors assembling anthologies on post-Fordism agree that the only point where the numerous theories of post-Fordism intersect is the collapse of the social-economic paradigm named after, possibly, the most famous car manufacturer of all time – Ford. Hence the prefix post– in most expressions denoting the new era, even though the terms, to which the prefix is being attached, differ from each other and relate to different aspects of the reality whose end they signify: to post-Fordism, to the post-industrial era, to post-modernism, etc. Mostly, these are economic analyses focused on a break within the mode of production. The term of postmodernism, signifying changes in the cultural and artistic spheres, is an exception rather than

the rule. Even so, the history of post-Fordism, despite its close association with economic content, is quite intimately linked to the history of cinema. Recently, this link has gained considerable relevance, enabling us to reconstruct it.

An analysis of the post-Fordist break within the film industry, the kind of which was conducted by Michael Storper, lends itself as a direct encounter of the two topics. Here, cinema is not examined as a specific type of artistic expression, but as a specific branch of production, within which the break in the economic paradigm can be identified fairly accurately. The transition from big, hierarchically structured film studios that oversee the making of a film from start to finish to independent companies, organised as networks, specialized in carrying out individual stages of film production, faithfully reflects the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist work organisation. Thus, the new breed of companies involved in the making of modern Hollywood films no longer rigidly specialize in individual segments of film production (e.g. in film animation), but simultaneously offer their services to the advertising industry, to the gaming industry, to design agencies, to internet companies, and even to military industry. Storper names the principle, by which these companies function, “flexible specialisation”. Film content producers are trained to operate in several directions, and their tools and production machines are multifunctional. They can be used to perform a number of tasks, requiring workers to possess a diverse set of skills.

Jonathan Beller takes the opposite approach to the topic of economic transition to a new mode of production. He does not analyse the economic features of the production paradigm shift within the film industry. Instead, he analyses the circulation of images in the modern hypervisualised society, and the creation of these images’ market value, in order to demonstrate that the post-Fordist mode of production is actually synonymous with the Cinematic Mode of Production – the title of his book. Rather than to the process of producing images, his analysis gives prominence to the creation of their market value. Unlike other commodities, Beller argues, images attain value primarily in the sphere of distribution. Since the value of cinematic and other images is less determined by their production than by how

consumers perceive them, Beller bases the principal theme of his book on watching: To watch is to labour. In simple terms, as viewers allow themselves to be affected by images, and direct at them their attention, i.e. their sensory perception and cognition, they are in fact creating and recreating their value. Today, the rough notion of physical labourers toiling away, presumably the basis of Marx's "labour-theory of value", needs to be replaced by the more refined notion of a quiet weaving of attentive viewers' minds, the notion on which Beller bases his "attention theory of value". Thus, the intimate surroundings of dark film theatres, in which anonymous viewers immerse themselves to assign meaning to initially meaningless images on screens, have become the paradigm of new-age factories for the creation of surplus value.<sup>1</sup>

Storper and Beller tackle the mutual bond between film and post-Fordism in two different, even opposite ways. While the former is primarily concerned with the sphere of production of film images, the latter addresses the sphere of their circulation, consequently the circulation of value demanded by the production and distribution of images. Paolo Virno is situated at the intersection of both theories. His analysis functions in the field of political economy and relates to the shift within a wholly economic paradigm, but also applies to the area of the modern forms of communication and to the study of culture and

1 The critique of political economy has a long and noteworthy tradition of flirting with the philosophical discipline of aesthetics, and Beller formed his attention theory of value within the framework of this tradition. Even disregarding perhaps the most famous works in this field, Benjamin's analysis of the value of works of art in the time of reproduction, and Adorno's and Horkheimer's analysis of the cultural industry, one must acknowledge W. F. Haug's theory of the aesthetic form of commodities, established in the early 1970s. But none of the authors mentioned have gone as far as to characterize aesthetic experience as the key agent in the creation of surplus value. Judging from Jonathan Beller's recent work, he seems to have backed away from his original position, dominated by the analysis of the experience of images, and instead focused on their production. Namely, during one of his most recent talks in Ljubljana, on 12th December 2008, he called attention to the immense hardware capacities required for the computer-generated images found everywhere in modern cinema to reach the viewer. He stressed not only the role of the means of production, the computer machinery owned by film producers, but also the necessary involvement of mathematics and other sciences, which make the image-generating computer software possible in the first place.

the arts. Not unlike Beller, Virno is dedicated to the analysis of the media landscape and various modes of communication, but in the vein of Storper, he favours a stricter analysis of the economic field, which he approaches using the theoretical tools of Marx's critique of political economy. Virno's contribution to the topic of post-Fordism is akin to Beller's attention theory of value, but there are significant differences between the two. While Beller's theory centres on the gaze and characterizes watching as labour, Virno focuses on the voice and considers speech the fundamental paradigm of value creation in modern times.

### The Speakers of Post-Fordism

The principle breakthrough in post-Fordism is that it has placed language into the workplace. Today, in certain workshops, one could well put up signs mirroring those of the past, but declaring: 'Men at work here. Talk!'

(Virno 2003:91)

These declarations would mirror what could once be read on signs put up in Fordist factories: Silence, men at work! It is on this inversion, signifying the transition from the Fordist work process logic to a post-Fordist one, that Virno focuses his short analysis of the concept of virtuosity as presented during a three-day seminar somewhere in the south of Italy, and titled in its book form *Grammar of the Multitude*.

Undoubtedly, the virtuosity of Virno's short analysis lies in his way of writing (or, rather, lecturing), by which he attempts to follow the transformations, displacements and slips of the notions of multitude in the works of various theoreticians (of Hobbes, Spinoza, Heidegger, Benjamin, Marx, Arendt et al) and in different fields (psychology, linguistics, political theory, political economy, etc). And it is just as true that the central axis, around which the transition to the post-Fordist age revolves, is the speech of the proletariat: "It seems to me that idle talk makes up the primary subject of the post-Fordist virtuosity."

What is bold, almost scandalous, about Virno's thesis is that it avoids the locus communis of addressing the post-Fordist domination of the tertiary and quaternary sectors over

other industrial sectors. Virno does not point out that service and communication sectors, consisting among other things of advertising, promotion and tourist agencies, have become the main production paradigms, determining all other branches of production. His thesis is radical in that it finds virtuosity, in every sense of the word, at the centre of the 'classical' industrial production: at the Fiat factory in Melfi (Virno's specific example), at the Mura textile plant in Murska Sobota, at the Revoz car manufacturing plant in Novo mesto, in the Laško and Union breweries, as well as at Hewlett-Packard and Panasonic facilities in China.

In short, Virno shifts the entire dispositive of the critique of political economy. The object of the critique has, in itself, not changed – it is probably safe to say that the labour process remains the same as it ever was. It has merely been modified by Virno's inclusion of speech, of the process of production by way of speech, which involves practically everyone from machine-operating workers to top managers and stock brokers. This is not simply a matter of adding another branch of production to the production activities examined by traditional economics. Language-based production straddles the entire economic field, and its effects permeate all production spheres.

In order to fully demonstrate the theoretical implications of including speaker-labourers in the production of value and surplus value, it is necessary to return to the time when the critique of political economy had yet to develop the sensitivity to the speech process, when theory was deaf to the voices of workers.

## Marx beyond Marx

We shall begin by focusing mainly on the points where Virno's analysis breaks with Marx critique of the political economy. These are not breaks in the true sense of the word, since they remain committed to Marx and refer to him in their conclusions. However, Virno sharpens a point that immanently contradicts Marx's theory. It is an approach best defined by a formulation from one of Antonio Negri's titles: *Marx beyond Marx*. A question persists: which Marx; beyond which Marx?

At the core of Marx's analysis of economy lies the discovery of a specific commodity, characteristic of the capitalist production: the commodity of labour-power, a paradoxical commodity for sale, like any other, in the marketplace. Yet what separates it from other commodities – radically speaking – is that it does not exist at the time of purchase. What is bought and sold is merely the capacity, the *dynamis*, rather than something existing in reality. The classic paradox of labour-power, already pointed out by Hegel, is this: if the capital were able to purchase an individual's entire labour-power for an indefinite period of time, it would create a slave and abolish itself as capital. Because labour-power is inseparable from the body, the capital would have the individual at its disposal for the entire span of his life, making their relationship not capitalist, but one of slave-ownership. Therefore, the discreet charm of capitalism is that it leaves the individual free – free to sell a certain time interval of his labour-power. Meanwhile, the capital only apports for itself the specific section of his labour-power's total period of duration that it intends to use. It uses the individual's labour-power by consuming it. Virno quotes from Marx' *Capital*:

Labor-power is 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being.

(Virno 2003: 81)

Labour-power's only attribute of any interest to the capital is that it can be consumed, and that out of this consumption it is possible to extract an equivalent of value by which labour-power is produced (the value of this commodity's purchase), as well as the surplus value produced by labour-power beyond the mentioned equivalent. Here, the equivalent implies that what has been substituted is not the value consumed in the labour process, but the value enabling the commodity, i.e. labour-power, to re-enter the labour process (the next day, for example). The extent of what maintains labour-power is a matter of many different interpretations. But according to all of them, including to the one by Marx, this does not only involve food, drink and shelter, but also education, knowledge and so on; in other words, all the

non-material goods that, in the quoted excerpt, Marx terms as “mental capabilities”.

In Marx, the value of any commodity consists of the elements involved in its production. On one hand, it is comprised of the value of the objects of labour, of consumed raw materials, and of tools taking part in the labour process. The value of these means of production is transferred to the product by the consumption of labour-power through work. Their value may be transferred to the product in full, as is the case with the objects of labour and raw materials that get consumed entirely, or only in part, as with tools whose level of wear and tear is sufficiently low to allow for them to be used in further labour processes. In addition, the value of commodities includes the value of labour-power. Here, the parallels between Marx's analysis and those of his predecessors cease. First, in the absence of labour-power not a single atom of the value of commodities involved in production would be transferred to the product. Yet labour-power cannot be invested with value, its capacity cannot actualize, without transferring to the product not only its own value, but also the values of commodities consumed in the process. From these two propositions, Marx infers that labour is the sole substance of value, but not the whole value of the commodities produced. As the substance of value, any work is abstract, negative, a consumption of labour-power, a “productive expenditure of a certain amount of human nerves, muscles, brain, etc.” Let the record show that in addition to the brain centre for speech, which is already implied in the list, one should include the speech organs involved in the creation of sonic matter.

Precisely for this reason this point presents itself as a privileged spot from which to observe Virno's relation to Marx's theory of the labour process – to a process which, as it turns out in retrospect, was mute. We must ask ourselves whether Marx heard the workers' idle talk at all. But really, there can be no doubt that not only did he hear it, but that others had heard it long before him.

### Instrumentum Vocale

The labourer here is, to use a striking expression of the ancients, distinguishable only as instrumentum vocale,

from an animal as instrumentum semi-vocale, and from an implement as instrumentum mutum.”<sup>2</sup>

Marx’s concept of labour-power as the human productive capacity therefore encompasses the “generic faculty for speaking”, of which Virno writes in his book. This puts the central theme – Virno’s relationship with Marx’s theory and how they both relate to the labour process – into an entirely new perspective. Considering that workers have always spoken, the question is where the break occurs, exactly. Or, if there had been idle talk among workers before Virno came along, what does his critique of political economy break from? On one hand, we have workers who speak, who have always spoken, but on the other, we have the labour process that no longer passes them by in a mute fashion, but has started recording their speech and creating surplus value from it. Following Virno’s analysis, one must say that labour capability as conceived by Marx did entail speech, but that in Marx’s time, labour process had not yet started recording the effects of speech. Thus, we are faced with an insoluble dilemma: workers have always spoken, but the labour process was not registering it. It remained deaf to their idle talk. It seems as if the formerly mute labour process suddenly came alive in the realm of sound.

In this, Virno’s theoretical vantage point corresponds to those exploring the implications of the transition from silent film to sound film and examining the radical cut made into film by the introduction of sound. Michel Chion, the theoretician of voice in cinema who attempted to track faithfully the changes that the film medium itself underwent during the transition, was perhaps the first to note that silent film is a completely inappropriate name for a film in which actors nevertheless engage in dialogue, albeit unheard, and that includes many sounds and noises to which we happen to be deaf. Thus, a more appropriate term would be “deaf cinema”.

Chion writes: “From the very outset there was an essential feature distinguishing the silent movies from canned pantomime. The silent characters were not mute, they spoke”

2 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch07.htm#17a>

(Chion 1999: 95). Indeed: looking at the virtuosity of speaker-labourers from another angle, everything Virno is saying suddenly seems quite familiar. Silence, men at work, the Fordist injunction of admittedly mute letters on factory signs, sounds similar to something we have heard before. Of course! Silence! Filming in progress, is the appeal of filmmakers. Not any filmmakers, but the very filmmakers of sound cinema. The appeal was repeated constantly, particularly at the time when it still held significance, when the ear had yet to grow familiar with it – in the period when sound cinema was taking the place of silent cinema, and the actors, the crew and everyone else involved with cinema had to be made accustomed to it. Michel Chion offers a remarkable description of this event:

When sound cinema brought real sound to the screen – like the belated guest who thought himself indispensable to the party – everything suddenly seemed in perfect order without it. [...] Real sound began to radically change the way films were made. [...] It placed cinema in shackles. Stories abound of having to enclose cameras in clumsy sound-proof booths and immobilize them. Of how, while in earlier times filming took place amid pleasant bustle, now at every step one encountered the depressing prohibition: 'Silence! Filming in progress.' Of how sound technicians became the tyrants of filmmaking, and how, for a time, the freedom of movement and cutting enjoyed by silent cinema was restricted.

(Chion 1987: 182)

After all, it is a change exactly like this that Virno ascribes to post-Fordism – which arrived after 1977 – making the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism analogous to the transition from silent cinema to sound cinema that ordered its actors to speak. There are known cases of silent film stars fading away due to their inappropriate, shrill or simply unbearable voices. Yet it is clear that the reversal caused by the introduction of sound technology into the film industry runs contrary to the one in Virno's thesis, caused by the introduction of workers' speech into the post-

Fordist labour process. While silent film was unperturbed by the out-of-frame idle talk of film crew members, by the lively bustle of the surroundings and, above all, by the loud humming of the camera – and the appearance of the sound track gave rise to the appeal of Silence! Filming in progress, meant to extinguish the environmental noises, sounds and speech – Virno's analysis shows the opposite. Silence, men at work! is an injunction of Fordism, while conversely, Men at work here. Talk! is the slogan of post-Fordism, where the generic human faculty for speaking is embedded in the production process. And furthermore, post-Fordism is where speech, or idle talk, becomes not only the essential creator of value in general – of the value of necessary labour on the product – but the very creator of surplus value.

Still, all this does not make the two injunctions any less the traces of the exact same event – the introduction of voice into the labour process. Thus, the injunction: Silence! Filming in progress. is not only an echo of the past, not a mere reverberation of an era buried by the new regime, but principally the cinematic truth of a new commandment, the repressed, reverse side of the injunction: Men at work here. Talk! This being the case, the question must be asked whether this permissive injunction simultaneously calls for something to fall silent so that idle talk might assume the role of the fundamental producer of surplus value.

### The Mute Character's Final Word

It was Chion's painstaking analysis of the transition from silent cinema to sound cinema that, at the beginning of his theoretical path, finally let some 'light' into film theory and its sound-related predicaments. One of his initial, and perhaps farthest-reaching, theoretical manoeuvres was to extract from sound cinema a figure that functions as a representative of silent cinema.

By endowing the film with a synchronized 'sound track' and bringing the voice to this added track, the talkies allowed us not only to *hear silence* [...] but also to have truly silent, mute characters. The deaf cinema, having presented them in among speaking but voiceless

characters, wasn't able to *make their silence heard*.

(Chion 1999: 95)

As speech enters into theoretical analysis, it is necessarily accompanied by silence. Paradoxically, it is silence that silent cinema cannot portray. The mute is a figure that either cannot exist in silent cinema or exists in it in a form that is quite impaired. It is to Chion's credit that he faced a theory studying a new situation, supplemented by the register of speech, with its first task: to inscribe the situation with the coordinates of silence. Without the geography of silence, there can be no geography of sound.

His theoretical operation is worth examining up close, since it undoubtedly holds great potential to shed a bit of light on our dilemma expressed most concisely by Virno's eighth thesis: "In post-Fordism, the general intellect does not coincide with fixed capital, but manifests itself principally as a linguistic reiteration of living labour." The *general intellect* is a term Marx uses in the *Fragment on Machines* to characterize the social knowledge embodied as past labour in the construction of machines (fixed capital). Machines represent the subject of the labour process termed by Marx, in contrast to workers, as the *instrumentum mutum*. Conversely, Virno considers *general intellect* to be the mass intellectuality, the very value expressed in the virtuous communication of workers. The relevant sentence in Marx reads:

[Machines, locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules, etc.] are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it.<sup>3</sup>

3 Karl Marx, Grundrisse: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.html>

Marx's key point, then, is that machines embody the social value of past time periods and labour processes. The new-age machine is a result of the knowledge developed through these processes. Simply put, the automatic machinery that Marx had in mind consists of developed machines which can be disassembled "into smaller parts, machines in themselves," to quote Deleuze. Machinery is a system of individual machines, themselves assembled. It is possible to trace the origin, the basic element, of any machine back to simple tools. Therefore, "the production process of large-scale industry [is about] the productive power of the means of labour as developed into the automatic process".<sup>4</sup>

Marx places the knowledge embodied in machines in an irreconcilable relationship to workers' knowledge – a relationship plagued by the asymmetry between the capital and the labour capacity. As, to Virno, the *general intellect* encompasses both, it seems in a way to transcend mere labour capacity. Virno locates the knowledge generated by the language interaction of living labour at the same level as the manifestation of the knowledge enveloped by automatic machinery. With this, he abolishes and does away with the asymmetry between actual living knowledge and the knowledge of a past labour process that, while productive, is committed to silence. To put it another way: he removes the difference between the structural place occupied by the knowledge of the actual speaker and the place inhabited by the machine-mute, the keeper of the knowledge of a past labour process.

## The Mute Character's Knowledge

Without explaining in greater detail Marx's conception of fixed capital and its relationship to the knowledge embodied in

4 In his analysis of Descartes' conception of animals, Marx provides a beautiful example of how the introduction of the machine into the labour process modifies the theoretical perception itself: "It may here be incidentally observed, that Descartes, in defining animals as mere machines, saw with eyes of the manufacturing period, while to eyes of the middle ages, animals were assistants to man ..." (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm#n27.>)

automatic machinery, let us attempt to inspect this relationship by way of Chion's theoretical operation mentioned earlier. Chion's basic point is that through the role of the mute character in films, it is usually possible to extract the filmmakers' predicament regarding the status of speech in sound cinema. He appears there to enable filmmakers to say something about speech, whose rightful place in cinema is far from self-evident. Each time a mute character appears in a sound film – it is only here that he can truly be articulated – he assumes a special structural function which Chion divides into three segments:

- 1 Through his silence, he represents ambivalent knowledge, even though we never know how much or how little he knows. But that is precisely why he causes “any character he interacts with to question their own knowledge, for knowledge is always partial, and the mute might well be the one who knows the rest. Yet whatever he knows, he cannot speak of: he acts as a witness who has seen something he should not have seen, or what others have not seen, but cannot reveal it. His silence functions as a moral conscience, as Chion puts it, disarming even the most vicious of criminals.
- 2 He is like a dark shadow, accompanying the main protagonist as his double, shrouded in mystery. “As for the mute character and his name [...] he does not refer to himself in the first person; he can only respond to the name given to him.”
- 3 Last but not least, the mute character refers to masking, exclusion, offscreen space. He “problematizes the film narrative's ‘final word’ that supposedly closes off the narrative system as a unified whole.”

(Chion, 1987: 189)

He points us to the very thing that drives film's speakers, to the unspoken final word, to the mystery propelling the action and making plots possible. Simultaneously, still under the aegis of his third function, he signifies the death announcement and the

debt to be paid, not unlike the appearance of Charles Bronson in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Every time Bronson appears, it foreshadows a past debt about to be settled. A mute in the vein of Bronson's character serves his function even if he is not really mute and deaf – put briefly, a mute character is more a personification of keeping silent. As such, he represents an extreme rather than a simple opposite of speech. He stands for something in the absence of which idle talk fails to initiate: silence as absence of speech is also the constitutive element of speech. This is precisely why “the cinematic mute brings into play the status of language, speech, and the voice in cinema. A voiceless body, he refers by inference to his counterpart, the bodiless voice of the acousmètre”. On the other hand, the famous acousmatic offscreen voice, characterised by Chion as the opposite extreme, functions “like a home base, central and autonomous, from which the speaking happens, and it orders, comments, delivers information, and so on” (Chion 1999: 101).

Between these poles, these extremes of voice, the bodiless presence of the off-screen voice and the embodiment of silence, is located the entire field of speech and its effects. Now it is possible to establish that Chion is not merely concerned with speech in cinema, but with the dimension, the register of speech in general, with the structure framing it. The place occupied by silence in the structure of speech is in fact the sound filmmakers' motive for the introduction of the mute character. As far as the cinematic mute is present to explain the role of speech in general, of the generic faculty for speaking, he has the status of an instrument delineating the field of speech, drawing its limits, and simultaneously enabling the articulation of speech – much like its counterpart, the bodiless, acousmatic voice.

### Instrumentum Mutum

Therefore, it is precisely the “automatic machinery” that is the mute of the post-Fordist labour process.<sup>5</sup> If post-Fordism is characterised by the coming to the fore of the speaker-labourers' lingual virtuosity, then this shift occurred because the developed industrial labour process had been inhabited and dominated by that very same mute – the automatic machinery

– who transformed the functions of all other elements of the labour process: the raw materials consumed in it, the object of labour passing through it, the product and, of course, the labour-power itself. This is why the mute machine perfectly embodies all three functions ascribed by Michel Chion to the role of the mute character in sound cinema.

The most highly developed machine, the automatic system of machinery, functions independently and autonomously, it IS the living (active) machinery”.<sup>6</sup> It would not do here to draw similarities with artificial intelligence. The system does not feel, see, etc. What is significant is the place it occupies in its relation to knowledge, the place it is assigned by capital in the labour process. The machine becomes a double – a mute partner of the living labour capacity embodied in the individual – that not only submits to its own laws and the laws of knowledge according to which it was built, but primarily establishes a new relationship to the labour-power and to the capital that placed it there. The machine is a system of knowledge, set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself. The automaton is an immovable mover, pure potency, capacity that can be set in motion at the push of a button. But as far as it is a machine, it is also a structure of a multitude of different, partial, formerly independent instruments of labour, elements that now comprise a unified mechanism, an automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs. By positioning the automaton-machine side by side with labour capacity, Marx was not making a superficial remark. The relationship in which he represents this double of labour-power, of that paradoxical

5 It is no coincidence that the *Grundrisse* (*The Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*) is the very text that enables the comparison of film theory to Marx' critique of economic theory. The *Grundrisse* was originally intended for self-clarification and were never meant to be published. As such, it offers a direct insight into, shall we say, the intimacy of Marx' thought that any publication-oriented revision would undoubtedly have attempted to stamp out. In this sense, it represents a privileged point from which one can observe Marx' analytical passion, as well as his particular phantasms that is just as much an inherent part of his theory.

6 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VI. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch13.htm>.

commodity, emerges not only from themselves, but from their relation to capital. In the labour process dominated by the capitalist relationship, man only counts insofar as he is a commodity, useful labour capacity that will only become realized through the labour process. Yet concurrently, the sole carrier of labour capacity is the basic biological configuration of man – not the body as a whole, but the multitude of organs constituting the body, whose wear and tear, according to Marx' definition of the substance of value, is a productive expenditure of a certain amount of human nerves, muscles, brain, etc. Automatic machinery assumes the structural role of the labourer-virtuoso's double – emphatically so:

The machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. (*matières instrumentales*), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion.

(Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VI)<sup>7</sup>

Its virtuosity is the virtuosity of a mute. It makes noises, it hums, it clanks, but does not talk. To paraphrase Chion, it does not refer to itself in the first person; it can only bear the name given to it; usually the brand name, the name of the manufacturer, or even the name of the owner's daughter: Fiat, Krupp, Mercedes, or Smith & Wesson. Here, one cannot help but remember the famous response to the threats of a robber, uttered by Dirty Harry in the film *Sudden Impact* as he stands alone, with no reinforcements in sight, in a diner where a hold-up is in progress: "Well, we're not just going to let you walk out of here." "Who's we, sucker?" the robber enquires. Harry Callahan replies: "Smith and Wesson and me."

Automatic machinery is a mute representative of the labour process's former periods. It contains accumulated knowledge and skill. "The science which compels the inanimate

7 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch13.htm>.

limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness." The knowledge possessed by the machine-mute relates to the knowledge of the speaker-labourer in precisely the same way as the knowledge of the mute character impacts on the knowledge of speaking characters. Any character he interacts with starts questioning their own knowledge, for knowledge is always partial, and the mute might well be the one who knows 'the rest'. It is not just that the separation of knowledge from the subject is unjust; much more importantly, there is the matter of the effects of this diametric position where, on one hand, we have the knowledge contained in the automaton, and on the other, the worker's knowledge, specifically his *lack* of knowledge concerning what knowledge automatons may possess. The knowledge required to operate or control them has nothing to do with this. What is relevant here is not the knowledge of the automaton's structure. This can be learned, albeit with a great deal of effort. The pertinent question is, What is the situation with the knowledge in the automaton's possession? What is its place? Not how the knowledge works, but what drives it. In these dilemmas, we may recognize the questions possibly inspired by encounters with early machines, posed by Luddites whose leader became the subject of Byron's poetry. But these questions were all too commonly answered by outbursts of violence, by intolerance of automatization, and by breaking of machines. Perhaps there is something more important in what this ambivalent knowledge brings – that the worker's position in the labour process may be the very thing he does not know, or, even more accurately, that he may not know the place of his skill, of the knowledge that is always partial, in relation to the functioning of the labour process which is now entirely dictated by the machinery.<sup>8</sup> This deficiency is caused by the

8 In addition to the introduction of automatic machinery into the labour process, Marx studies the change in the subsumption, the subordination of labour-power under capital. He considers the market exchange of labour-power for money, for salary or wage, as merely a formal, contractual subsumption of labour-power under capital. On the other hand, the subordination of labour-power under, and by, the capital – by way of the introduction of machinery and the knowledge embodied →

worker's uprootedness from direct labour and reduces him to merely keeping stride, parallel to the process, so that his labour becomes abstract. Yet at the same time, the deficiency begins motivating his communicative virtuosity. For as machinery emerges as the embodied accumulated knowledge and skill, the living labour-power appears "merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VI).<sup>9</sup> So to Marx, in a certain sense, it is not the speech of others that drives the workers' idle talk. To a much larger extent and far more essentially, what drives it is the derailment of the worker from the labour process, the dispersion of points among which he is scattered by the machinery. Virno is all too quick to conclude that the post-Fordist idle talk takes places only or primarily at the intersubjective level, when the discussion calls at least for the inclusion of this silence's paradoxical status, of the mute knowledge embodied in the machine. The imbalance between the two poles is what, as Virno says, causes the subject to lack foundation.

Once they have been freed from the burden of corresponding point by point to the non-linguistic world, terms can multiply indefinitely, generating one from the other. Idle talk has no foundation. This lack of foundation explains the fleeting, and at times vacuous, character of daily interaction. Nevertheless, this same lack of foundation authorizes invention and the experimentation of new discourses at every moment.

→ in it into the labour process – is real. The capital makes labour-power really dependent on itself, as well as on the science and knowledge that work for its benefit. In film theory, Chion similarly follows the reversal from formal to real subsumption of silence. In the silent period, cinematic subordination of silence was merely formal. The introduction of the mute character into sound cinema, however, signals the real subsumption of silence.

9 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch13.htm>.

Communication, instead of reflecting and transmitting that which exists, itself produces the states of things, unedited experiences, new facts. I am tempted to say that idle talk resembles background noise: insignificant in and of itself (as opposed to noises linked to particular phenomena, such as a running motorbike or a drill), yet it offers a sketch from which significant variances, unusual modulations, sudden articulations can be derived.

(Virno 2003: 90)

In short, the structure resembles the one Chion extracts from the mute character as the representative of silent cinema in sound cinema, as the representative of its own past. In sound cinema, speech is organised around silence. The mute is the character who provokes talk, who challenges speakers to say more, or less, than what they had intended. Thus, it is only possible to fully comprehend the status of speaker-labourers in post-Fordism against the background of this silence, only in relation to the machine-mute.

### The Acousmètres of Post-Fordism

The relationship of the mute to speakers is not the only one Virno overlooks in his analysis of idle talk as the basic raw material of post-Fordist production. He also overlooks that the field of the production process is inhabited by voices originating outside of production. The production process reverberates with bodiless voices, with acousmatic voices of stock brokers and bankers who direct monetary flows, approve credits and their amounts, thus deciding the fate of individual companies. Although it was not Chion who coined the term acousmatic voice, it was his extraordinarily lucid analysis of Fritz Lang's film *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* that assigned it the key structural place within sound cinema.

First, Chion shows how the voiceless body refers to its other, to the other extreme of speech, to the bodiless voice. The "cinematic mute brings into play the status of language, speech, and the voice in cinema. A voiceless body, he refers by inference to his counterpart, the bodiless voice of the acousmètre."

Between these extremes, the bodiless voice and the voiceless body, is located the entire field of speech and its effects.

It is simple to locate this mutual referral of both assumed values within the production process. Every machine, especially the complex automatic machinery, demands large capital investments that make the machine not merely another production element involved in the creation of the produced commodity's value, but also the embodiment of a debt that will eventually have to be settled. This debt refers to the capital relations outside the production process, to relations shaped moment to moment on stock exchanges, in bank boardrooms, and in central banking institutions that determine interest rates. The current financial crisis teems with examples of consequences this debt can have for speaker-labourers. The uncertain status of debt in its physical form, in the form of the production machine, is far likelier to condemn workers to losing their jobs than it is to influence its own fate. The machine is a guarantee against debt, while workers are merely an emergency source of its payment.

Just as the voiceless body (the machine-mute) announces the debt to be paid, so the acousmatic, bodiless voice ultimately decides the content of the mute's final word that closes off the narrative system as a unified whole. In contrast to the speaker-labourers whose knowledge is always partial and therefore remains imprisoned within the production process, the silence of the mute and the voice of the acousmètre seem to carry another kind of knowledge – an omniscience even; the knowledge that determines whether an individual company, and the labour process therein, will endure or collapse:

The cinema maintains a strangely symmetrical relation between the acousmètre's bodiless voice and the mute character. In both cases, as I have said, the character who has a body but no voice, or a voice but no body, is taken as more or less all-seeing, all-knowing, often even all-powerful.

(Chion 1999: 100)

Still, Chion warns us, this parallelism is not to be taken too far.

What then is the essential difference between the knowledge of the mute and the knowledge of the acousmètre? Firstly, as opposed to the mute, the acousmètre does not belong to the same time and place. The invisible source of the acousmatic voice is not located within the production process that involves both machines and workers. This other scene of production, this other space and time, to be sought on stock exchanges, in banks and investment firms, is only *other* to what modern economists call the real sector. Its omnipotence derives precisely from its non-affiliation with the space-time of the real sector: the offscreen voice functions “like a home base, central and autonomous, from which the speaking happens, and it orders, comments, delivers information, and so on.” (Chion 1999: 101) It is only the stock exchange rates determined through the communication between owners and stock brokers that truly determine the value of individual companies as a whole, consequently directing information flows on which depend the new jobs available to speaker-labourers.

Here, we perhaps encounter the biggest gap within Virno’s analysis of speech in post-Fordism. In both sectors, the real and the financial, we are dealing with the register of speech as the basic raw material of post-Fordism. Yet the structural place of speech within the two space-times is fundamentally different. While the speech of the financial sector within the real sector represents the autonomous focal point of the acousmatic voice from which the speaking happens, orders, comments and delivers information, the idle talk of speaker-labourers is mere background noise to the financial sector.<sup>10</sup>

10 Apart from the modern production system and from the role of machines within it, it might be beneficial to examine the status of scientists, i.e. the place they occupy in relation to the topology of speech in post-Fordism. Undoubtedly, their status is at least somewhat paradoxical. Since communicative virtuosity is at the root of most scientific achievements, the scientist should perhaps be classified as one of the speakers of post-Fordism. On the other hand, the scientific development is embodied in the direct labour process through the silence of the machine, through its grumbling and humming. To use another popular cinematic metaphor, scientists act as ventriloquists, endowing mute dummies – the post-Fordist machines – with their communicative virtuosity.

## The Three Listening Modes

Chion distinguishes between three modes of listening: causal, semantic and reduced listening. The latter is limited to the listener only focusing on the sonic matter and disregarding the other two categories, the sound's cause and meaning.

Causal listening is characterised by continuous identification of the sound and its source, by reduction of the effects of sound back to its source. Prominence is given to the quality of the voice or sound, insofar as it contains something beyond itself: to the sorrowful voice of a narrator that points to her emotional state, or to a trembling voice indicating the speaker's fear or excitement. Chion offers a much more materialistic example of causal listening – tapping on a closed container. A reverberating tapping sound indicates an empty container, while a blunt tapping sound signifies the container is full. This is the mode of listening that accurately determines the relation of sound to its source.

Semantic listening is focused on the communication code; on the discernment of meaning, on the deciphering of the code transmitted by the sonic matter. For example, listening to the rapid dialogue of stock brokers in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*, it is difficult to follow the lines and understand the stock market jargon which is interwoven with specific abbreviations and expressions of the stock market code.

Perhaps the most interesting mode of the three, reduced listening addresses the organization of the sonic matter itself – not only the relationship between individual sonic elements, but also the relationship of sound to silence, and even the external relationship of sound to picture. This listening mode relates to the understanding of the laws of sound to the extent that they differ from the laws of other perceptions. A delightful example of reduced listening is offered in “Living the Dream”, episode 14 of the fourth season of the medical drama *House, M.D.* Dr. House, the titular character, becomes convinced that the leading actor of his favourite soap opera has a threatening medical condition. He bases his diagnosis on the observation that the actor has recently been pausing for increasingly longer periods of time between his lines. The doctor discovers the symptom by focusing

on the internal structure of the sonic matter in the television actor's speech after he has noticed the lengthened pauses between the spoken lines of dialogue.

We shuttle constantly between modes, but we can never unite them. It follows that the modes of listening are mutually irreducible and differ fundamentally from each other. In the Ron Sheldon-directed *White Men Can't Jump*, Woody Harrelson's character plays a Jimi Hendrix cassette tape on the car stereo. His fellow basketball player, a black man played by Wesley Snipes, admonishes him: "See, white people, you all can't hear Jimi. You *listen*." The remark may be interpreted in two fairly distinct ways. It can be interpreted as you listen, but you cannot understand, wherein the understanding refers to the semantic listening process, to the deciphering of a code. In this case, the secret code of the black minority in the United States.<sup>11</sup> But perhaps the remark is most firmly grasped when interpreted as a contrast between the definite (hear) and the indefinite (listen) verb form. Indeed, this statement may seem as an ultimate slight against listening, but it can also be taken as referring to reduced listening, to a specific musical surplus. Not to suggest that there is something about Jimi Hendrix's music that surpasses music, but that the surplus is the music itself – i.e. the musical organization of his songs – regardless of its social and cultural background.

In spite of the fuzziness of the borders between listening modes, their key differences are fairly identifiable. This is why Chion pays attention to all three modes, each of which uncovers a specific element of sound in relation to the external sonic reality. For example, semantic and causal listening may spontaneously take place at the same time, but we can still easily slip from one mode into the next. We may be so taken with the quality and modality of speech that we momentarily forget the meaning of the uttered words. And conversely, we may be so alert to what a film character is telling us that listening to his intonation becomes

11 This reading is paradoxical in that semantic listening ends up reduced to the source after all. That is to say, the statement remains incomprehensible if we do not know that both the musician and Wesley Snipes are black.

secondary or ceases altogether. Therefore, if we follow one mode of listening too closely, we may very well lose another.

Virno seems to have been trapped by the fascination with causal listening. When he makes post-Fordist workers the basic bearers of the productive idle talk, he concurrently identifies speaker-labourers as the sole producers of surplus value.<sup>12</sup> In all the modulations, intentions of meaning and transformations of speech, he ends up discovering something beyond the mere exchange of opinions. In them, he points out, it is necessary to recognise the added value of the finished product – the value created by speaker-labourers with their idle talk. His mode of listening is limited to determining the relation of sound to its source. He does not analyse, for instance, the relationships between statements, or the relations of the speaker-labourers' statements to gossip, whose source should not be sought at the level of direct production process. He neither enquires as to the semantic value of these statements nor where the workers' idle talk stands with regard to the speech not originating among workers (e.g. the acousmatic speech of the stock exchange).

On the other hand, Herbert Marcuse has noted that workers' statements were the subject of semantic analysis on the part of modern sociometric sciences that were, even then, being included in the production process by, and in the service of, the capital. In the book *One-Dimensional Man*, written in the 1960s, Marcuse analyses the methods, contemporary at the time, of human resource management departments. These departments introduced the scientific methods of sociometry. What is crucial here is that company-employed analysts actually listened to the speech and statements formulated by workers. Like Virno, they acknowledged workers as speaking beings. They invited workers

12 Incidentally, Chion also speaks of the added value of sound in sound cinema: The effects of music, combined with other sonic elements of film and with picture, are primarily a part of the general context of the audio-visual effect that we have isolated since the beginning of our discussion on these matters, and named the 'added value'. [...] The added value is the effect that makes the viewer spontaneously project information, emotion, and the atmosphere created by the element of sound onto what he is seeing, as if all these things were emanating from the image itself" (Chion 2000: 97).

to participate in conversations where they had the opportunity to express themselves, to relay their opinions. In accordance with sociological methodology, scientists interviewed the workers in order to root out any inconsistencies between the workers' and the owners' understanding of the labour process. This was supposed to bring about greater productivity and improve the work atmosphere. Among other things, the sociologists recorded par excellence political statements: *Wages are too low*. Marcuse details the analysis of a complaint made by a worker whom researchers had named B. B makes the general statement that the piece rates on his job are too low. The interview reveals that 'his wife is in the hospital and that he is worried about the doctor's bills he has incurred.' Based on these non-productional factors, scientists created a semantic interpretation of his original complaint. They took its intended meaning to be that B's present earnings, due to his wife's illness, are insufficient to meet his current financial obligations (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Ch. 4)<sup>13</sup>. His statement was thought to have been caused by the fear of not being able to cover his wife's medical expenses.

Yet, "the untranslated statement formulates a general condition in its generality (*Wages are too low*)."*Wages*, the subject of this statement, is not limited by a special predicate. It has not been said *my wages*, or the wages of the workers of such and such a factory. *Too low* is a relational term drawing into the statement external conditions or states that it never mentions. We are looking, then, at a political statement addressing the understanding of the very foundations of production, and which can be perceived as an indictment of a general injustice. It is exactly as such, as an indictment of an injustice, that it enters the processing procedures of the companies' analytical departments. But once there, it is scientifically 'translated' into a statement about an individual injustice, a statement about a single individual's specific situation. True, the statement does encompass this situation, but the situation is NOT what the statement refers to in its generality (*Wages are too low*; not

13 <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/one-dimensional-man/ch04.htm>.

these particular wages, but wages in general.) Observed from the perspective of Virno's analysis of speaker-labourers, the case is problematic in that it involves all creative and virtuous effects of the unfounded idle talk in which Virno recognizes the basic potency of post-Fordist production. Have the human resource managers not done exactly what Virno considers the source of surplus value? They took the worker's statement as unfounded idle talk, something that "offers a sketch from which significant variances, unusual modulations, sudden articulations can be derived (Virno 2003: 90). They followed the rule that this same lack of foundation authorizes invention and the experimentation of new discourses at every moment. And their interpretation is an invention in the true sense of the word; idle talk generated by another bit of unfounded idle talk.

Even if we set aside the ethical commitment to the speech of workers, a commitment only possible if the basis of production has been acknowledged, there is still the purely logical problem. Statements emerging from the idle talk's lack of foundation must be separated from the position of utterance structurally inscribed in them. But in this way, the very structure of speech disintegrates into a fluid series of arbitrary variations of meaning, devoid of any reference to the conditions of utterance. If idle talk really lacks foundation, then all its statements necessarily exclude any reference to the conditions of the production process.

## The Post-Fordist Soundscape

Before Virno and several of his contemporaries took the theory of post-Fordism into the realm of voice, drew its coordinates and placed it on the map of the critique of political economy, film theory had had an enviable, lengthy tradition of addressing sound, this belated guest who suddenly invited itself onto film and has been stubbornly persisting there ever since.

The voice, this unusual subject of both theoretical lines of enquiry, comes inscribed with a certain kind of displacement, an uncanny quality. Wherever it appears, be it in cinema, in the production process, or in the ears of unsophisticated early listeners, it acts as an intruder, an uninvited guest. Its untamed

nature extends to all who hear it an indecent proposal to domesticate it, to subdue its itinerant presence and humanize its unfamiliarity. Chion in particular has an extremely sensitive ear for the itinerant character of sound. He illustrates its scene of origin beautifully by way of an excerpt from Sophocles' *Spies*: "In the excerpt, satyrs – that noisy and deranged cohort – are looking for Apollo's heifers who have mysteriously disappeared, and their attention is drawn to a noise echoing from a cave; a noise they describe as 'odd and exhilarating, unlike anything ever heard by a mortal.'" (Chion, *Dehors et dedans*). The oddity and exhilaration that derail the savage listeners are eventually alleviated by a nymph who explains to them the nature and origin of this unprecedented sound. Not only is the sound presented as a wild and untameable object, completely foreign to the human ear, but, perhaps more significantly, its reverberations are met with an equally fierce and uncultured cohort of satyrs whose hearing organs have not been informed that they have merely been perceiving sounds of a musical instrument newly invented by the young god Hermes. It is not only the sound, heard for the first time by accidental listeners, that is untamed and elusive. Their hearing organs are just as undomesticated and untrained. And from this moment on, the only concerns will be how to tame this strange sound, how to humanize it, and where to place it:

In the expectation of identification and visualization of its source, the sound of the lyre is at once everything and nothing: it can signify anything and it is not subject to aesthetic judgment. To the satyrs, the context in which they hear this divine sound is acousmatic (its source is invisible) and anonymous (its source is not identified), so they initially perceive it as "a strange noise" a "deaf noise" that could just as easily be the mooing of a harmless cow as the signal of some terrible danger. It is only later, after they have calmed down, that they begin asking themselves whether it could have been the sound of a human voice. What tames and humanizes the sound therefore does not originate in the sound itself, but in what we project into it.

(Chion 1994: 250)

We can ascribe to the sound whose identity and origin we do not know the minimal paradoxical quality of being at once everything and nothing. It may signal some terrible danger, or turn out to be the mooing of a harmless cow. Tranquillity is impossible until the sound has been identified and located. But tranquillity implies a danger of which theory should be acutely aware. Sound has ceased to appear as naturally given, but is forever encumbered by a modicum of what listeners insert in it. The subject of study is no longer the content of sound alone, but also the content that listeners project into it.

To the critique of political economy, the introduction of speech into the production process, theoretically recognised by Virno as the watershed in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, equals the moment encountered by film theory when sound was introduced into cinema. Their common object is not so much the voice as the entrance of voice into a territory that had been deaf to it. What represents the real of the event within both theories is the subsequent arrival of voice in a field previously explored and examined by theory. Post-Fordism must now domesticate the belated guest, just as film theory has done before it.

Here is where the encounter of these theories – suggested by the common variations of the injunctions *Men at work here. Talk!* and *Silence! Filming in progress.* – evokes a sense of failure. In his study of speech, the new arrival in the production process, Virno summons to his aid practically every popular field of expertise – biology, anthropology, media theories, psychology, psychoanalysis, language theory, political theory, and economics, of course. And even though he makes explicit use of examples from the Internet, television, and films to demonstrate the role of idle talk, he forgets to invite film theory into his virtuous labour laboratory – the very guest that might have best helped him combat the childhood illness to which neither of the sound-examining theories is immune. After all, the film theory's initial progress had been slow, and its steps towards building a topology of voice equally uncertain. Chion named sound naturalism and the related theoretical concepts as the childhood illnesses of film theory. One of these concepts was launched by the Canadian theoretician Schafer under the name

that remains popular – soundscape, a neologism composed of the words sound and landscape:

Particularly the term ‘environment’, when applied to sound, is not neutral; implicitly or not, it carries a series of a priori statements and thought twists. Firstly, the term ‘environment’ condenses cause and effect – environment as the cause of sounds, and sounds that have been caused – alleviating something that could be called a naturalist preconception. But it is through this very preconception that the resistance to thinking about sound is most frequently expressed.

(Chion 1994: 257)

The post-Fordist working environment where workers’ voices can be heard from every corner is one of the soundscapes that combine, and make indistinguishable, the voice and the working environment. Virno assumes that linguistic virtuosity and the labour process, which take place simultaneously and synchronously, should be understood as one event, as a single event plane. In this way, every voice may be projected onto a parallel labour process, and only after the economic situation has been so circumscribed can one say that any random idle talk already produces surplus value. Chion’s assessment of this notion barely requires any commentary: “Since every cow goes moo, every phenomenon is supposed to moo in its own way.”

Yet, that the labour process and linguistic virtuosity do form two separate, if interwoven, registers of reality is nicely demonstrated by a predicament from Lars von Trier’s film *Dancer in the Dark*. As the first few bars of the musical number seep through the humming and clanking of machines, the virtuosity of a nearly blind worker girl takes wing, and she spins, dances and sings, carried away in a daydream. Soon after, a piece of metal becomes lodged in the machine causing it to grind to a halt. The labour process has been interrupted. The huge labour automaton, forgotten during the daydream, is now jealously exacting its toll: its halt is making the girl anxious.

But perhaps even more severely than by his one-sided reliance on the causal listening and sound naturalism, Virno

fails by pointing out the obvious – the penetration of voice into post-Fordism – but not creating a topology of voice that would include the speech entering the direct production process from the outside; the acousmatic voice of the financial sector that, in addition to the idle talk of speaker-labourers, inhabits every production process, however removed from the world's stock exchanges.

Also, Virno overlooks the internal border of idle talk, i.e. the silence within the production process examined so incisively by Michel Chion's study of the mute characters' role in sound cinema. The idle talk of speaker-labourers thus only occupies a part, albeit a key integral part, of the entire topology of voice in post-Fordism.

Translated by Dušan Rebolj

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## Colophon

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Profound changes in the global economy, the labour process, class composition, political organisation and forms of cultural practice over the last 40 years have given rise to numerous radical theories seeking to comprehend the novelty of our epoch. Between economism and politicism, resignation and decisionism, apocalypse and revelation: contemporary critical thought oscillates between new and old contradictions of the radical critique of the 'existing state of affairs'.

This important collection, containing critical essays by some of Europe's most dynamic radical theorists and political activists, puts Marx's critique of political economy back in the centre of debates about the concept and reality of post-Fordism. Rather than a fixed theory or concept, the dialogue of these essays allows post-Fordism to come forward as a productive description of a contradictory field of conflicts, interests and political experiences. The result is a stimulating tapestry of critical perspectives that remind us that the defining coordinates of the present can only be comprehended in the deeper historical perspective of transformations of the capitalist mode of production and the forms of resistance and struggle to which it incessantly gives rise.

Peter D. Thomas, author of *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* and editor of *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*.