

Atoms organised: On the orientations of theory and the theorisations of organisation in the philosophy of Karl Marx

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atoms organised

*on the orientations of theory
and the theorisations of organisation in the philosophy of Karl Marx*

Bue Rübner Hansen

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Queen Mary University, London
December 2013

Appendix A: Required statement of originality for inclusion in research degree theses

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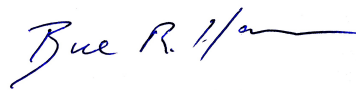
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Abstract

Atoms Organised - On the Orientations of Theory, and the Theorisations of Organisation in the philosophy of Karl Marx

The contemporary crisis has led to a renewed interest in Marx's critique of political economy. But today it is hard to read Marx as the prophet of a new and better world, his writings on capitalism's self-destructive tendencies seem without hope: where Marx believed that capitalist organisation would concentrate, homogenise and organise labour and orientate it toward socialism, in today's globalised capitalism the tendency is the opposite, towards precariousness, disorganisation and competition. This raises the problematic of this thesis, that of the relation between orientation and organisation. Where capitalist organisation atomises and differentiates, the starting point for orientation cannot be capitalist organisation. The question emerges: is there a place and orientation of self-organisation in Marx – and what is its possible relation to the critique of the dynamics of capital?

To answer this question, I will not focus on Marx's explicit theory of workers' organisation or the party, which is in crisis, but on his theorisation of the epochal problem of organisation under capitalism. Through a reading of some of Marx's central writings, which is sensitive to their historical context, the thesis asks: *what is the orientating role of the concepts of organisation and disorganisation in Marx's theory of capital and of revolutionary, history-making practice?* From Kant we learn to think the mutual implication of theory and practice through the concept of *orientation*. Furthermore, we show that Marx's concept of *organisation* was inspired by Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, which starts from the problem of atomised individuals whose reproduction is contingent. Thus, organisation, when appropriately historicised in terms of this condition of contingency, does not start from the relation between capital and labour, but from the problem of reproduction. In conclusion we arrive at a concept of struggle that starts from resistances and struggles for reproduction, and which poses the question of their combination, self-organisation, and generalisation.

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Preface

This thesis was written during the unfolding global crisis, and it was disorientated and reorientated by it. I first started my research a year after the crash, in September 2009, at Queen Mary University. The initial project was to theorise contemporary money in relation to abstraction and production. This research was interrupted by the student movements of 2010 and derailed by the year of 2011, in which I, like so many others, lived the Egyptian Revolution, the Indignados, the August riots, and the Occupy Movement mostly vicariously. And with enthusiasm, anticipation and foreboding. By 2012 the project had definitively turned to look at the central condition of the modern power of money: the separation between individuals and between individuals and their means of reproduction, and the problem of abolishing these conditions. Finally, the last and most important stretch of writing, from the beginning to the end of 2013, has been undertaken in Vienna, among new friends, many of whom have left behind the recent crises of Southern Europe, and the long ones of Pakistan, Morocco and Nigeria. While crisis, movements and friends did much to transform my topic and method, the work itself has mostly been lonesome: an enthusing conversation with the dead about the problems we share, and a time of withdrawal from the joys and frustrations of the creations of resistant sociability that took place around me. This contradiction has been a source of disorientation and of many of the hopefully productive tensions that run through the pages that follow.

Many can be thanked for their challenges, inspirations and suggestions, and for their caring help in sustaining me, the spaces that we share, and each other, together through life.

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Introduction, by way of some conclusions

Like God, capitalism does not exist. ... Capitalism is still marginal even today. Soon people will realize that it is universal only in the imagination of its enemies and advocates.

- Bruno Latour¹

1. A Crisis of Capital, a Crisis of Historical Imagination

If the moment of Bush and Bin Laden put a big question mark next to the thesis of the final victory of liberal democratic capitalism, the end of Lehman Brothers can be said to coincide with the end of the moment of Latour and the thesis of the irrelevance of the concept of capital. However, if global capital suddenly appeared as such, rather than as the semi-naturalised idea of 'the economy', the renewed possibility of cognitive mapping was perhaps more productive of a feeling of powerlessness than anything else. The crisis has not only revealed the contradictions of global capitalism, but also the difficulty of agency on the level of the world system, whether it be in the form of technocratic policy making or oppositional politics.

In his book on utopianism Fredric Jameson distinguishes between utopia as *program* and as *impulse*. Whereas the political forms of the former refer to revolutionary practice or intentional communities, the latter is expressed in political and social theory, even in its strictest realism, as well as in social democratic and liberal forms, when they aim at the transformation of the social totality. In either case, utopianism refers to an avowed or disavowed desire to transform the social totality, which Jameson describes as a 'commitment to closure'. With Roland Barthes he suggests "here as elsewhere it is closure which enables the existence of system, which is to say, of the imagination."² The current crisis can thus be understood as a crisis of utopian politics, which is to say a certain politics based on a hopeful orientation towards the future. On the side of the

1 Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 173.

2 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, First Paperback Edition (London: Verso Books, 2007), 5.

project, this hopeful orientation is based on a connection which has now been questioned, that of the relation between totality and the possibility of agency. What is in crisis on the side of the utopian impulse which sustains different forms of 'reformism' is the belief that the dynamic of the whole is benevolent, not to say providential. This belief becomes unsustainable in a moment where this dynamic is pushing us ever closer to the abyss. Capital is not organising its gravediggers, but setting adrift that part of the world, which cannot simply, in the apt phrase of Geoff Berner, 'move to a higher ground': drifting ever deeper into environmental disaster, precarity and immiseration. So when we turn to an analysis of the orientation of revolutionary practice, it is not simply because this is our interest, but because the current moment imposes such an interest on ever greater swathes of humanity living in the lowlands.

The current crisis is not merely the crisis of the totality, but its reassertion under the condition of a gross asymmetry between the scale of the task and the hopes we may foster. This marks out our moment as radically different from the last sequence in which revolutionary practice was on the agenda a mere quarter of a century ago. In revolutionary theory, what has perhaps most fundamentally changed is the conception of historical agency and subjectivity. This introduction will thus start with a contextualisation of the problematic of this thesis in terms of the contemporary challenges for revolutionary theory, and their differences with respect to yesterday's. It does this through a rough periodisation of the last 50 years in terms of two shifts in the relation between the Marxian critique of political economy and revolutionary practice. This periodisation will allow us to rephrase the classical question of the relation between theory and practice in terms of orientation and organisation, which brings us from an opposition between knowledge and action to a relation which is more existential and ontological.

2. The Ends of Progressivism and the Great Symmetry

During the cold war capital and its opponent appeared as geopolitical blocs lead by sovereign state actors: West versus East, the USA against the USSR. Within the relation between capital and labour, a similar symmetry could be imagined: against capital, the proletariat was gradually becoming unified and homogenised; workers' organisations seemed to develop in tandem with capital's increasing organisation of the working class. Today, we might retrospectively say that this was obviously never the case, except for

anyone deaf and blind to the struggles of women, racialised populations, and the inhabitants of industrialising post-colonial territories. However, it is perhaps too crude to say that the proverbial male industrial workers and their intellectual and political representatives were oblivious to the fact that populations of the dispossessed potential wage workers were always heterogeneous. In any case, this heterogeneity was greatly underestimated as a practical problem for organising, and as a weapon of capital. Thought within the framework of Eurocentric theories of development and progress, proletarian heterogeneity could be imagined as disappearing through the homogenisation of the global working class. We can perhaps best capture the hegemonic colouring of revolutionary hope in this period, by referring to its belief in what we can call the 'Great Symmetry Thesis', according to which there was a deepening symmetry between capitalist and working-class organisation and between the development of capitalist actuality and proletarian potentiality. This is not a symmetry of self-constituted opposites, of course, but rather of two competing parties within an antagonistic whole.³

The power of conviction of this thesis was based on what we with Kant can call 'rough indicators' or '*historical signs*', which, despite setbacks, connect the past, present and future of the present (*rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*) under a general tendency. As Kant remarks, the sign of progress in his time is the *enthusiasm* invoked in the spectators by the French revolution.⁴ While this can easily be understood as an almost apolitical notion of spectatorship, we need to understand it as more than that. The revolution itself was merely a sign of the singular French situation, whereas enthusiasm elsewhere is a sign that the revolutionary sentiment is contagious. It is a sign of a subjective ground for revolutionary wagers elsewhere. For Marx already, revolutionary hope was premised not merely on agency, but on a historical process providing the conditions for agency: '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only

3 Théorie Communiste's notion of programmatism comes close to describing this: 'programmatism is defined as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which become the *programme to be realised*. Programmatism is not simply a theory — it is above all the practice of the proletariat, in which the rising strength of the class (in unions and parliaments, organisationally, in terms of the relations of social forces or of a certain level of consciousness regarding "the lessons of history") is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone toward revolution and communism'. Théorie Communiste, "Much Ado About Nothing," *Endnotes 1* (London: 2008): 155.

4 Immanuel Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed.. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 181–83.

as *revolutionising practice* [*revolutionäre Praxis*].⁵

Thus, the rough indicators in the period of the Great Symmetry Thesis were the increasing degrees of working-class organisation, the development of welfare states, the successes of liberation movements and early developmentalist experiments, the explosions following 1968 and the enthusiasm they evoked across the globe. All of these allowed subjects to imagine a progressive tendency of the whole, and hence to hope and meaningfully work to realise it. Due to its character of projection and commitment, the thesis could not, strictly speaking, be wrong. It was not a hypothesis about a state of things, but a thesis to be proven through determined organising efforts. However, we must also notice the ambivalence of the post-war period: while progressivism was deeply disturbed by the war itself, the Great Symmetry Thesis was challenged by anti-colonial freedom struggles, and black, women's and gay movements from the 1960s. Yet, while these struggles often proceeded through a falsification of claims of progress or of the universality of proletarian organisation, their successes and partial incorporation into more official modes of struggles were easily taken to justify both. By all accounts, the end of this period was signalled by the political and economic events of the late '70s and '80s: stagflation and repression of the post-'68 movements, the on-march of neoliberalism and structural adjustment programmes.⁶ In countries such as Italy and France, the sensitivity to the shift was perhaps more developed than elsewhere because of the early local crises of the post-war settlement, as well as the strong leftist critiques of trade unions and communist parties emerging particularly after 1968, which slowly migrated into the conception of capital lacking an 'outside', a characteristic central to the post-modernism of Lyotard and Baudrillard.⁷ The moment of 1989 did not sink the thesis of the Great Symmetry, but was rather the moment when it was broken up on the shore of 'the End of History'. As has often been noted, this was not the end of utopianism, but the victory of liberal utopianism..⁸

5 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Selected Works, vol. 1* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 14.

6 This periodisation is not so much historical as contemporary and theoretical: the aim is not to understand what happened, but to understand the present moment.

7 We can here follow Bifo's tracing of the historical awareness of the end of progressivism and the Great Symmetry, to the sensitivities of punk and autonomia and the year 1977. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh; Oakland, CA; Baltimore, MD: AK Press, 2011).

8 Slavoj Žižek, "Post-Wall," *London Review of Books* 31, no. 22 (November 19, 2009): 10.

3. Hope and Objectivity Divided

So what is the world that replaces the world in which the Great Symmetry Thesis was a convincing wager? Here, a brief characterisation of the present period will be sufficient: capital today operates through an increasingly global differentiation and competition between all those that are compelled to engage in wage labour or to make themselves dependants on people with money, as debtors, wives, domestic servants, etc.. This is the proletariat in its broadest definition as a condition or problem. Capital operates not through unification, conjunction and homogenisation, but through concentration and dispersion, disjunction and differentiation. Global capital is not the imagined homogenising industrial machine of Fordism, but rather a financial-logistical relay, mediating a productive apparatus that can best be described in terms of its uneven and combined extraction of surplus value. After the political deregulation of capital flows and the technical revolution in logistics, global capital has become capable of disciplining policy makers and populations alike. The swelling ranks of the global reserve army of labour intensifies competition between workers, lowers wages and makes it ever harder to unionise in defence of wages and conditions. Capital does not tendentially organise proletarians, but rather modulates the existence of the proletariat between superfluousness, marginality, migration, precarity and overwork, relying on the state to organise, police and discipline, incarcerate or super-exploit those populations that become temporarily or permanently superfluous as regular wage workers. In other terms, there is a radical disconnection between capitalist organisation and proletarian organisation. After the end of the Great Symmetry Thesis, it appears that development of the productive forces is the condition of the impossibility of the emancipation of the proletariat. Thus we have a compensatory re-emergence of forms of the problem of orientation.

It is here useful to bring up the Kantian concept of orientation. According to Kant, theory is needed when the knowledge of the phenomenal and objective world is insufficient to act. Orientation speaks of a *practical* requirement for a connection between the phenomenal and the practical, the noumenal and the theoretical.⁹ As Kant notes, ‘To *orientate* oneself in thought means to be guided, in one’s conviction of truth, by a subjective principle of reason where objective principles of reason are

9 Kimberly Hutchings, “What Is Orientation in Thinking? On the Question of Time and Timeliness in Cosmopolitical Thought,” *Constellations* 18, no. 2 (2011): 191.

inadequate.¹⁰ Kant's concept of orientation speaks of a practical, even existential need for orientation: to exist as a rational moral being, I need to supplement reality with certain theoretical principles that make such rational moral action possible, where reality itself is not moral or rational. In short, moral action is based on faithfulness to subjective principles.¹¹ Morality in history, and thus in politics, depends on the theoretical postulate that history is not a chaotic process, but tends towards realising the *telos* of mankind. These teleological postulates are introduced as supplements to practical reason, making it possible: for if the world was ruled by chance and chaos, what reason would there be to hope, to not become a cynic, a nihilist, an opportunist, an egotist?¹² The consequence of introducing the problem of orientation into philosophy is thus the 'penetration of philosophy into the present' and a 'reciprocal penetration of politics and the actuality of the present into philosophy.'¹³

The difficulty of radical philosophy after the Great Symmetry was the phenomenological experience of global capitalism as the ambient atmosphere in which we live, a system of necessitation without an outside, where the internal contradictions of bourgeois society are no longer signs of the openness of history. The awareness of crisis did not disappear, but lost its historical meaning. It became a condition, a specific experience of disorientation proper to post-modernity, or simply the normal mode of capitalist regulation, taking the form of 'a proliferation of minor and indefinite crises, or, as we prefer, to an omni-crisis.'¹⁴ The struggle here is not between alternative projects of closure, but the struggle given by the reality of closure which normalises crisis and the state of exception. Here, the role of theory becomes simply to hold open the possibility of something different. As Marx notes, without proletarian struggle and a mature objective situation, communist 'theoreticians are merely utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in search of a regenerating

10 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 240.

11 Ibid., 243.

12 Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41–53.

13 Benjamin Noys, "The Arrow and the Compass" (presented at the "Waiting for the Political Moment," International Conference, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2010), 3,

14 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* I/146, no. July-August (1984); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 189. Following Reinhart Koselleck, Hardt and Negri define modernity as crisis; their understanding is that it results from the 'conflict between the immanent, constructive, creative forces and the transcendent power aimed at restoring order.' The difference introduced by post-modernity is that there is no longer any outside, and thus no longer any coherence to the crisis, which comes to diffuse the whole social body. Ibid., 76.

science.¹⁵ Thus, since Great Symmetry Marxism and leftist theory has not produced revolutionary theory proper, but a series of attempts to speculatively hold together the analysis of globalising capital and the ideal possibility of communist movements, to keep open hope against cynicism and the liberal triumphalism of 'the End of History'.¹⁶ The 'divorce' of theory from struggles is not just an effect of the waning of struggles, but of the crisis of the previously dominant articulation of theory and practice around the Great Symmetry Thesis.

In a statement which Žižek turned into a veritable sales pitch for theory, Fredric Jameson remarked that it 'seems easier ... to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature' – or 'the end of the world' in Žižek's formulation – than the end of capitalism.¹⁷ In this period, the whole was represented by radical theory as totally enveloping; Jameson saw the last remaining 'precapitalist enclaves' of nature and the unconscious as totally colonised and penetrated by the logics of capital.¹⁸ Alain Badiou spoke of 'the state', referring both to a logical state and the political state, a part of which is the economy, as 'a sort of metastructure which has the power to count over all the subsets of the situation.'¹⁹ And finally, Hardt and Negri spoke of a global Empire and biopolitical production which envelops the world, making any symmetrical contradiction between capital and labour as collective subjects impossible, replacing it with the antagonism between the actuality of capital and the virtual power of the multitude.²⁰

Inscribed in a situation where objective principles provide no points of orientation, it is no coincidence that these thinkers, rising to global fame in the decade before the Great Financial Crisis, all developed more or less Kantian solutions to the problem of orientation. Žižek turns back, along with Badiou, to a subjective principle, the 'idea' of communism, while Hardt and Negri inscribed the multitude in a teleology according to which the development of the productive forces under capitalism gradually makes

15 Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in *MECW*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 177.

16 Fukuyama, however, notes that the time of liberalism triumphant is also the 'very sad time' of Nietzsche's pitifully pragmatic and unheroic 'Last Man.' Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), and Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 25.

17 Fredric Jameson, "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 2009), 50.

18 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 48–9.

19 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London; New York: Verso, 2011), 143.

20 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 24, 359.

capital itself a parasitic fetter on its own process.²¹ Jameson's proposal of 'cognitive mapping' as a re-actualisation of the orientating use of the theory of the capitalist mode of production under conditions of post-modernity poses the problem as one of 'some weakness in our imagination.'²² However, given the enveloping condition of late capitalism, cognitive mapping merely gives us a map of our *misère*, and can, at best, be supplemented by a 'politics of utopia', which keeps the possibility of revolutionary practice open.²³

Here it is interesting to discuss Jameson, as his both detailed and broad-stroked critique of the *post-modern condition* has some moments in common with the crisis of revolutionary practice, which we have described above in terms of the crisis of its utopian support (the spatial thesis of universalisation, unification and homogeneity, and the temporal thesis of progress). For Jameson, the problem is presented as an epochal disorientation, in which subjects have lost their bearing and thus their capacity to act. In this context, he proposes the concept of global cognitive mapping, 'in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion.'²⁴ However, where Jameson poses the problem in terms of an aesthetic and a pedagogy, the problem we noted is of an organisational kind. What interests us is not first of all the individual subject's capacity to situationally represent its place within the 'vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole;' even if the difficulty of doing so is clearly related to the organisational problem we are trying to describe.²⁵ The crisis of the revolutionary theory of old is indeed a crisis of certain programmatic and ideological figures which gave subjects their bearing and allowed them to engage in a certain practical wager. However, we must note that this theoretical complex – The Great Symmetry Thesis and the progressivist conception of history – would have been nothing without the real success of a certain organisational model, and the belief that it was generalisable (just as it would be hard to imagine Kant's secular historical teleology outside the context of dawning capitalism and colonialism). Thus, the crisis of the Symmetry Thesis must be

21 As Lucio Magri wrote, the faith in the multitude can easily be read as a mirror image of the faith in progress. "Parting Words," *New Left Review* 31, no. II (February 2005): 103.

22 Jameson, "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," 50. Tanner Mirrlees, "Cognitive Mapping Or, the Resistant Element in the Work of Fredric Jameson," *Cultural Logic* 8 (2005).

23 Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.

24 Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 53.

25 *Ibid.*, 50.

related to the attacks and fracturing of workers' organisations, the restructuring of the labour process, and shift in employment contracts, which increased competition between workers, etc.. This paradigm was premised on a certain symmetry between the organisation of capital and the organisation of the proletariat, in both theory and practice. Perhaps the problem of the post-modern and neoliberal condition is not that there is too little communist theory to orientate revolutionary practice, but that there is too little communist organisation to orientate revolutionary theory? Today, theory seems to be operating with what we can describe as an Asymmetry Thesis, which sees both capitalist organisation (neoliberal governance, logistics, etc.) and disorganisation (crisis, surplus-population) as leading to the disorganisation of workers' organisations. How to think revolutionary practice – if at all – when changing circumstances seem to undermine the capacity for human activity and self-change?

4. Questions of Contingency and Organisation

The crisis and the struggles of 2011, to put it metonymically, have reopened history, as Francis Fukuyama recently admitted, and therefore the possibility of revolutionary theory as such.²⁶ Insofar as any true crisis always comes as a surprise, it also presents the period preceding it with a certain clarity: the symptoms of the crisis that was coming suddenly appear with great clarity. The crisis can be read as a crisis of the closure of capitalism, a revelation of the at least passing impossibility of controlling the exception or normalising crisis. Where crisis is a systemic irruption of contingency – where the flows and relations necessary for the reproduction of the system are destabilised or break down – the condition of crisis is that necessity never abolishes contingency, but rather manages and organises it. Thus, recent writings by Angela Mitropoulos have suggested how capitalism must be understood as a constant attempt to deal with contingency by means of insurance and contracts, as forms of risk-distribution.²⁷ Melinda Cooper has shown how the contingency of wage labour under conditions of precarity and surplus-supply must be transformed into necessary labour by means of the forced system of workfare.²⁸

26 Francis Fukuyama, "The Future of History," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January-February 2012),

27 Angela Mitropoulos, "The Time of the Contract: Insurance, Contingency, and the Arrangement of Risk," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 763–781; Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (Brooklyn, NY; London: Minor Compositions, 2012).

28 Melinda Cooper, "Workfare, Familyfare, Godfare: Transforming Contingency into Necessity," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 643–661.

With the crisis – and the retrospective gaze it allows us to cast on the period that precedes it – we find ourselves in a new circle of struggles, and faced with a capital whose totalisation clearly equals not merely the subsumption of activities and things into its processes of accumulation, but also the abjection of surplus-populations, and the build-up of risk and contingency in the system. What is new is the urgency with which new struggles around the problem of reproduction arise; these are of course resistances short of revolution. Contingency hence no longer refers merely to the overflowing free creativity of living labour or a moment of capitalist control, but rather to the contingency of proletarian reproduction and the urgency of this problem. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*, the sale of the labour power of the proletarian 'is tied to conditions which are accidental *for him*, and indifferent to his *organic* presence. He is thus a virtual pauper.²⁹ If contingency is tied to *freedom*, it is tied to that most ironic of freedoms, the freedom from the means of production. The contingencies of capital – the problem of the repayments of debts and the realisation of value for instance – are immediately linked to the contingent reproduction of proletarians. A capital that fails to achieve the profits necessary for its self-reproduction sheds or flexibilises labour; labour thus unemployed or underemployed fails to consume enough or repay its loans. Crisis is, in Koselleck's paraphrase of Marx, 'always ... a product of the dependency of the proletarian class on capitalists. Every crisis is thus at once a "crisis of work" and a "crisis of capital."³⁰ The existence and concept of crisis, however, does not in itself provide an answer, but a problem, which must be posed as a question.³¹ For Marx, revolutionary theory was never a matter of providing utopian supplements, but of speeding up the self-recognition of struggles: 'we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it *must* require whether it wishes or not.'³² For Marx, the condition of overcoming the situation in which theorists 'science in their minds' rather than 'take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece', is that 'history moves forward' and that 'with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines.'³³ To move beyond utopianism and abstract principles, the task today would then be to rethink the connection between the

29 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), The Pelican Marx Library (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 604.

30 Reinhart Koselleck, "Crisis," trans. Michaela W. Richter, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (April 2006): 396.

31 For the political limitations of theories of crisis, see appendix 0.2. and 0.3.

32 Karl Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 209.

33 Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," 1976, 177.

tendencies of capitalist development and struggles. We will argue that a revolutionary theory might again be possible, if we let it be orientated by the struggles for proletarian reproduction in the face of virtual and actual poverty, if we start from the contingency of proletarian reproduction and do not limit ourselves to the wage-relation.

5. The Aim of this Thesis

We start with the premise that Marx's critique of political economy is still unrivalled as a basis for understanding the actuality of capitalist totalisation.³⁴ However, because the Great Symmetry, i.e. concept and actuality of proletarian organisation and historical development that sustained the revolutionary orientation of this theory, is no longer in place, the concept of totality that used to be conceivable as an ultimate horizon of revolutionary practice, today becomes the horizon of proletarian impotence, unless supplemented by an orientation to something like the virtual multitude, 'the desire called Utopia', or the communist hypothesis, or the elective communities of rural communes. The crisis of revolutionary thought, we have argued, is a result of the disappearance of the previous paradigm of organising. The problem for theory today is not show theoretically how the totality itself is tending toward revolution, but to become sensitive to how existing struggles might be organised to offer better resistance, and how the limitations of these struggles might pose the problem of revolution. The thesis is interested in discovering what role Marx's theory might play in orientating revolutionary practice under conditions where progressivism and the symmetry between proletarian and capitalist organisation are no longer convincing. The ambition here is to develop such a theory in integral connection with Marx's critique of capitalist actuality rather than as a supplement to it. In other words, our general question is: *what resources are there in Marx for thinking the revolutionary potentiality of the organisation of struggles, beyond the Symmetry Thesis?*

In Kant, what allows the circulation of philosophy into reality and reality into philosophy is the use of *figurative notions* which can attach abstract concepts to intuitions derived from possible experience, making 'such concepts, which are not in other respects drawn from experience, suitable for *use in the experiential world*.'³⁵ But

34 We bypass here the debate over the role of revolutionary theory or science in Marxism, as exemplified in Lenin's slogan that '[w]ithout revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'. See appendix 0.0. and 0.1. for some remarks on this relation.

35 Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," 237.

where for Kant these are mere supplements, Marx's orientation is based on a conception of the contradictory unity between reality and conceptuality, which means that they are conceptually isomorphic. The condition of the reality of knowledge lies in the immanent intelligibility of the real, in the Hegelian sense, that reality is 'whole' and 'rational'.³⁶ To be whole and rational, in the Hegelian sense which does not respect the binary materialism-idealism, is to be *self-organised, and self-positing*. This is not a matter of a higher purpose, but of an immanent purpose in a mode of organisation, emerging through the combination of what is otherwise disorganised or merely juxtaposed. Here we must remember that Marx always strives to present a fully immanent orientation, i.e. one that does not rely on principles external to the matter at hand. Ultimately, there is not one science of actuality and another of principles or potentialities in Marx. This means that where Kant needs figurative notions to translate between abstract ideas and concrete situations, in Marx the abstract and concrete is treated by the same models. Marx does not start with two domains, but with the orientated middle between them. Our hypothesis is that what unites Marx's methodology and his ontology, or in other terms his theory of theoretical practice and his historical materialism, are the concepts of organisation and disorganisation.³⁷ For Marx, as for Hegel, the organisation of actuality is irreducible to the material elements in any situation, actuality is always also 'ideal', but in a very materialist, relational and processual sense. Practice requires a moment of thought to orientate itself in relation to this organisation of reality (*Wirklichkeit*), and its own re-organising efforts are themselves 'idealising'.³⁸

Indeed, the present thesis attempts to answer its general question, by asking more specifically: *what is the orientating role of the concepts of organisation and disorganisation in revolutionary theory and practice?*

To answer this question we cannot go directly to Marx's explicit organisational and strategic writings, which are written under the sway of the Symmetry Thesis. Our approach will instead be to ask if there is in Marx another logic which will allow us to pass between the critique of political economy and politics in ways that are different from those of the Symmetry Thesis. We will here follow a dual strategy: On the one hand we will engage in a critique of the moments of Marx's writings where his

36 G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, new ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 20; G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.

37 We leave it to others to analyse the related series form, formation and deformation.

38 Richard Gunn, "Practical Reflexivity in Marx," *Common Sense* no. 1 (May 1987): 39–51.

projections are shaped by the logics of progressivism and symmetry. Here we will see that the classical theories of totality as *always-already*, and often concomitant reduction of theory to the question of systematic dialectics, are hard-pressed to think revolution beyond the Symmetry Thesis. Thus we will, on the other hand, engage in a rereading of the dialectic which does not presuppose the existence of totality, but sees totalisation instead as an ongoing process requiring the use of force to deal with its own contingencies. To do this, we will focus on Marx's use of materialist concepts of organisation and formation, and their origin in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, rather than the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Whereas the latter starts with the contradictory unity of consciousness, the former begins with the real oppositions of exterior elements, and their material synthesis through combination and organisation.³⁹ Alfred Schmidt notes how the central concepts of Hegel's philosophy of nature, mechanism, chemism and organism/teleology, 'are of the greatest importance for the understanding of [Marx's] materialist dialectic.'⁴⁰ While the words *mechanism* and *chemism*, and words for the relations they name, composition and combination, do not occur often in Marx's writings, we will show that the *concepts* they refer to are central to the logics of Marx's writings, and to understanding his dialectic as one that sees totality as result. Not only does Marx's theorisation of systematic totality, of actuality, operate according to the materialist logics of organism, organisation and teleology; the organisation of totality always includes and requires processes of combination, which are contingent because composition is the possibility of other combinations or non-combinations.⁴¹

39 We spend some time pointing out the relation between Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and Kant's introduction of organisation into the concept of nature in the *Critique of Judgement*. We focus on Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*, rather than Schelling's otherwise important contribution, because of Marx's intimate familiarity with it. It deserves mention that while Marx was studying Hegel's philosophy of nature, Engels was polemicising against Schelling in his 1841 Friedrich Engels, "Anti-Schelling," in *MECW*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975).

40 Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 105.

41 In Hegel the notions of mechanism, chemism and organism are not only levels of reality with the specific relations (*composition*, *combination* and *teleology* respectively), but include or map onto other central concepts, developed on other levels of abstraction:

- mechanism (difference, chance/possibility, encounter, repulsion/attraction).
- chemism (identity, contingency, subsistence, synthesis/division).
- organism (differentiation, necessity, reproduction, organisation).

G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, ed. Theodore Geraets et al. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 273–286; G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, Vol. I, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970).

6. The Structure of this Thesis

The thesis is divided into two parts, which roughly cover the young Marx and the mature Marx, respectively. Part I is focused on Marx's early method of orientation, his concepts of organisation (particularly atomism and organism), as they develop in intimate connection with his shifting practice; from aspiring academic, to newspaper editor, to communist revolutionary. Instead of presuming that theory is orientated, this allows us to ask the question: how does theory orientate itself?⁴² The answer, in short, is through the utilisation of the theoretical models at hand, and through letting itself be orientated by social and revolutionary practices.

Chapter 1 sets out from Marx's early engagement with the theory of atomism in his 1841 *Doctoral Dissertation*. We see how Marx was interested in the Epicurean idea of the primacy of free materiality. While not affirming the Hegelian system, Marx was criticising atomism from the point of view of a theory of organisation of the disorganised, separated and free atoms. What Marx found useful in Epicurus was the fearless and uncompromising autonomous orientation of the atomic swerve, the performative practical energy of the abstractions of atomism. We discuss Althusser's critique of Marx's *Dissertation* as an idealistic theory of freedom which provides merely a concept of ideal freedom used in the critique of actuality. From here we ask to what extent Marx's dissertation, drawing on the most materialist aspect of Hegel, implies a theory of a practice of constitution and organisation.

Chapter 2 explores Marx's orientating use of an organic conception of society and an Enlightenment philosophy of history during his time as an editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and their implications for his theories of bourgeois society, history and revolutionary practice. In this period, Marx begins to reject politics based on abstract ideas or schemas. The question becomes one of organisation: the organisation of the mass against the state's organisation and separation of the mass into estates. We show how this theory of organisational practice follows the categories of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

Marx introduced the proletariat in the mid-1840s: considered both fundamentally organised by capitalism yet abjected from it as paupers, the proletariat develops as a revolutionary agent in symmetry with bourgeois society. In chapter 3 we discuss recent attempts to avoid the productivist and sociological conceptions of the proletariat by

42 For our method of reading in Part I, see appendix 0.4.

thinking the proletariat as pure negativity. We show that while this brings us beyond the Symmetry Thesis, it also misses the importance of organisation for Marx. This chapter moves towards a critique of the intimate relation between the Symmetry Thesis and a uni-linear and Eurocentric philosophy of history, resting on the assertion that universal expropriation and capitalist development is a condition for communism. Hereby we reach the end of Part I.

Chapter 4 provides a transition between Part I and Part II. In this chapter we raise a series of methodological questions to Marx's conception of history. How is it possible to adopt concepts of organisation drawn from the philosophy of nature in the study of historical social formations, and what is the relation between these figures and systematic dialectics? We argue that while the logic of capitalism as a crisis-prone organic whole might be helpful in analysing a structure and its internal tendencies or 'laws of motion', it is less helpful in analysing historical change and revolutionary practice. We see that in the absence of the Symmetry Thesis the concept of capital as an organic-systemic dialectic can only provide an abstract theoretical concept of revolutionary practice.

Chapter 5 comes back to the atomistic world of exteriority and separation, but attempts to historicise the modern applicability of such a theory in terms of the simultaneous development of possessive individualism and free labour in the period of primitive accumulation and colonial merchant capitalism. The condition of the interiority of the capitalist system and the dialectic as the method of analysis proper to this whole is the separation between persons, and between proletarians and their means and relations of reproduction at the dawn of the capitalist epoch. Capitalism can only mediate but never abolish this separation and the contingency of the relation between capital and labour. We thus begin to think capital in a more political register, focussing on contingency, resistance, and violence.

Chapter 6 looks at the combination of workers and capital as a contested affair which eventually gives rise to the capitalist system and at the applicability of the concept of a 'social organism'. The regularity of the class relation and the integration of the proletariat in capitalist reproduction was only established by a protracted war on self-reproduction. The necessities of capitalist reproduction thus also appear from this perspective in their contingency and in terms of the *Gewalt* that sustains the system. This allows us to begin to theorise a broader range of struggles in relation to capital.

This broadens the orientation to potentially revolutionary practice, beyond the question of a systemic logic and its *Aufhebung*, to the systemic implications of resistances. From a strict focus on the unity-in-contradiction of capital and labour, we arrive at a notion of the opposition of strategies, which can only succeed by expanding their respective capacities of self-reproduction. We come to see the capitalist totality as a result and the domain of the systematic dialectic as a continually imposed through force and against contingency.

Chapter 7 starts from Marx's theory of surplus-population, i.e. of populations 'inorganic', to the needs of capitalist reproduction. This theory can help us understand the dynamics which produces the notion of the Asymmetry Thesis that capitalist organisation systemically entails proletarian disorganisation rather than organisation. If proletarian disorganisation is thus a constant feature of capitalism, and a deepening tendency, we can understand the proletariat's problem of separation in terms of a deepening problem of reproduction. We propose to start neither from Symmetry nor Asymmetry, but from the problem of proletarian reproduction and the manifold different practical solutions it gives rise to. Thus the thesis ends with some remarks on the problem of proletarian organisation, applicable under conditions of separation, contingency, non-reproduction and surplus-population, but also relevant for attempts to think the self-organisation of the workers who are still organised by capital.

7. Conclusions

Many have of course analysed and practised the politics of reproduction and self-organisation exceedingly better than Marx. Therefore, even if we insist that Marx still provides at least the basis for the best critique of capital, it might seem we need to posit a simple division of labour between Marx's negative and critical theory of capital and such affirmative politics and theories. The attempt of this thesis does not reject the practical need to also turn to non-Marxist theories and practices. However, it questions the opposition between the purely negative theory of the capital on the one hand, and the theorists and practitioners of the new world on the other. It does so by arguing for the possibility and deepening necessity of self-organised struggles and reproduction in Marx. By attempting to bring together practices of organisation and critical analysis of the totality we try to ask how what appears as a utopian impulse might again be thought as the impetus of what we with Marx and Engels can call real communist movements.

To think this after the Great Symmetry is also to ask what revolutionary practice might be beyond a commitment to closure 'in the name of autonomy and self-sufficiency and which is ultimately the source of that otherness or radical, even alien, difference...'⁴³ Not a turning against difference, as in Jameson's description, but an organisation of difference giving rise to an antagonism to the social totality. Such resistances and organisations are products of global capital yet irreducible to it. This allows us to ask 'what is to be done' without presupposing the dominance of theory over practice, or the need to dispense with the theory of capitalist objectivity when it seems disempowering.⁴⁴ We speak here from the point of view of an immanence which is not the hopelessly subsumed immanence of the capitalist system, nor the teleological immanence of the species, living labour or the multitude, but that of practices of resistance and organisation; the immanence of experiments with different solutions to the problem of the proletariat towards its revolutionary abolition.

43 Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 5.

44 To refer to the discussion staged between Lenin, Foucault and Rancière in appendix 0.0. and 0.1.

PART I

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Chapter 1: The Freedom of the Swerve, the Actuality of Idealisation

1. Introduction

We start with the end of the prehistory of Marx, at the time of his studies in Berlin. Few readings of Marx's thought and practice go back to this period because the writer we find here was not yet the 'young Marx' of most Marxists' interest, not yet Marx the communist, or Marx the critic of Hegel.⁴⁵ Of course the decision not to read the youngest Marx is often based on the sound principle that one should not give attention to writings solely because they were written by someone who would later produce texts of importance. If we are interested in the young and mature Marx's orientations however, it is useful to go back to the earliest Marx, and his disorientation. In this period Marx was not what he came to be. To engage with the earliest Marx is to engage with a writer who we can only read as differentiating himself, rather than as already differentiated. The point is not to stress Marx's youthful originality, but his initial differentiation, his method as a becoming in relation to problems of his contemporaneity.⁴⁶

In his 1841 *Doctoral Dissertation*, which is a study of the ancient atomists Democritus and Epicurus and the focus of the present chapter, Marx suggested that we see what is expressed 'as a difference of theoretical consciousness' as 'a difference of practical energy...'.⁴⁷ This insight can be applied to Marx himself, and the intensity of his engagement with philosophy, which his early letters reveal was deeply embodied and visceral (see appendix 1.0.). This intensity must be related to the intellectual battlefield of which Marx was a part of in Berlin. Marx was not, as some commentators⁴⁸ would have it, a straight Hegelian before his 'break' with Hegel. As Stathis Kouvelakis points

45 For notable exceptions, see note 58. For an interpretation of Marx's earliest comments on Kant, see appendix 1.1.

46 See appendix 0.4. on the idea of approaching Marx not through his method (Lukács definition of 'orthodox Marxism'), but in his singular path of becoming, a durational engagement with the problematics of one's time (the space of *contemporaneity*).

47 Karl Marx, "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature - Doctoral Dissertation - with Fragments and Notes," in *The First Writings of Karl Marx* (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2006), 102.

48 For a sketch of the relation between the Left-Hegelian and Young-Hegelians, see appendix 1.2.

out, the Hegelian school was already destabilised and riven since the publication of David Strauß's *The Life of Jesus* in 1835. The young Karl's engagement with Hegel and Left- and Young-Hegelianism was never with the orthodoxy of a coherent tradition or a fully formed school, but with an intellectual scene in the disarray of a crisis, and a textual body always already approached through intellectual struggles.⁴⁹ After the Hegelian system and theology: a world torn apart in a crisis of orientation. Thus we are less interested in categorising Marx's positions as belonging to this or that school, than in understanding Marx's writings as efforts at orientation in relation to contemporary problematics, such as *what is or can philosophy be after Hegel?* and *what is freedom and how can it be practiced and become actual?*⁵⁰ The primacy we give to the question of orientation means that we cannot follow Althusser's methodological prescription of submitting the early Marx to a 'Marxist theory of ideology', according to which the 'ideology' of the young Marx 'must be regarded as a real whole unified by its own problematic.'⁵¹ Althusser's principle precludes the very question of theory as an active part of orientation, in favour of a demarcation between science and ideology.⁵² He needs to posit ideology as 'a real whole' in order to effect an 'epistemological break' between the Young and the Mature Marx. If Althusser is right that certain shared problematics created a kind of 'unity', it was not the unity of a 'real whole', but the negative unity of a battlefield and a shared disorientation, which produced a number of more or less inventive reorientations.

The aim of this thesis is to understand how Marx's ideas of organisation and disorganisation orientate revolutionary practice. We start with the *Dissertation* for the apparently paradoxical reason that it has little discussion of the problem of organisation and none of revolutionary practice. This does not mean that it is irrelevant, however, but that it gives us both the zero-point of the concepts of orientation and organisation, and the theoretical place of their introduction. In 1839, as a part of the preparation for his dissertation, Marx carefully transcribed the plan of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, in three different versions.⁵³ In this context the question of atomism in the *Dissertation*, is

49 Kouvélakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 236. See also Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

50 These problems, we must note, cannot clearly be marked off as metaphysical, ethical, or political, as such characterisation is precisely one of the questions and stakes of orientation. See appendix 1.3. for an example of Marx's early and very acute awareness of writing *after* the system of Hegel.

51 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2005), 62.

52 Gregory Elliott, *Althusser - The Detour of Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 75–82.

53 Karl Marx, "Plan of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature," in *MECW - Marx 1835-1843* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 210–215.

always also a question of the ground of the theories of chemism and organism (self-organisation in nature), and the passage from the most abstract and exterior level of multiplicity (atomism/mechanism) to interiority and ideality. It is thus an attempt to grapple with the question of the emergence of ideality and organisation out of pure disorganised chaotic materiality.

But Marx's reading of Epicurus is also, and more conspicuously, about the ethical problem of freedom of thought, against religious authorities.⁵⁴ There is a strange oscillation between the ontological and the ethical problems of freedom which constantly stretches natural philosophy in the direction of the ethical. With Epicurus he takes the atom as a concept of freedom and raises the question of the actualisation (*Verwirklichung*) of this freedom. This is an ethics that suspends the presuppositions of the Kantian concept of orientation. The atom needs no objective principles of orientation because it swerves in the void and knows nothing of worlds. And the atom *needs* no subjective principle either, because it *is* its own principle; for atoms there is no first mover and no final end. Epicurus is perhaps unique among the philosophers available to the young Marx in providing a principle of orientation that does not entail re-erecting the gods or systems which had crumbled at the feet of the Young-Hegelians. Marx of course would not follow Epicurus in rejecting actuality and any ordered world as an illusion, yet he was fascinated by the practical energy of this outrageous thesis and its usefulness as a battering ram against the inverted reality he saw around him. But Marx would then demand of Epicurus a theory of actuality and its relation to the freedom of the atom. Theoretically, Marx would note that Epicurus was not willing to think how atoms compose, combine and organise themselves as compound bodies or organisms. Practically, Marx pointed out the radical thrust in Epicurus' thesis and its essential *critical character*: if the world consists of free atoms, any world that is not free fails to live up to its essence.

In the final part of this chapter we will discuss whether Marx can adopt Epicurus' ethical standpoint after having shown it is inconsistent as an ontology. This leads us to ask: if Epicurus' *wrong* theoretical standpoint is *correct* in practice, what becomes of Marx's theoretical critique of Epicurus on the level of practice? What happens if we allow the constant stretching of natural philosophy towards ethics to fold back upon natural philosophy itself? If the atom can be stretched in the direction of ethical freedom, what happens when the concept of ethical freedom folded back on natural

54 See appendix 1.4.

philosophy encounters the problems of chemism and organism? In short, do we find in the *Dissertation* the place of a concept of (self-)organisation and actualisation, as an hidden logic in the critique of actuality?

2. An Idealism of Freedom?

In his late text 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter', Louis Althusser briefly attacks Marx's *Dissertation* for having repressed and perverted Epicurus' materialism of the encounter by transforming it into 'an idealism of freedom'. For Althusser, Epicurus' materialism is opposed to the disguised idealism of 'rationalist materialism', which only seeks to explain necessity and teleology, which does not respect reality but tries to impose the concept on it.⁵⁵ As we will see, this reading fails to understand that Marx's reading is more nuanced, affirming philosophy as a practice of idealisation which is not subsumptive of reality, but a mode of real actualisation, of immanent composition and organisation; this reading becomes possible once we recognise that an important source for Marx's reading of Epicurus is Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

So the question is whether Althusser is right to reject Marx's reading of Epicurus as an idealist conception of freedom which has no room for a materialism of the encounter? Does Marx, on the one hand, *reject* Epicurus for not having a theory about necessity and teleology, and does he, on the other hand, reduce Epicurus' atomism to a rationalist idealism of freedom focussed on self-consciousness? While indeed the standard reading would suggest so, the reading of Marx as a post-Hegelian reader of Hegel's philosophy of nature will suggest otherwise. Through such reading we can ask: what is the difference between Hegel's and Marx's philosophy of nature? In other words, is there such a thing as a Marxian event taking place in the *Dissertation*? The rest of the chapter will attempt to outline these questions, arriving at the following four answers. **Firstly**, Marx *does* criticise Epicurus' philosophy for being idealistic, but his problem is not with Epicurus *in toto* but rather with the theoretical *form* of Epicurus' statement of atomism.

55 Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writing, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006), 168. In a note, Althusser added: '[Marx] devoted his doctoral thesis to [Epicurus], basing it on a splendid piece of nonsense, which the thought of his "youth" made inevitable: an interpretation of the "clinamen as "freedom".' Ibid., 206. On Althusser's critique the 'idealism of freedom', see André Tosel, "The Hazards of Aleatory Materialism in the Late Philosophy of Louis Althusser," in *Encountering Althusser: Politics and Materialism in Contemporary Radical Thought*, ed. Katja Diefenbach et al., 1st ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 11–12.

Secondly, on the level of the content of Epicurus' theory, Marx's implicit critique of it is indeed based on the idea that Epicurus fails to account for necessity and natural teleology. However, pace Althusser, Marx's search for a philosophy of necessity and teleology is not posited in *opposition* to Epicurus. Rather, Marx poses the problem of the passage from the atom to compound and organised wholes; he does not negate atomism, but raises the question of how we might think, starting from the atom, lasting encounters in terms of their natural-teleological organisation. The question is, in the terms of Hegel's philosophy of nature, *how does matter involve itself into life?* **Thirdly**, while Marx criticises the bad idealistic *form* of Epicurus' statement, he insists that it is effectively, i.e. practically, a *materialism* moving within and against any such organised wholes. **Fourthly**, and finally, we find in Marx's statement an implicit critique of Epicurus' incapacity to *orientate* himself theoretically in relation to the actuality of such wholes because he lacks a theory of the irreducible reality of representations.

Before passing through these four points, we will start by outlining the stakes of the *Dissertation*. Firstly, we will read it as a mediation on atomistic ontology, as an ontology of freedom, and then look at the ethical implications of this theory.

3. What is the Difference of the Epicurean Event?

The apparently austere and scholarly project of the *Dissertation* was a passionate intervention in the politically charged philosophical struggles at the time. Speaking to the contemporary relevance of atomism Marx exclaims: '[i]s not their essence so full of character, so intense and eternal that the modern world itself has to admit them to full spiritual citizenship?'⁵⁶ For our purposes, it is noteworthy that Marx's reading positions itself, as Kouvelakis argues and we shall see, *against* Hegel in rehabilitating the subjectivity of ancient philosophers freed from fear of the Gods and *for* Hegel in questioning the atomistic individuality entailed in such a philosophy. This latter tendency of the text which draws on Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is, as mentioned, mainly subterranean, and visible in Marx's remarks about the limitations of atomism. If we want to understand the precise relation of Marx's later concept of organisation to atomism it is essential to uncover that hidden polemic.⁵⁷ But while Marx's text tends

56 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 92.

57 Occupying the peculiar position of having been written *before* the texts of the canonical 'young Marx', Marx's *Doctoral Dissertation* is often ignored by Marxologists. However, as with almost any aspect of Marx, there still exists a wide range of differing interpretations of it. Martin McIvor, "The Young Marx and German Idealism: Revisiting the Doctoral Dissertation," *Journal of the History of*

towards a theory of necessity and *natural* teleology, this does not mean, as Althusser implies, that Marx negates the Epicurean position. Rather, Marx's reading of Epicurus not only with, but also against Hegel, means that the text must be understood as Marx's first attempt to formulate a materialism, which, while leaving out Hegel's insistence of an ultimate speculative orientation to the Absolute in favour of a conception of *practice*, learns from Hegel and Epicurus that it does not have to be deterministic.

The full title of Marx's *Dissertation* reveals its question *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*.⁵⁸ The stated purpose of this work, which was scheduled for publication and seemed a perfect springboard for an academic career, 'a preliminary to a larger work', was to contribute a solution to 'an unresolved problem in the history of Greek Philosophy' whose stated contemporary relevance was to correct an apparently minor mistake of Hegel's, namely his conflation of the Democritean and Epicurean philosophies.⁵⁹ The analysis of the difference between these two philosophers is to be understood as the analysis of the difference given in their tackling of a common problem. In the *Dissertation*, Marx is looking for their difference in the seemingly least likely place; not in their ethical writings, but in their atomistic philosophies of nature, where Hegel had considered Epicurus a mere follower of Democritus. If these philosophies have met a 'dull ending', Marx writes, it is because their difference – expressed in both their life and decay – has not been recognised.

The *Doctoral Dissertation* itself begins with the call to study the microscopic differences between Epicurus and Democritus's philosophies of nature. While the differences of their ethics and scientific practices are apparent, most historians of philosophy, Marx notes, have overlooked the difference between the two or described Epicurus as a confused and inconsistent follower of Democritus. In the notebook, Marx merely lists Epicurus and Democritus as two characters in the carnival of philosophy. In the *Dissertation*, their respective roles become clearer: Democritus, the 'laughing philosopher', took part in the worldly carnival and 'threw himself into the arms of

Philosophy 46, no. 3 (2008): 400–401. For an extensive survey see Gery Browning, "Marx's Doctoral Dissertation: The Development of a Hegelian Thesis," in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*, ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 131–45; Tony Burns, "Materialism in Ancient Greek Philosophy and in the Writings of the Young Marx," *Historical Materialism* 7, no. 1 (2000): 3–39; Peter Fenves, "Marx's Doctoral Thesis on Two Greek Atomists and the Post-Kantian Interpretations," *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 47, no. 3 (July 1, 1986): 433–452.

58 It should be noted here that we are not interested in the question of what Epicurus and Democritus wrote or thought, but in Marx's reading of them.

59 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 88. For the apparent identity and profound differences between the philosophies, see *ibid.*, 96–97.

positive knowledge', while Epicurus is described as '*satisfied and blissful in philosophy*' with '*nothing but contempt for the physical sciences*.'⁶⁰ Democritus wandered the world and studied natural necessity. Epicurus stayed in his garden and rejected any necessity in order to live in freedom/happiness, *ataraxy*.⁶¹ Marx is clear that their difference is irreducibly one of both theory and practice, without suggesting that one can be relegated to a cause of the other. It is, in short, a difference of *orientation*. But Marx, according to his 1839 notebook, is not so much interested in a *comparative study* as in Epicurus himself. Here, he expresses his project to think the *event* of Epicurean philosophy very precisely, when he says that it should not be presented as *conditioned* by preceding Greek philosophy, but as throwing a retrospective light on a presentation which is necessary to 'let it express [*aussagen*] its own specific [*eigenthümliche*] position.'⁶²

In the *Dissertation*, Marx initially poses the question of the difference between the two ancient philosophers in comparative terms, a comparison made relevant by the fact that they share a common problematic, that of atomism. However, the tendency of his account is to stress the novelty of the Epicurean position. Through what he presents as a comparison of answers to the same problems, Marx continually stresses the Epicurean position as an invention in the face of the problem of Democritean determinism. The Epicurean event, and the minimal, decisive difference of Epicurus is his introduction of the *clinamen* of the atom. Whereas Democritus' ontology was one of strict necessity and causality where the atoms would follow the straight line of their fall, Epicurus introduced this minimal and unpredictable swerve of the atom, reserving a place for chance, and a condition of freedom.⁶³ This resonates with Hegel's critique of vulgar mechanism:

This *external* manner of thinking always presupposes motion as already externally *present* in matter, and it does not occur to it to regard motion as something immanent and to comprehend motion itself in matter, which latter is thus assumed as, on its own account, motionless and inert. This stand-point has before it only ordinary mechanics, not immanent and free motion.⁶⁴

The critique, since classical times, of *Democritus* was that if atoms fall in a straight line they will never meet. In other words, Democritus cannot think the *genesis* of combined

60 Ibid., 99–101.

61 Happiness conceived as freedom and absence of fear of death and the Gods.

62 Ibid., 201, translation amended.

63 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 102–103, 117.

64 G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1969), 181.

bodies, let alone a world, but can only conceive of its facticity in contradiction to its elemental conditions. Epicurus also starts with imagining the atom as falling according to a straight line; every body, insofar as it is falling, is thus a moving point and draws a line. However, by falling, the atom is negated by the straight line, just as the spatial point is negated (*aufgehoben*) in the line; if the fall is its only determination, there is nothing solid about the point and it disappears into the straight line.⁶⁵ Insofar as it moves in a straight line, it exists in a mode of being in which it surrenders its singularity (*Einzelheit*). Epicurus' solution, in Marx's reading, was to suggest that the atoms must be self-determined *prior* to their determination as what falls in a straight line. The atoms are not determined by anything but themselves; their movement cannot thus be determined relatively to anything, including the notion of a straight line – reversely it is only according to such a measure that atoms swerve. So what is this singularity which Democritus cannot think? The atom, considered as a spatial point, is a negation of abstract indeterminate space, of the void; in this moment the atom negates all relativity and is only for itself. It is a singular intensity.⁶⁶

The solidity, the intensity, which maintains itself in itself against the incohesion of space, can only be added by virtue of a principle which negates space in its entire domain, a principle such as time is in real nature.⁶⁷

In short, the singularity of the atom as solidity-intensity, is not a purely spatial determination, but one that is temporal. Hegel similarly analyses time in terms of a negativity inherent in space, between indeterminate space (the void) and determinate space (the point). However, he stresses time as *universal, a fact of all spatiality given its inner negativity*.⁶⁸ Thus it appears that there is but *one* time. However, this time is immediately the time not of 'one' negativity, but of the singular intensity of *any* atom/point, of which there is a multiplicity. This argument easily disappears in Hegel's exposition in the *Philosophy of Nature*, which follows only one direction of negation, namely that which drives the overall dialectic onwards. What does this mean? While Marx's reading follows Hegel's general principle that the line negates the point, Marx's

65 Without making explicit reference to it, Marx is here superimposing the section on space and time with those on motion and matter in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature, Vol. I*, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970). As mentioned, Marx's surviving notebooks suggest that he studied this carefully. Bue Rübner Hansen, "Hegel's Concept of Time" (Paper presented at the *Telos and Totality Conference*, Jan Van Eyk Academy, Maastricht, December 3, 2012). See appendix 1.11.

66 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 129.

67 *Ibid.*, 111-12.

68 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I*.

suggestion is that for Epicurus the negation also works the other way around;⁶⁹ the atom, in its intensity, negates the relativity of the straight line. Yet this temporality is not the linear time of the fall, but the temporalisation proceeding from its singular intensity. The atom swerves, 'in time, in place unfixt' (Lucretius), the clinamen is not a sensuous quality, but 'the pulse' or 'the soul of the atom', 'immanent and absolute movement itself.'⁷⁰ The atom is not 'in' time, but rather temporalises and spatialises itself:

The atoms are purely self-sufficient bodies or rather bodies conceived in absolute self-sufficiency, like the heavenly bodies. Hence, again like the heavenly bodies, they move not in straight, but in oblique lines. *The motion of falling is the motion of non-self-sufficiency.*⁷¹

Where the fall is relative, the swerve is absolute and self-sufficient. Taking seriously the radical *primacy* of the clinamen, its opposition to determinism is no longer central. The atom can no longer be defined in terms of determinism/indeterminacy, but only qua itself, as a concept of singular movement. The atom, defined by the clinamen, 'is the cause of everything, hence without cause itself.'⁷² Thus, if clinamen means something like freedom, it is a freedom neither opposed to necessity, nor realised in necessity (as the classical idealist notion of freedom). It presents us with a concept of absolute freedom and self-causation not on the level of God, but on the level of untotalisable multiplicities.

Marx's Epicurus does not deny the compulsions of the everyday or the appearance of relations of causality. He is fully aware that the actuality of our everyday life, language and experience is full of necessities and composite bodies. The philosophy of the swerve is not a theory of actuality, but a theory of the deeper reality of possibility which explains the actual. The clinamen is thus prior to the actual, and the encounters of atoms are not determined by what is actual but are constitutive of the actual itself. The swerve is the fully real yet indeterminate condition of reality, the possibility which grounds any

69 Epicurus can do this, according to Marx, because he operates in the domain of immediate being, in which determinations are immediate and reciprocal as immediate relations (ibid.)

70 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 194, 196. This definition of matter itself as immanent and absolute free movement, resonates with Hegel's critique of Kant's notion of forces: 'This *external* manner of thinking always presupposes motion as already *externally present* in matter, and it does not occur to it to regard motion as something immanent and to comprehend motion itself in matter, which latter is thus assumed as, on its own account, motionless and motionless and inert. This stand-point has before it only ordinary mechanics, not immanent and free motion'. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 181.

71 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 112. See appendix 1.10.

72 Ibid., 114. In philosophy and theology God has often been defined as this cause and origin (arché) of everything, himself without an cause or origin himself (he is *anarchos*). Here the *anarchos/God* is immediately *multiplicity*.

actuality. In the case of the explanation of real phenomena, Marx stresses that unlike Democritus, who was interested in *real possibility* as the explication of the relative necessity of a phenomenon in terms of its network of conditions, causes and reasons, Epicurus was interested in *abstract possibility*.⁷³ Thus, beneath this question of the real possible, on the level of the atom, there is something more like the virtual, which brings us closer to an aesthetic principle of intuition and an ethics of possibility against any politics of the actual.

4. The Ethics of the Atom

For Marx's Epicurus there is no clear separation between the atomism and ethics, the freedom of the atom is, immediately, the possibility of freedom of *self-consciousness*. The impossibility of separating the ontology and the ethics of atomism is apparent not only in the ethical lessons drawn from the ontology, but also from the appearance of ethical analogies in the description of the atom itself. Thus, the declination of the atom, so writes the Epicurean Lucretius, 'breaks the bonds of fate, the everlasting sequence of cause and effect', in the domain of physics as well as in "consciousness":

although many men are driven by an external force and often constrained involuntarily to advance or to rush headlong, yet there is within the human breast something that can fight against this force and resist it [*entgegenkämpfen und widerstehen*].⁷⁴

The singular intensity of the point is thus the minimal and fundamental principle of resistance to the machinations of external causality; it is the condition of freedom – understood as *arbitrium* (contingency, chance, indeterminacy) – of both the atom and consciousness. The clinamen of the atom is not defined by space or time, it is not a sensuous quality, but a *potestas*,⁷⁵ *noumenal* rather than *empirical*, virtual rather than actual.

Defending Epicurus against Cicero's critique,⁷⁶ Marx's shows how the swerve is not an inconsistent addition to Democritus' strict determinism, but the central principle of

73 Ibid., 105.

74 Titus Carus Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Martin Ferguson Smith, 2nd Revised edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 2001) quoted in "Doctoral Dissertation," 171 and 197.

75 Marx, a law student and classist familiar with Roman Law, must have been aware of the distinction between *potentia* and *potestas*. For a brief discription of the difference between this distinction in Aristotle and Roman Law, see Andre Santos Campos, *Spinoza's Revolutions in Natural Law* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 90.

76 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 110–13.

Epicurean philosophy which reappears also in the ethical ideal of a life in ataraxy of individual self-consciousness, a life undisturbed by mundane matters and free of fear of the Gods.⁷⁷ Indeed, the apparent materialist-physicalism of this thesis, shows its own idealist/metaphysical character by setting in motion only 'conscious' ethical energies. As an ethics, this mode of thought might appear strictly individualist to the point of suggesting a withdrawal from worldly affairs (just like the Gods themselves must be considered to live in harmonious withdrawal), but it also suggests an ethics of the self: 'for man as man to become his own real object', Marx writes, 'he must have crushed within himself his relative being, the power of desire and of mere nature.'⁷⁸ This formula brings into mind Kant's radical rejection of all 'pathological' motivations, yet it comes with a major difference: the Epicurean Gods cannot serve as principles or postulates of practical faith; they are radically indifferent or resistant to the affairs of men. Here we can usefully contrast the Epicurean concept of orientation from Kant's.

Kant had insisted that practical (moral) orientation requires the assumption of an intelligent creator who has ordered the world justly and with a view to the happiness of man.⁷⁹ This *need* of reason leads to the assumption of God's existence as a *subjective principle* (rather than a dogmatic truth), a principle which is necessary not only 'if we wish to pass judgement, but because we *must pass judgement*.'⁸⁰ Without this postulate, 'we' cannot formulate moral laws without which 'we' cannot navigate the world practically. Further, if such law is not provided, libertinism and the lawless use of reason will come to dominate, and require the authorities to repress it and possibly *all* free thinking. Kant's appeal against lawless reason is thus also premised on *fear*.⁸¹ What the postulate of God founds, the moral law, is the final end to ground all teleologies. Why? Precisely because it is in this moral law, and only here, that we find a being which has its reason of existence *in itself*, an end residing in the supersensible faculty of

77 Ibid., 115. Given that Marx focuses on Epicurus' atomistic theory rather than his ethics, the shift from the freedom of atoms to the ethics of self-consciousness, in which intensity and self-movement folds over into reflexivity, is not made clear. It is however apparent that, with the ethics, we shift from a register of natural freedom to the problematic of autonomy, of willing one's own freedom/swerve, making it a principle, a law of one's being. Appendix 1.8.

78 Ibid., 117.

79 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 276 §86. In a polemic against the 'physico-theological' attempts by Spinoza, Kant argues that it is impossible to propose a purely theoretical concept of God. Ibid., 269, §85.

80 Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 242.

81 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 248–49.

freedom.⁸² Only here do we find a true *final end*. In their days in the Tübinger Stift, the young Hegel and Schelling had been fiercely critical of Kant's move to subordinate the freedom of reason, which he had so carefully constructed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to the postulate of God. They saw it as reopening the door to religious belief and the authority of the Church in moral matters.⁸³ The young Schelling, as Marx was aware, was not just a critic of Kant's subjective God, but also of any objective God. Thus, when he characterises the Epicurean affirmation of the irrelevance of Gods to ethics, he quotes Schelling: 'when you presuppose the idea of an *objective God*, how can you talk of *laws* that reason produces out *of itself*, since autonomy can only belong to an absolutely free being.'⁸⁴

The atom swerves. It is attracted or repulsed. It has no need for orientation. It simply *is* orientated in its movement within a non-totalised space. The powers of God, the sovereign and teleology no longer have any transcendent or transcendental jurisdiction; primacy lies with individual forces who might subdue each other, but never dissolve themselves into unities. Through the philosophy of the swerve, any materialist orientation becomes irreducible to any unity or sovereignty that might try to subsume, subject or organise it. Marx's Epicurus's thus provides an ethics of resistant subjectivity. Yet we find in the *Dissertation* certain hints in the direction of a political reading of Epicurus, the discussion of which we save for the final part of this chapter.

5. The Metaphysics of Atomism

We start with Marx's critique of the theoretical form of atomism, which he shared with Hegel. For the atomists, everything in the world consist of atoms, a multiplicity of atoms, which are essentially external to one another, but which appear as unified in our senses and imaginations. Thus, organisations, totalities and worlds are mere appearances. But how then, goes the Hegelian question, could pure exteriority produce the universal concepts through which this exteriority can be theorised? Is not the

82 'He is the only natural creature whose peculiar objective characterization is nevertheless such as to enable us to recognize in him a supersensible faculty—his *freedom*—and to perceive both the law of the causality and the object of freedom which that faculty is able to set before itself as the highest end—the highest good in the world' Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 264, §84.

83 Terry P Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33–38. See also "Dominant Philosophical-Theological Problems in the Tübingen Stift During the Student Years of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling" in Dieter Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 31–54.

84 In a fragment of the *Dissertation* appendix Marx quotes this passage and criticizes the older Schelling for having forgotten the truth of his youthful radical philosophy. Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 161.

philosophy of atomism essentially *subsumptive* of its own object, rather than expressive of it? The contradiction is that they, despite themselves, reproduce a sharp distinction between truth and knowledge, universality and particularity, between the philosophical principle of the world and its manifestation; thus, they are unable to 'reach the concept', the concept being exactly that which would grasp, or be the conscious side of, the mediation between form and content.⁸⁵ Everywhere, notes Marx, Epicurus assumes that conceptual distinctions are real ones: 'Just as his principle is the atom, so is the manner of his cognition itself atomistic ... every determination assumes the form of isolated individuality.'⁸⁶ The atom is not merely a principle (*atomoï archai*) of multiplicity, indivisibility, singularity, but the elementary substance of the world (*atoma stoicheia*). It is at once absolute self-reliant form and absolute substance, which becomes clear when atoms are considered in their conglomerations, which gives rise to quality, to the world that appears to us. It is an abstract determination as well as a real one.⁸⁷ The atom is not merely the existence of a content (*stoicheion*) – as Democritus claims – but the essence (*archê*) of what appears. The problematic of both Democritus and Epicurus, in Marx's as well as Hegel's interpretation, is caught in the dilemma of proposing an empiricism which banishes abstract thought, yet needing abstract thought to formulate its own proposals of the universality of the atom as a philosophical statement.⁸⁸

we do not escape metaphysics (or, more precisely, the tracing back of nature to thoughts) by throwing ourselves into the arms of Atomism, because, of course, the atom is itself a thought, and so the interpretation of matter as consisting of atoms is a metaphysical one.⁸⁹

The problem which Epicurus has with explaining the universality of his own philosophy of the atoms, given the premise of unbridgeable separation, reveals another difficulty: that of thinking freedom beyond abstract singularity. As Hegel notes, the problem is not metaphysics as such, but whether this is the right kind of metaphysics, particularly whether it, like atomism, approaches the matter in the one-sided way of the understanding, or thinks the articulation of thought and reality as organised. Only in the latter case can it 'form the basis both of our theoretical and of our practical action. This

85 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane (marxists.org, 1892), Part 1, Section 2, B.

86 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 128.

87 Ibid., 125-31.

88 McIvor, "The Young Marx and German Idealism," 402.

89 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 156, §98.

is the reproach that strikes down the philosophy of Atomism.⁹⁰ Hegel, in other words, finds atomism wanting because it cannot orientate us, it cannot bring together the practical and the theoretical.

The resistance to gods and real wholes means that Epicurus's philosophy can only find its home in practical separation from the world. He rejects the problem of the actualisation of freedom through the constitution of a *world* or through its actualisation in the world.⁹¹ So the question is not just how to think the abstract universality of the atom, but how composite bodies – the *sine qua non* of philosophy and any world – can be made possible in a world of separated atoms. This is the question of the reality of abstractions, and of the *real combination of atoms into bodies*.

6. From the Atom to Organisation

The Epicurean notion of body (*soma*) includes both simple, indivisible bodies – the atoms – and the compound bodies that we can familiarize ourselves with through our senses. But there is a curious dualism or contradiction here, Marx remarks. As the world changes, and appearances are annihilated, the atom persists; it is the eternal foundation of the changing world, but as such it never appears; it becomes the essence underlying the world of pure appearances, which are closer to semblances than appearances in the Hegelian sense (which are the *necessary* expression of existing essence).⁹² While the meeting of atoms, which is paradoxical to Democritus, is made possible by the notion of their swerve, Epicurus', in Marx's reading, insists that the encounters do not abolish the swerve: the self-reliance of atoms asserts itself as *repulsion* in their encounters.⁹³ This tension between attraction and repulsion is central to Marx's reading of Epicurus' atomism; it means that the only possible combination of atoms into a body is based on their singular attractions rather than on external subsumption and that this attraction does not abolish the swerve. The atom is the movement of the swerve, and a simple affective binary: attraction and repulsion. In this sense the atom is no subject, because it has no object, only encounters and affects.

90 Ibid.

91 In a mythologising note, Marx posed the question of a re-construction from the rubble (Democritus/Epicurus), after the fall of the system (Aristotle/Hegel). Whereas he likened the latter pair to Prometheus, he seems to see his own time as that of Deucalion. See appendix 1.3.-1.5. and 1.9.

92 'Essence therefore is not *behind* or *beyond* appearance, but since it is the essence that exists, existence is appearance', while *semblance*, on the contrary, is not 'independent and self-supporting' Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 199, §131.

93 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 116.

Even if attraction creates compositions, it does not abolish the swerve. For this reason all conglomerate bodies have only a temporary and regional existence. The very principle of their combination is also the inner principle of the eventual separation of any one given body. The starting point – the separation of atoms – always reasserts itself. The composition of atoms does not abolish their exteriority, but only creates a semblance of interiority. The atoms do not involve themselves into life. So, when the atom 'proceeds to reality' (*Wirklichkeit*, actuality) and comes into appearance, it never exists as itself, but always as something else, as the bearer of forms indifferent and external to it.

On this basis, Epicurus cannot think actuality as actuality. He can only separate actuality into its component parts, not think its immanent organisation. Ultimately Epicurus can only dissolve any organisation; the fear that the thought of a whole might disturb ataraxy becomes an incapacity to think the self-organisation of matter. Marx's formulation of this problem is telling: Epicurus' incapacity to think organisation 'is a necessary consequence, since the atom, presupposed as abstractly individual and complete, cannot actualise itself as *the idealising and pervading power of this manifold*.'⁹⁴ Later Marx writes in a parenthesis, '[Epicurus] knows no other nature but the mechanical.'⁹⁵ The reference to these 'real idealising powers' and a nature beyond the mechanical would have been clear to many contemporary readers of Hegel:⁹⁶ in the *Philosophy of Nature*, the first such power – following the section on mechanism – is *chemism*, the combination of that abolishes their individuality in creating a new compound body.⁹⁷ After chemism, Hegel introduces *organics*, with the organism as a truly idealising power organising the multiplicity of its elements according to its own principle, its own idea. In Marx's own abbreviated summary of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, this is 'singular nature. The determination of subjectivity, in which the real distinctions of the form are likewise brought back to ideal unity, which is self-found and for itself — Organics.'⁹⁸ Idealisation is, as noted by Catherine Malabou, a process of simultaneous condensation and synthesis of what is different, both an abstraction and a contraction.⁹⁹ Thus, the reference of Marx's subdued critique of Epicurus is clearly the

94 Ibid., 130. My emphasis.

95 Ibid., 142.

96 Mechanical here does not mean deterministic, but refers to the play of forces, of matter, weight, motion, attraction and repulsion.

97 For an elaboration of the concepts of chemism and organism, see chapter 2, and appendix 1.12.

98 Marx, "Plan of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature," 510.

99 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 2004), 60.

Hegelian conception of *organism*. Contra Althusser, this does not mean that Marx's critique is idealistic in an anti-materialist sense. In fact the concept of 'idealising power' refers, in the case of organisms, to a materialist concept of organisation and natural teleology.¹⁰⁰ It simply means that organisms are self-generating and self-reproducing, and that their elements are determined and alive in relation to the whole. The organism has a temporal and local *purpose and cause of itself* in the sense that it is irreducible to external causations and organised according to its own principle. An organic whole is an *Idea* insofar as it is not localisable in any part or any limited set of relations between the parts. An organism is always in a relation to the outside, not merely consuming it, but idealising it. As Stephen Houlgate writes:

Life not only 'idealizes' matter into the organs of the body; it also 'idealizes' objects and materials outside the body by assimilating them into itself. "If life were a realist", Hegel remarks, "it would have respect for the outer world: in fact, however, it always inhibits the reality of the other and transforms it into its own self."¹⁰¹

Thus Marx judges Epicurus on a standard drawn from Hegel. It refers to a concept of the idea as something not abstractly universal and external to matter but immanent to the organisation of matter. Such organisation, considered as a process of idealisation, refers not just to the actual (*Wirklichkeit*), but to actualisation (*Verwirklichung*).¹⁰² Epicurus' atoms do not explain how a virtual multiplicity can actualise itself as or around an 'idealising and pervading power', how essence must come to exist, and how the existing essence must *appear*. Why is actualisation linked to idealisation, and what is meant by idea here? In a text written during the same year as Marx's *Dissertation*, Engels launched a critique of Schelling which draws on this Hegelian principle:

Being is thinkable for him only as matter, as *hyle*, as wild chaos. ... The chief meaning which Schelling attributes to it is ... that of possibility, and so we have a philosophy based on possibility. In this respect, Schelling rightly calls his science of reason the "none-exclusive" science, for in the end everything is

100 Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, 105.

101 Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), 163. 'Hegel refers to organic self-renewal as 'reproduction.' He understands reproduction, therefore, to be the process whereby an organism continuously produces and preserves itself as the singular organism it is - the process of 'self-producing.'

102 *Wirklichkeit* is a core Hegelian concept, which is translated as 'actuality', and sometimes as 'reality.' It relates to the verb *wirken*, to effect or to work (lit. an activity which changes a state of things). See appendix 1.6. for a note on Hegel's use of the concept of *Wirklichkeit*.

possible. What matters, however [contra Schelling], is that thought should prove its worth by its inner force to become real.¹⁰³

Potential in the sense spoken of here does not refer to logical possibility, but to a mode of being which is not actual. Thus, to understand actuality it is insufficient to proceed in an empiricist fashion from sensual impressions (such immediate proximate truth is mere *semblance*), or through abstract ontological speculation, say by positing a field of atoms (a multiplicity). The proper method for understanding actuality is to understand the path of actualisation, or idealisation.¹⁰⁴ This passage from possibility to actuality moves through contingency, it does not abolish chance but produces its own power and its own necessity of self-preservation. What is actual is necessary; not in an absolute sense, but in the sense that an organism's self-reproduction is *necessary*. Just as an organism can change, decay and die, possibility and contingency still form moments of *finite* necessity; they are part of any process of actualisation, as well as of actuality itself.¹⁰⁵

Here, Marx and Hegel's critique that Epicurean philosophy fails to account for itself (the pure immanence of the multiplicity of atoms is an abstraction which is only possible in thought, yet atomism does not provide a way to explain how this thought of the atom becomes possible) is redoubled when Marx enters into the content of Epicurus' theory. In either case the problem is *not* the conceptual or 'real' abstractness of the atoms, but the lack of a passage from the abstract to concrete actuality. Thus Marx's reading of Epicurus does not, contra Althusser, entail a praise to teleology and necessity against the swerve. Rather, it criticises Epicurus for not theorising the passage from the atom to the actual, for one-sidedly insisting that the swerve is subversive of any whole, rather than potentially productive of compound bodies, and how encounters might lead to the generation of organised bodies. The freedom of the atom therefore appears as *opposed* to the necessity of composed bodies, just as possibility appears opposed to actuality. Epicurus, in Marx's interpretation, cannot think the possibility of freedom in compound bodies. If freedom is the swerve of the singular absolute atom, the organisation of bodies can only be the repression of this freedom. This is not to say that it is abolished in compound bodies, but rather that it cannot be more than the principle of the contingency of abstract bodies. The atom's '[a]bstract individuality is freedom from being, not freedom *in* being.¹⁰⁶

103 Friedrich Engels, "Anti-Schelling: Schelling and Revelation," in *MECW*, vol. 2, 1975, 207.

104 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 209–213 §140–141.

105 *Ibid.*, 217 §145, see also §148.

106 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 130–31. My emphasis.

But, in a world full of fear of authorities and gods, Marx can still take Epicurus' atomism as a model for philosophy despite its limitations. This is where Marx goes beyond Hegel's critique of Epicurus, towards an affirmation of the practical implications of Epicurean philosophy.

7. Turning Against the World: Practical Energy

As we have seen, Marx's reading of Epicurus is guided by Hegel's critique that atomism is characterised by the contradiction between concept and existence, between form and matter. These contradictions become most clear when Epicurus refuses to theorise the existence of meteors. For Marx the issue of meteors, as they were thought by Epicurus' contemporaries, becomes a paradigmatic problem of Epicurus, because they share the characteristics of the atom (unchangeability, self-centeredness, and the swerving in empty space), yet are actual rather than merely possible, concretely universal rather than abstractly so. The fact that Epicurus would not face, according to Marx, is that '*[t]he heavenly bodies are ... the atoms become real [wirklich].*'¹⁰⁷ This reveals the priority of Epicurean ethics over its physics. Once an actual composite body appears as a force great enough to crush an individual self-consciousness, or rather to cause it to fear such annihilation, Epicurus deconstructs that force: he insists that there is a multitude of explanations for the meteor, and that it thus cannot be a unified object.¹⁰⁸ That he turns against any composite bodies which have achieved an existence of their own is both Epicurus' 'most glaring contradiction' but also his 'profoundest knowledge'. It reveals the absolute priority of ataraxy in his thought. Epicurus' reluctance to grant to the composite bodies of the heavens a concrete empirical existence possessing the qualities of the atoms reveals that his priority lies with constructing a practice free of fear, leading him to affirm abstract *singular* self-consciousness against what Greeks would have taken as a clear example of an actual self-subsisting body outside consciousness. Epicurus' priority is hence not a natural science of actuality, but a 'natural science of self-consciousness'.¹⁰⁹

For Epicurus, what is absolute is not the system, but the abstract-singular; an anti-philosophy within philosophy. Moving against appearances – refusing to be a mere

107 Ibid., 142.

108 Ibid., 140.

109 The affirmative principles of Marx's Epicurus, swerve and ataraxy, are immanent to matter, which is why Marx can speak of it as a 'natural science' of self-consciousness. Ibid., 143 and 146.

medium of nature's self-reflection – this is a self-consciousness whose timeliness is as abstract as the singular movement of the atom, it is a process of self-temporalisation, an affirmation of abstraction from the world. Epicurus' position as Marx sees it is deeply materialist precisely because of the profound practical implications of its idealism. In pressing Epicurus' contradictions, what he in a draft called the 'immanent dialectics' of Epicurean philosophy,¹¹⁰ Marx shows how their movement is the movement of the atom and of individual self-consciousness. Furthermore, he shows how they pass into an affirmation, that of ataraxy, against the given. This is not an idealism attempting to subsume the world under the theoretical concept, but one that can only be practiced.

While this might appear as the moment where Marx, as noted by Althusser, subsumes Epicurus to the tenets of Hegelian Idealism, the result is also the exact opposite: *He discovers that Epicurus's philosophy is a practical philosophy*, whose foremost procedure is the affirmation of 'the absoluteness and freedom of self-consciousness' *against systematic philosophy*.¹¹¹ Contra Hegel, in Marx's reading, Epicurus' metaphysics is *practical* precisely because it provides a theoretical orientation that refuses to submit itself to the actuality while being actual itself: it is, we might say, a practice of abstraction or subtraction which reveals a vision that is not distributed according to the modal categories of the the actual and the possible, but in terms of the actuality of conflicting actualities.¹¹²

Here we see again, that, however much Marx interpreted Epicurus through Hegel, Marx was also already writing from a distance of Hegelianism after the collapse of the ambition to provide an absolute system. What we have seen in the case of the meteor, is that Marx discovers the question of the practical-performative dimension of Epicurus' philosophy. It allows us to understand how the zero-level of teleology, organicism and dialectics which we have located at the beginning of Marx, not just through its deficiencies nor as an internal background against which the rest of the oeuvre can be contrasted. Just as importantly, it gives us an alternative image of practice and thought, which perhaps remains open as a subterranean possibility in Marx's writings. While Marx collapses singularity into abstract individuals that are considered as self-identical, it is clear that the affirmative force of philosophy is not reducible to individuality, it is differentiating, a singular force:

110 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 186.

111 Ibid., 145.

112 See appendix 1.14.

It is a psychological law that the theoretical mind, once liberated in itself, turns into practical energy, and, leaving the shadowy empire of Amenthes as will, turns itself against the reality [*Wirklichkeit*] of the world existing without it.¹¹³

Whereas Epicurus carried atomism to its most radical conclusion, namely the practical and 'conscious opposition to the universal [the meteors as concrete individual universals]', Democritus merely saw the atom as an abstract, objective category of natural philosophy, not as an 'active [*energisches*] principle'; the atom, for this reason, 'remains without actualisation'.¹¹⁴ If for Epicurus the atom is pure possibility, the ethics implied by this possibility turns it into a practical force; in terms of the Aristotelian distinction, theoretical *dunamis* becomes practical *energeia*, an actual force in opposition with other forces. Marx shows that the practical truth of Epicurus' abstract notion of singularity is that it ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes part of a struggle in and against universality, thought in terms of *resistance* rather than actualisation. But this concept of active freedom, even if *actual*, is totally underdetermined and abstract: it provides no answer to Marx's own question of how freedom might be actualised in a manifold, or, in political terms, how individual freedom can be thought concretely, socially, politically. Marx's preferred method here becomes that of the critique of the untruth of the world, rather than that of the construction of a world.

Describing the German philosophical scene in the same note, he describes the positive and the critical philosophy as two 'parties', the *party of the concept or critique* and the *party of the non-concept, or positive philosophy*.¹¹⁵ Marx counts Epicurus to the side of critical philosophy, and Democritus to the side of positive philosophy. While the activity of the former turns to the outside of philosophy we have just seen, the latter turns towards the inside of philosophy, merely applying, developing and entrenching its categories. If positive philosophy 'knows that the inadequacy is immanent in philosophy', critical philosophy 'understands it as inadequacy of the world which has to be made philosophical'.¹¹⁶ Both parties inhabit an inverted world, but positive philosophy finds contradictions only in thought, and is thus forced to live the inversion (*Verkehrtheit*) as madness (*Verrücktheit*). The party of the concept, on the other hand, achieves real progress because it knows this madness to be real. While as philosophy's

113 Ibid., 149.

114 Ibid., 146.

115 See appendix 1.15.

116 Ibid., 151.

notion of freedom provides a measure by which the world can be found wanting, it cannot actualise it without transforming itself. What was a systematic philosophy becomes a practical philosophy, it is 'lowered to an abstract totality', it becomes a force of change by loosing the system, by becoming worldly, by actualising itself as a part of worldly struggles.¹¹⁷

The cry for the philosophy to become worldly and for the world to become philosophical recurred, as we will see in the next chapter, in Marx's writings until the mid-1840s. The figure presents us two complimentary moments. One is philosophy's critique of the world as it is, the other the actualisation of philosophy in the world. On the one side a critique of actuality, on the other a practice of actualisation. If the Marxist tradition is saturated with readings of Marx as a critic of actuality, most Marxists reject the early Marx's notion of the actualisation of philosophy as idealist or affirm this very idealism through the concept of the 'idea of' (freedom, equality, communism). We find Althusser in the former camp. In this reading, Marx's *Dissertation* is idealist and rationalist because it appears to Althusser that the actualisation of philosophy means the actualisation of the abstract freedom of the atom. In this light, Marx's argument as we have recounted it appears somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, Marx criticises the theoretical form of Epicurean philosophy from the point of view of the concrete. On the other hand, it seems that he, in adopting the *practical thrust* of Epicurean philosophy, adopts the very abstraction that he rejects. Thus, as claimed by Althusser, Marx's reading and use of Epicurus seems to cast him as an idealist and anti-materialist.

The premise of this argument is that there is not merely a practical but also a logical opposition between actualisation and actuality, between the idealist concept of freedom and the materialist concept of actuality. They appear as concepts of a different order, like the difference between resistance and revolution. However, where Althusser sees an opposition between idealist spiritualisation and the materialist theory of combinations, we will propose that what we find in Marx's materialist critique of Epicurus – posed in his question of idealisation – is a theory of the actuality of spiritualisation. Further, in his 'idealist' theory of actualisation, we might find a materialist principle of combination. All this makes sense if we understand Marx as a follower of the Hegelian notion of actuality in nature whose structure is ideal, yet describing an ideality that emerges out of a material process of combination, looping back on itself.

117 See also appendix 1.3.

Whereas the actualisation of philosophy relates to the potential of self-consciousness, idealisation, in the materialist terms of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, is the emergence of actuality through processes of *composition, combination* and *(self)-organisation*.¹¹⁸ The idea of self-consciousness on its own remains abstractly universal; only the notion of idealisation/organisation can give us a concept of concretely universal and material actualisation, of the freedom in being – as Marx points out in his critique of Epicurus. But to do so, it must not presuppose organisation, but rather show the passage from composition and combination to organisation (and thereby its reversibility, through putrefaction and decomposition).¹¹⁹ For this natural philosophy, 'idealisation' means the self-organisation of a manifold, or more precisely the passage to 'life'. Only when the chemical passes over into the organic do we have, according to Hegel, a self-reproducing process, and only here do we have the recursivity of the ideal, a certain finite self-relating teleology, and self-causation: freedom in compound bodies.¹²⁰

This opens for two different approaches to idealisation. Firstly, a critical approach that picks apart an actual concrete body and shows the process by which it is constituted and structured and how it contains and organises a manifold which remains irreducible to it. On the other hand, there is the possibility of a constructive approach which attempts to organise a manifold, i.e. to constitute actualise itself. What the rest of this chapter will suggest is, firstly, that where the *critique of actuality* uncovers a situation in which a manifold is organised through an alienated idea, *actualisation of philosophy* refers to the actualisation of an idea in the precise sense outlined above: as the self-organisation of a manifold. We start with an analysis of Marx's early notion of critique:

In a note on ontological proof and money, which was written during the period in which he composed his dissertation, Marx suggests that God and money are very real. The imaginary character of God (just as money) does not make the idea any less effective: 'it works on me (*das wirkt auf mich*). In this sense all *gods*, the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence (*eine reelle Existenz*).'¹²¹ The problem here is that these ideas, even if imagined, are actualised through the activity of a common imagination. They are effective and actual (*das wirkt*) insofar as they are

118 See appendix 1.6.

119 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature, Vol. III - Part II of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970).

120 See also Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 156, §256.

121 'Did not the ancient Moloch reign? Was not the Delphic Apollo a real power [*wirkliche Macht*] in the life of the Greeks?' Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 160.

practised in a definite 'country' through exchange or worship.¹²² The manifold of the believers are organised by this idea, but through their own activity.¹²³ God and money are not irrational because they are 'ideal' rather than 'material', as if the material is somehow more real than the idea which emerges out of material practices. No, God and money are irrational and false because they present themselves as self-grounding and self-positing: they present themselves as independent facts, by hiding the material practices of idealisation that sustains them. They present an actuality without the activity of actualisation that sustains it. The *truth* of God and money, what for human beings can be truly self-grounding and self-positing is only human self-consciousness itself. Here we are back to the truth of Epicurus in Marx's reading: an ethics of self-consciousness.

However, if critique demonstrates the conflict between what is (religion, money, unfreedom) and what could be (freedom, self-determination of reason), does this not leave Marx with a political equivalent of Epicurus' rejection of the consistency of real meteors in the name of a freedom which remains abstract? Given that Marx criticizes Epicurus' atom for not providing a concept of idealisation, organisation and actualisation, might we not criticise Marx's notion of self-consciousness in precisely the same terms? When we fold Marx's ethics back on the natural philosophy it was developed as a critique of, this ethics has to face itself the questions the natural philosophy was subjected to. Under this challenge, what we have is no longer merely an ethics of self-consciousness – the 'truth of atomism' which is the result of Marx's investigation – but the challenge to develop a politics of constitution or organisation. The final section before the conclusion of this chapter will present some traces of a political philosophy in the *Dissertation* that render it probable that Marx was aware of at least the possibility of developing such a politics on the basis of the overall framework of natural philosophy (which as we have seen, did not end with atomism for Marx).

8. The Missing Political Philosophy of the *Dissertation*

While Marx's critique of Epicurus relies on the criteria of self-organisation in natural philosophy, the question remains if and how Marx would carry that on in relation to

122 We are here reminded of Althusser's thesis that ideology has a material existence. Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 42.

123 For a more extended analysis of this note, see appendix 1.7.

Epicurus' remarks on the social and political. However, here we find ourselves if not in a blind alley, then at the entry to a bridge that is missing its central section. But the political reading of atomism was, as pointed out by Hegel, quite widespread at the time:

In modern times, the atomistic view has become even more important in the *political* than in the physical. According to this view, the will of the *single* [individuals] as such is the principle of the State; what produces the attraction is the particularity of needs [and] inclinations; and the universal, the State itself, is the external relationship of a contract.¹²⁴

The missing section is the lost parts of the *Dissertation* appendix which dealt explicitly with social and political matters. We can only imagine what was written under the headlines we do know, such as “The Longing of the Multitude” and “The Pride of the Elected”. However, some comments on political questions survive in the thesis and the notes, and they reveal that Marx did not see Epicurus' practical philosophy as incapable of thinking the political constitution of social bodies. The Epicurean theory of the atoms, and hence the notion of freedom, physical, ethical and political, given with it, relies on the presupposition, shared with Democritus, of a fragmented world – materially and politically.¹²⁵ If the philosophy of the atoms rules out the possibility of moral, religious and historical unifications along transcendent, transcendental or sovereign lines, it still manages to produce a unique conception of community. It is precisely Epicurus' introduction of the swerve which 'changed the whole inner structure of the domain of the atoms' that makes this possible.¹²⁶ Because atoms swerve, they do not simply fall side by side, but encounter one another. The political consequence of this is that 'the covenant, in the social domain of friendship' is possible as a real organisation of 'atoms', because their meetings might produce an attraction. Marx quotes Diogenes Laertius' writings on Epicurus in a footnote:

Those animals which are incapable of making covenants with one another, to the end that they may neither inflict nor suffer harm, are *without either justice or injustice*. And those tribes which either could not or would not form mutual covenants to the same end are in like case. There never was an absolute justice, but only an agreement made in reciprocal intercourse, in whatever localities, now and again, from time to time, providing against the infliction or suffering

124 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 155, §98. Hegel's italics removed.

125 See appendix 1.13.

126 Marx, “Doctoral Dissertation,” 118.

of harm.¹²⁷

Justice and injustice, as well as social order and disorder, are not eternal, but emerge through social combinations, through covenants. If Epicurus' philosophy is a practice against actuality, the idea of contracts and covenants must be read as practice of social composition, and therefore against the mythologies of social contract theory. Attacking Max Stirner's understanding of Epicurus' philosophy four years later, Marx wrote:

To give our saint [Stirner] some indication of the real base on which the philosophy of Epicurus rests, it is sufficient to mention that the idea that the state rests on the mutual agreement of people, on a contract social, is found for the first time in Epicurus.¹²⁸

Contra Althusser's critique of Marx, it is clear that Marx is familiar with Epicurus' notion of (temporarily) lasting encounters, the creation of social bodies *ex novo*, outside teleologies and pre-given norms. Such encounters are contingent insofar as the capacity cannot be referred back to any essential human or animal capacity, but to circumstances, decisions and/or desires. However, the priority of repulsion is clear in Marx's reading of Epicurus' political atomism: thus he stresses the Hobbesian characteristics of the encounters. For instance, when he speaks of the swerve as a *resistance* to being driven by external force to advance or rush headlong, Marx's mobilisation of military analogy is marked. As an alternative model to this outer compulsion, he speaks of individual heroes fighting a 'war *omnium contra omnes*'.¹²⁹ The horizon of encounters never abolishes the separation, or only does so temporarily. As Marx the law student must have been aware, it is this latent possibility of civil war arising from the separation of individual interests, which for Hobbes necessitates the mechanical order imposed by sovereignty and law, and for Hegel the organic articulation of law and sovereignty with the dynamics of civil society itself. While civil war is the reason for forming a new state, this state does not abolish power relations and resistances, and thus it never makes itself superfluous. We will see in chapters 3 and 4 that Hegel's position on the state and organism is far from homoeostatic and harmonious.¹³⁰

127 Ibid., 173. It must be noted, even if Marx does not, that Epicurus' Garden included both women and slaves, a fact highly controversial at the time, and unusual for philosophical schools throughout history.

128 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," in *MECW*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 141.

129 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 197.

130 See, for instance, G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §276, p.314. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of

Epicureanism, in Marx' reading, rejects this organic logic in favour of an ethics of freedom and war, which is based on a dis-articulation of the relationship between war and state. Marx's theoretical critique of Epicurus from the standpoint of the involution of life through the organisation of atoms, in this context is exactly what the Hegelian critique of this political philosophy would be: it fails to account for actually existing social bodies and for the possibility of the *political, social* actualisation of freedom. Political freedom for Epicurus is merely freedom *from* the polis, not the freedom *of* the polis, to paraphrase Marx's formula. Given his Hegelian insistence that the atom needs to be thought in relation to the organisation of atoms into organisms, Marx would seem to be committed to push the project of political freedom towards the question of its 'organic' actualisation. If the truth of Epicurean atomism is practical rather than merely contemplative, then the idea of a social covenant also cannot be taken as a contemplative theoretical construct, but as a practical principle of constitution. Thus the practical implication of Marx's theoretical critique is the orientation of practice toward the organisation of freedom, as the self-organisation of the social against the inverted reality of the present; in chapter 2 we will find a sketch of mass organisation which shows that Marx did take up this argument against the conservative, right-Hegelian idea of the ideally homoeostatic social organism.

Whereas the late Althusser's philosophy of the encounter sides with Hobbes and Epicurus, Marx's *Dissertation* might help us critique the ontology of separation implicit in all three. In their divergent conceptualisations of possible social bodies, Althusser, Hobbes and Epicurus remain on the level of forces and their relations, on the level of 'mechanism'.¹³¹ It is clear that Marx's *Dissertation* does not eternalise teleology or the social organism, and that it accepts the irreducibility of the swerve. However, if it is insufficient to oppose meteors with abstractly individual atoms, it also is insufficient to oppose social organisms to a principle of abstract free individuality, even if that does have an important practical energy irreducible to actuality. This is the most glaring contradiction of the *Dissertation*.

It would seem that the practical philosophy sufficient to live up to Marx's theoretical critique of the Epicurean philosophy of nature would be orientated toward the organisation of free singularities under the condition of exteriority. The possibility of

1822-1823 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 100. See also appendix 1.16. for a historical sketch of the passage from Hobbes to Hegel.

131 On the late eighteenth century passage from a mechanistic to an organic conception of society, from Hobbes to Hegel, as it were, see appendix 1.16.

organising a manifold relies on the premise that it is not already fully organised. Self-organisation draws on what is partially or fully withdrawn from – or is abjected by – the powers that attempt to organise it, whether heavenly or earthly. Thus, we find in Marx's contradiction the means to reverse the idealist drift of his argument into a philosophy of materialist organisation and consistency.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced what might be considered the zero-level of the problems of organisation and orientation: a materialism radically inorganic, non-teleological, non-systemic; a fundamental ontology of the swerve and of fragmentation. Epicurus gave Marx an image of a world of absolute exteriority, where there is no state, no law, no sovereign, only singular swerving atoms. What Marx's Epicurus contributes to the overall argument of this thesis is, first of all, a non-Kantian subjective principle of orientation in practice: this is a philosophy that is fully committed to free orientation, that is an orientation that is neither bound up on the fear or hope in gods and sovereigns. Marx's study of the difference between Democritus and Epicurus' philosophies of nature proceeds by highlighting the inherent contradictions of both positions. We have seen how Marx's immanent critique follows Hegel's critique of atomism as well as his *Philosophy of Nature* on the central points in the argument. Through a critique of the contradictions of Epicurus, Marx finally triumphantly produces a reversal: Epicurus' philosophy of nature is in fact a practical philosophy of self-consciousness against actuality. The theoretical problem that Epicurus' theory of the atom cannot explain how the essence of the atom becomes the actuality of the phenomenal world, is reversed into a strength in his ethics: it becomes a violent rejection of a false reality in the name of the essence of freedom. This gives us the famed viewpoint of critique, the revelation of a world that fails to or even represses the actualisation of its own potential for freedom. In the next two chapters we will see how this logic plays out in Marx's critique of bourgeois society and capitalism, and how it is intertwined with a philosophy of history that sees actualisation first as the more or less natural course of history (under the figure of progress) or as a matter of a historical struggle of the new against the old, or the more fully developed against the lesser.

However, this chapter also argued that the natural-philosophical framework of Marx's reading of Epicurus necessitates a concept of real organisation, which is material and

ideal all at once. While we have seen that Marx shows that the truth of the Epicurean atom is the affirmation of the freedom of the separated individual – and as a radical ethics against actuality – this does not mean that he adopts this position wholesale. We have argued that the critique of atomism's inability to think composite bodies must recur on the level of ethics, and push Marx towards a politics. Given the conceptual framework of the Hegelian *Philosophy of Nature*, such a politics must be one of organisation and idealisation. This gives us the possibility of a philosophy that goes beyond the critique of the unactualised freedom within actuality, to the question of the overcoming of the problem of separation. This Marx will be important in the final chapters of this thesis. This reading will help us ask the question of how the most separated – those separated from their means and relation of reproduction – are combined and organised by capital, and how they may combine and organise themselves against it.

Chapter 2: Orientation in Actuality and the Orientation of Actualisation

1. Introduction

After finishing his dissertation, Marx became a journalist and an editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne. Moving from philosophy to public polemics, Marx's praise of the Epicurean practice *against* actuality was complicated by the question of orientation *in* the present, in actuality. How can one orientate oneself in the social conflict-ridden, developing social order of which one is a part of, and how can freedom be actualised within it? Our reading of Marx's situated practical orientation revolves around two axes opened by his entry into journalism. On the one hand, there are the theoretical questions of the critique and the mapping of actuality around the structure or organisation of the present, and of its tendencies over time: what is the state, what is society, and what are the traces of progress in their development? What is the essence that struggles to be born? This orientates, on the other hand, a set of practical questions of the strategies and priorities of practice, but also the existential orientation of the practice; is it hopeful or opportunistic?

However, the journalistic practice that had challenged Marx to engage in the theoretical reorientations was soon made impossible. Marx was pushed into exile, leaving him the choice between abandoning his politics or inventing a new practice. If he had hitherto conceived the actualisation of freedom as an ongoing process that could be helped along by the midwifery of enlightened journalism, it now emerged as a problem which could only be solved by revolutionary practice. Here Marx raised the question that had already been operative in the theoretical schema of the *Dissertation*, namely the question of the combination and organisation of the disorganised masses, the organisation of a revolutionary practice, i.e. a practice of the actualisation of freedom in a composite social body. When Hegel's organic notion of the state becomes posed as merely possible, constitution and organisation become practical, historical questions. In the logic of organisation that Marx mobilises to handle this question we will find the tools with which we can think both the problem of global capital and revolutionary

organisation, in the contemporary crisis of the symmetry thesis, tools for critique as well as practice.

2. Orientation and Actuality

The orientation of revolutionary practice must find its bearings in the actual, and overcome it. The critique of actuality reveals the potentials for this overcoming. Kant, as suggested by Michel Foucault, was perhaps the first to pose the question of the present philosophically. Where philosophers had in the past thought of the present in terms of its passage towards the future, or in its difference from the past, Kant's text *What is Enlightenment?* isolates the question of contemporaneity: he does not ask what is the difference between yesterday and today, but '[w]hat difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday.'¹³² The possibility of a philosophy of the present tears the subject out of the grasp of eternity and the flow of history. This allows an orientation that is not marked by contemplation or submission to the laws of history. 'Kant', Stathis Kouvelakis notes, 'is no doubt the first to have redeployed the reflexivity of the subject as a 'sagittal' relationship to its own present [*actualité*] rather than as a trajectory internal to a consciousness that has withdrawn into its own depths.'¹³³ From this, Foucault draws out the notion of modernity not as an epoch but as an attitude, a way of relating to contemporary reality, to others and oneself,

an *ethos*, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.¹³⁴

The swerve is not in the void, but in actuality. Where the ethics of the swerve requires an absence of fear, the Kantian swerve requires the *courage to use one's own understanding* in the context of the present. But courage, for Kant, is not enough, it needs to be guided by universal principles of reason. There is dual risk in using one's reason, the inner risk of *fanaticism* (*Schwermerei*¹³⁵) and *libertinism* and the outer risk

132 Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 34.

133 Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso Books, 2003), 2.

134 Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," 50.

135 Literally 'swarming' in a derogatory sense: 'swarming like an insect around a fire.' On Kant's concept of *Schwermerei*, see Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010), 120–132.

of repression by the authorities: courage must be practiced with caution.¹³⁶ Clearly the theoretical assurance that autonomy is universal, which is grounded finally in the transcendental subject, is not enough for Kant here. To suggest that the subject can be trusted and trust itself, Kant needs a supplement that gives *hope and belief*. He finds this in a set of teleological figures, which are not theological as such, but natural-organic, connecting the subject to a developing natural-history rather than to the divine. They all concern some immanent organising function in the world which gives action meaning: if the world were ruled by chance and chaos, what reason would there be not to be a cynic, a nihilist, an opportunist, an egotist?¹³⁷ Kant here explicitly argues against the Epicurean notion that states are formed by random collisions which, by chance, produce formations capable of survival, and in favour of the idea that nature follows a regular course of self-actualisation.¹³⁸

To have the courage to use one's own understanding is thus to exit one's self-incurred *immaturity*; courage, for Kant, is not a groundless decision or pure possibility, a leap, but a choice of maturation, of the actualisation of ones' potentials.¹³⁹ Similarly the courage to act in history with an aim to improve it, especially through education, is orientated not by 'progress' abstractly speaking, but by the figure of the maturation of the species, and the promise of the eventual realisation of all its ends.¹⁴⁰ The temporal and organic figures of maturation and ordering refer at once to the intelligibility of the space of action, and to a subjective principle of hope. Orientation becomes possible because actuality is organised and hence *orientable*, and orientation can become progressive (or revolutionary) because this actuality can also be taken to be the product of a universal or universalising process of actualisation. Figures of organisation or disorganisation (chaos, social organism, the species, the state system, etc.) are not merely maps for subjective action in the present, they direct this action, they produce a hopeful or cynical, a courageous or fearful subject. However, if these are initially supplements rendering hopeful orientation possible in a world that is otherwise confusing, this supplement, to be convincing, must be related to a convincing philosophical interpretation of history. The relation to actuality for Kant only refers to an experimentation with possibility to the extent that actuality itself is seen as an as yet

136 Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," 248–49.

137 Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 42.

138 Ibid., 48.

139 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nesbit, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 54.

140 Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 42.

insufficient actualisation of what is possible.¹⁴¹ The theoretical supplement to practice takes over, and we are not far from practice becoming a supplement to the process of history. Whereas Kant is quite explicit on the orientational supplementarity of what he calls 'prophetic history' and 'historical signs', Marx's early theorisation of society tends to put practice into the service of theory. We can also say that to the extent that the orientation in society is determined by a historical orientation structured according to the modal categories of (species) potentiality and (organic social) actuality, the struggles of the present are always read according to a theoretical schema rather than according to the strategic and political questions of struggle and resistance. This concept of history, of course, is that given with the idea of Enlightenment.

For Marx and the Young-Hegelians the central problem of continuing the Enlightenment after Hegelianism was to produce a subjectivity irreducible to actuality. The central strategy was to orientate the subject to some essence or potentiality that is not yet actualised, placing it in relation to what is not present, yet of the present, as a potential more than a possibility, a promise, an opening. Andrew Chitty presents the early Marx's interest in the relation between actuality and essence in the following terms:

in 1837 Marx was setting himself the project of showing that the state is 'firmly based' in some underlying essence of which it is the realisation or actualisation If he could discover this essence, it would enable Marx not only to explain the shape of existing states, as the realisation of that essence, but also to criticise them to the extent that they failed to realise that essence adequately.¹⁴²

Chitty refers to Marx's *Doctoral Dissertation* to suggest that Marx's interest was 'to measure ... the individual existence by the essence, the particular actuality by the idea.'¹⁴³ If the theoretical set-up of the dissertation allowed the development of a practical philosophy of constitution and organisation, Marx was indeed tending towards a critical rather than practical approach. As Marx became a journalist, it was the critical path that became dominant. This new field of activity meant that Marx was forced to face actuality head on, but from the point of view of the public intellectual. Had Marx

141 Ibid.

142 Andrew Chitty, "The Basis of the State in the Marx of 1842," in *The New Hegelians: Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, ed. Douglas Moggach (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222.

143 Ibid., translation amended by Chitty. Chitty, "The State in Marx"; Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 149.

simply juxtaposed, in a philosophical fashion, the abstract idea of *freedom* with the base actuality of Prussian society, he would have encouraged fanaticism or cynicism. Here, the historical model of Enlightenment, which was common sense among liberals in the Rhineland, enabled him to present the potential of freedom at work in the determinate analyses of society and its development. Actualisation, as presented by the philosopher, is not a matter of practical constitution and organisation in the broadest sense, but of Enlightenment. This task is at once practical and theoretical, critical and pedagogical, it aims at the change of social objectivity by means of a subjective change. As with any philosopher who takes up popular writing, Marx was challenged to change his discourse when his medium became the pages of a daily newspaper which was reaching broad layers of liberals in the Rhineland, as well as the censors of the Prussian government. His *new job*, to put it profanely, created a need for reorientation in relation to the *problems of Prussian contemporaneity*, a new practice of writing, as well as a shift in subjectivity coming with the new activity and position. First on the agenda was the freedom of press itself, which he with Kant saw as the condition for the communication of all other principles of freedom.

3. The Freedom of the Press

In a series of six articles written in May 1842, Marx followed the debates in the Assembly of the Estates on the freedom of the press. In this context, the division between public polemics and philosophical argument becomes blurred, perhaps to the point where we must question the idea that Marx's journalism is a practice *mediating* between philosophical ideals and social reality. Marx's articles affirm the freedom of the press as a *species-freedom*, and unfreedom as loss of self, a 'real mortal danger for mankind.'¹⁴⁴ In short, censorship is an assault on the actualisation of the potentials of the species. If we take seriously the creative form-giving activity of this actualisation, we see how the role of journalism is not merely critical – to reveal how actuality does not live up to the possibility of human freedom – but to reveal, performatively and practically, the potentiality of the species through the composition of texts. 'Truth ... is common to all – it does not belong to me, it belongs to everybody, it possesses me, I do not possess it.'¹⁴⁵ We are here dealing with a temporal conception of essence as something that does not pre-exist its emergence, similarly to Feuerbach's *species-*

144 "Essays on the Freedom of Press," in *MECW*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 161.

145 *Ibid.*, 112; S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 2nd ed. (Verso, 2011), 34. Cf. appendix 2.2.

essence, which, unlike the *species-being* of the human animal, emerges only in time.¹⁴⁶ In Feuerbach, finite human animals reveal themselves to be capable of abstraction and of cognising the infinite when they imagine themselves as subjects of God. This happens even if they do not recognize that this shared abstraction is in fact their common capacity, their common potentiality for producing a common knowledge of themselves as community without the alienated mediation of God.¹⁴⁷ Marx's writing on the task of journalism can be interpreted as the reverse of Feuerbach's critique of religion: both reveal the human essence in its *unfolding and developing potential* (rather than past and given). In Feuerbach this is revealed in its alienated and abstract form, in religion, in Marx as an unalienated and practical activity, as journalism. But this figure only goes so far; Marx was painfully aware (or was made so by the censors) that he was not writing for humankind in general, but for a Prussian public and under Prussian jurisdiction. In short, it was a priority to speak of the matters of the Prussian state and society. Not to the species and the universal citizen, but to the citizens of what Hegel called the 'state organism' of Prussia as one particular embodied organisation of the species.

Feuerbach equally insisted upon the situatedness of 'real living being' and the necessity of founding reason on a 'determination of *place*.' Indeed, '[r]eason *orients* itself only in space.'¹⁴⁸ Space only exists as place, and with the determination of different places 'organized nature begins'. To situate oneself is the first question of the awakening consciousness and the first question of the 'wisdom of life'; whoever does not understand this is either a child or a fool.¹⁴⁹ To reach reason, the fool must bind himself to a place. 'To place different things in different places or to distinguish spatially what is qualitatively different is the condition for every economy, even for the spiritual economy.' But whereas Feuerbach had insisted on *place* in order to ground orientation in the situated rational sensuousness of the subjects together, in their relations of '*reason, will and affection*', as he called in 1841,¹⁵⁰ Marx the journalist would have to situate himself in relation to the

146 Cf. appendix 2.3.

147 The human species is infinite in that there is no limit to 1. its accomplishments, 2. the number of members, and range of abilities, 3. its species-powers, which transcends the limitations of individuals. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 7.

148 This and the following quotes are all from Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1986), 61, §44. My emphases.

149 Henri Lefebvre is here surprisingly close to Feuerbach: 'In the beginning was the Topos. Before – long before – the advent of the Logos ... lived experience already possessed its internal rationality ... long before the analysing, separating intellect ... there was an intelligence of the body'. *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), 174.

150 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 3. Reason, will and affect are neither individual nor species

German situation and mores, in relation and opposition to the *ancien regime*. Marx's path would thus mark out one possible orientation of radical practice, whereas Feuerbach's would another.¹⁵¹

4. Actualisation and the Rationality of the Social Organism

In May 1842, Marx engaged in a heady polemic against his Young-Hegelian comrade Moses Hess. Adopting the standpoint of the highest ideals of philosophy, Hess had insisted that the question of the centralisation of the state, considered from this higher standpoint, “falls away of itself as being futile,” for “if man is really what he should be by his essence, individual freedom is not separate from general freedom.” To this, Marx noted sarcastically that it is indeed impressive with what “astonishing ease” ... this standpoint is able to orient itself, yet an orientation which is not a 'solution of the problems' at hand is of little value.¹⁵² Against these 'abstractions' of the 'imagination', Marx insists on an orientation toward actuality. Marx still affirms philosophy, but no longer abstractly, or 'foolishly' to use Feuerbach's term. The question of the essence of actuality for this philosophy is not the essence that provides an abstract solution, but rather that of the concrete potential inherent in the problem of the present. And for a man of the press the problem first of all is *Sittlichkeit*, which descriptively refers to the state of mores, habits and modes of relation common to the people, and normatively to the level to which freedom is realised in the social body.

A central argumentative move in Marx's defence of the free press was to affirm 'the intellectual heroes of morality, such as Kant, Fichte and Spinoza', against the Censorship Instruction. For these thinkers the problem of the actualisation of morality – a concept here invoking social normativity only via the notion of *autonomy* – was conceived in terms of a contradiction between religion and morality, heteronomy and autonomy.¹⁵³ A contradiction; whenever we see Marx point out a contradiction we have become accustomed to interpret it as *historical and its overcoming as revolutionary*. However, this reading is less convincing when dealing with texts from before what

possessions but something that pulls us along. Feuerbach's text proposes a practice which is similar to Epicurean ethics or Foucault's ethos in that it is the sufficient ground of itself; it does not, in other words, ask if it is adequate in relation to some power transcending it or a totality that includes it.

151 On Feuerbach's radical philosophy of the species as a philosophy of the future, see appendix 2.3.

152 'The Question of Centralisation in itself and with regard to the Supplement to No. 137 of the Rheinische Zeitung Tuesday, May 17, 1842' in *MECW - Marx 1835-1843* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 183.

153 Marx, “Freedom of the Press,” 119.

Althusser speaks of as Marx's discovery of the continent of history, his break.¹⁵⁴ Thus, in the texts on the freedom of the press Marx's solution to the contradiction between morality and religion, autonomy and heteronomy, and freedom and necessity, is to propose what we can call a *problematic* and a *method of actualisation*. The contradiction names a problem: how to actualise freedom, autonomy and morality? The solution to this problem is not a historical overcoming of the contradiction, but a *practice of actualisation*. Actualisation is here not *against* the social order as such, but against the immaturity of this order. Here, Marx resorted to the image of the socio-political order as an *organism*, in its Hegelian formulation.¹⁵⁵ To think society as actuality, in the Hegelian terms of the young Marx, means to think it as a set of elements (individuals, families, civil society, the state) that inter-relate with a certain necessity, mutually presupposing and reproducing one another. In short, they relate organically; unlike the atomic freedom of the swerve, such freedom includes reproduction within itself. Such organisation is '*rational*' in the sense that its own reason is inherent in it, it is self-positing, and as such intelligible in its immanent ordering. It is a whole (*ein Ganze*), not in the sense of an aggregation or composition of external elements, but in the sense that it organises its elements according to its own principle of self-reproduction.¹⁵⁶

Marx charged against the Prussian Censorship Instruction that its trust in the state institutions such as the police and censorship betrays a fundamental *mistrust* in the state organism,¹⁵⁷ a pathologising medical gaze cast on the rationalities of social life:

The human body is mortal by nature. Hence illnesses are inevitable. Why does a man only go to the doctor when he is ill, and not when he is well? ... Under constant medical tutelage, life would be regarded as an evil and the human body as an object for treatment by medical institutions. ... The starting point of the censorship is that illness is the normal state, or that the normal state, freedom, is to be regarded as an illness...¹⁵⁸

154 Althusser, *For Marx*, 14.

155 A contemporary dictionary defines organism thus: 'the association of different organs in viable whole, and the organisation of this whole: life is a repeated motion and the reciprocal influence [*wechselseitige einwirkung*] of all elements in an individual body'. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "Organismus," *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von H. Hirzel, 1854), 1340

156 For a brief overview of the notions of rational, actual, organic and the whole, with some mention of their connections, see Michael Inwood, *Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), particularly pp. 34, 177, 244, 309. 'Whole' here does not refer to something closed or harmonious, but a *contradictory and perishable* organisation of singular elements.

157 "Freedom of the Press," 122.

158 *Ibid.*, 163.

Normality, for this Marx, is not what is, but what could be in what is. On this basis, Marx asserted his belief in the unfolding organic rationality of the social organism, its functional differentiation necessary relations, and the intrinsic rationalities of this organisation. The way this organism is taken up has everything to do with Marx's new practical engagements; crucially, it does not play the role of a merely theoretical concept, but it is immediately a *concept for struggle* and *construction*, and an orientating tool, i.e. a conceptual answer to the need to situate oneself within a wider social, political, intellectual space.¹⁵⁹ In his engagement with the notion of the organic structure of society, Marx followed Hegel in suggesting that the social, economic, political whole as actuality, in its intelligibility, can be known (or at least approximated) as a system.

Within the socio-political body, the press is the eye and intellect, the 'ubiquitous vigilant eye of a people's soul, the embodiment of a people's faith in itself.'¹⁶⁰ Without the press, the social organism would be dumb and blind, and the state's and law's attempts to mediate contradictions and ameliorate social tensions would be ill-advised, and the body would risk dissolution. The press is the soul of the public sphere, charged with cultivating an 'embodied culture that transforms material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealises their crude material form.'¹⁶¹ This idealisation is an immanent one, not the practical organisation of what is separate which we saw emerge as a possibility in the *Dissertation*, but the always-already of social organisation. It is, in other terms, a theoretical figure of self-organisation, devised along Kantian lines, to expel the authorities' fear of lawless freedom. But there is an implicit threat also, not visible in Kant, which reveals the tactical intent and intelligence of the statement: the radical proposal for full freedom of the press is addressed to absolute monarchy as the only way to avoid the danger of a revolutionary upheaval.

159 We can here contrast the richness of Marx's concept-creation with Reinhart Koselleck's notion of *polemical concepts* (*Kampfbegriffe*) or *counter-concepts* (*Gegenbegriffe*), which tend to reduce the politics of concepts to their opposition and enmity. "The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts" in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 155–191. Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 188.

160 Marx, "Freedom of the Press," 164.

161 Marx, *MECW vol. I*, 164.

5. The Orientation of the Press

Here it is time to enter into a closer reading of the concept of the orientating function of the press, and how Marx relates it to the purpose of promoting public orientation towards the development of the species, or enlightenment. Kant's reflection on enlightenment, as Foucault notes, is rather ambiguous; it is at once characterised as an ongoing process, a task, and as an obligation.¹⁶² As such it is both a collective process and a personal responsibility which requires courage. Individuals are, at once, elements and agents of enlightenment. So what is Enlightenment? It is, first of all, use of reason for reasoning's own sake, its motto being '*Sapere aude!*', dare to know.¹⁶³ Yet, almost immediately, Kant mentions the monarchical addendum: '*but obey!*'. This demand for obedience does not refer to a freedom of private thought as opposed to public submission. On the contrary, Kant defends the free *public* use of reason, whereas he agrees that its *private* use must be submissive. This can be taken as a historical sign of the shift from the post-reformation, and late-absolutist forms of power, via the French revolution to bourgeois forms of power and social relations. If the revolution has set free public man, private man is not free, but is an element of the social organism, a member of a class, a worker, a professional, a tax payer, in short a person of private interests and passions, directed and invested by *particular* rules and ends (Kant would elsewhere devalue these as 'pathological' motivations, and subordinate them to autonomous reason, which was negatively defined by its capacity to curb these motivations¹⁶⁴). Public man, on the other hand, is a man of letters, criticising the laws that he, as a private citizen, conscientiously obeys.¹⁶⁵ In Kant, the role of the free press is precisely to function as an 'organ' of the free public use of reason, an organ of the self-enlightenment of the species. Following Kant's lead, Marx defines the press as the exceptional profession, where private man has as his job to further the public use of reason:

If the press *itself* is regarded *merely* as a trade, then, as a trade carried on by means of the brain, it deserves greater freedom than a trade carried on by means of arms and legs. The emancipation of arms and legs only becomes humanly significant through the emancipation of the brain, for it is well known

162 Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," 35.

163 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," 54.

164 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas K. Abbott (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

165 Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?."

that arms and legs become human arms and legs only because of the head which they serve.¹⁶⁶

Hegel had recognised the importance of the press for orientation within objective morality, *Sittlichkeit*, but also suggested that the consumption of newspapers is of a somewhat passive and habitual nature:

Reading the newspaper in the early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one's attitude against the world and toward God, or toward that which the world is. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands.¹⁶⁷

Our attention is here directed to the very quotidian function of the newspaper, which is often overlooked in analyses of its role in spreading the revolutionary *enthusiasm* of universal and world-historical events, such as the revolutions in France and Haïti.¹⁶⁸ The newspaper helps situate the reader, but in a place quite different than Feuerbach's placing of the singular subject *in situ*, or his universal *orientation* to the species. The newspaper, as it were, mainly operates in that problematic middle region of state and nation, between the singular and the universal, a region which to enthusiastic spectators and libertines always seems to fail to live up to the universality of the species or the singularity of embodied experiences.

But whether we speak with Marx the editor, Feuerbach the lover of humanity, Hegel's believer or Kant's moral subject, there is the presupposition of a *need* for orientation in relation to greater powers. For the Epicurean gardener practicing the autarchy of the swerve there is, ideally, no such *need*, except, of course, in relation to nature, the weather and the sun. The Epicurean orientation is the negation of the need for orientation in society, an orientation toward ataraxy and self-affirmation, whereby all apparently unitary phenomena can be picked apart into small explanations. The difference between these modern thinkers and Epicurus is perhaps the insistent actuality of a society that imposes itself as a temporality and a rationality that organises us, as an alien power. Marx must therefore go beyond Epicurus and introduce the orientating tool of *critique* when he starts to think how representations such as money and god are *actual*, and how they organise the activity of the people who relate through them. In

166 Marx, *MECW I*, 272.

167 Hegel quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 49.

168 For the influence of the latter on Hegel, see Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*.

other words, the need for orientation in social actuality emerges because society cannot be separated into component parts, but imposes itself as an *organising principle over and against individuals*.

During his time at the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx orientates his discourse and his reader by way of the metaphor of the 'organic' system: 'One form of freedom governs another just as one limb of the body does another. Whenever a particular freedom is put in question, freedom in general is put in question.'¹⁶⁹ The existential orientation of the intellectual, unlike other trades (e.g. crafts which simply mediate as labour between the latent potential of an object and the telos of the plan), is one tasked with mediating between the objective parts of society and its own telos, in order to secure their convergence. The metaphors of the social body play out the organic stratifications so common to nineteenth-century biology: the sovereign as the will, the press and philosophers as the mind, the people divided into estates as the different limbs. While this organicist argument made the point of the interdependence of freedoms, the metaphor implies, as Kouvelakis notes, a hierarchicisation which is immediately gendered and classed: the self-reflexive masculine brain of the press would enlighten and temper the sensualist feminine heart of the people.¹⁷⁰ It is not enough to simply refer to the gendered and classed character of the metaphor itself. In her book on the matter, Sara Ahmed continually demonstrates that orientation is not only a turning toward, but also a turning away from. Orientation always entails a certain blindness, or wilful abstraction from, or forgetting, and a certain gendering and racialisation.¹⁷¹

While it would appear that it is the model of the social organism that is the problem here – as opposed to the universalistic notion of humanity – perhaps it is in fact the opposite. What produces the hierarchicisation of the social body and the undervaluing of the passions, and bases labours of care and production, is not necessarily the organic figuration of society, but the reading of the notion of the organism through the definition of the truly human as *will* and *reason* (narrowly conceived). This is nothing but the division between the human and the (human) animal, and a valorisation of the former over the latter. At issue is not only the division of the organism, but the idea of the political primacy of reason and will. A broader concept of rationality as self-organisation, as given in the *Philosophy of Nature*, goes beyond this diremption: in

169 Marx, *MECW vol. I*, 180.

170 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 273.

171 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology - Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2006). For an example of this in the early Marx, see appendix 1.5.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, the *rational* organisation of the organism in general is essentially that of its *self-production* and *reproduction*.¹⁷² Thus, the subordination and devaluing of the labours of production and reproduction are, perhaps surprisingly, not a function of the organic metaphor as such, but rather of the universalism of the conception of freedom, which relies on a diremption within the human body, the state and the species, between reason and passion, will and base needs.¹⁷³ We have here seen how Marx's practice as an editor aimed to help along the actualisation of freedom in the social body, through the enlightenment of the reading populace about the nature of its unfreedom and about its capacity for freedom. But more than that: he presented his very effort itself as a practice of actualisation both through the communication of and production of truths. Finding and fighting for his place in Prussian society, Marx had certainly moved beyond the ethereal foolishness of the philosopher of abstract essences. He found his very 'organic' role as a passionate functionary of the Prussian soul. In the period of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx's politics were radical, but within, even if sometimes at, the limits of the law; his practice can perhaps best be described as reformism, trying to help along progressive tendencies and spur on any openness for reform within the Prussian territories. However, his defence of the press as the last bulwark against revolution, and the first step towards liberal reforms, soon broke down. In his seminal reading of the young Marx's trajectory, Stathis Kouvelakis convincingly demonstrates that Marx's theoretical break – Althusser's thesis of Marx's invention of the science of historical materialism – was predicated by a political break, by the leap out of his liberal politics as a journalist. But it is tempting to describe the conditions of the political break with the tools inherited from Marx's historical materialism. We can say, retrospectively, that the arguments for progressive reform did not only fail to convince the authorities, but had done so for reasons that were necessary. Increasing pauperisation and occurrences of civil unrest created an ever greater audience for liberal publications and agitation, and for this very reason the authorities began to suppress liberals and the press. Given the social situation, political debate – even of the reformist character Marx had practised – was becoming subversive. He was eventually forced to resign from the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which soon after closed.

172 'Hegel refers to organic self-renewal as "reproduction." He understands reproduction, therefore, to be the process whereby an organism continuously produces and preserves itself as the singular organism it is - the process of "self-producing.'" Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), 163.

173 Of course this diremption is no mere fiction, but a very real division within bodies and between different people.

6. The Production of a New Possibility

In the remainder of this chapter we will cover two steps taken by Marx in the uneasy passage between events. First, we will inquire into the character of the political break and its invention of a new possibility, that of a hopeful orientation conditional on partisan struggle beyond the midwifery of enlightened publicism. Secondly, Marx's theoretical break, as indicated by Kouvelakis, was delayed with respect to his political break. However, we will not explore this period under the headline of a lag, but rather in terms of the continuity of the orientating figures of the social organism, in order to trace its mutations and its path into Marx's early critique of political economy, which is the subject of the next chapter. More importantly, we will show how this period of theoretical reorientation – which produced Marx's lengthy and unpublished *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* – entailed a reactivation of the logic of composition-combination-organisation from the materialist dialectic of mechanism-chemism-teleology. What had been implicit in his critique of Epicurus, now became explicit, for a moment, in his theory of revolution. This logic will not travel into Marx's first engagement with political economy from the mid-1840s onwards, but will be crucial for us in our reading of *Capital* in chapters 5 to 8.

.....

Marx's political break was not the product of a choice or a theoretical discovery, but of an impossibility, the impossibility of continuing his practice as a journalist and editor. The social and political crisis which was intensifying in Prussia forced the “will” of the organism to suppress its “intellect”; critical intellectuals either withdrew in pessimistic silence, or remained vocal only in exile or clandestinely. Without job and income, literally expelled from what he had seen as his functional role within the social organism, Marx, like many others with him, was free as an atom rendered 'inorganic'.¹⁷⁴ Before the suppression, German radicals had experienced an increasingly intolerable daily pestering and policing. They were caught in an intensifying contradiction between obeying the necessities of German actuality or affirming the potentiality of freedom. When the space in which Marx had operated finally closed on him, he expressed a deep relief.¹⁷⁵ However, even if the Prussian government had shown its true face and dispelled the illusions of reformers, such an advance was not as automatic as Marx's

174 One should bear in mind that his wife Jenny Marx (*née* von Westphalen), along with the labour of Helene Demuth and the financial support of Friedrich Engels and others, was the contingent condition for the reproduction of Marx, and thus for his effective autonomy.

175 Karl Marx, “Letter to Arnold Ruge, Jan 25, 1843” in *MECW I*, 379.

statement seems to suggest. Marx's new freedom came not only at the cost of his livelihood and eventual exile, but it also forced him to reorientate himself. The agitation for freedom would no longer be a defence of an idea, and the practice of freedom would no longer be a profession: both now entailed the fearless choice of a life. The crisis produced the necessity of a decision but did not determine it. The contradiction did not itself offer up any *Aufhebung*; indeed, the choice of continuing politically (affirming his practice or negating the repression) was impossible, practically speaking. And furthermore, theoretically speaking, the timely orientation toward the progressive realisation of freedom was no longer possible. Marx would have to rethink the temporal determination of the problematic relation between essence and actuality. The situation posed a problem in the deeper sense: one that is overdetermined by neither existing solutions nor questions, but a problem that required the *invention of a new possibility*. To make possible a practice of actualisation, the mutation in the problem of the present would have to be related to a new potential. With the newspapers closed or under hard censorship, the option of going clandestine was, strictly speaking, the only possibility for a radical writer, and, at the same time, not possible at all if he was to put food on his table. If history is not made under conditions of our own choosing, as Marx later said, we must add that sometimes it is only made by exploding these conditions, by a revolutionary decision to wager everything on the establishment of another base of agitation, social as well as material. As Kouvelakis puts it, 'Marx's revolutionary political position [was] not a free choice among several 'positive' possibilities, for it proceeds, literally, from an impossibility: it is the production of a new possibility.'¹⁷⁶ Materially speaking, this possibility is developed through cohering a large number of German exiles in Paris around the publication of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, which also worked as a kind of correspondence society with radicals who remained in Germany.

As the state suppressed the press – the agent of enlightenment – it was clear that there was no longer any elevated position from which to observe the unfolding of progress in history; one would have to become a state intellectual, an armchair pessimist or an authentic radical. Orientation – as a subjective disposition towards action, and not just objective mapping – would have to be partisan in a social organism riven with explosive contradictions. At this point the significance of this rupture is not primarily theoretical, but rather practical and existential. Practice is still supplementary to the theory of a real

176 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 278.

historical process whose direction gives reason for hope, but differently so. As the actualisation of freedom becomes a matter of struggle rather than enlightenment, the theory which orientates practice becomes aware of its own limitations: the promises and contradictions it points to can only be realised and resolved in the domain of practice. In other words, rather than being simply a process of actualisation, history now becomes a matter of material struggle between the agents of this actualisation and the defenders of the ancient regime.

Engaging with what he saw as the central problem of the present, the contradiction between essential species-freedom and actual unfreedom, Marx had first imagined the philosophical activity of the concept, and thus the press as better mediations (considered as activities) of this contradiction, an activity which could bring forth the potential implicit in the social whole, actualise it. With the repression of the press, this position had become untenable. Marx had to either give up the idea of the actualisation of freedom, or engage in the social contradictions in a *partisan way, as he had previously become a partisan in philosophy*. Marx chose the latter, '[n]othing prevents us ... from taking sides in politics, i.e. from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them.' No longer a partisan of the doctrinaire idea which actualises itself through the education of the species, but which actualises itself through rendering the struggles of the world conscious:

we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world. We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign-slogans. Instead we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it *must* require whether it wishes or not.¹⁷⁷

But why is the world struggling, and how does this struggle progress the realisation of freedom in history? How did Marx's becoming a partisan affect his conceptualisation of the historical whole-as-process of which he was a part of?

7. The Navigator on the Ship of Fools

The image Marx used to convey this particularly German situation in his letters to Arnold Ruge and the readers of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* drew on the classical trope of the *ship of fools* quarrelling and navigating without orientation at the

¹⁷⁷ Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 209.

mercy of the winds. At the time of writing, and as a consequence of the troubles in Germany, Marx was travelling in Holland, writing to Ruge from a 'barge on the way to D.'¹⁷⁸ Kouvelakis presents Marx in his perilous situation as himself a madman, reading this passage through Foucault's analysis of the *Narrenschiff*.¹⁷⁹ Like Foucault's madmen, Marx has indeed been expelled to his ship, caught in the uncertainty of the passage to nowhere; the town of 'D.' is clearly not his destination but another point of passage in his exile. Foucault's evocative figure would here agree with Feuerbach: no longer 'in place', Marx and many of his contemporaries became fools again. However, this was not the no-place of philosophy, but the madness of displacement, *die Verrücktheit der Verrückten*. As Marx had written two years prior, the trick is to know in what sense this madness is real, actual.¹⁸⁰ In this sense, he already had the figure of reorientation at his finger-tips: thus the political break itself did not produce the *theoretical* break from the problem of the social organism. In several different ways, Marx continued to draw on this figure as a concept of orientation in relation to the organisation of the state and civil society.

So why is the world struggling? The immediate answer was close to the old answer: the contradiction between what society could be and what it is, between essence and actuality. At one point, Feuerbach translates this notion into a secularised conception of *sin*, understood as the 'contradiction of myself with myself – that is, of my personality with my fundamental nature.'¹⁸¹ Similarly, in his letter to Ruge, Marx attempts to invert the subjectivating mechanisms of patriotism and religion (national shame and the confession of sin) in order to turn them into tools of revolutionary subjectivation. He suggested that the potential of freedom could come to orientate Germans, once it is related to the tyranny in the present: this would produce a national shame, an 'anger turned in on itself', turned against their complicity with despotism.¹⁸² Furthermore, a comparison with other nations might make Germans realise they are fools for being liberal and patriots under conditions of 'repulsive despotism', make them feel shamed when faced by the 'opinions of foreigners about the Prussian Government' and with the Dutch who 'are still citizens.'¹⁸³ Those who confess to this madness, possess a negative – critical – truth of the untruth of German consciousness:

178 On the trope of the *ships, stars and navigation*, see appendix 2.9.

179 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2003), 9.

180 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 151.

181 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 28.

182 Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 200.

183 *Ibid.*, 199–200.

[To attain] self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age ... [w]hat is needed above all is a *confession*, and nothing more than that. To obtain forgiveness for its sins mankind needs only to declare them for what they are.¹⁸⁴

That Marx orientates himself with such ease, like a navigator on the ship of fools, is due to his inscription of the new situation within the theoretical apparatus he had long carried with him. Of course, the reorientation around this negative truth – the insight into madness – does not explain Marx's practical and political transformation nor negates the eventual character of his leap into a revolutionary orientation. But this does not mean that we can conclude that his theoretical conception was simply lagging behind his practical invention. While the analyses of the political break speaks of urgent practical exigencies, the direction of this leap, as well as the fact that Marx took these circumstances to call out for a leap at all, is a testimony to a certain still hopeful orientation. If there is a lag, the leap might be unimaginable without it. For instance, Marx could have interpreted the impossibility of continuing his former practice as a contingent event, a postponement and temporary setback, something that need not challenge his progressivist interpretation of history. He could have seen it as yet another of the exceptions of which history is full of, and which, according to Kant, must simply be ignored and inscribed in a teleology if we are to have any hope. Like his *practical* reorientation, Marx's intellectual *reorientation* is not by any means given by the situation. So why can Kouvelakis interpret Marx's revelation in the face of these events 'as thought's new awareness of its own historicity'?¹⁸⁵ Even before the 'invention' of historical materialism, Marx saw the suppression of the press as non-contingent, and his own position within these events as *necessary*. Why? Precisely because his thought is organised around the notion of the organically integrated whole. Before and after the break, the problem of actuality (the contradiction between potential and actuality, between freedom and despotism) remains the same, as does the aim of his politics (the actualisation of freedom). Marx's conception of the unrealised potentiality of the species becomes one that stresses contradiction, a contradiction which is both social and internal to the subject, a contradiction which is developing towards 'the approaching revolution.'¹⁸⁶ This courage to take this leap is premised precisely on the continuity of a certain philosophically founded belief in the direction of history. If hope becomes

184 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 209. On Marx's references to confession and his comparison of the revolutionary philosopher with Luther, see appendix 2.7.

185 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 280.

186 Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 200.

conditional on practice, the passage to action remains related to a hope in the historical process. Had such belief lacked, Marx's leap would have either been an act of voluntarism or fanaticism, or would not have happened at all.

What we are interested in here is how the space between the practical *salto mortale* and the theoretical invention of historical materialism saw a mutation of Marx's theoretical apparatus, which happened by way of a return to the question of the composition and organisation of actualisation.

8. The Orientation of the Political Revolution

In the spring and summer of 1843, after his forced resignation from the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx wrote a long critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state.¹⁸⁷ This commentary is helpful in giving some background for the correspondence with Arnold Ruge, which was going on in the same period. We have already seen Marx contrast the potential freedom and generic capacity of humankind, an ideal at once real and unactualised, with the real unfreedom blocking its realisation. And from the beginning of the *Critique*, Marx engages in a close immanent critique of the question of concrete freedom and the social organism in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Whereas Hegel had defined actuality in the *Logic* as the realisation of an idea, of reason, as the unity of inner and outer, of essence and appearance, in the *PR*, the work that supposedly celebrates the actuality of the (Prussian) state, he defined the state in the following way:

In contrast with the spheres of private rights and private welfare (the family and civil society), the state is *on the one hand* an *external* necessity and their higher authority; its nature is such that their laws and interests are subordinate to it and dependent on it. *On the other hand*, however, it is the end *immanent* within them...¹⁸⁸

Hegel does not theorise the potentials in the 'immanence' of the family and civil society, but merely posits it as the sphere of contingency of the everyday in which the individual 'is visibly mediated by circumstances, his caprice and his personal choice of his station in life.'¹⁸⁹ Thus, in Marx's reading of Hegel, the family and civil society appear 'as the dark ground of nature from which the light of the state is born'; they are a mere material

187 He focussed on paragraphs 261-313 in the *Philosophy of Right*.

188 §261 in Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*; quoted in Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 58.

189 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §262; quoted in Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 61.

for the state, the passive content subsumed under the state form.¹⁹⁰ For Marx, the real, i.e. the *actualising* relationship, is the opposite: 'The family and civil society are the preconditions of the state; they are its true agents; but in speculative philosophy it is the reverse'; here they are 'not regarded as true, necessary and self-justified.'¹⁹¹ But when Hegel fails to show how the state grows out of the needs of families and civil society, his description is both 'false' – undialectical – insofar as it does not trace the movement from content to form, *and* 'correct' insofar as it describes the Prussian state and its lack of true actuality. The problem is *not* straightforwardly that Hegel does not comprehend the 'real relations', as in Althusser's notion of ideology, but that his mode of argument takes the form of '*Vorstellung*', which sees contingency instead of potentiality. In short, it precludes the perspective of affirmation. Marx's early inversion of Hegel thus takes the perspective of the rationality and freedom of the species: the real everyday material relations and exchanges of bodies, in the spheres of reproduction (the family) and production and social exchange, or intercourse (civil society).¹⁹² In other words he follows Hegel's extension of the idea of the social organism into the questions of reproduction. The problem, for Marx, is that Hegel takes these spheres as mere phenomena which realise the idea of the state, whereas the state for Marx is supposed to be the actualisation of the *life* of the people.¹⁹³ Hegel takes the empty idea as subject, rather than as predicate. Yet early on, in Jena in 1801/02, Hegel had presented the life of the people (*Volksleben*) as a matter of the philosophy of nature:

It would consist in a process by which the more organic forms of existence incorporate in their internal unity the otherwise dispersed elements of the inanimate forms that precede them. This is a process that ultimately leads to the creation of a social organism.¹⁹⁴

The Hegel Marx read had repressed this passage, prioritising instead the systematic dialectical exposition of the state as already individuated and self-positing. Against the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right*, who says that the 'organism of the state' is the subject, 'the differentiation of the Idea into various elements and their objective reality', Marx reverses subject and predicate: the differentiation of state or constitution is *organic*.

190 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 61.

191 Ibid., 62.

192 The German term for intercourse, *Verkehr*, refers to social, metabolic, sexual and communicative exchange, and besides that, to trade and circulation.

193 On the notion of the life of the people, see appendix 2.5.

194 Giovanni's introduction to the *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), xviii–xix.

Rather than the noun *organism*, Marx proposes the adjective *organic*, which comes to work as a concept of the organisation of society. The concept of an organism itself does not answer the question of the *specificity* of that organism: the noun organism itself does not tell us if it is an animal or a political organism.¹⁹⁵ To determine this *differentia specifica* of a species is not a matter of conceptual distinction, but of determining its *Gattungswesen*, i.e. a *generic* difference. If the state-organism is considered as the totality, its component parts are nothing but a determination of a passive content, of diversity, or the many subsumed under this one. Against this, Marx states that the '*real differences* or the *various aspects of the political constitution* are the presupposition, the subject. ... the Idea must be developed from the real differences.'¹⁹⁶ Thus Marx criticises Hegel for presupposing the universal and deriving the particular from it. Instead of developing the state from the immanent contradictions of civil society itself, Hegel starts with the Idea of the State (of the whole, the One), and then goes on to examine its internal differences, or parts, i.e. the family and civil society.¹⁹⁷

This opens for a more radical conception of actualisation, starting from the differences of the sphere of production, reproduction and intercourse. However, as we will see toward the end of this section, Marx, like Hegel, will still limit the political to the freedom-will-reason nexus, defined *in opposition* to the functions that sustain the 'human animal', production, reproduction and social intercourse. Civil society and the family are the powerful and active, yet always and per definition politically *passive*, basis of the state. So what is the active, actualising subject of the state, what is the power that *constitutes* this state? Marx's answer is not individuals, but *the people* – *however not as a pure agglomeration of individuals*. So how to conceive of the people? For Hegel, the people is only sovereign as state through its representation in the particular body of the sovereign, the monarch. Instead of positing the subjects of the state as those who produce the state, Hegel suggests that the state produces its subjects. We are here reminded of Althusser's 'ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects', and 'there can only be such a multitude of possible ... subjects on the ... condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*', i.e. the king in this case.¹⁹⁸ For Marx, on the contrary, the monarch can only be the 'representative and

195 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 67.

196 Ibid., 66.

197 As we see in appendix 2.10. – which deals with the concept of *differentia specifica* and essence in Hegel – Marx's line of argument here follows Hegel's own critique of 'Observing Reason' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 146–148.

198 Althusser, *On Ideology*, 47 and 52.

symbol of sovereignty of the people. The sovereignty of the people is not based on him, but he on it.' Marx continues: 'The state is an abstraction. Only the people is a concrete reality.' Thus Marx can speak of the monarchical constitution as a 'form' which 'subsumes' what really has produced it, namely the people.¹⁹⁹ Marx insists on seeing the 'Subject' as a *result of democracy*, seemingly paradoxically given the obvious fact that more or less all monarchical states at Marx's time lacked democratic constitutions. He can do this because his measure is not the 'real relations', but the potentiality inherent in actuality. Against the surprising alliance of Althusser and Hegel, Marx claims democracy as the truth of monarchy, as democracy in contradiction with itself. Why? Because democracy gives a principle of constitution (it is 'the generic constitution [*Verfassungsgattung*]', whereas monarchy is merely the result, constituted, which negates its process of constitution: power can only be centralised in the one through the activity of the many. Democracy is generic not just in the taxonomical sense that it is the genus of all species, of constitution, but more fundamentally because it is the *generative* force of all existing constitutions.²⁰⁰ In short, in a democratic constitution, the universal genus democracy encounters the democracy as a species of itself.²⁰¹ However, from the point of view of the orientation to revolutionary practice that Marx was developing, these merely formal determinations do not take us far.

The problem that the notion of the people raises, is the fact that the elements composing it are differentiated into families, civil societies and the estates, who have differing and competing interests. Given that the family and civil society are private, the properly public and political problem of this differentiation only emerges with the estates, which Hegel defines, in Marx's paraphrase, as 'civil society's deputation to the state ... the illusory existence of the affairs of the state as being an affair of the people ... the political illusion of civil society.' By mediating between the people and the executive, the estates prevent the isolation of the crown and connect the internally diverging interests of different sectors of civil society. But more importantly, they prevent the *organisation* of the people as a 'powerful bloc'. They 'prevent individuals from having the appearance of a mass or an aggregate', and keep the people disaggregated and disorganised, 'and so from acquiring an unorganised opinion and volition and from

199 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 85.

200 Ibid., 87. See also appendix 2.5.

201 For an elaboration of this logic, see Žižek in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 314–15.

crystallising into a powerful bloc in opposition to the organised state.¹²⁰² The state, again, is seen as organised and organising its elements. As long as the people appears as organised by the state, its own capacity of self-organisation remains unknown to it. The point is not that the state renders the people powerless, but that it alienates its power, monopolising and exploiting it. Here it becomes:

evident not that a particular interest contradicts the state, but rather that the actual organised universal thought of the mass and aggregate is not the thought of the organised state and cannot find its realisation in the state.²⁰³

Thus, the self-actualisation of the people is blocked by the dual working of the state: it divides the social body into competing part, and organises them to its own advantage. Marx here gives us a significant characterisation of revolutionary practice as composition, combination and organisation. The aim of such practice is 'the actual universal thought of the mass', following the model we saw in chapter 1 of the organised body as the 'the idealising and pervading power of this manifold.'²⁰⁴ However, this is not achieved in a simple reversal of the organisation of the state, but from below. The condition of possibility of the self-organisation of the mass is that it first appears to itself as an disorganised mass, subtracted from its role in the division of labour. The estates, as a mode of integration that works against such subtraction by representing particular interests, prevent the:

unorganised opinion and volition from crystallising into an opinion and volition in opposition to the state, through which determinate orientation it would become an organised opinion and volition.²⁰⁵

For the mass to pose a threat, three steps need to be fulfilled: the unorganised mass must first appear, it then gains a direction and orientation by crystallising into a bloc, but only truly becomes a threat when it *organises itself*. The problem of a democratic struggle against the state goes through a minimal movement of active *disorganisation*, before it can combine and organise itself against the state.

If the *Dissertation* mainly raises the issue of the passage from disorganised over combined to organised simply to point out what is lacking in Epicurus, this section from the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* presents the concepts in positive form, the

202 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 132.

203 Ibid.

204 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 130.

205 Ibid.

middle term being *crystallisation*. It is here worth looking at the specificity of this term in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.²⁰⁶ The passage from *atomism* or *mechanism* to *chemism* in general is the event through which elements combine to form composites that have different characteristics than they have when separate. Combination is nothing but a lasting encounter between two elements, lasting in the sense that they will remain combined until some other element or chemical separates them. Crystallisation is the aspect of *chemism* which marks the limit to *organism*. The first minimal form of crystallisation happens in simple chemical encounters, such as that between acids and alkalies which results in the crystallization of salt, which 'is not just the simple abstract unity of chemical elements', but combines the elements into something qualitatively new.²⁰⁷ But crystallisation goes all the way to the limit of life. Whereas life proper is process and self-formation, 'animated singularity, what we can call advanced crystallisation is a chemical process that reproduces itself, [is] a process which is sensitive to the environment, such as changes in temperature.'²⁰⁸ As Hegel puts it, the basic 'crystal of animation' is the concrete coming together of 'sensibility, irritability and reproduction.'²⁰⁹ Crystallisation thus plays a crucial role in a theory of the '*generatio aequivoca*' (what is also called heterogenesis or abiogenesis) of life, as a 'general mode of vitalisation.'²¹⁰ However, the passage to animation proper is rare because such 'immeasurable multitudes' of ephemeral 'points of life' have the 'objective organism' of earth outside them.²¹¹ In this hostile environment they rarely differentiate themselves into proper animals that reproduce *ex ovo* through *generatio univoca*.²¹²

Where Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* had posed the state as a solution to this problem, Marx the journalist had argued that this problem would be overcome through the gradual process of the self-actualisation of freedom. Faced with the blockage of this process, and the abjection of the radicals who had carried it forward, Marx developed a theory of the heterogenesis of democracy, the actualisation of freedom against the state through the self-organisation of the masses. However, this conceptualisation of self-

206 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 215–17. As Petry notes in his commentary Hegel was here following contemporary and eighteenth-century natural scientists such as Charles Bonnet, J. C. Reil, K. H. Schultz and J. F. L. Hausmann.

207 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature, Vol. II - Part II of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 34.

208 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 131.

209 Ibid., 127. *Plasticity* is an important link between crystallisation and organic formation, which in this context refers to a process of *contraction* or *idealisation*. See Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 59–60.

210 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 36.

211 Ibid., 34.

212 Ibid., 36. See appendix 2.8.

organisation is premised on the idea of the members of the mass in their equivalence, rather than their heterogeneity. Marx introduces the mass as a starting point for self-organisation which is not caught up and complicit with the competitive differentiation of the state. The mass both represents the modal category of *possibility* – the possibility of freedom and self-organisation – and that of actuality – resisting the division of labour and its organisation by the state. Marx importantly insists on the impossibility of conceiving the revolutionary formation of a 'bloc' starting with *particular* interests. The orientation of the universal thought of the mass is directed towards its own organisation against the state. This orientation suspends the opportunism or cynicism of private competing individuals. The orientating point is thus developed immanently from a fidelity to the compositional-organisational process itself.

However, the idea that the mass composes itself purely as 'opinion and volition' is telling. The socio-organic moments of production, reproduction and intercourse and bodily capacities for affect, love and sensuousness (to follow Feuerbach's anthropology) are all subsumed under the category of heteronomy. Even if Marx is right to question whether self-organisation can start with the *particular* moments of the mass (the competing interests, as particular moments of the state), his humanist frame precludes any consideration whether the 'animal' aspects of human existence (the 'passions' and the activities of production, reproduction and intercourse) can also singularise themselves, just as the will and opinion can. In other words, he reduces the possibility of composition to the abstract compossibility of atomic subjects, rather than the complex organisation of organic bodies.²¹³

We have seen how Marx steered through his disorientation, not just through the negative insight into disorientation, but because he held on to a concept of species-essence, his 'humanism'.²¹⁴ Marx's idea of the human was not simply a theoretical concept and political epiphenomenon, but, like God and money, a *Vorstellung*, a concept which was an index of the actual practices of humanisation within a country. Thus Marx took the relatively low political currency of humanist discourse as a sign of the meagre transformatory potentials of the German situation. He noted that if to be human is to be political, as Aristotle had said, Germany, the most philistine [*spießbürgerlich*²¹⁵] of all

213 We borrow the notion of compossibility from Leibniz, simply to speak about the possibility of composition.

214 For a note on the Young-Hegelian critique of humanism, see appendix 2.4.

215 See appendix 2.6.

countries, was an 'animal kingdom' in a 'dehumanised world'.²¹⁶ The problem of German foolishness is not that the Germans are too idealist, but that they are too realistic:

The Germans are such prudent realists that none of their wishes or wildest fancies ever extend beyond the bare actualities of life. And this reality, no more no less, is accepted by those who rule over them. They too are realists, they are utterly removed from all thought and human greatness, ... but they are not mistaken, they are right; just as they are, they are perfectly adequate to the task of exploiting and ruling over this animal kingdom – for here as everywhere *rule and exploitation are identical concepts*.²¹⁷

The realism of the world of fantasies and abstractions is the realism of a world of domination and exploitation. The human *differentia specifica* of politics cannot unfold itself in this world where individuals become merely concerned with their reproduction: '*Muta pecora, prona et ventri oboedientia*; the herd is silent, docile and obeys its stomach.'²¹⁸ To be human is to be political: active, affirmative, autonomous, not on an individual level, but collectively. Again, Marx's method is not to contrast lofty ideas with 'real relations', but to affirm the powers that might be actualised. However, like Hannah Arendt, he limits these potential powers to the Greek ideal of politics. To be a political animal is to be a Greek citizen rather than a slave, or, falling short of that, to be a free man rather than a housewife; autonomy happens on the unquestioned and apolitical basis of heteronomy.²¹⁹

These remarks show the limits of Marx's particular formulation of the concept of revolutionary self-organisation, in its link with the conception of the political subject in terms of will and consciousness, abstracted from affects and appetites. However, they also show that these limits are external to this model of practice and orientation itself, and bound up with a particularly humanist conception of political agency.

9. Smoking, Eating and Drinking

As mentioned by Kouvelakis, the political break did not immediately produce the famous theoretical break. Driving Marx towards this break was the labour of

216 Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 202.

217 Ibid. My emphasis.

218 Ibid., 205.

219 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd Revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

understanding the apparent blockage of the German situation and its potential new openings. Observing the dawning industrialisation of western Prussian provinces, Marx recognised that the ancient regime harboured within itself a surprising revolutionary force: not that of the people, but bourgeois civil society itself. In the 1844 introduction to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx notes that 'the relationship of industry and the world of wealth in general to the political world is one of the main problems of the modern age.'²²⁰ In short, Marx increasingly rejected the idea that rule and 'rule and exploitation' are identical concepts. The central antagonism was not the one that pitted the mass against the state, but the struggle within civil society itself which pushed society into conflict with the state, as the latter remained a crusty old expression of the former social relations that were rapidly being revolutionised. This allowed a precise analysis of the failure of the reform project: the reforms which would have been needed to respond to the developing situation would simply not be possible within the old political system. This contradiction, and not the stupidity or sadism of the rulers, was the reason why the 'brutal state of affairs' could only be maintained 'by means of brutality.'²²¹ This understanding of the causes of this state of affairs in turn implied a new theory of the conditions of revolution, starting not with repression, but with the disruptive dynamics of *production and trade*:

[T]he system of industry and commerce, of property and the exploitation of man will lead much faster than the increase in the population to a rupture within existing society which the old system cannot heal because ... The existence of a suffering mankind which thinks and of a thinking mankind which is suppressed must inevitably become unpalatable and indigestible for the animal kingdom of philistines...²²²

Contrary to Ruge, who is yearning for the healing of the wounds of the social organism and the creation of the institutions needed to accommodate the pressing change, Marx finds that the thinking and the suffering are pregnant with the future, a potentiality coming closer to perfection 'the more time history allows' these two groups to reflect and gather strength, respectively.²²³ While not ready, it seems that they will necessarily be so; if this is a disorientated ship of fools, Marx seems to find solace in the idea that it

220 Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 248.

221 Marx, Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 205.

222 Ibid.

223 Ibid., 206.

is caught in the winds of history. Marx's position here is, as it was in the letter dated September 1843 quoted above,²²⁴ still characterised by a belief in progress which the *ancient regime* will either have to accommodate or be crushed by. But another strata of thought can be uncovered here, one that is not necessarily dependent on progressivism: Marx speaks of a very different temporality, one that is not a tendency of history, but happening in its space, in need of time, which history can only give it as an allowance. This is the time of the development of affective, sensory modes of living, the common problem of capitalism – thinking and suffering – and the combination of the embodied forces of thought and needs.

This redrawing of the central line of antagonism around a new contradiction and a new site of disruptive unfolding potentiality entailed a reconsideration of the relation between politics and economics. In the face of the discovery of the deepening *economic* antagonism of civil society and actuality of class struggle, the revolutionary practice of self-organisation – given its reduction to the purely political manner – would seem of less relevance. Marx, and especially the Marxist tradition, would later take this route. The reduction of the mass to its 'political' aspects would be followed by a tendency to reduce the proletariat to its purely economic interests and an obsession with the interiority of capitalism. However, Marx's discovery of the political centrality of the spheres of production, reproduction and intercourse does not immediately lead to a separation between the economic animal and the passionate, affective, thinking and loving side of the human-essence. While this may be the case in Marx's later anti-humanist writings, his notion of the human had, for a period, the conceptual force to hold together all these aspects of human-potentiality worthy of actualisation. But more than that, Marx saw, for the first time, all these dimensions of life and struggle combined as he engaged with the 1844 rebellion by the Silesian weavers, and then with the communist workers circles during his exile in Paris.

In his article on the Silesian weavers ('the theoreticians of the European proletariat') he criticises the reduction of the human to the political will or to other such shared characteristic. The human is, instead, something that needs to be composed. Marx asks: 'do not all rebellions without exception have their roots in the disastrous isolation of man from the community?' The common community here is not the political community, but the 'human' community of life, 'physical and spiritual life, human

224 Ibid., 206-9.

morality, human activity, human enjoyment, human nature.²²⁵ If truth is not a description of objective relations, nor an affirmation of equality, but an actualisation or idealisation which suspends the impossibility of relating, which suspends separation and indifference, it is aimed not only against the bourgeois solution to this separation (the state and wage labour), but toward the construction of a new society.²²⁶ The social revolution takes the form of an antagonistic mode of self-organisation:

All revolution – the overthrow of the existing ruling power and the dissolution of the old order – is a political act. But without revolution, socialism cannot be made possible. It stands in need of this political act just as it stands in need of destruction and dissolution. But as soon as its *organizing functions* begin and its goal, its *soul* emerges, socialism throws its political mask aside.²²⁷

What does it mean to say that the human only emerges through composition? In the manuscripts of 1844 we find a notion of communism which explains this conditional character of the human. If private property represents the human as an abstract capacity for labour, and thus makes the common essence-potentiality appear, Marx writes, *communism is humanism* mediated with itself in an overcoming of private property. It is not the realisation of a pre-given abstract essence, but the first real emergence of humankind.²²⁸ Here, the intersubjective dimension missing in the negative vision of the proletariat as paupers and fully subsumed by money and the wage in the positive vision of the collective worker, reappears. Humanism in this sense is the unity of 'idealism and materialism', the vital powers, drives and passions of corporeal men and women.²²⁹ Communism can only be the result of real communist activity which happens, as Marx describes in very concrete terms, at the site of the encounter between the philosophy of potentiality and working bodies:

When communist *workmen* gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, [in short, to find orientation] etc. But at the same time they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means has become

225 Karl Marx, "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,'" in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 418.

226 For Hegel the passage from inorganic bodies – the inorganised bodies of chemistry and physics – to organic bodies is the passage from the mere 'prose' of inorganic material existence to the 'poetry of nature' the creation of a common soul or 'spiritual bond' between the parts. *Philosophy of Nature II*, 220, §336. and Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 315, note to §38.

227 Marx, "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,'" 420.

228 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Paris 1844," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 395.

229 *Ibid.*, 389–91.

an end. The practical development can be most strikingly observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers. Smoking, eating and drinking, etc., are no longer means of creating links between people. Company, association, conversation, which in its turn as society as its goal, is enough for them. The brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their work-worn figures.²³⁰

This rich vision of communism as a new need emerging from the conviviality around political subjectification and need satisfaction, is striking in its description of affective micro- and nanopolitical sensitivities and passions as the basis of a new composition of bodies in a common struggle, producing something far beyond mere resistance or making links beyond those of shared individual interests.²³¹ Unlike political and economical organisation, which focuses on organising people according to their will and interest respectively – whether by an employer, a trade union or as a voter – self-organisation does not reduce the elements of its composition. Rather, the composition of workers creates the condition of the development of new needs, the crystallisation of community around a heterogeneity of activities. But while this might give us a necessary condition for revolutionary self-organisation, it is not sufficient. The orientation of revolutionary practice raises the questions of antagonisms and aims beyond current actuality. Whereas this chapter has outlined these abstractly, the next will raise the question of Marx's critique of the actuality and tendencies of bourgeois society and his introduction of the proletariat as a notion of the compossibility of resistances and of revolutionary organisation.

10. Conclusion

In this interregnum between Marx's reform-oriented journalism and his invention of historical materialism, between the two breaks, we have found important hints towards a practice of organisation within and yet against the dialectic of the state. In a surprising resurfacing of the arguments drawn from the philosophy of nature, we have a brief proposal for a revolutionary practice of self-organisation or social composition. This does not, of course, give us any *theory* of self-organisation, but something more like the

230 Ibid., 365.

231 In chapter 7 and appendix 7.4. we will be discussing the importance of combining activities of 'need satisfaction' and resistance (community self-defense and self-help) with political pedagogy and training.

outline of a logic for such a theory, and what is more, its *place* within the wider critique of bourgeois society, Or rather, it raises the question of a displacement or subtraction of the multitude or mass from its organisation within bourgeois society. Self-organisation proceeds from a minimal moment of disorganisation, and through combinations established through the sharing of food and pleasures as well as ideas, strategies and long term aims. However, we as we do not have a theory of organisation, nor a theory proper of the moment of disorganisation.

In his last *Jahrbücher* letter to Arnold Ruge Marx had gone beyond liberalism in insisting that rule and exploitation are identical concepts. Nonetheless, he was beginning to realise that the rapid development of industry in the Rhineland was starting to put its own pressure on the political order, that there was a dynamic exceeding in force his liberal readership's educated advocacy of political freedom. Marx was about to make a monumental discovery for himself, that of the proletariat. In the next chapter we will enter into a reading of Marx's theory of revolution as it grew out these insights in the mid to late 1840s. Here he introduced the theory of the proletariat as a paradoxical product of bourgeois society: at once a radically negative mass abjected and disorganised, and a class of productive workers fully organised and exploited. In Marx's theorisation the proletariat turns into a figure of hope, because he reads the development of bourgeois society as a real teleology, attempting to subsume the world. Through this process Marx's predicts the simultaneous growth of the number, the power and the misery of the proletariat, and thus its growing need and organised capacity to abolish bourgeois society. However, we will also see how Marx overlooks three counterveiling tendencies: the growth of state's welfare and repressive apparatuses as well as the colonial pressure valve, as predicted already by Hegel in relation to the rabble.

Chapter 3: The Rabble and the Proletariat

It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle.
- Karl Marx²³²

*Universal history must be construed and denied
...there is disintegration by way of integration*
- Theodor Adorno²³³

1. Introduction

As Marx's theoretical orientation shifted from the problem of the state to that of bourgeois civil society (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), his political vision of self-organisation slipped out of sight, yet he did not reject it. Marx became more and more interested in the contradictions and forms of organisation inherent in civil society. Organisation became focused on this systemic contradiction rather than the combination and organisation across and against the divisions imposed by bourgeois society. Rather than a set of exterior conflicting classes, Marx theorised bourgeois society as a contradictory whole with certain developmental tendencies. This theorisation doesn't merely posit the actuality of organisation, but moreover that of a certain telos specific to the organisation, a telos which drives the expansive development of bourgeois society. This chapter aims to show that the critique of this real 'teleology' is useful for orientation in relation to the dynamic organising processes that characterise the system. It is in this concept of totalisation we find the specifically Marxian notion of revolutionary practice for the first time, one that is not reducible to political revolution, secession or resistance, but one that aims at changing the conditions under which human beings produce and reproduce themselves, which aims at emancipation from both exploitation and domination. However, we need to be careful in distinguishing the logics of bourgeois-capitalist organisation from the philosophy of historical progress so

232 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans. H. Quelch, New edition edition (Prometheus Books UK, 1995), 132.

233 Theodor W Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2004), 320, 24.

intimately connected to it. Thus we must beware of the implicit philosophy of history that comes with Marx's prediction that the real teleology of capital would organise its gravediggers. According to this conception, bourgeois society would increasingly generalise itself, subsuming more and more human activities, still larger populations and ever greater parts of the globe. In doing so, it would create an ever larger proletariat and, henceforth, the potential for communism. We will see here how the Symmetry Thesis arises in Marx, and how its orientation to the potentials in capitalist orientation turns our attention away from the fate and potentials of those populations that are fighting proletarianisation. Thus, the conjunction of historical teleology and the Symmetry Thesis allowed Marx and untold numbers of followers to neglect the problem of organisation beyond the capital-labour relation.

Our reading in this chapter will proceed through four steps. Firstly, it will introduce the problematic of the real teleology of civil society, and its relation to Hegel's notion of spontaneous social order ('the cunning of reason') as well as the problem of the rabble in the *Philosophy of Right*. In doing so, we become able to account for the Hegelian context of Marx's concept of the proletariat, as well the specificity of Marx's position. Secondly, we will discuss Marx's initial formulation of the problem of the proletariat as the radical negative truth of civil society, and thus as a figure that introduces the idea of universal yet partisan knowledge. This will allow us to discuss – on the terrain of Marx's text – the limitations of a line of argument which have attempted to sustain the possibility of revolutionary theory with a claim on totality after the Symmetry Thesis. Both have done so by focusing on the proletariat/rabble as a universal exception, rejecting the sociological or production-centred notion of the working class. One such argument, found in Kouvelakis' reading of Marx, draws on the proletarian exception as the negation of any ideological claims to closure, as the negative truth of totality, following Žižek. Another argument, found in Frank Ruda, takes the radical need and dispossession of the proletarian as an ontological figure of universality and rebellion, following Agamben. In either case, we find that the reading of the proletariat solely in terms of negativity and exceptionality leaves us without a concept of proletarian organisation. Where the former is merely critical, the latter leaves us with a messianic hope premised on immiseration and spontaneous insurrection. Furthermore, we have to move beyond both appraisals of negativity to understand why Marx became increasingly focussed on the productivity and organisation of the proletariat by capital, which, while closely connected to the Symmetry Thesis, had an important rationale

beyond it. Both the Symmetry Thesis and the idea of the purely negative exceptional proletariat give revolutionary hope by projecting the multiplication and deepening of proletarian negativity in the process of capitalist development. This means that both conceptions of the proletariat as a subject of history, be it as an organised class or messianic non-class, end up premising their orientation on the real teleology of capital. In doing so, they easily reproduce Marx's problematic unilinear conception of history, even when they are critical of Marx's Symmetry Thesis and his sometimes prophetic promises of necessary revolutions.²³⁴ Only if we acknowledge the need for a positively defined organised proletariat, can we divorce the problem of the proletariat from the philosophy of history, and develop the concept of revolutionary (self-)organisation for which we are looking.

2. Antagonism of the Whole and Partisan Knowledge

Marx had taken his organic model of civil society from Hegel. Like Hobbes, Hegel recognised the conflictual dynamics of bourgeois society, but he followed Kant and Adam Smith in transforming this vision, which in Hobbes' theorisation had required the artificial imposition of order, into an immanent teleological conception.²³⁵ Whereas Kant had his 'asocial sociability' and Smith the 'hidden hand of the market', Hegel proposed the formula of the 'cunning of reason'.²³⁶ Crucially, this meant that Hegel's conception is not one of a harmonious or even 'ideally' harmonious social body, but one integrating within itself the contradiction between the antagonism of atomised individuals and their mutual dependence. This contradiction is fundamental to the modern state as the only social organisation which is truly historical, prosaic rather than poetic-mystical. As opposed to the poetry of the myths and legends of 'people without history', the modern state organises

a world of finitude and mutability, of entanglement in the relative, of the pressure of necessity from which the individual is in no position to withdraw. For every isolated living thing remains caught in the contradiction of being

234 For an explication of the versions of this argument of capital and its gravediggers, see appendix 3.0.

235 On this shift from a mechanic notion of the 'body politic' to the organicist notion of the 'social organism', see Bue Rübner Hansen, "The Crisis Is the Organism's Mastering of Itself – A Conceptual and Practical History of the Problem of Crisis through Koselleck and Hegel," in *Conceptions in Economic History*, ed. Mikkel Thorup (Springer Press, 2014).

236 'Individual men and even entire nations little imagine that, while they are pursuing their own ends, each in his own way and often in opposition to others, they are unwittingly guided in their advance along a course intended by nature.' Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 41.

itself in its own eyes this shut-in unit and yet of being nevertheless dependent on something else...²³⁷

The historical social body is not the realisation of a human plan (a 'contract') nor a divine plan, but of the immanent forces of integration and organisation in the historical process, always viewed under the perspective of Minerva's owl, i.e. retrospectively. The passions of humans are then inseparable from the development of this universal history.

This may be called the *cunning of reason*, — that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty and suffers loss. For it is *phenomenal* being that is so treated, and of this, part is of no value, part is positive and real. The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned.²³⁸

It might be tempting to conclude that Hegel recognised the systematic production of misery in bourgeois society *but* inscribed it within a generally benevolent teleology of the whole. However, these two moments are strictly corollary for Hegel. It is the real teleology of bourgeois society that produces this misery. Or, it is Hegel's recognition that bourgeois society is a whole with a certain telos that structures it and drives it ahead which allows him to see that misery is neither an accident nor a remnant of the past. Whereas historical teleology in Kant takes on the orientating function of an ideal, in Hegel it takes the form of an actual idea that is a concept of an actual mode of organisation.²³⁹ As we will see, he was fully aware that this did not mean the abolition of the problem, but its amelioration. The actualised state of freedom contained within itself a necessary exception, yet one that could be dealt with through charity, welfare, and the police.

While Hegel presents misery as an unfortunate product of civil society that is to be managed, he does not think the rabble as a historical residue. This fact presents us with a different version of social organisation, one which allows Marx to think the rabble as a universal exception and the standpoint of partisan knowledge. For Marx, the proletariat

237 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 150.

In Chapter 1 we have seen that Hegel noted how this fact was reflected in modern political theory.

238 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel: Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-1823*, ed. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (OUP Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) §36.

239 For the notion of partisan knowledge, and its relevance for the Leninist and Lukácsian conception of revolution, see Alberto Toscano, "Partisan Thought," *Historical Materialism* 17 (September 2009), 175–191.

became the name of this exception, both the truth of the untruth of the whole, and the point from which truly universal liberation could be achieved, the point of subtraction from the merely particular interests of the estates, the families and the competing interests of civil society. The proletariat that entered Marx's philosophy was at first a *philosophical concept* of a subject adequate to actualise the promises of German philosophy, rather than the empirically existing labouring and dispossessed populations. Marx hence granted practical import to his philosophy by granting philosophical import to this population.²⁴⁰ The search for possible revolutionary subjects – the mass which soon became the question of the proletariat – was thus overdetermined by the search for a subject to actualise the promises of German philosophy, which were, we need to add, the promises of the French Revolution.²⁴¹

The political regimes of the German states – economically backwards compared to industrialised England, and politically retarded compared to France – appeared to Marx as truly *ancient*. German philosophy, however, a brain overdeveloped in a stunted body, he considered to be the philosophy of the future: the potentiality of German actuality, Marx asserted, has foremost been developed in philosophy, thus the issue is not simply to overcome abstract philosophy, but to actualise it. '*You cannot abolish [aufheben] philosophy without actualising it [verwirklichen]*'.²⁴² This process is essentially undertaken in praxis, but philosophy itself becomes a practical force, when it takes grip of the masses, which it can when it becomes radical – goes to the root of matters – which for humankind is man itself; i.e a theory which demonstrates 'ad hominem' goes to the root of things, to mankind itself, as the root of all matters human. Revolution thus became a question of the meeting between philosophy and the proletariat.

[R]evolutions require a *passive* element, a *material* basis. Theory is realised [verwirklicht] in a people only insofar as it is the fulfilment of the needs of that people. But will the enormous gap that exists between the demands of German thought and the responses [Antworten, answers] of German reality [Wirklichkeit] now correspond to the same gap between civil society and the state and civil society and itself? Will the theoretical needs be directly practical needs? It is not enough that thought should strive to realise itself; reality itself must strive towards thought. ... A radical revolution can only be the revolution

240 On why Marx is not caught in the problematic of the 'ends of man', see appendix 3.1.

241 Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso Books, 2003).

242 Marx, "Critique of Hegel. Introduction," 250. Translation amended.

of radical needs...²⁴³

It is this radical need, or proletarian non-reproduction, which is not just a symptom of the *real* disintegration or internal 'impossibility' of society, which as *problem* is the site of the possibility, and the human necessity of revolution.²⁴⁴ As the exception to the realisation of freedom in society, radical needs tell a universal truth about this society. Thus any practise and theory beginning from this standpoint is true precisely because of its partisan orientation, and constructive of real universality precisely because it does not fight for a particular interest within a system of rights, but to abolish the conditions that produce it as an exception, and thus to abolish rather than promote its particular interests.

But why doesn't Marx present an argument against the proponents of public relief and charity, the default arguments and institutions working against the production of any radical need? What makes this problem, and therefore its solution, radical? How can Marx simply presume that his readers will agree that the problem of the proletariat can only be solved by radical means, that the proletariat was a *necessary product of bourgeois society, i.e. one that can only be abolished through revolution*? Here it becomes useful to return to a standard text in the German philosophy of bourgeois society, which was well-known by Marx's contemporaries, namely Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. This text is not only interesting because it supplies implicit arguments against 'reformist' proposals that charity and public relief will solve the problem of poverty, but also because it seemingly provided the model for Marx's initial theorisation of the role of the proletariat in relation to the problem of what Hegel had called *the rabble*, which is the equivalent of the Latin *proletarius*.²⁴⁵

3. The Problem of the Rabble, and the Solutions of the State

In a few often overlooked paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Right* which have recently been given a central role in an important study by Frank Ruda,²⁴⁶ Hegel analyses the phenomenon that the poor – defined as those that lack the means to reproduce themselves ('natural means of acquisition' and 'bonds of kinship')²⁴⁷ – tend to become a

243 Ibid., 252.

244 On the concept of need in Marx, see appendix 3.2.

245 On the Roman genealogy of the concept of the 'proletariat', see appendix 3.4.

246 Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2011).

247 G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, new

“rabble” (*Pöbel*), '[w]hen the activity of civil society is unrestricted, [and] occupied internally with expanding its *population and industry*.²⁴⁸ The poor becomes a rabble when they fall out of the organic mediation of society, wage labour, and develop a subjectivity antagonistic to labour ('frivolous and lazy') and 'against the rich, against society, the government', etc.. Hegel describes this as a particular *societal* condition, not as natural poverty; it is thus a 'hardship ... inflicted on this this or that class', which is a problem which 'torments modern societies especially.'²⁴⁹ The impoverished masses' refusal of work and the work ethic is produced by the lack of self-respect, motivation and skill produced by their initial expulsion from work, their unemployment itself. However, putting them to work is no solution:

...their livelihood might be mediated by work ... which would increase the volume of production; but it is precisely in overproduction and the lack of a proportionate number of consumers who are themselves productive that the evil consists ... This shows that, despite *an excess of wealth*, civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is *not wealthy enough* – i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient – to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble.²⁵⁰

While the problem of overproduction is theorised in its classical terms as one of excess and lack (underconsumption), the problem of the rabble is considered in terms of two excesses: excess wealth and excess poverty. Poverty is not merely a lack of wealth, but an excessive existence of an impoverished mass. This problem was not Hegel's discovery, and his originality can be exaggerated. Albert O. Hirschman claims that it is unlikely that Hegel – whose *Philosophy of Right* was published in 1820 – could have been aware of either Sismondi's theory of *generalised* overproduction, published in 1819, or Malthus' theory of over-population, published in 1820.²⁵¹ In any case, the central logic combining the dynamic antagonism of bourgeois society with the growth of the rabble is particularly interesting in Hegel because it is lodged within his systematic and dialectical understanding of the modern state. We can say that, in some sense, the *methodological* principle that the whole must be thought in its contradiction

ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 265 §241.

248 Ibid., 266, §243.

249 Ibid., 266f, §244.

250 Ibid., 267, §245.

251 Albert O. Hirschman, “On Hegel, Imperialism and Structural Stagnation,” in *Journal of Development Economics* 3 (1976), 3. For Sismondi's critique of Malthus, see appendix 3.3.

gave Hegel the sensitivity needed to appreciate the *radicality* of the relation between the production of wealth and of paupers, not just as a problem of civil society, but one for the state as well as the social body as such. Crucially, for Hegel the only remedies of this problem go against the very principles of civil society: poverty is a structural, we can say organic, feature of modern societies.

By establishing the insights developed in Hegel's rabble as the precondition of Marx's proposal of the proletariat, we can note that the problem of the proletariat is from its beginning – even if not introduced as such by Marx – not a purely economic or national one, but articulated with the state (in terms opening both to biopolitics and discipline), as well as with colonialism and globalising trade. Without noting the relation to Hegel's rabble, Étienne Balibar similarly notes that Marx's proletariat renders his orientation irreducible to the classical distinctions of nineteenth-century political thought: state/society, politics/economics, public/private, etc.²⁵²

For Hegel, the problem of the rabble forces the state to intervene in civil society. Frank Ruda lists a number of such solutions, or ameliorations, to the problem of the rabble, arguing that they are all insufficient either for Hegel himself or for reasons of Hegelian logic:²⁵³ 1) There is the possibility that *the poor can be taken care of by civil society itself*. However, this contradicts the principle of civil society, which is accumulation; it makes civil society appear as a family, and annuls the need for labour as mediation in civil society. 2) The rabble could survive through *public begging*; however, this could instil in people the habit of not working and would also risk demoralising the working population, thus undermining a key principle of civil society, that of work. 3) *The right of distress, i.e. the right to steal or withhold payment in a situation of urgent poverty*. This casts the poor as beasts, living and stealing from necessity rather than as free moral beings who can be required to respect the law. This contradicts both the principles of property and that of human freedom. 4) The problem of poverty could also be solved through the *redistribution of labour*. However, this means that the poor now produce what others would have produced; this either pushes the problem to other producers who become poor, or results in civil society producing too much; or both. 5) Another solution could lie in *the corporation and its ethics* (of responsible consumption). The corporations, Hegel's prototrade union,²⁵⁴ is an exclusive institution which only supports

252 Étienne Balibar, "In Search of the Proletariat," in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 136.

253 Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 15ff.

254 *Ibid.*, 22.

the poor it knows; paupers migrating from other countries will, in particular, be excluded from it. 6) The last solution to the problem of poverty is the classical one of *the police, and, in combination with it, religion (in the form of charitable institutions)*.²⁵⁵ This criminalises the paupers without dealing with the causes of poverty, and charity, again, produces lazy asocial people, i.e. people whose relation to society is not mediated by money/labour, and therefore contradicts the principle of civil society.

So the rabble cannot be abolished without going against the principles of civil society (points 1-3), nor without displacing and thereby perpetuating the problem (4), nor through exclusive or superficial measures (5-6). Finally, Hegel mentions the possibility of *exporting of surplus-commodities* to countries with lower productivity ('which generally lag behind ... in creativity'), and of *exporting the poor through colonization*.²⁵⁶

Civil society is driven to establish colonies. The increase of population alone has this effect; but a particular factor is the emergence of a mass of people who cannot gain satisfaction for their needs by their work when production exceeds the needs of consumers.²⁵⁷

Hegel does not provide a critique here, but, as Ruda notes, colonisation is not a solution to the problem, but a temporary postponement which function through a logic of 'bad infinity'; in other words, it does not lead to the sustainable self-positing of civil society, but drives it ahead in an expansionary thrust which must end.²⁵⁸ Although Hegel does not allude to this end himself, it is clear that he must have been familiar with theories that posited a limit to the growth of civil society. Indeed, the issue of an end to growth, of the market, production and population, was a common theme to classical political economists.²⁵⁹ Adam Smith, one of Hegel's primary resources in matters of political economy, had, in fact, predicted that the demographic growth and expansionary tendencies of manufacture and trade would eventually exhaust themselves allowing capitalism to peacefully arrive to a *stationary state*.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, as Smith *did* notice the social misery produced as a necessary effect of capitalist development, he readily

255 Ibid, §242. Note that police at the time of Hegel referred to any administrative body taking care of public order, including sanitation, urban planning, poverty relief and ambulance services, as theorised in the *Polizeiwissenschaft* of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771).

256 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 269, §248.

257 Ibid.

258 Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 20.

259 Kenneth E. Boulding, "The Shadow of the Stationary State," *Daedalus* 102, no. 4 (October 1, 1973), 89–101.

260 Ege Ragip and Jean-Daniel Boyer, "A Seminal Source for Kant and Hegel" (presented at the Annual Conference of the European Society for the History of Economic Thought, Thessaloniki, 2009).

proposed the solution that the government must ameliorate the situation.²⁶¹ Thus Hegel's solutions to the problem of the rabble can be read as mutually complimenting mediations which do not abolish the problem but ameliorate it, and, precisely by doing so, allow the perpetuation of the 'solutions', providing the state, religion, charity with an inextinguishable *raison d'être*.²⁶² This is how for Hegel the contradiction between civil society and the state, and the sacrifice of human beings, is normalised, ameliorated, and rendered both productive and reproductive through the state itself. The state thus appears as the commensuration of history, conceived reflexively, retrospectively, systemically.

Marx's initial response to this formula of history takes the form of a purely temporal manipulation, generally by suggesting that we are not *yet* at the end of history, and particularly by presenting Prussian development as retarded, a remnant of the past rather than a modern state. This gives us unfinished actualisation on two levels: the level of the species and that of the state. While both Marx and Hegel speak of antagonism within civil society, and a contradiction between civil society and the state, they diverge on two crucial points. First, Marx's above mentioned recognition of the disruptive character of the dynamism of bourgeois society differs from the contradictions identified by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*. In the latter text these contradiction are containable within the state and the solution to the problems of society is a stable one: 'the true reconciliation, which reveals the *state* as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective', whereas for Marx the contradiction tends towards becoming explosive.²⁶³ Second, Marx adopts the *partisan orientation* of the subjective *intolerability* of the proletarian condition.

The situation is thus *unsustainable* both subjectively and objectively. As the *objective tendency is determinant*, it renders it impossible to solve the problem of poverty within its current systemic solutions – state welfare, charity, and full employment. Without a theory of the deepening contradictions of capital, the problem of the proletariat would merely persist, with the estates, the police, charity and colonisation acting as a countervailing tendencies. The notion of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat is not merely premised on the fact that charity and state policy cannot abolish it, or that

261 See appendix 6.3.

262 For such an 'ethical' reading of Hegel, see Joel Anderson, "Hegel's Implicit View on How to Solve the Problem of Poverty - The Responsible Consumer and the Return of the Ethical to Civil Society," in *Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism: Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Robert Williams (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 185–205.

263 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 380, §360.

such proposals contradict the principles of civil society as in Hegel, but the thesis of the *tendential deepening of these contradictions, whose force is ultimately greater than that of the countervailing measures*.

This allows Marx to retain a *hopeful orientation* premised on the progress of bourgeois society, albeit one progressing by its bad side. However, structuring history around such a narrative of progress, or, alternatively, basing politics solely on the unfolding tendency, easily entails a certain blindness to those 'sacrificed and abandoned' by the 'cunning of reason'; it involves a blindness with regards to those that are not part of the partisan "we" that can be considered to be on the good side of the bad side of history. To see but one example illustrating the question of proletarian reproduction outside the wage-relation, we will now turn back the clock six months to the autumn of 1842.

4. The Margins of Civil Society and the Estovers of the Rhine Valley

In 1842, Marx was challenged to think the relation between socio-economic processes and the legal and institutional arrangements and politics of the German lands – a first and somewhat embarrassing venture into the discussion of material interests, as he described it years later.²⁶⁴ This effort consisted in a series of articles covering the debates of the Provincial Assembly of the Rhine on the criminalisation of the collection of wood by the rural poor, prompted by increasing instances of theft of wood in the Moselle valley. In these articles, Marx deconstructed the argumentation of the landowners through the standard of natural justice; he attempted to reveal how their crude and self-interested provisions made a mockery of the law, which 'is the universal and authentic exponent of the rightful order of things.'²⁶⁵ The silences implicit in this approach are telling insofar as they are *necessary* silences for a conception of history in which historical teleology is conceived in progressivist terms. The foremost contradiction of the situation outlined by Marx is the contradiction between the reality and the idea of bourgeois law, but he shows little knowledge of customary right and what E.P. Thompson has called the moral economy of the poor. What is silenced, as Peter Linebaugh has shown, is the struggles and practices of those populations who resist capitalist 'development'.²⁶⁶ Indeed, Marx did not analyse how the peasant had been

264 Preface to Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *MECW, Marx 1857-61*, vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987).

265 Karl Marx, "Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood," in *MECW*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 224.

266 Peter Linebaugh, "Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood and Working Class Composition," *Crime and*

displaced from their land through the dual pressures of falling prices on agricultural produce due to the heightened competition brought about by the German customs union (*Zollverein*) of 1835, nor did he look at the expropriations by the big landowners. He also did not raise the question of traditional rights to estovers and the commons, nor of the practices of commoning and sustainable living of the paupers, which Peter Linebaugh describes (while warning against romanticisation) as superior to what took its place, modern industrial forestry based on the new science of silviculture.²⁶⁷ Marx's polemics are limited, as polemics often are, to ridiculing lawmakers and fellow members of the sphere of reader-writers, and misses the struggles of those who practice what is ridiculous as a mere slogan and do so according to their own situated rationalities, situated within broader social developments.²⁶⁸ The sub-economic practices of the commoners and rural proletarians (the labours of Pyrrha and Gaia)²⁶⁹ are withdrawn from the calculation, invisible, or at least unaccounted for by Marx, just as they were in the struggle for democratic representation and capitalist valorisation at the time. Here it is the production of society, modern industry and commerce, considered as a necessary organic unfolding of actuality, which casts the shadow. Commons and small peasants, and the becoming dependent of women on wage earners (i.e. the non-reproduction of unmarried proletarian women), are as silent in the analysis of production and reproduction as they are in Marx's affirmation of political autonomy dating from the same period. The critique of the inner contradictions of bourgeois society here turns its back on the destruction and subsumption of what lies at its margins. We will see this repeated later in Marx's early discussions of colonialism. However, for now, we are interested in Marx's partisan theory of the proletarian revolution, as it is articulated with the theory of the dynamics of civil society.

5. The Universal Negativity of Proletarian Need

The hopeful orientation, given with the prediction of a developing potential and need for revolution is, as we have seen, premised on the theory of the deepening and expanding contradiction inherent in civil society. The characteristics of the proletariat are, from the start, determined by the problematic of the actualisation of universality on

Social Justice 6 (Fall-Winter 1976), 5–16.

267 Ibid. For a broader historical outline of these issues, see Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

268 Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," 248. Ibid.

269 Cf. appendix 1.5.

the level of society. For such an agency to be possible, a collective subject sharing needs and interests must be able to cohere. The proletariat is the answer to the need and interest of philosophy in finding an agent of the actualisation of freedom, a '*universal representative*' of society, whose claims can be the claims of society itself.²⁷⁰ For Marx, the proletarian revolution is not an invariable possibility of bourgeois society. Instead, it relies on the creation of a class with *radical* rather than *particular needs*, that is a class whose interest is the expression not just of its own position, but of the whole of society. Marx contrasts this with the merely *particular* character of the French revolutions. Unlike the classes in France who through the revolutions of 1789 and 1830 became for-themselves, he considers the proletariat to be the 'passive element' of a German revolution. The proletariat is the name of the pure possibility of revolution, situated in the *problem* of the impoverished and exploited masses. It not a class in the usual sense, but a 'radical class', in Marx's terms. This class is universal, because it embodies the 'universal offence', 'a general limitation', and the 'notorious crime of the whole of society.'²⁷¹ This mass is the general negativity of society; it claims no *particular* right because it suffers wrong *in general*, its claim is not *historical* but 'merely human', suffering a '*total loss* of humanity' in the nakedness of its existence.²⁷² The passivity of this element is not a passivity of its members, but the passivity of the class as a class, the masses produced by the 'emergent industrial movement', living not '*natural*' but '*artificially produced poverty*'.²⁷³ The concept of the proletariat does *not* correspond to the needs of an already existing and given population, but to the possibility of the conjunction of two needs, those of philosophy and those of a class in formation.²⁷⁴

Two readings suggest themselves forcefully here: this proletariat is *not*, contrary to how it has often been conceived, a sociological category (a class in the classical sense) naming a positively existing and productive population. Instead, it is the name of a certain embodied negativity vis-a-vis society, a *mass* that is a necessary exception to the social order, similarly to Hegel's rabble: 'The emergence of poverty is in general a consequence of civil society, and on the whole it arises necessarily out of it... A rabble arises chiefly in a developed civil society.'²⁷⁵ Second, it is precisely this negativity that

270 Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," 254. Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," 254.

271 Ibid., 254.

272 Ibid., 256

273 Ibid.

274 Ibid., 252, 254

275 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 453, addition to §244. On Balibar's insistence on the need for reading the proletariat as both mass and class, see appendix 3.4.

makes the proletariat universal, the negative truth of society. These readings contain an important critique of the long tradition of substantialist, essentialist Marxist conceptions of the proletariat. However, I will briefly outline below how the evacuation of all proletarian positivity is in fact what enables Marx to develop the well-known more substantialist account. The problems with both conceptions will lead us to propose a more materialist theory of the problem of the proletariat in chapters 4-7. We will now examine the purely negative account of the proletariat.

Stathis Kouvelakis has pointed out that the proletariat first emerges in Marx's writings as a 'paradoxical protagonist' devoid both of the sociological substantiality and Feuerbachian positivity that was characteristic of the contemporary Engels' study of the *Condition of the English Working Class*.²⁷⁶ He productively interprets the proletariat, as presented in the 1844 *Introduction*, as 'the void that is constitutive of the existing order', and 'lacks any transcendent “guarantee”', and thus 'confronts that society with its own impossibility, its pure difference.'²⁷⁷ Such manoeuvres, which make it possible to reaffirm class antagonism and totality without invoking a *positive* communist project (in Kouvelakis' words, '[t]he problematic of the radical revolution and the constitution of the proletariat poses politics as permanent revolution'), had a certain strategic importance as levers against first Stalinist and then liberal triumphalism in the post-1979 and 1989 epoch (to choose two dates marking the exhaustion and end of the twentieth-century circle of struggles) – for instance, think of the political adoption of Lacan in Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek. While Kouvelakis' argument – which clearly draws on the early Žižek – usefully demonstrates the impossibility of a closure or 'suture' of the social totality, we get a sense of its limits through the simple question: *who claimed this possibility of closure or homeostasis in the first place?* Clearly the negation here stays invested in the organicist conception it rejects. Take away the organicism and you lose the critique. In short, it operates as a critique of the fantasy of the closure of a more conservative organicist philosophy. This reading, while productive, functions primarily in the mode of ideology critique.

Furthermore, this underdetermination of the problem of the proletariat is exactly what lends a certain universality to its negativity. The capacity of the proletariat to carry the

276 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 329–30. Ibid.

277 Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” 256. Ibid. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London: Verso, 2001); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *The Essential Žižek* (London: Verso, 2008).

abstract humanism of philosophy is premised on the erasure of its positive traits. Frank Ruda thus argues that the pure indeterminacy of the dehumanised masses is what makes them most generically human, i.e. least marked by mere particularity, most capable of the 'universal production' of species-essence.²⁷⁸ Unlike the 'working class', a term only adopted by Marx slightly later on, particularly from Engels, the proletariat is not a positive socio-economic determination of the social whole, but an excess or residue with respect to the organisation of society, a notion of the impossibility of the closure of the social whole, in short an 'inorganic element' – as Marx writes, without *a claim on history, it has only a claim on humanity*.²⁷⁹ Thus the proletarian revolution is not the mere revolution of a class affirming itself, but the 'total redemption of humanity' at the point of 'society's acute disintegration'.²⁸⁰ Whilst there is much to this reading of species-essence as purely generic and a principle of infinite differentiation, the question of *how this potentiality is actualised* remains unanswered in Marx's as well as Ruda's text. Like Agamben's *homo sacer*, which Ruda refers to, the *tabula rasa* of dehumanised humanity easily becomes a pure inscription-surface for the ideas of the philosopher. Marx's pedagogico-political self-understanding shines through in the gendered metaphors with which he describes this paradoxical actualisation of the non-body of the proletariat: the material weapons of the proletariat must be supplied by the intellectual weapons of philosophy. If the lightning of thought 'struck deeply into this virgin soil of the people, emancipation will transform the *Germans* into *men*'.²⁸¹

The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of philosophy.²⁸²

In the universal victim the philosopher finds a muted body-without-mind that can be spiritualised and moved only by philosophy and the basest of physiological needs. The actuality of revolution only comes about through the combination of the trajectory of philosophy with that of the proletariat, a combination focused around the metaphor of the life-giving lightning. This actualisation takes the form of a paradoxical idealist

278 Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 172.

279 Frank Ruda convincingly connects Marx's introduction of the proletariat to Hegel's notion of the rabble. *Ibid.*, 170.

280 Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," 252.

281 *Ibid.*, 257.

282 *Ibid.*

reversal: it is not the actualisation of real potentialities, but the actualisation of a potential precisely because this potential has been *absolutely curbed, a body redemptive because crucified, as it were*. If what is struggling is the human species, not understood as one particular class in a social body, but precisely in its inorganicity and negativity as an excretion of that society, then it is 'nothing' and yet it '*must be everything*'.²⁸³ The relative socio-economic pauperisation of the proletariat becomes an absolute poverty in comparison with the infinite potentiality of the human species as revealed in the abstract infinity imputed to God and experienced in the false infinity of the expansion of capital.²⁸⁴ There is in this negative proletariat something like a Christology, a kind of *kenosis*, an emptying out which leads to the absolute receptivity to the message of philosophy.²⁸⁵ Just as the Messiah is always a figure of theological orientation, the proletariat is an orientating figure of radical philosophy. But whereas theology pushes the Messiah ahead of it into an unknown future, radical philosophy looks in the present for the potentiality of the realisation of freedom. What will be a Messiah is now a mass whose historical mission must be communicated to it from without, or for whose uprising the prophet philosopher must wait silently. The proletariat thus takes the form of the male fantasy of the feminine body, which can give birth to all of humankind, but can only do so passively and under the condition of her impregnation by philosophy.

The idea that the actualisation of freedom can only come about through an embodiment of spirit and a spiritualisation of the body attests to the experience of their separation and a desire to reunite them which is common among thinkers friendly to the events of 1789. Another figure is perhaps more useful to look at from the point of view of the question of organisation. Think of the logic of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein – The Modern Prometheus* for one, a logic very much with us in Marx's discourse above.²⁸⁶ This analogy opens for a consideration of the separation and daily sacrifice of proletariat, as the bodies of which a monster might be composed. The question becomes how two 'inorganic' and radically negative elements of society, the radical intellectual

283 Ibid., 254

284 Cf. Feuerbach, appendix 2.3.

285 It is tempting to take this *kenosis*, *Entäusserung* in the translation of Luther and Hegel, as the moment where – like Christ at Calvary – the proletariat empties itself of the particularity of its own suffering and universalises it. We are here reminded of the last paragraph of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where comprehended history (the unity of contingency and comprehended organisation) internalises this suffering 'as the actuality, truth and certainty of his own throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone'. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, New Ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 493

286 For a reading of the proletariat as a monster along the model of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, see David McNally, *Monsters of the Market* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

and the dispossessed masses, can combine and organise themselves into a new social body. But this concept of idealisation or spiritualisation fails to consider organisation and rationality as immanent and emergent. It appears the problem is not so much the empty negativity of the proletariat as the problem of the isolation of the philosopher from the proletariat, which makes it appear unthinking. Marx himself implicitly questioned this conception, which repeated the organicist non-critique of the division of labour between 'hands' and 'head', as early as 1844 when he hailed the rebellious Silesian weavers, and metonymically the German proletariat as such, as the '*theoretician* of the European proletariat'.²⁸⁷

The negative conception of the proletariat importantly stresses the *truth of antagonism* in bourgeois society, and thus the truth of partisan orientation within it. It does so against the flat sociological conception of classes according to which there are only particular interests, and the bourgeois foreclosure of antagonism and its reduction of all conflict to negotiable conflicts between particular interests. The proletariat is the universal truth of bourgeois society both in its sacrifice and its thinking. However, how does this orientate revolutionary practice? It merely holds up the image of enforced impotentiality on the one side, and full self-actualisation on the other, a real suffering contrasted with an utopian image. In the absence of a concept of practices of organisation and actualisation, the only actualisation of communism possible is messianic.

The need for a concept of a force which would be able not just to destroy a world, but to actualise itself and build a new world leads Marx to retain the concept of the infinite productivity of the species (which was later transformed into the affirmation the productivity of the working class against the lumpenproletariat).²⁸⁸ Moving beyond the purely negative definition of the proletariat, Marx began to study the world-building capacity of the workers under the impression of Feuerbach's concept of the human species-essence. In other words, he became critically interested in the productive actuality of the *workers*, not the pure possibility, or indeterminacy of the species, but the effective, developing potentiality of the working proletariat. Where money and the wealth of civil society are merely the products and representations of the workers, the task is to find it as the basis of both the workers and the unemployed the common

287 Marx, *Early Writings*, 415.

288 For Engels' and Marx's position on the lumpenproletarian, and the problem of lumpen 'parasitism', see appendices 3.5.-3.6.

productive power. Whereas for Hegel the division between the rabble and the employed producers is produced by the tendency of the activity of civil society to specialised and limit work,²⁸⁹ Sismondi, whom Marx studied in Paris in 1844,²⁹⁰ had already in 1819 insisted that, in the words of Marx, '[t]he Roman proletariat lived at the expense of society, while modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat.'²⁹¹ From here on, Marx became interested in how the workers produce both civil society *and* their own poverty. Where Hegel had seen the rabble as a product of civil society, Marx reversed Hegel's formula, just as he had reversed the relation between the sovereign and the people (chapter 2).²⁹²

6. The Organised Proletariat

Marx's earliest studies of political economy can be taken as a investigation into the economic cause of the production of the proletariat. In this sense, Marx's critique of political economy was from the beginning a study of the conditions of revolution. Whereas Marx's first presentation of the proletariat in the introduction to the critique of Hegel presents is in terms of its negativity and as a universal exception, he was quick to develop a theory of the relation between the bourgeois organisation of the proletariat and proletarian counter-organisation. *The Holy Family*, the 1844 text which was the first to be co-authored by Marx and Engels, attacks Bruno Bauer's conception of *criticism* as 'organising *work*' which is necessary to organise the '*raw material*' of the mass. While rightly deriding Bauer's elitist idea that philosophy as Spirit must organise the 'rest of the human race as Matter', pointing to how the prose and poetry of the lower classes demonstrates their capacity to 'raise themselves spiritually', Marx and Engels' critique of Bauer implicitly sidelines the question of *self-organisation against the differentiation of bourgeois society*: they insist that there is no problem of organisation, because '*bourgeois society*, the dissolution of the old feudal society, *is* this organisation of the mass.'²⁹³ We might take this as the first expression of the Symmetry Thesis in Marx: from now on, the problem of the subtraction from the estates and the division of labour

289 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 266 §243.

290 *MECW*, 3, p. 596 – editor's remarks.

291 1869 Preface to Karl Marx, "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 395. 1869 Preface to Karl Marx, "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 395.

292 Marx here transfers several of the defining trait of the species to the proletariat. See appendix 3.4.

293 Karl Marx, "The Holy Family," in *MECW*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 135-36. My emphasis.

– the appearance of a mass to itself (cf. chapter 2) – disappears. The problem is no longer how the people might appear *despite* its organisation into estates, but how bourgeois society's organisation of the proletariat is to be turned against it through workers' organisation.

In the *Manifesto*, proletarian organisation becomes increasingly necessary because under modern industry the class antagonism, which exists in all written history, tends to intensify towards pauperisation and precarity. The possibility of proletarian organisation grows along with its necessity, as the condition of the working class is equalised and distinctions of labour are obliterated with the introduction of machinery and the reduction of wages 'nearly everywhere ... to the same low level.'²⁹⁴ Furthermore, this possible organisation becomes increasingly powerful: the proletariat 'not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more.'²⁹⁵

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.²⁹⁶

The proletariat becomes actually revolutionary because crises, bourgeois competition and the replacement of workers with machinery 'makes their livelihood more and more precarious.'²⁹⁷ Workers begin to form combinations (unions), clubs and permanent associations, to bargain, keep wages up and make provisions for their occasional revolts. Due to the deepening precarisation and pauperisation of proletarians, collisions in the work-place increasingly appear as collisions between classes. This is what builds, through victories and defeats, 'the ever expanding union of the workers' enabled by modern means of communication and the railways. The 'more or less veiled civil war' on which bourgeois society is founded eventually breaks into revolution and the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie, by an 'independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.'²⁹⁸ This struggle culminates when bourgeois domination comes into immediate contradiction with the reproduction of the proletariat.

294 *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Selected Works, vol. 1* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 117.

295 *Ibid.*

296 *Ibid.*

297 *Ibid.*

298 *Ibid.*, 118.

The bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels write, is 'is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery.'²⁹⁹

The power of the *revolutionary* Symmetry Thesis is the premise that capital and labour are, from the outset, exterior to one another and in a state of civil war. This means that class struggle is defined not as the negotiation, pressure and counter-pressure of two interdependent parts of a whole (as unity in contradiction), but as tending towards real opposition.³⁰⁰ But still the primacy lies with the overall process; the combination of capital and labour in the exploitation of wage-labour in modern industry. The temporality and spatiality of this process is linear: a simple process of outward expansion and growth, with very little sensitivity to the spatio-temporal differentiations of the process. The overall historical tendency outlined still has the form of the philosophy of history: linear, expansive, homogenising and unrelenting. It is only because the symmetry is that of an opposition, and because the overall process is that of a linear development, that Marx can state that:

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.³⁰¹

This *prophetic* and hope-inducing orientation must be read as a partisan wager, which did look successful for a long time. Yet capital later proved perfectly capable of integrating the labour movement and of turning opposition into a dialectic contradiction, if only under pressure of the threat of revolution and because of the possibility of a differentiated global system of exploitation and colonial looting.

The remainder of this chapter will problematise the historical orientation founded on productivity and the development of the mode of production that subtends the reduction of history to the symmetry between the productive proletariat and capital. This produces a blindness to the actuality and history of other struggles: future and contemporary struggles against colonialism and proletarianisation, to which we turn shortly, and the past and continuous struggles around the gendered division of labour. As concerns the latter, it is worth noting that Marx and Engels' attempt at a historical anthropology in

299 Ibid., 119.

300 For the relation between real opposition and dialectical contradiction, see the discussion of Colletti in appendix 4.2.

301 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 119.

The German Ideology casts the gendered division of labour, which they claim develops “naturally” (their scarecrow), as more fundamental than the division between manual and mental labour, and as being at the root of property relations: ‘This latent slavery in the family [of women and children] ... is the first property, but even at this early state corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others’.³⁰² The historical development of the species-powers in different modes of production as class societies thus rests on a *primordial and continuing* subordination of women and children. The ‘most developed’ historical potentiality of the species does not manifest itself in the species-reproductive activity of women, but only in the social division of labour, that is to say in the social labour of the proletariat as universal producer. *If hope rests with the progressive tendencies of history, if the proletariat is redeemed by its productivity as well as its negativity, what is the hope of those who are consigned to do a labour primordially repressed as merely reproductive, neither productive nor negative?*

7. History, Colonialism and Invisibility

While the species in its difference only exists, i.e. reproduces itself, in particular modes of production, there is still a difference between the generic capacity for differential (re)production and the determinate modes of (re)production. It is only with the capitalist mode of production that history becomes world history. Already in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels argue that:

The further the separate spheres, which interact on one another, extend in the course of this development, the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the developed mode of production and intercourse and the division of labour between various nations naturally brought forth by these, *the more history becomes world history*. ...³⁰³

Indeed the species itself, as a real *universally communicating and reproductive*

302 It is important to note the *tense* of the prose of this historical sketch. It is written in the present perfect of what has been in what is – in Marx and Engels’ space of contemporaneity – hence the invisibility of matriarchal societies and divisions of labour without hierarchy. Ibid., 33-34. Engels made up for this much later on in his *Origins of the Family* which was based on Marx’s ethnological notebooks. Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” in *MECW*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990).

303 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 39. My emphasis.

totalisation, is only historically becoming actual, in a process still unfinished. It only becomes so by replacing 'the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency' with 'intercourse in every direction, the universal inter-dependence of nations.'³⁰⁴ The development of the species as a true potentiality arises through the integration of its reproduction and communication on a global scale: 'Influence of means of communication. World history as not always existed; history as world history a result.'³⁰⁵ Despite the fact that world history is premised on the daily sacrifice of individuals and the appropriative and exploitative processes of colonisation and the capitalist world-market, Marx does not reject this process outright. Rather, his method compels him to develop a situated critique of this actuality, and to relate it to a subjective orientation towards the potentialities created through 'universal intercourse', universal destruction and the possibility of global crises. While local communisms have always been possible, only with global expropriation does it, paradoxically, become a global possibility.³⁰⁶

Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples "all at once" and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism. Moreover, the mass of propertyless workers – the utterly precarious position of labour-power on a mass scale cut off from capital or from even a limited satisfaction and, therefore, no longer merely temporarily deprived of work itself as a secure source of life – presupposes the world market through competition. The proletariat can thus only exist *world-historically*, just as communism, its activity, can only have a "world-historical" existence.³⁰⁷

The development of a world-historical problem makes possible a world-historical solution; communism has nothing to do with resistance, but only with the actualisation of the species made possible by the historical existence of the proletariat. It would therefore seem that the possibility of communism is hence premised on the violent proletarianisation of populations on a world scale, which in turn is premised on the dispossession and criminalisation of the commoners and the reproductive activity of

304 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 112.

305 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 109. Balibar's reformulation poses this as a general theoretical point: 'a synthetic concept of time can never be a pre-given, but only a *result*.' Étienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 297 and 280.

306 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 37.

307 *Ibid*.

women and children. While communism is the violent *overthrow* of bourgeois society, it still appears that the bourgeois brutalisation of the world will ultimately be for the better of mankind, forcibly developing its potentialities through expropriation and exploitation. Indeed, Marx's infamous article 'The British Rule in India', written for the *New York Tribune* in 1853, is an outright celebration of the historical role of colonisation, despite the brutality and destructiveness of its methods, and vileness and stupidity of its intentions:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.³⁰⁸

This role concerns not only the destruction of the caste-system and slavery of a society incapable of change itself in its 'undignified, stagnatory and vegetative life', but also of the 'brutalising worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of *Kanuman* [sic], the monkey, and *Sabbala*, the cow.'³⁰⁹ The world-historical role of capitalism is thus negative and destructive, advancing history by the bad side, to use the formula Marx devised against Proudhon.³¹⁰ While this formula is devised, writes Balibar, against a moralising, optimistic historical teleology which draws on Hegel, it is Marx's response that is truly Hegelian, an invocation of the cunning of reason, the capacity of the historical dialectic of 'converting war, suffering and injustice into factors of peace, prosperity and justice.'³¹¹ However, as Daniel Bensaïd notes, Marx is no Hegelian insofar as he is writing about a future yet to be, the potentiality inherent in the struggle to which the 'bad' side gives rise. Thus, Marx seeks to

extricate himself from the abstraction of universal History ... without lapsing

308 Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 493.

309 Ibid.

310 Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1995, 132. Edward Said here presents Marx as being seduced into 'Romantic Orientalism' by his final quote from Goethe's poem *Westöstlicher Diwan*; however, the difficulty is rather deeper, it lies in Marx's unilinear historical schema. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 153–55. See also Kevin B. Anderson's discussion of Said's critique, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010), 17–20.

311 Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 2007), 98.

into the insane chaos of absolute singularities; and without resorting to the trump card of progress. In so far as universalisation is a process, progress is not conjugated in the present indicative, only in the future anterior: conditionally.³¹²

Marx is thus positioning himself squarely beyond the dilemma '*progress or chaos*' which is the premise of the Kantian orientation in history.³¹³ Moreover, the issue is not a calculus of good and bad according to a moral standard, but an affirmation of potentialities produced by the crisis of the old world and the composition of the new. This modern bourgeois society is one that – as we saw in the beginning of this chapter – is like a sorcerer that has lost control of his own spells, of the dynamism of trade and industry.³¹⁴ Modern history – which Marx counts merely 'many a *decade*' into the past – is the history of 'the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeois and of its rule.'³¹⁵ The production of wealth and poverty on two sides poses a radical problem not so much on its own account, but on account of the deepening of this contradiction towards crisis:

It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. ... In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity — the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce.³¹⁶

The problem this poses is not that of absolute lack and poverty, nor the problem of the *virtual poverty of the proletariat*, but the deepening contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of property. But while these crises have solutions – like Hegel noted – they are only temporary:

how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced

312 Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Time: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* (London: Verso, 2009), 61.

313 Cf. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 42.

314 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 113.

315 Ibid.

316 Ibid., 113–4. On the notion of crisis in nineteenth-century Germany, see appendix 3.8.

destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented. ... not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons — the modern working class — the proletarians.³¹⁷

The optimism of Marx's passage is premised on the conviction that the contradictory development of bourgeois society not only leads to crises, but to successively deeper and more wide-reaching crises, in the process of which the development of productivity as well as radical needs will produce a radical revolution of the producers of history. But what Bensaïd's reading does not appreciate is how this entails consigning the struggles of the 'people without history', to use a phrase central to the demarcation of Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, to the definite past, to political irrelevance, i.e. to consider not only their struggles but their modes of life as bereft of potentiality in the present. This concerns not only the 'exo-colonisation' of non-European lands, by territorial might and capitalist relations, but also Marx's analysis of the bourgeois 'endo-colonisation' of Europe.³¹⁸ Further, as Peter Osborne notes,

[c]risis 'theory' is ... in principle inadequate to thinking the historico-political meaning of crises – and this includes Marx's own account (or 'theory') of capitalist crises, however central to such a thinking it might be.³¹⁹

The notion of crisis does not in itself hold the political key, this is rather found in the projection that the dynamic of bourgeois society tends towards a symmetrical development of capital and its gravediggers. It is on the validity of this prediction that Marx's conditional optimism is premised.

Marx does not present this as an automatic process of growth and development, but a violent process of the destruction of previous modes of production. Capital might tend towards becoming an Absolute Subject – world history or the universal mode of

317 Ibid., 114.

318 This terms were introduced in a Marxian context in Jason Read's Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003). However, one should keep in mind the earlier use by Paul Virilio, who presents both as essentially territorial military logics, in which a state colonises its own population.

319 Peter Osborne, "A Sudden Topicality - Marx, Nietzsche and the Politics of Crisis," *Radical Philosophy* 160, no. Mar/Apr (2010), 21.

(re)production – but it is merely an expanding teleology, in a world that consists of as many histories as there are modes of (re)production (and infinitely more myths, legends and shared memories, of course).³²⁰ The question is whether subsuming, world-subduing history can ever become History, contemporalise and synchronise all other histories.³²¹ Marx notes that the bourgeois mode of production is built on the 'ruins and elements' of vanished social formations 'whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along with it.'³²² As Dipesh Chakrabarty insists, looking at what Marx says capital 'encounters [...] as antecedents [but] not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life-process', there continues to be a non-totalised substance of histories irreducible to this subject of History.³²³ Chakrabarty is interested in how these 'interrupt and punctuate' the life-process of the 'self-reproduction of capital' as a basis of a 'politics of human belonging and diversity',³²⁴ or how, in a beautiful definition, 'the subaltern is that which constantly, from within the narrative of capital, reminds us of other ways of being human than as bearers of the capacity to labour.'³²⁵ The issue of 'capital antecedents', is generally one of elements that might and might not be(come) part of the reproduction of capital. After the sentence cited by Chakrabarty, Marx continues: '[i]n the same way as it [capital] originally finds the commodity already in existence, but not as its own product, and likewise finds money circulation, but not as an element in its own reproduction'.³²⁶

However, the issue for Marx is of course not one of small subtractions, resistances and histories, of the persistence of difference and other forms of life within capitalism (Chakrabarty's History 2). Indeed, if such small narratives are to have any significance on the level of Marx's critique they must be related to the problem of History (History 1). Here the question becomes whether lives other than those of labour, marginal or non-reproductive of surplus-value are antagonistic to capitalist reproduction, whether such lives are self-reproductive, and whether both the antagonism and the self-reproduction of this non-reproduction of capitalist relations is at least potentially

320 Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

321 As would be the claim of theories (to which we will return in chapter 7), that due to the real subsumption of society, today any outside can only be a fantasy produced with capitalism, i.e. not an other in itself, but an other of capitalism.

322 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105.

323 Marx's Theories of Surplus-Value quoted by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (new ed.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 63.

324 *Ibid.*, 64, 67. See also Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 99-100.

325 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 94.

326 Addendum 2. "Interest-Bearing Capital and Commercial Capital in Relation to Industrial Capital" in Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts: Theories of Surplus-Value* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1863).

generalisable. I will ask the question of such histories from the point of view of Marx's practical energy, his orientation towards a dissolution of the problem of capitalism, based neither on a state of affairs nor an ideal, but on the potentiality of a 'real [*wirkliche*] movement which abolishes [*aufhebt*] the present state of things', starting with the conditions now in existence.³²⁷ The logic of this movement in this quote from *The German Ideology* is presented as an *Aufhebung*, but what is the precise logical structure of this movement? From Marx's noted unilinear progressivism of the 1840s, the next chapter will engage with the writings of the period where he was beginning to question this conception of history, and open to a multi-linear conception of history.³²⁸ The first event that truly challenged the unilinear conception was the failure of the revolutions of 1848. If Marx adopts his early philosophy of history from enlightenment thought, it is significant that his sensitivity to crisis and contingency immediately allows his own texts to question it, while his orientation towards revolution maintains it, as a form of *speculative* and *partisan* thought of the possible on the level of the total historical process. Speculative thought is not cancelled when its promise does not materialise, rather, it raises the question of a *catechon* holding back the revolution: thus Marx did not challenge his schema as much as introduce the notion of a proletarian obstacle to proletarian revolution (the lumpenproletariat) and the insistence of the need for a historical leap, anticipated through 'a poetry of the future'.³²⁹

8. Conclusion

We have seen how Marx's faith in the coming revolution is based on a belief in the growth of both aspects of the proletariat at once. However, our discussion has also shown that Marx's texts reveal the existence of at least three countervailing tendencies, whose impact he implicitly shows are negligible: First, there is the activity of the state, charities and the estates, which ameliorate social tensions in Hegel's theory of the rabble. Second, there is the logic of the *division* and *competition* between the negative, unemployed and disorganised lumpenproletariat on the one hand, and the productive, positive and organised proletariat on the other hand (with its passive and only indirectly organised basis in domestic labour). Third, there is the globalising extension of the problem of capital through trade and colonisation.³³⁰ Focusing on the dynamism of the

327 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 38.

328 Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 2010, 3.

329 See appendix 3.5 for the former, and 3.7. for the latter.

330 In the broadest of terms, the problem of capitalism is also the problem of colonialism, both in its

contradiction within civil society, and its contradiction with the ancient regime, Marx underestimated the mediating role of the state in organising and controlling the disorganised through measures of violence and welfare, as well as the problematic of the globalising *divisions* between proletarians. In order to bypass the problem of the heterogeneity and difference of the proletariat, the idea of the proletariat had to be homogenised into the figure of the (male) wage worker. The system-immanent analysis of capital and its drive to organise a still greater portion of the globe orientates revolutionary practice toward the already *organised* proletariat and its systemic contradiction with capital. As long as another orientation toward organisation is not found, this analysis will be bound up with a belief that colonialism and capitalist expansion in general – however regrettable and violent – is historically progressive, as the condition *sine qua non* of the possibility of communism. The problem – and thus the solution – of the proletariat are both overdetermined within this real-teleological horizon.

The very same logic that makes the proletariat the revolutionary agent of world history, also makes these colonisations world-historically progressive. What we have seen above is a certain blindness to the potentialities of those who form the 'reproductive' basis of capitalist history (women and children), and to those which are in the process of being subsumed (the commoners). All these will only possess historical potentiality once their powers in the present have been expropriated, and once they become exploited. Once the actuality of such activities is naturalised or made invisible, its potentialities disappear from the concepts of not just history and revolution, but from any concrete description of the development of the species itself. As long as it focuses its hopes for communism on the dialectic of its object, even the most radical theory is, to steal words uttered in a very different context, 'compelled to reproduce, to reduplicate in itself the law of its object or its object as law; it must submit to the norm it purports to analyze.'³³¹ Or as Jean Baudrillard put it:

The logic of representation – of the duplication of its object – haunts all rational discursiveness. Every critical theory is haunted by this surreptitious religion, this desire bound up with the construction of its object, this negativity

specific sense of territorial domination, but also in its economic sense as exploitation or expropriation *ex novo* (what we in chapter 5 will see Marx theorise as formal subsumption and primitive accumulation).

331 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 97.

subtly haunted by the very form that it negates.³³²

Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* shows that such haunting, when made explicit by critical thought, is not so much a trap of critical theory as a utopian supplement to orientation produced by human beings in their misery. To translate this unconscious utopianism into a real effective utopianism it is necessary to provide a critique of actuality. There is little doubt that the formalism of the critique of bourgeois society is necessary for orientation, in so far as this society consists of a set of forms (the legal-form, the money-form, the state-form, the value-form, etc.). In Marx's method Bloch finds such a *theoretical* mode of orientation under capitalism. Marx must be able to think like a detective, who 'is *homogeneous* with the *criminal* — where nothing but the economic aspect has to be considered; and only afterwards to imagine a higher life.'³³³ Through Bloch's method the surreptitious utopianism of critical theory can be made explicit, as the becoming conscious of spontaneous utopianism. I will argue – agreeing with Bloch – that the project of revolutionary orientation today must carefully distance itself *not* from the immanence of Marx's critique to bourgeois society, but from the tendency, visible in Marx, but even more so in a long line of “Marxist” readers, *to reduce his orientation to the forms and logic* of his object. Bloch's defence against this reduction, however, does not sufficiently challenge the reduction of actuality to the actuality of the capital-labour relation, it merely counterposes reality with utopian desires and the imagination of a higher life. The question of revolutionary orientation demands and implies more than this, just as we must understand the ways in which actuality itself – the actuality of Soviet power, the cataclysmic world war, and the unexhausted power of the workers movement – made Bloch's concept of hope more than an abstract concept of the unconscious or conscious imagination of a higher life. The question of revolutionary orientation asks how we can maintain the critique of capitalist forms and organisation – as an indispensable form of cognitive mapping – while not reducing *practical* actuality thereto, thus keeping open the question of revolutionary composition and organisation within and against actuality, without which utopianism becomes abstract.

332 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 1975), 50–1.

333 Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 242.

**END
OF PART**

I

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Chapter 4. The Problem of History

1. Introduction

In Part I of this thesis we saw how Marx's theory in the mid to late 1840s was profoundly concerned with the problem of revolutionary orientation within the teleology of bourgeois society. On the one hand we found the conception of the contradictory real teleology of bourgeois society and capital, undermining itself by destabilising its own state-form, producing a revolutionary underclass and tending towards crises. The reason this theory is not catastrophist or messianic is that it sees in this process the secular development of another potentiality, that of the proletarian mass, pauperised, organised and made into a majority by capital. In this linear projection toward the final struggle between capital and labour, the struggles against colonisation and proletarianisation become irrelevant, reduced to pitiable resistances against modernisation, against history itself.³³⁴ The theory of the revolutionary proletariat becomes insulated from the struggles of those who are being dispossessed and colonised. The problem of organisation is reduced to that of the inversion of the bourgeois organisation of the proletariat.

The aim of this chapter is to show how this whole conception, which was outlined in Part I (chapter 1-3), is deeply connected to the systematic ambitions of the systematic dialectic, and its tendency to reduce the problems of orientation and organisation to the interiority of the always-already totalised bourgeois society. The idea is neither to reject the dialectic as such, nor to reject the concept of a specific real teleology of capital, but to lay the ground for an argument that stresses the contested and reversible relation between disorganisation and organisation, and the need to think more complex temporalities of struggle and history. Through this, we lay the ground for the argument in Part II (chapter 5-7), which will propose a historical, social and political reading of the central orientating logics of Part I – atomism, organism, tendency of organism to crisis – in order to arrive at a concept of the organisation of capitalist societies which

334 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto", Section 1. For a discussion of the unilinear conception of history in the *Manifesto*, and Marx's overcoming of it in the early 1850s, see Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010), Chapter 1.

sees organisation not merely as a logic, but as a constant effort that requires the use of force. By thus explicating the orientating use of these materialist concepts of organisation and disorganisation, we come closer to our aim of developing a concept of revolutionary organisation which is not reliant on the Symmetry Thesis, i.e. a concept of organisation which does not limit itself to the organisation of the working-class. This chapter will take a first step in this direction by questioning the unilinear concept of history in the *Communist Manifesto*, and by raising the question of the relation between the capitalist process of totalisation and different temporalities.

2. Species History and Modes of Production

It is useful to start with one of the most influential critiques of the elements of Hegelian-style systematic dialectic in Marx, that of Louis Althusser. As Althusser points out, historicism, humanism and economic determinism share a common problematic: the idea of a continuous homogeneous time (history) in which change happens, a common substance of that change (humanity), and a law governing this movement, be it that of human progress, of history, or of economic laws.³³⁵ The common problematic of these approaches, which need not overlap, is their reliance on the category of a greater subject (History, Humanity, the Economy), which necessarily introduces a teleological distortion into the study of history, and reduces its time to the one time of the 'essential section' that defines the essence of the subject of history. To think beyond the One history of the subject of history, and the reduction of analysis to this one mode of production and its categories, Althusser proposes a different concept of structure and time: *complex variable time of a decentered structure, of peculiar relatively autonomous histories punctuated by peculiar rhythms*.³³⁶ These are not independent of the whole: 'the specificity of each of these times and of each of these histories ... is based on a certain type of articulation in the whole, and therefore on a certain type of dependence with respect to the whole'.³³⁷ This presents us with a theory of the co-articulation of different subjects and non-subjects, which avoids the reduction of the historical orientation of a subject to its *participation* in some universal subject, be it the transcendental subject or the Absolute. History is only ideally synthetic, in actuality it is

335 Louis Althusser, "The Object of Capital," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 138–40.

336 *Ibid.*, 99.

337 *Ibid.*, 100.

conjunctive and disjunctive. Beyond the particularity of social formations, and the universality of the species, this concept of *complex variable time* gives the outline of a thinking of time that is not teleologically unified. Althusser's proposal outlines the conditions for an articulation of the relation between different times, and the persistence of the problem of synchronisation, i.e. the perpetual non-synchronicity of history. From this perspective we can retain the concept of the singular temporalisation introduced by the Epicurean swerve, a time which is 'relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the "times" of the other levels.'³³⁸ It is tempting to take this, as many have done, as a final statement against the Marxian concept of real teleology.

In what follows we will first attempt to show that this critique has some purchase against the Marx we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, yet how the later Marx goes beyond some of the problems of this approach. On the background of these chapters we can argue that Marx's conception of history in the 1840s remained entangled with Kantian orientation. Kant himself insisted that Enlightenment, that is the actualisation of the human capacity for autonomy, would have to proceed through 'many revolutions.'³³⁹ The actualisation of the species is immanent to, yet comes into conflict with, the actual organisation of societies. In Marx we have a similar double assertion of teleology in history, the species as *causa-sui* against the goal-driven globalising totalisation of bourgeois society.³⁴⁰ Whereas the latter gives us the historical form of a certain organic social structure, the former gives the condition of any form, the generic capacity of the species. This suggestion of teleology in history needs to be distinguished from the Enlightenment-era species history of Kant's classical text *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, in which he asserts that the 'natural capacities of the [human species] are destined sooner or later to be developed complete and in conformity with their end [reason].'³⁴¹ In Kant the species is immediately an organism developing in history. There are three elements to this conception: First, history is unified in a singular subject, humanity. Second, the singularity of this subject is also its autonomy; its progress happens not in relation to nature, but *from* nature; its progress

338 Ibid., 99.

339 Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 51.

340 We will return to the question of the *drive* of capitalism in chapter 6. De Angelis makes finer distinctions than Marx in respect to the drive of capitalism, seeing it as the *telos* of expansion, which has the urgency of a drive (non-fulfilment is crisis), thus it is also *conatus*, the striving for self-preservation. Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 39–43.

341 I here synthesize Kant's first and second proposition. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 42.

happens not in a complex interplay with the multiple temporalities of nature, but in homogeneous and empty time, to draw on Walter Benjamin.³⁴² Third, the teleology is not deterministic, but prophetic and regulative, in the worlds of Kant's *The Contest of Faculties*, it serves an orientating purpose and as a principle of hope, the *sine qua non* of a meaningful practical promotion of this ideal.³⁴³

In Part I we have traced three distinct meanings of history in Marx: for the early Marx (1842-1845) the concept of the species was a lively teleological philosophy of a political character: the telos is mankind in its infinity and universality. Species-essence is a rallying cry against all religious institutions, a program to make visible the common and singular powers of the self-actualisation of human beings in the present. This time is predicated not on a futurity as such, but on what we can call, following Sartre, a prediction of the present: a judgement on the present *sub specie futurae*.³⁴⁴ Such prediction is based, minimally, on the wager that the truth of the present can be comprehended as a becoming-whole (a process of totalisation, in Sartre's words). Here the model of the judgement is that of an organism striving to realise its inner potentials, progress is instituting 'orientated change'.³⁴⁵ Secondly, the species-history operative in *The German Ideology* (1845) begins with the reproductive differentiation of the human species from animals, and, implicitly, from their own animality.³⁴⁶ This latter concept of the species is the generic condition of history, of the differentiation of the species into different historical modes of (re)production: 'They themselves [the humans] begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence.' Following this definition human beings are the beings that are substantially defined by having a mode of production. Finally, in the later writings, but already incipiently in *The German Ideology* – which as Althusser has noted is the 'work of the break' – Marx begins to question the idea of the species as the subject of history, focussing instead, first, on 'real material individuals', and later, on modes of production. In either case the subject is not given, but must be produced temporally, as the becoming self-reflexive and willing of what is already unconsciously self-positing and self-reproducing.

342 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), Thesis XIII.

343 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties." Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 52–3.

344 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason - Volume 2*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, new ed. (London: Verso Books, 2006), 407.

345 *Ibid.*, 408.

346 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 20.

Althusser blamed the young Marx for his Hegelian use of teleology for a historicism similar to Kant's, and replaced the conception of teleology with that of 'complex and non-linear time.'³⁴⁷ However, we will aim to show that Marx does not move beyond such a conception (we thus cannot agree with Althusser's claim that Marx left Hegel behind). Instead, Marx's conception of dialectic *mutated* in crucial respects. Given that Althusser does not recognise this, he does nothing to help us understand why Marx would introduce *Capital* in terms of a social organism in natural history. We must therefore show how the conception of organic totality operative in the systematic dialectic and in Marx's later works is different from (or at least not reducible to) the Kantian and Hegelian historicism criticised by Althusser.³⁴⁸ We can do so by first considering the relation between the study of historical modes of production as organic wholes and the general, or generic species horizon of natural history. As we have seen, Marx's progressivist philosophy of history is closely connected to the notion of species history. The critique of progressivism would thus seem to be accomplished by an insistence of bracketing the contemporary epoch – considered systematically – from this wider narrative, and to conceive class struggles and the possibility of communism only from a viewpoint immanent to this epoch. The end of this chapter discusses this attempt, exemplified by Chris Arthur, examining its consequences for revolutionary thought, and its difficulties with producing a concept of communist organisation and resistance beyond the Symmetry Thesis.

3. The Natural History of Modes of Production

I have already mentioned that Marx often casts the analysis of capital in the terms, relations and forms of organisation drawn from the study of nature. Importantly, both the methodology and the object of *Capital* is introduced in such terms. Indeed, in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx presents his method as analogous to chemical analysis and microscopic anatomy', as a procedure of abstraction starting with the 'economic cell form' of bourgeois society.³⁴⁹ The object of the study itself is 'the development of the economic formation of society ... as a process of natural history...'³⁵⁰

347 Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 101.

348 On the argument for the need to think totality, see appendix 4.0.

349 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 93.

350 *Ibid.*, 92.

Human history is part of natural history in a dual sense. First, the interaction between humankind and nature, what Marx would call their metabolism, *Stoffwechsel*, following the bio-chemist Justus Liebig, is itself natural-historical. Second, the history of human societies considered in themselves is natural insofar as it is determined by certain emergent laws and regularities, which are not intended by any one subject, neither individuals nor society itself. Thus, to start with the second point, this does not merely entail an understanding of society 'as a real part of natural history', as he put it in 1844,³⁵¹ but the use of the modes of relation and organisation of nature in the study of society. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels noted:

We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on [or qualify, *bedingen*] each other so long as men exist.³⁵²

The real, actual science [*wirkliche Wissenschaft*] of human beings begins with the representation [*Darstellung*] of the practical production and reproduction of life, under definite conditions. Also, in *Capital*, the inscription of the history of societies into the history of nature plays the role of casting the analysis of social developments in terms of a process realising itself behind the backs of its actors, but through their activity: 'they do this without being aware of it', as Marx puts it in the section on the fetish character of the commodity.³⁵³ Or in the more general methodological formulation of the preface to the first edition:

My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual [*den einzelnen*] responsible for relations whose [social] creature he remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.³⁵⁴

Thus the preface speaks of society as 'an *organism* capable of change, and constantly engaged in a process of change.'³⁵⁵ As we would expect from the organic metaphor this perspective is explicitly teleological, speaking about the 'economic law of motion of

351 Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 355.

352 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 17. For an argument in favour of the historicisation of the laws of nature, made from within natural science, see I Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (New York: Bantam, 1984).

353 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 166.

354 *Ibid.*, 92, translated altered.

355 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 93, my emphasis.

modern society', whose specific 'natural phases of development' cannot be skipped or removed by decree; not only is the subjective control of this organism not *actual*, it is not possible in itself, but requires the transformation of the life-process of society itself.³⁵⁶ It is from this organic teleological perspective that his study of England, as the '*locus classicus*' of the capitalist mode of production is applicable to Germany, telling the Germans: '*De te fabula narratur!* ... The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.'³⁵⁷ The law of capitalist development is, however, not a *law of nature*, but a *law in natural history*, a *specific historical form of social reproduction*:

The law of capitalist accumulation, mystified by the economists into a supposed law of nature, in fact expresses the situation that the very nature of accumulation excludes every diminution in the degree of exploitation of labour, and every rise in the price of labour, which could seriously imperil the continual reproduction, on an ever larger scale, of the capital-relation.³⁵⁸

This law is *not* natural, but natural-historical: historical because limited in its applicability to the capitalist mode of production, natural because a condition of the reproduction of this historical mode of production. In other words, its functional necessity, its character of law, is premised in its place in the organic reproduction of this society. *It is the ultimate unity of natural history and history – or the fact that human nature is defined by its having changing modes of production – which legitimates the application of forms from the domain of natural history ('organism', 'evolution', 'metabolism', etc.) in the study of societies.*

One of the most sophisticated Marxist approaches to the dialectic between history and nature has been proposed by Alfred Schmidt.³⁵⁹ In his account, Schmidt points out that Marx consistently considered the study of history (and its relation to nature) to be a part of natural history and warned against an abstract fundamental ontology of matter (like the one later proposed by Engels in *The Dialectics of Nature*, but also, we might add, the non-dialectical ontology of Althusser in *The Philosophy of the Encounter*)³⁶⁰. Marx and Engels write that 'the celebrated “unity of man with nature” has always existed in

356 Ibid., 92.

357 Ibid., 90–91.

358 Ibid., 772.

359 Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 32.

360 Ibid., 43–45 and 35 respectively. On Dialectical and Historical Materialism, see appendix 4.1. and 4.2.

industry and has existed in varying forms in every epoch according to the lesser or greater development of industry.³⁶¹ Schmidt stresses that Marx rejected the separation between history and nature, or rather insisted on their dialectical co-constitution as a part of the common process of Nature, 'conceived in its widest sense as the total reality comprising both moments.'³⁶² In both the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes nature as the 'inorganic' body of mankind:

Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuous dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.³⁶³

... and, as such a member [of a community], he relates to a specific nature (say, here, still earth, land, soil) as his own inorganic being, as a condition of his production and reproduction.³⁶⁴

In his later works Marx began to describe this process, the human interaction with nature, as 'metabolism' [*Stoffwechsel*]:

Different use values contain very different proportions of labour and natural products, but use value always comprises a natural element. As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society. On the other hand, the labour which posits exchange value is a specific social form of labour.³⁶⁵

The relation to nature is an invariable of the history of economic formations, but one that is realised differently, in specific socio-historical forms. If the relation is itself transhistorical, it is so in a fully undetermined fashion; its determination is always and immediately historical. *The German Ideology* suggests that the human species is transhistorically characterised by this relation, that the beginning of history as the

361 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 28.

362 Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, 16.

363 Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 328.

364 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rrough Draft)*, The Pelican Marx Library (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 489.

365 Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," 278.

production of humankind's own means of subsistence produces this gap and thus both nature and history at once. In this perspective the natural history of the species might appear as a linear progression of the generic (the species, or genus, *Gattung*) through different social-organic forms, i.e. different modes of production.³⁶⁶ To disentangle the relation between the generic (the universal *Gattung*) and the specific (the particular social formation, or 'organism'), it is useful to contrast Marx's views to those of Hegel and Darwin who both influenced his concept of nature.

In a recent survey of the use of organic models or metaphors in Marx, Arno Wouters shows that Marx's conception of social organisation hinges on the same concept of *Organisation* developed by his contemporary Karl Ernst von Baer, an embryologist and founder of *Teleomechanical Biology*.³⁶⁷ Wouters argues that the similarities between Marx's and Darwin's methods are relatively superficial and convincingly demonstrates that the centrality of concepts of organic organisation in Marx's study of social formations is drawn from the tradition starting with Kant's reintroduction of the Aristotelian notion of the intrinsic teleologies of organisms in the *Critique of Judgement*³⁶⁸ rather than from Darwin. However, there is one crucial omission from Wouters' otherwise extensively researched article: Hegel.³⁶⁹ This omission means that he misses the direct influence of Hegel's concept of organism on Marx, and underestimates the importance of Darwin for Marx. Very briefly put: whereas Hegel rejects the notion of a history of nature, including evolution, Marx emphatically agrees with the natural historical perspective drawn from Darwin, whose work he considers as a proof in natural science that history does not proceed in a universal teleology, but through struggle. Thus he wrote to Lasalle, January 1861:

Darwin's work is most important and suits my purpose in that it provides a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle. One does, of course, have to put up with the clumsy English style of argument. Despite all shortcomings, it is here that, for the first time, 'teleology' in natural science is not only dealt a mortal blow but its rational meaning is empirically

366 For a discussion of Marx's conception of the relationship between the human species and nature in ecological terms, see John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, "The Dialectic of Organic/Inorganic Relations Marx and the Hegelian Philosophy of Nature," *Organization & Environment* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2000),: 403–425.

367 Arno Wouters, 'Marx's Embryology of Society', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 23, no.2 (1993); 149–179.

368 On Kant's theory of 'natural ends', see appendix 4.3.

369 For a comparison of Hegel's and Kant's concepts of the organism, see Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel Freedom, Truth and History*, 2nd Edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 162.

explained.³⁷⁰

Indeed, as in Darwin's work, teleology only appears retrospectively, as the result of struggles. However, unlike in Darwin, each historical formation is defined by its own particular mode of antagonism, its legal and institutional apparatus and so many failing attempts to stabilise the antagonism and exploit the antagonistic part.³⁷¹ Marx had already in 1847 noted this.³⁷² Moving beyond providential development, or the idea that essences pre-exist their realisation, Marx's theory retains the rational content of Hegelian natural teleology: a process of emergent self-positing self-organisation, starting from exteriority. It emerges when a "chemical" process (which is self-organised in the sense that the combination is given with the properties of the elements themselves and no external principle) flips back on itself and becomes self-reproductive. But unlike Hegel, Marx insists that nature has a history, and cannot be comprehended without attending to its struggles and openness. Marx is not proposing that history is chaotic or radically contingent, however. Rather, each epoch is organised around its own specific lines of antagonism; this is the basis of the structure of any social formation. Insofar as antagonism is fundamental, any attempt to mediate it results in contradictions, internal contradictions which permeate the whole. Or, perhaps we better phrase this reversely: it is precisely because antagonism is not dissolved but mediated, that it remains. This fundamental problem is thus both explanatory of and explained by the whole. If Marx was in agreement with Darwin's historical and conflictual approach to nature, he was closer to Hegel in his adoption of the thesis of the *internal* contradiction of social wholes.

4. Organism: Necessity of Contingency and Crisis

When it comes to the analysis of capital, as we have seen, Marx's perspective is resolutely 'organic' within a universal, natural-historical frame. We might say that this functions as a transcendental horizon in Marx, which functions as a condition of the intelligibility of historical specificity. Marx was, as we have seen in chapter 1, familiar

370 Marx to Lassalle, 16 January 1861 in Karl Marx, *MECW - Marx and Engels: 1860-64*, vol. 41 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 246. Here Marx seems to lift the description of Darwin directly from a letter he received from Engels one year prior. Engels to Marx, 11 or 12 December 1859 in Karl Marx, *MECW - Marx and Engels: 1856-59*, vol. 40 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 550.

371 In a letter to Engels Marx notes that Darwin's struggle for existence is Hegel's civil society and Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* in the animal kingdom. 18 June 1862 *MECW 41*, 41:381.

372 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans. H. Quelch, new ed. (Prometheus Books UK, 1995), 132.

with Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. Contrary to the old misunderstanding of Hegel as a thinker of harmony and necessity, it is from him that Marx takes the notion that organic structures, while self-organised wholes, are *not* homeostatically balanced and whole, but contradictory for the reason that they organise within themselves forces that might break free. In his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel theorises the organism in the following terms: 'these (elementary powers of objectivity) are ... continuously ready to jump to begin their process within the organic body, and life is the constant fight against such a possibility.'³⁷³ It is for this reason that the very notion of an organic structure entails contingency and the possibility of crises. Crises entail the necessary 'excretion' of sweat in fever, for instance; but excretion is a symptom, which does not secrete the disease itself.³⁷⁴ We must note here, that this conception is strictly speaking not ecological, but relates to the inner organisation of an organism rather than to its environment.

The Marx that Wouters reconstructs so elaborately, on the other hand, is one without notions of contradiction, contingency or crisis. All this serves to position materialist dialectics as the problematisation proper to a system which, while reproducing itself organically, is always shot through with the struggles of matter. And in fact, in the postface to the second edition of *Capital* Marx stresses the centrality of the concepts of contradiction and crisis to his method: the dialectic of *Capital* distinguishes itself from the 'mystified form' fashionable in Germany, in that it recognises 'the contradictions inherent in the movement of capitalist society ... the summit of which is the general crisis. ... [T]he universality of its theatre and the intensity of its action', he finishes, 'will drum dialectics even into the heads of the mushroom-upstarts of the new, holy Prusso-German empire.'³⁷⁵

Thus for Marx, *rational* dialectics are dialectics which recognise and are proven by the contingency, contradiction and *crisis* of the existing order. Crisis is a possibility because, even though an organism must be conceived in terms of its inner structure of necessitation, this necessity is not absolute, but merely a concept of what mediations and exchanges, flows and productions are necessary for the organism to reproduce itself. It is precisely the contradiction between a structure of necessitation and the contingency it cannot abolish that produces the possibility of crisis. For instance, for

373 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the "Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences" with the Zusätze: Part 1*, ed. Theodore Geraets and et al (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, Inc, 1992), 293, §219 add., translation amended.

374 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, Vol. 1 III, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 201.

375 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 103.

capitalist reproduction to happen, it is necessary that the commodities produced are sold, that their value content is realised, that there is an effective demand. Because buyers and sellers are separated, there is no guarantee that the latter will find a consumer for their product or the former a commodity to fulfil their need. While money mediates exchange by avoiding the necessity for a direct meeting of buyer and seller, this mediation also *deepens* the separation of the two by dissociating the acts of purchase and sale of commodities in time and space.

[T]he exchange of commodities implies contradictory and mutually exclusive conditions. The further development of the commodity does not abolish these contradictions, but rather provides the form within which they have room to move. ... In so far as the process of exchange transfers commodities from hands in which they are non-use-values to hands in which they are use-values, it is a process of social metabolism.³⁷⁶

The interruption of this process of circulation – the fundamental form of capitalist crisis – is thus not only a crisis of the realisation of capital (i.e. the sale of a commodity above, or minimally at its value), but a metabolic crisis of the social organism.

To say that these mutually independent and antithetical processes form an internal unity is to say also that their internal unity moves forward through external antitheses. These two processes lack internal independence because they complement each other. Hence, if the assertion of their external independence [*äusserliche Verselbständigung*] proceeds to a certain critical point, their unity violently makes itself felt by producing – a crisis.³⁷⁷

Thus, even though sale and purchase are thus organically related, they do not necessarily coincide, they are indeed temporally and spatially antithetical. Yet the two cannot separate, cannot become truly independent; they mutually rely on each other. 'Crisis is nothing but the forcible assertion of the unity of phases of the production process which have become independent of each other.'³⁷⁸ Or as Marx says, '[t]he most abstract form of crisis (and therefore the formal possibility of crisis) is thus the metamorphosis of the commodity itself.'³⁷⁹

376 Ibid., 198.

377 Ibid., 209.

378 Karl Marx, "Theories of Surplus-Value," in *MECW*, vol. 32 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 140.

379 Ibid.

The metamorphosis of commodities relies not only on money, but on a set of juridical relations and other basic conditions generally guaranteed by the state – particularly the enforcement of contract and the guarantee of the currency of national monies.³⁸⁰ However, as these are empirical conditions of the possibility of the actual capitalist mode of production (not *logic* conditions), we shall focus with Marx on the abstract form of this mode of production, the practices that sustain or perform these abstractions, and the methodological and epistemological consequences of these abstractions. The concrete organic system of capitalism is thus based in the everyday acts of practical or real abstraction in commodity exchange, which in turn are based on a continued separation between buyers and sellers.³⁸¹

Hence the magic of money. Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way. Their own relations of production therefore assume a material shame which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action.³⁸²

If bourgeois society is an organism it is one that is highly abstract; it does not consist of the immediate concrete relations between individuals, rather this society is the structure of abstractions (the commodity-form, money-form, value-form, wage-form, capital form, etc.) that mediates the practical abstractions through which individuals reproduce themselves as atomised. Capital can thus be seen as a system of abstractions which is reproduced behind the back of individuals. Capital is therefore not an ordinary organism. It is not a self-reproducing life sustaining itself in an ecology. Its teleology is not concrete and biological but historical and abstract. In Kantian terms, capital does not operate as a ‘self-organised being’ according to its own ‘intrinsic’ or ‘natural’ telos, but according to an extrinsic or final goal. Tellingly Kant chooses the logic of rent/profit and investment/speculation to exemplify such teleology:

a house is certainly the cause of the money that is received as rent, but yet, conversely, the representation of this possible income was the cause of the building of the house. A causal nexus of this kind is termed that of final causes (*nexus finalis*).³⁸³

380 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 178, 222–226.

381 I will return to the problem of real abstraction as an effect of commodity exchange, drawn from Alfred Sohn-Rethel, in the next chapter. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, “Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology” (London: Macmillan, 1976).

382 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 187.

383 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §63, p.196 and §65, p.200.

Capital, in Marx's theorisation, is centred *and driven by a final end*: its teleological mission is its *expanded* self-reproduction – M-C-M', or *money makes more money* – which requires the exploitation of bodies, and the violent conversion of any ecology into an objectified environment, either into an externality or a resource. Capital's subsumption of other bodies displays an abstract striving, a super-sensible and thus insatiable hunger, which demands the blood and the flesh of bodies, the lives and materials of the world. Capital is not a final teleology that has 'taken possession' of a social organism, it is the very organisation of that organism itself. Yet it pursues its goal at any cost to the lives which produce it and measuring everything according to its abstract credo. Capital, in these abstract terms, is an automaton positing itself in total disregard for any intrinsic telos (any life, project or desire) it cannot render productive for itself and any ecology it cannot carve up and commodify, colonise and privatise.

.....

Marx thus inscribes the social wholes into the natural history of societies. Does this entail, however, a narrative of progressive development of human societies 'through' history, in which the struggles of one epoch naturally lead to a crisis, whereby one form of society develops into the next? In other words, does this entail a teleology through which humanity is the substance going through these changes? In a rejection of such a reading, proponents of the so-called 'Systematic Dialectics'-approach³⁸⁴, have recently argued that Marx and Hegel's dialectics are mainly 'concerned with the articulation of categories designed to conceptualise an existent concrete whole' rather than a 'historical dialectic.'³⁸⁵ The Systematic Dialectics-approach is concerned with the structures of a whole in its 'synchronic', or rather synchronizing, expansive organic reproduction. As we will see, this reading is closely aligned with the method of the later Marx; it is important in that it does not reject Marx's later continued use of the concept of species history or social wholes, but instead follows his more historically sensitive reformulation of these problems outside the remit of any classical philosophy of a

384 Alternative names given to this set of new – i.e. post 1989 – dialectical reinterpretations of Marx, include 'the New Dialectic' and 'New Hegelian Marxism'. These draw a great deal on a dominant Marxist interpretation in the 1970s, the so-called *Neue Marx Lektüre*. See Christopher J. Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1. Roberto Fineschi, "Dialectic of the Commodity and Its Exposition: The German Debate in the 70s: a Personal Survey," in *Re-reading Marx - New Perspectives after the Critical Edition*, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi (New York: Macmillan, 2009). Other contemporary authors writing in this tradition include Moishe Postone, Patrick Murrey and Geert Reuten.

385 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 4.

history or organicist conception of society.

5. From Dialectical Reason to Systematic Dialectics

We will now establish the connection between dialectics and real teleology in order to account for the argument that a *systematic dialectic* is needed to orientate ourselves in capitalist actuality.

Different notions of totality are at play in the relation between the history of the natural history of the species and that of modes of production; by implication this gives us different methods as well as different theorisations of history in terms of totality. First, there is the issue of a history which diachronically and synchronically involves many modes of production, and, perhaps, floating disorganised elements. Secondly, there is the totality of a mode of production, as the 'idealisation of a manifold', i.e. as an organic teleology, self-positing, self-reproductive. The former opens the question of the totality or set of all totalities: either a substantial non-subjective 'totality' of elements external to one another, like Spinoza's '*Deus, sive Natura*', or the Hegelian *speculative, subjective* unity of a teleology of teleologies.³⁸⁶ Hegel's thesis challenges the formulation of the Spinozist notion of substance in a similar way that he challenged the principle of atomism (cf. chapter 1). While Hegel accepts the notion of physical nature as a non-totalised multiplicity, he insists that this *concept* of Nature is impossible without Spirit, and that Spirit must be shown to have arisen from the interiorisation of this nature itself, the comprehension of which is only possible retrospectively as the Spirit's recognition of itself in exteriority.³⁸⁷ The *Philosophy of Nature* starts with this exteriority of the Spirit to itself in an abstract substantial nature without teleology, but proceeds to teleology, particularly in relation to the concept of organic life, following Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.³⁸⁸

While Marx, of course, shows little interest in this debate over the philosophical concept of God, his approach is interesting in that it rests neither on a purely immanentist rejection of the reality of teleology, nor on the stereotypical image of the

386 Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (New York: Hafner Press, 1949); Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969. For a discussion on Hegel's critique that Spinoza's substance 'lacks the principle of personality' or subjectivity, see Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 13–19.

387 Note here the famous transition from the *Encyclopedia Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature*, whereby the former grounds the latter.

388 On the difference of Hegel's notion of intrinsic teleologies, see appendix 4.3.

Hegelian reduction and subsumption of the differences of the world to the great teleology of the Spirit.³⁸⁹ Instead, he tries to hold up both images at once. In doing so, we might see him adopting Hegel's more circumscribed perspective on nature both as the existence of elements in their exteriority, treated by *the Understanding*, and as actuality of great many teleologies (natural and historical) in their interiority, grasped through dialectical reason.³⁹⁰ Whereas the Understanding treats things as exterior to itself and each other, as things, '*Dialectical*' or '*Negative*' Reason includes within itself the perspective of the movement and self-reflexivity of the thing. It is the '*immanent transcending* [*immanente Herausgehen*], in which the one-sidedness and restrictiveness of the determinations of the understanding displays itself as what it is, i.e., as their negation.' As thus it is 'the principle through which alone *immanent coherence and necessity* enter into the content of science...'³⁹¹ As Sartre states in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*:

If dialectical Reason exists, then, from the ontological point of view, it can only be a developing totalisation, occurring where the totalisation occurs, and, from the epistemological point of view, it can only be the accessibility of that totalisation to a knowledge which is itself, in principle, totalising in its procedures.³⁹²

The theoretical orientation toward totality must therefore be understood not as a pure need of reason, but as an *imposed* need by the developing totalisation in which theoreticians – be it Marx or Silesian proletarians – find themselves. The two perspectives on dialectical Reason, one 'ontological' the other 'epistemological', pose here the *ideal* of an orientation in which they coincide, and their split: orientation is precisely needed because these perspectives do not coincide.³⁹³ If Kantian *critique* is the

389 Hegel is careful to insist that nature is irreducible to conceptual thought. 'As thoughts invade the limitless multiformity of nature, its richness is impoverished, its springtimes die, and there is a fading in the play of its colours. That which in nature was noisy with life, falls silent in the quietude of thought; its warm abundance, which shaped itself into a thousand intriguing wonders, withers into arid forms and shapeless generalities, which resemble a dull northern fog. ... By thinking things, we transform them into something universal; things are singularities however, and the lion in general does not exist.' Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I*, 198.

390 For an explication of the difference between *the Understanding*, *Dialectical Reason* and *Speculative Reason*, see Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 125–34, sections 79–82.

391 *Ibid.*, 128, §81.

392 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason - Volume 1*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, new ed. (London: Verso Books, 2004), 47.

393 Perhaps the quintessential concept of this coincidence is given by Hegel: 'The absolute Idea has shown itself to be the identity of the theoretical and the practical idea.' Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. (Miller Trans.), 824.

study of the conditions of possibility of a given object, dialectics is the form of critique appropriate to an immanent totalisation, a process which posits itself and whose elements mutually presuppose one another, that is to say a process which is, in short, 'organic' or 'teleological'.¹³⁹⁴

The idea of a systematic as opposed to historical dialectic can be understood as an answer to and a defence against the Althusserian attack on the historicism and economism of Hegel-inspired readings of Marx, as well as an internal critique of the old Hegelian Marxist of the *philosophy of history* as such, which had gone into disrepute through the experiences of the world-wars and Stalinism. As such, it was an attack on the uniform interpretation of history according to general transhistorical trends, but an attack carried out from the standpoint of a basic faithfulness to dialectics. Thus, unlike Althusser's proposal of structural causality which eliminates the subjective unification of history ('history as a process without a subject'), the systematic dialectics approach theorises history in terms of the figure of a subject in history, but limits it to the capitalist epoch. In *Capital* the abstract and impersonal power of capital is itself an historical actor, a self-developing, automatic subject. Its value form is 'the dominant [*übergreifendes*] subject of this process'.¹³⁹⁵ It is important to note, however, that these two conceptions are not mutually exclusive. Capital as a subjective force in history might be taken as a regional subject within the overall process of history, which has *no* subject. This is indeed the route we will take.

If the research programme of systematic dialectics is limited to the historical epoch, this limitation functions precisely through the positing of capitalism as a real subject, whose history can be understood, retrospectively, as the unfolding of its essence. The negation of the historical dialectic in favour of a systematic dialectic situates us within a given organic whole, and allows us to study the systematic, reproductive relations between its parts.³⁹⁶ Historical interpretation, for Chris Arthur, itself becomes 'irrelevant' to the study of totalities and their reproduction, understood as the '*circuit* of reproduction of these moments by each other'.¹³⁹⁷ He follows here Marx's strict insistence on the priority

394 The dialectic is critical insofar as it inquires into conditions of an existing object. However, unlike the Kantian critique which aims at providing the *transcendental* conditions of the possibility of an object whose existence is taken for granted, the Hegelian dialectic is interested in the inner conditions of necessitation of the object itself.

395 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 255.

396 'If the dialectic as inquiry is the search for internal relations within and between abstracted units, the dialectic as exposition is Marx's means of expounding these relations to his readers.' Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 65.

397 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 64.

of the being over capital over its historical becoming, and that the starting point of any cognition lies in the orientation vis-a-vis actuality, indeed that any orientation is also an effect of actuality:

In the succession of the economic categories, as in any other historical, social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject – here, modern bourgeois society – is always what is given in the head as well as reality [*der Wirklichkeit*]...³⁹⁸

This reality must be considered in terms of actual organisation and production, rather than its history. In bourgeois society *capital* is the 'all-dominating power.'

It would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.³⁹⁹

Any object of study which is a totality requires such a systematic method, which in turn will allow insight into 'the *necessity* of certain forms and laws of movement of the whole under consideration.'⁴⁰⁰ This systematic, and contradictory character of capital is what gives it its specific dynamics and tendencies, a temporality which is its own, irreducible to natural history. Pace Althusser, the 'essential section' of capital is valid because this essential conflict is what makes capital appear, with necessity, as an abstract subject.

If there is no dialectic of history as such, but only of specific historical modes of production, at the very least the capitalist one, does that entail a total negation of natural history? Does that, qua the thesis of the co-constitution of real totalisation and the knowledge of that totalisation, entail a thesis that each epoch is only truly comprehensible to itself? And does this throw us back to a kind of radical historical solipsism limited to the interiority of capital?

398 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 107.

399 Ibid.

400 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 64.

6. Retrospective History and Abstraction

The 'Introduction' which Marx drafted in September 1857, and which was later published with the notebooks known as the *Grundrisse*, contains what is perhaps Marx's clearest subordination of species-history to the history of modes of production. Criticizing the ahistorical methodology of classical bourgeois economics, particularly the Robinsonades of the eighteenth century, and the abstract applications in economics of categories such as production, consumption, labour, etc. Marx's main argument was that

[t]here are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called *general preconditions* of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped.⁴⁰¹

In this sense we can say that the reproduction of the species – from the moment it began producing its own means of subsistence – is the *problem* to which different means of production are solutions; a problem which only exists through its solutions (the problem arises retrospectively from the first solution; the absence of a solution would mean extinction or a becoming-animal of the species). This brings us to the specific histories of different modes of (re)production, or different historical epochs in their internal temporalisations. History is thus not a universal temporal 'within which', but on the one hand the 'substantial' time of the species and on the other the 'subjective' time of always finite modes of (re)production. But these modes of production work retrospectively as the conditions of the retrospective cognition of species history, precisely because they are part of a developing history:

Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the economy of ancient, etc. But not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society.⁴⁰²

This is not, however, a traditional teleological narrative of the progress of the species. This developing history is only understood through 'rational abstractions' such as

401 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 88.

402 *Ibid.*, 105.

production in general.⁴⁰³ But such abstractions have not been cognitively possible throughout history and have only become so in a particular mode of production. Thus the abstractions 'production' and 'labour', which are indifferent to the specificity of different productive activities, presuppose

a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer pre-dominant. As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form only.⁴⁰⁴

But Marx is quick to point out that this is not just a matter of the concepts being the mental product of the concrete totality of labours. Rather, this indifference in thought corresponds to the real indifference towards the specificity of labours, when labour 'in reality [*in der Wirklichkeit*] has ... become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form.' Such has only become the reality in the most developed bourgeois society, the United States, only here has the abstraction of the category 'labour' become 'true in practice.'

The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which express an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.⁴⁰⁵

The theorisation of the universal history of humankind is thus only possible from the point of the bourgeois mode of production, in which for the first time the abstractions necessary for grasping species history in its manifold differences and specificities becomes practically effective on a social scale, become *actual*.⁴⁰⁶ This has two related implications: First, it forces us to recognise the historicity of the transcendental framework of history; the universal history of the species, while a transcendental condition of historical knowledge is itself conditioned by the real abstractions of capitalism. Second, the fact that the general concepts of the analysis of capital are

403 Ibid., 85. 'All production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society'. Ibid., 87.

404 Ibid., 104.

405 Ibid., 105.

406 Marx distinguishes between the 'barbarians who are fit by nature to be used for anything, and civilised people who apply themselves to anything.'. The racism of this remark is not just Marx's, nor only ascribable to the narrative of progress, but a feature of the capitalist mode of production's relation to 'less developed' societies. Ibid.

concepts of a systematic dialectic means that the concepts of this analysis can only be used in relation to other (past or contemporary) modes of production by ridding these concepts of their theoretical determinacy, or, if possibly, by constructing them anew. For Marx, history can be narrated *retrospectively* as a history of potentialities, cognizable only in their actualisation, yet always very real. Thus the categories made possible by bourgeois society are still valid – but only abstractly – for previous epochs; the historicity of the transhistorical perspective does not limit historical cognition absolutely. In the words of the 1857 Introduction, the example of abstract labour

shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity – precisely because of their abstractness – for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.⁴⁰⁷

Marx's organic conception of bourgeois society, as we saw above, is conceived in terms of a natural history, but as a history of *second* nature folding back on and reworking first nature. Here it is important to distinguish Marx's approach from vulgar evolutionary narratives of the Enlightenment variety, according to which history can be read prospectively as the development and unfolding of a pre-given essence. Against this, Marx's evolution is, as in Darwin, *retrospective*. It is only retrospectively that history can be interpreted as an evolutionary development. No prospective laws can be predicted, except the law of antagonism, which is open to contingency. The rational meaning of teleology in history, history as a rational (i.e. intelligible, organised) development, lies in the interpretation of the past in terms of the present insofar as it is intelligible, organised, we could say 'meaningful'.

But is it possible that while *we* cannot grasp the 'real laws of development' except like the owl of Minerva, history in-itself does indeed unfold according to such laws? In the *Grundrisse*, Marx approaches a more radical position which posits the primacy of chance over necessity in history. Marx outlines the following oblique notes at the end of the 1857 Introduction:

(5) Dialectic of the concepts of productive force (means of production) and relation of production, a dialectic whose boundaries are to be determined, and which does not suspend (*aufhebt*, sublate) the real difference (*die realen*

407 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105.

Unterschied).⁴⁰⁸

So any given historical dialectical totalisation can never be total. The seventh point in Marx's note to self breaks open what otherwise appears as a closed circle of the essential (i.e. necessary, yet contradictory) unity of forces and relations of production. 'This conception appears as necessary development. But legitimation of chance.'⁴⁰⁹ The historical process leading to the necessity of this relation, this interdependence, is, considered prospectively, ruled by chance; the future of the past was not predictable, not a causal result of past events. Thus, the possibility of progressive history lies with the models used to interpret history, models that have themselves emerged through historical struggle. In other words, the logic of an unfolding system and its inner necessities (i.e. a real teleology) cannot account for the emergence of that system, and its constituent parts, nor for its own becoming through chance. For this reason, the explanation of past events cannot be folded over to become a guide to the future. History can only orientate us in the sense that it allows us to understand the historical emergence of the problems around which the present is organised. While giving no guidelines to action, it can nevertheless help us understand the conditions and the structure of the openness of the present, by connecting the antagonisms and crises of the present with epochal problems and the structures maintaining and ameliorating them.

When the study of history is limited to the interiority of capitalist mode of production, this does not mean that historical species teleology is eliminated, but rather that it is rendered retrospective and secondary. Furthermore, the real teleology of capital in the present posits once more the problem of how theory orientates revolutionary practice. The classical dialectical Marxist approach has been that such orientation would still be fully immanent to the historical process of capital, but stressing the 'bad side' of this dialectic, and the openness of history given by the notions of contradiction and crisis. The next section will aim to show that the limitation of theory to systematic dialectics entails, when it comes to the orientation of revolutionary practice, a reintroduction of the historical dialectic, only this time as a *projection*.

408 Ibid., 109.

409 Ibid.

7. Transitions Between Modes of Production

We have seen that the systematic study of bourgeois society in 'organic' terms does not entail a progressivist philosophy of history, but rather a self-reflexive theory of the retrospective nature of the knowledge of history. However, this does not bring us outside the remit of the Symmetry Thesis' reduction of historically relevant struggles to those of capital and labour. Here we will see how the classical Marxian conception of revolution is based on the Symmetry Thesis, and how the rejection of this thesis produces a purely formal understanding of transitions between modes of production.

In a chapter towards the end of *Capital* on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', Marx outlines the passage from the beginning of capital to its end, from its pre-history to its post-history. Insofar as the systematic dialectic is taken as proper only of capital, this chapter provides a kind of historical frame of the historical boundaries not only of capital, but of the validity of the systematic dialectic. Marx's projection of the end of capital followed, in broad outlines, the one developed 20 years earlier (cf. chapter 3): a communist revolution becomes possible as a result of the increasing concentration of capital and the deepening proletarianisation of the masses of society:

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production.⁴¹⁰

Like in the *Manifesto*, Marx does not suggest that degradation will itself lead to revolution, but that revolution can only come from the organisation of the proletariat as a class, which becomes possible through its relation with capital. The introduction of machinery makes the livelihoods of the proletarians ever more precarious, and their organised power makes them ever more capable of overthrowing capital. Similarly, in the *Manifesto*, the revolutionary implications of Marx and Engels' sketch of capitalist crisis and immiseration is premised on the existence of workers' combinations (trade unions), clubs and permanent associations, as we saw in the previous chapter.⁴¹¹ The

410 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

411 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 116–17.

reformist philosophy of progress of the social-democrats, which projected that increases in capitalist productivity would allow working-class wages to rise without necessitating revolution, also relied, unknowingly or not, on the organised strength of the global working classes, revolutionary or otherwise.⁴¹²

In chapter 32 of *Capital*, the workers' movement, even if it is *a sine qua non* in Marx's sketch of a revolutionary epoch-making transformation, is mentioned merely in passing. The real and combative existence of this movement was too powerful to be forgotten by the contemporary reader. Today, after the belief in the Symmetry Thesis, the references to the working class 'united and organized' by capital, can be easily glanced over. We are left with a purely schematic presentation of transition: 'the expropriators are expropriated ... capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation.'⁴¹³ In the passages just before this future transition beyond capitalism, as Étienne Balibar points out, Marx presents the past transition to the capitalist mode of production. Both are presented as homologous in terms of the dialectical logic of the negation of the negation. In Balibar's summary:

First transition: from the individual private ownership of the means of production, based on personal labour ('the pygmy property of the many') to capitalist private ownership of the means of production, based on the exploitation of the labour of others ('the huge property of the few'). First transition, first expropriation. Second transition: from capitalist ownership to individual ownership,⁴¹⁴ based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era, on co-operation and the common possession of all the means of production, including the land. Second transition, second expropriation. These two successive negations are of the same form, which implies that all the analyses Marx devoted to primitive accumulation on the one hand (origin), to the tendency of the capitalist mode of production on the other, i.e., to its historical future, are similar in principle.⁴¹⁵

It would seem that capital negates pre-capitalist modes of production, and that socialism negates the capitalist mode of production in a simple historical dialectic; as such this

412 This optimism was pithily criticised by Walter Benjamin: 'Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", thesis XI.

413 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

414 Ibid.

415 Étienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 274–75.

negation of the negation takes us back to pre-capitalist ownership while incorporating the gains of capitalism. We have seen that dialectical contradiction always has a common element, that the dialectic presents us with a unified process. So does this mean that we are dealing with a transhistorical perspective which sees before, during and after capitalism under one perspective, that of the transition between modes of production considered as a part of species history? No, as Balibar, and less explicitly so Chris Arthur,⁴¹⁶ point out that this homology conceals how the substantial analysis of primitive accumulation presents us with a history of the transition to capitalism which is a discontinuous, contingent, violent and organising political process. The schematic reading of the transition *to* capitalism in chapter 32 is totally bloodless and schematic, unless one remembers the chapters on primitive accumulation preceding it, which we will revisit in our chapter 5.

It seems that the material, historical logic of either transition is violent, political, contingent and organising. Only from the standpoint of the result – capitalism or socialism – can transition be considered in terms of the dialectics of the negation of the negation. What is then lost when one assumes, as Chris Arthur does, the strict priority of the systematic dialectic of capital, with the commendable intention of escaping the philosophy of history? For Arthur the homology of the two transitions contains an 'abandonment of the historical perspective, and the problematic of causal genesis in favour of the question of 'the ground of the system's self-production.'⁴¹⁷ For Balibar,

the analysis of the historical tendency of the capitalist mode of production seems to be one moment of the analysis of the capitalist mode of production, a development of the intrinsic effects of the structure. It is this last analysis which suggests that the (capitalist) mode of production is transformed 'by itself', through the play of its own peculiar 'contradiction', i.e., through its structure.⁴¹⁸

Arthur stresses that the question of transition is secondary to the critique of capitalism as a '*self*-subsistent' and '*self*-reproducing totality'.⁴¹⁹ In Arthur's strictly system-immanent perspective this becomes the unity of a substance which is essentially contradictory. For him the transition to socialism is not a matter 'of returning to an

416 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 116.

417 Ibid.

418 Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," 275.

419 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 118.

original Golden Age, but of liberating an interior moment within the capitalist moment.⁴²⁰ This liberation is based on the contradictory developments of capital itself, which does not mean that this liberation proceeds as a law-like consequence of this development.⁴²¹ Arthur again brackets the past, and posits the future in the light of the present. While usefully orientating us away from nostalgic imaginaries and the philosophy of history, his logical opposition between the capitalist mode of production and pre-capitalist modes of production cannot be temporalised. Once posed in historical terms, we have a sterile periodisation, which has no concept of what matters for political practices of resistance and revolution: violence, contingency, organisation.

Thus it seems that the systematic dialectical critique of the capitalist mode of production can only produce merely *formal* figures of the transition to capitalism as well as beyond it. In the absence of a theory and method that can deal with the contingencies produced by misery and workers' competition, a method of combination and organisation, historical change appears either as radically *un-determined* (to the extent that the dialectical transition is taken to be merely logical) or as radically overdetermined (to the extent that the dialectical transition recognised retrospectively is taken to present the immanent logic of what really happened – or of what will have happened). The former presents us merely with a critique of reified reality. The latter reintroduces a philosophy of history, albeit one that is strictly historically situated. Both, respecting the division of labour between theory and practice, provide only orientation in objective social space, and thus only half an orientation. That other, practical side of orientation was, as seen in Marx, closely connected to the organisation of the workers' movement.

8. Break or Accelerate! The Limits to Critique Without Organisation

Perhaps the best way to describe the effect of the crisis of the Symmetry Thesis, is to describe it as the divorce between objective and subjective orientation: between the orientation in actuality and that of actualisation, in other words, between the orientation in that which is organised and the orientation of organisation. This produces a strange effect in radical theory, which, unwilling to limit itself to exposing the dialectical structure of *Capital*, still yearns to think the temporality of revolution. To think the overcoming of capitalism *without* organisation but with Marx, leaves, broadly speaking,

420 Ibid., 122.

421 Ibid., 132.

two orientations: the *via positiva* of *revolutionary accelerationism* or the *via negativa* of *messianic catastrophism*.⁴²² Both try to think the conditions of revolution on the background of what we can call the Asymmetry Thesis, which sees both capitalist organisation and disorganisation as leading to the disorganisation of workers' organisations. Here, we will leave the critique of historical teleology behind, and enter into a brief critique of the *critique* of this teleology, as it proposes itself as an orientation without organisation.

The space for revolutionary accelerationism in Marx is given by his theory that the ever faster, contradictory development of capitalism will by itself lead to a final crisis. Here we find a special teleology of the history of capitalism, i.e. one that studies the internal history of capitalism as a necessary tendency towards its own limit, and crisis. Here the contradictory character of capital itself and the ever deeper misery and negativity of the proletariat, demonstrate the openness of history towards the overcoming of the current order, even without a party or a labour movement. This teleology is very inorganic and focussed on the species. Whereas for Hegel an organism which reaches its inner limits begins its decline and then dies, revolutionary accelerationism interprets the crisis and 'death' of bourgeois society as well as the production of the *conditions* for communism as part of the same process. The reason the death of capitalism pure and simple – without the victory of the organised proletariat – can be considered revolutionary rather than catastrophic, is that accelerationism believes in the teleological development of the species, and particularly that of its technologies.

Messianic catastrophism refers to the more pessimistic position, which recognises that the deepening immiseration and sacrifice of life under capitalism will not by itself produce a revolutionary reversal, and that capitalist technology is deeply destructive and designed to discipline. Thus, rather than acceleration, a rupture is needed, an interruption of the whole process. Walter Benjamin suggests here a corrective to the overwhelmingly accelerationist Marx:

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train – namely, the human race – to activate the emergency brake.⁴²³

422 I borrow the concept of accelerationism from Benjamin Noys. Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,

423 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 402.

Whereas accelerationism thinks the transition to communism as an *Aufhebung*, the emergency break functions more on the level of an *interruption*, which opens for an *abolition* of capitalism.⁴²⁴ The logic of capital – which is also embodied subjectively and materialised in machinery – is either raised to a higher level, or totally done away with. So revolution is either – Messianically – an *evental break* with history, or its commensuration – epically – through the *acceleration* of the tendencies of history.

The basic temporal structure of this dilemma – to *break* with history or to *accelerate* it – is not merely produced, as claimed by Étienne Balibar, by the progressive, evolutionary linearity of the conception of history that accompanies it, but by the totalisation of the process of history, the interconnectedness of all parts in the process.⁴²⁵ At the same time they are both predicated on a critique of the organisational paradigm implied by the Great Symmetry Thesis, but the absence of a concept of organisation, apart from that of capital. The crisis of the previously dominant notion of organisation becomes a crisis of radical theory's ability to think organisation in general – at least as long as other modes of organisation remains invisible to it. The first step to open for another concept of organisation, would be to ask the question of multiple times. Capitalist history is not totality, but totalisation, not organised, but organising; it must be theorised as an ongoing attempt to synchronise a manifold and render it contemporaneous which entails a multiplicity of times, and potential different synchronisations and rhythms.

To question the totalisation of history means to begin to think the temporality of other processes, not to merely criticise capital for being totalising. In the exclusively *critical* or *negative* spirit of dialectical Marxism,⁴²⁶ Chris Arthur points to the existence of two 'others' of capital, yet does not seem to recognize the importance of thinking from the point of view of their irreducibility to capital.

The critical aspect of the dialectic shows that on the use value side capital faces two 'others' of itself that it cannot plausibly claim – in Hegelian fashion – to be only aspects of its own self. Its external other is Nature which capital is degrading at frightening speed thus undermining its own material basis. Its

424 Balibar describes as a central aporia of contemporary history: 'if communism is located outside history, that is to say outside class struggles, it is simply another speculative or religious myth; but if communism is simply the process of present history (or the direction of present history), it will never become real. How to break with the mainstream of history from within?' Étienne Balibar, "The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser," in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1992), 6.

425 Étienne Balibar, *Eleven Theses on Marx and Marxism* (Swedenborg Hall, London: | Backdoor Broadcasting Company, 2011), the last 10 minutes.

426 See appendix 4.4.

internal other is the proletariat, capital's own creation, which is potentially capable of overthrowing it.⁴²⁷

Insofar as non-capitalist processes – those of nature, human bodies, other modes of production – are not *thought*, we cannot even understand the total process of capital: its imposition of its own time through the constant attempt to synchronise its elements, happens through a *struggle*. The systematic dialectic, qua systematic dialectic, confronts Althusser's challenge to think the '*real residues*' of the purified exposition of capital, such as classes beyond capital and labour, the continued existence of other modes of production, and their relation to the strict capital-labour dialectic, as well as the irreducibility of living labour and nature to its capitalist subsumption, as a starting point for orientation and possibly for construction, for organisation.⁴²⁸ In his reading of the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', Balibar expressed some unease with the dialectic of transition. This leads to him positing the transition to capitalism as unfinished: the problem of the transition to capitalism is for him subordinated to a more general task to understand the synchrony than that of the mode of production itself, a synchrony 'englobing several systems and their relations.'⁴²⁹ To this effect, he quotes Lenin's remarks that there were up to five coexisting modes of production in Russia prior to the transition to socialism.⁴³⁰ While this opening to a history conceived in the terms of Spinoza rather than Hegel, is appealing, this should not lead us to a total negation of teleology or dialectics *à la Reading Capital*. Thus, as we have hinted, Althusser's critique of the 'essential section' fails to come to terms with Marx's own insistence on the 'subjective' drive of capitalism to synchronise and contemporalise its component parts, the systematic dialectic is limited to speaking of the dynamics of capitalism itself, and its unilateral subsumption of non-capital. This leaves us with an analysis which can only approach the analysis of the temporality of the whole through a conjunctural analysis starting from a situated present. The whole can, as noted by Peter Osborne, only be approached through the aggregation of

427 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 77.

428 Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 196. While Althusser does not himself take matters so far, Robert C. Young has shown the importance of Althusser's gesture in terms of opening Marxism for a reconception of the post-colonial that does not reduce world history to the history of the capitalist subject. Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1990).

429 Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," 307.

430 *Ibid.*, 308. And we could also quote Marx's remark in the 1857 'Introduction', that the bourgeois mode of production is build on the 'ruins and elements' of vanished social formations 'whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along with it.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105.

disjunctive analysis of different temporalities, but it precludes the analysis of a whole as mode of production or history; in our terms, it precludes the theorisation of real teleologies operating through contemporalising and synchronising mechanisms.⁴³¹ Althusser's complex variable time negates the possibility of thinking the temporality of the whole as whole, his procedure operates in the mode of a negative totalisation.

9. Conclusion

Insofar as practice is orientated by a theory which is exclusively focused on the interior, systematic contradictions of capitalism it cannot provide a concept of organisation beyond that of the Symmetry Thesis. As Massimo De Angelis remarks,

within traditional Marxist discourse we face a key problem in the conceptualisation of the 'outside'. It seems to me that this presents itself either as historical pre-capitalist ex ante, or a mythological revolutionary postcapitalist ex post. In the middle, there is the claustrophobic embrace of the capitalist mode of production, within which, there seems to be no outside.⁴³²

Certainly this claustrophobia was nothing but a feeling of class power, at a time when there was a strong belief that the proletariat organised in the workers' movement would already lead humanity's march to socialism. The feeling of a lack of an outside emerges only when one is no longer on a victory march. The claustrophobia of today is not merely that of Marxist discourse, but of capitalism itself. Thus, today, Kantian figures of orientation are needed for compensation, to maintain hope, as exemplified in our introduction: the communist hypothesis, the multitude, literary utopias. The reduction of the critique of capitalism to the systemic contradiction between capital and labour produces a curiously self-enclosed present in need of utopian supplements, or a faith in that the acceleration of the capitalist teleology will liberate us. This is a theory which cannot imagine any revolutionary practice which is not fully 'immanent' to the class relation. Caught in this present, the only hope comes from messianism or insurrectionist voluntarism, or a belief in the ultimately self-defeating movement of the whole (or some combination of these). However, De Angelis' 'outside' does of course exist, in the form of commoning practices resistant to capital or to proletarianisation. This is no pure outside, but rather the present viewed from the point of view of the

431 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2011), 24–5.

432 De Angelis, *The Beginning of History*, 229.

continued exteriority of power relations, the continuity of violence, contingency and the ever-renewed attempts at proletarian self-organisation.

The task is, as our final chapters will argue, not to reject the systematic dialectic, but to historicise the emergence of a impersonal social subject (to use Marx's term) that can be described in these terms, and to understand it in a determinate relation to other non-systematic logics, such as those of composition and combination, which are conditions of organisation, of emergent systems. Part II of this thesis will propose a historical, social and political reading of the central orientating logics presented in Part I, where they were presented both in ontological-natural-philosophical (atomism, organism/teleology, crisis and abjection) and in practical-political-economic terms (ethical individual, social organism and organisation, rabble and crisis). In the next chapter we will historicise the starting point of the whole movement of Part I, that is the ontology of separated elements and the problem of their being organised into society, and thus honor the demand put forward by Hegel and Marx that a theory must be able to account for its own conditions of emergence. We will do this by rereading Marx's writings on market individualism and primitive accumulation. In doing so we will be able to develop, in chapter 6, a dialectic which theorizes the emergence of the systemic interiority of bourgeois society through the historical organisation of exteriority, of separated individuals. Further, we will see how the problem of separation, once recast as a problem of proletarian reproduction, becomes related not merely to the exploitation and organisation of labour, but to the problem of the disorganisation of proletarian surplus-populations, and the need and possibility of thinking a mode of organisation that starts from the differences and separations between proletarians (chapter 7).

**PART II –
THE
THEORI
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Chapter 5. The Pre-History and Genealogy of Capital

Dialectic loves and controls history, but it has a history itself which it suffers from and which it does not control.
- Gilles Deleuze⁴³³

And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.
- Karl Marx⁴³⁴

1. Introduction: The Problem of the History and Historicity of Capital

It is something of a Marxist truism that Marx's method is distinguished from that of contemporary political economists by the historicity of its categories.⁴³⁵ However, this suggestion may not be as scandalising as Marxists hope it would; political economy knows itself to be either resolutely transhistorical or methodologically ahistorical. It either takes its categories as valid for all epochs of history, or suggests that the pre-capitalist past is resolutely and definitively past. Indeed, Marx's own retrospective theorisation ('human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape') and systematic approach seem to bring him close to these positions. Also the *differentia* cannot be Marx's insistence on the systematic dialectic characterised by the fundamental antagonism between capital and labour, given that Adam Smith and David Ricardo knew full well that labour and capital had systematically opposed interests. The difference of Marx's historicisation of the capitalist mode of production does not lie in its systematicity or in its knowledge of class antagonism, but in its suggestion that this struggle cannot be normalised, and that it has a violent beginning and end. It is in this conception of history we find a theory insisting to orientate revolutionary struggles towards a revolution against the epoch, and the set of problems that define it. But as long as theory is not revolutionary, that is, a part of the epoch's own thrust beyond itself, its standpoint needs to be that of an imaginary outside, utopia, messianic or

433 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1983), 152.

434 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 875.

435 Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, 19.

voluntaristic. The question here is to think the actuality of organising efforts that point beyond the problems of the epoch, and of which theory can become the 'mouthpiece', the function that speeds up the process of knowledge.⁴³⁶

In this chapter, we will begin to define the epochal problem of capital beyond the Symmetry Thesis. We will see that the problem is not merely that of the capitalist exploitation of the workers, but the separation of proletarians from each other. Here we are talking about the separation from means and relations of reproduction caused by primitive accumulation, rather than Michael Lebowitz's 'degree of separation between workers'.⁴³⁷ Lebowitz is interested in understanding how the rate of relative surplus-value is determined through class struggle, that is, dependent on worker's capacity to combine and capital's power to separate workers. He thus approaches the problem of proletarian separation in terms of the capital-relation. Methodologically this is expressed in the priority of totality:

Understanding capitalism as a system, as an organic whole, is precisely the concern here. What are the conditions for the reproduction of the system? For the generation of surplus-value? For the realisation of surplus-value generated?⁴³⁸

Lebowitz's important study of the political economy of the working class is here influenced by Marx's method in the critique of political economy. *Capital* book starts with the abstract form of appearance of capital, the commodity, and shows how this is the minimal active mediation, or real abstraction, upon which the whole system depends. Marx's expressed ambition is to move from the abstract – the separation between commodity owners, and the exchange mediation of this separation – to the concrete – the expanded reproduction of capital and the world-market.⁴³⁹ If we start, not with the commodity, but with the abstract existence of 'absolute paupers' for whom their relation to capital is merely 'possible', in Marx's words, a number of different actualities are given alongside the dominant mode of systemic reproduction.⁴⁴⁰ This allows us, in Part II, to approach the problem of proletarian separation as an open one, without

436 Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," 1976, 177. Karl Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 209.

437 *Beyond Capital*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 84–88; "The Politics of Assumption, the Assumption of Politics," *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 2 (2006): 29–47.

438 Michael A Lebowitz, "Trapped inside the Box? Five Questions for Ben Fine," *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 1 (May 1, 2010).

439 On the method of *Capital*, see appendix 4.5.

440 Karl Marx, MECW - Economic Works, 1861-1863, vol. 30 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 40–41.

thereby rejecting the idea of the real teleological character capital, and the importance to study capital as an organic whole. In studying the genealogy of capital, we will be able to break out of the symmetry of the capital-labour relation, and see how capital and labour are fundamentally sets of heterogeneous elements, which come into relations through a multiplicity of different encounters (exchanges), whereby they combine and become organised around the teleology of capital itself (chapters 6 and 7). Capitalist organisation is never absolute, but always provisional and 'regional', even when global. The present chapter will consist in a genealogical reading of the creation of the separations, which are the conditions for this historical combination.

This genealogy of capital, which focuses on the emergence of capitalism through trade and primitive accumulation, will allow us to historicise the use in political theory of atomism, chemism and mechanism, which we saw in Part I. Furthermore, the theorisation of the beginnings of capitalism is important in that it orientates our conception of struggle in the present, and our imaginary of what revolution might be. As we will see, historical studies of the origins of capitalism, exemplified here with reference to Jairus Banaji, tend to tell a narrative of a slow process of growth and emergence, which stresses the existence of particularly merchant capital in feudal times, whereas analyses centred more on Marx's systematic analysis of capital, tend to focus on the break between capitalism and feudalism as modes of production. Banaji poses the discussion as one between 'trajectories of accumulation' and 'transitions to capitalism.'⁴⁴¹ Our *theoretical* orientation to revolution is greatly shaped by whether we think historical change in terms of emergence or rupture. In our reading, an orientation based on the former will tend to underestimate the systemic articulation of capital, and the problem of revolution as an *epochal leap*, while the latter will tend to think revolution in formal logical terms, rather than in terms of situated struggles: this leaves us with the always-already of capitalist totality, from where revolutionary practice appears as an epochal logic of transition, quite divorced from more strategic, organisational and political logics. While Banaji's distinction is useful to us, our interest in this chapter is not the empirical historical study of the complex process through which capitalism arose, but how Marx's chapters on the beginning of capitalism might help us rethink the relation between emergence (the logics of actualisation, organisation, totalisation) and rupture (historical leaps, revolution), through the problem of violence (war, struggle,

441 Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 347–48.

force, resistance). In this and the coming chapters we will attempt to show how the historicised logics of separation, combination and organisation, can help us think both types of qualitative shifts and their determinate relations, and the contingency of the passages from separation to combination and organisation.

2. The Philosophy of *Capital* or the History of Capital?

Marx's major critique of political economy, *Capital*, presents us with three distinct starting points, one logical, one historical and one genealogical. The beginning of *Capital Volume I* takes us straight into the bourgeois mode of production, starting with the 'immense collection of commodities', as the general appearance of wealth in 'societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails.'¹⁴⁴² And it goes on to show how the elementary form of wealth – the individual commodity – consists of two contradictory sides, or is split between two relations, that of its value in use and its value in exchange. While this first chapter of *Capital* takes us directly to the abstract *logical* beginning of capital, the middle Chapters of capital present us with a *historical* narrative of the emergence of the origin of manufacture and the development of large-scale industry (ch. 13-15, *vol. I*). The final chapters of *Capital* (Part 8, i.e. ch. 28-32) present us with a pre-history and a genealogy of the creation of the conditions of both capitalist circulation and production, namely the capital relation. This last section gives us the third beginning of capital, its beginning with processes of *primitive accumulation*; it thereby gives us a narrative of the pre-history of bourgeois society. Marx's order of presentation has the effect of prioritising the system, its contradictions and laws of movement, over the contingency with which the relations between capital and labour – and indeed between proletarians among themselves – are made and unmade. Our reversal of Marx's order – starting from genealogy (ch. 5) passing on to history (ch. 6) before proceeding to the logic of capital (ch. 7) allows us to reread Marx from the point of view of the openness and struggles of the system. This will allow us to approach the question of historical transition in terms of dynamics of struggle and organisation rather than in terms of formal dialectical reversals (cf. ch.4).

Marx's account of primitive accumulation, *ursprüngliche Accumulation*, in Part 8 of *Capital Volume I*, begins with a critique of political economy's attempt to account for the genesis of its object, capital, through a theory of what Marx names '*so-called*'

442 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 125

previous accumulation.⁴⁴³ This critique is couched within a summary of the results of the preceding 25 chapters of Volume I ('We have seen how...'), focussing on the definition of capital as the production and accumulation of surplus-value, and how capital accumulation itself presupposes capitalist production, which in turn presupposes the existence and productive combination of masses of capital on the one side, and of workers on the other. The question of the genesis of capitalism is thus a question not only for political economy, but for the book, *Capital*, itself.

We might say that the chapters on primitive accumulation present us with *two* beginnings of capital. One is the pre-history of merchant and usurers capitals before the capitalist mode of production, the other is the *genealogy* of conditions of the mode of production as such. The former narrative stresses the *emergence* of capitalism out of protocapitalist exchange and trade, and the latter the beginning of capitalism as preceded by the implosion of feudal society, i.e. in terms of historical continuity and discontinuity. This prompts the question: what is the relation in Marx's *Capital* between emergent tendencies in history – such as the historical development of exchange and international trade – and the historical rupture presented in the chapters on primitive accumulation in *Capital*?

Before we enter into a reading of Marx's text, we will see how the difference between these two approaches has taken the extreme form of the opposition between philosophical and historical readings of Marx. As we have seen in chapter 4, Marx himself was well schooled in the ways of dialectical logic, and at times posed it in a definite opposition to historical studies:

In order to develop the laws of bourgeois economy ... it is not necessary to write the *real history of the relations of production*. But the correct observation and deduction of these laws, as having themselves become in history, always leads to primary equations ... which point towards a past lying *behind* this system. These indications, together with a correct grasp of the present, then also offer the key to the understanding of the past -- a work in its own right.

443 I will here follow the established standard translation (common to Aveling, Moore and Fowkes) of *Ursprüngliche* as 'primitive', even if a more literal translation would be 'original' or 'originary'. Adam Smith spoke of 'previous accumulation'. While leaving aside the issue of translation I will clarify the conceptual implications of these terms, which in my reading do not suggest a developmental history in the sense suggested by 'primitive' nor a history of origins as commonly understood, but rather a *genealogy*. For a critique of the translation 'primitive' see Sweezy in *The Transition from feudalism to Capitalism*, 17. and for a defense, see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2000), 2.

This correct view *likewise* leads at the same time to the points at which the suspension of the present form of production relations gives signs of its becoming -- foreshadowings of the future.⁴⁴⁴

Here we see, once more, Marx prioritising the study of the inner forms of necessitation of capital, as suggested by the Systematic Dialectics-approach. This tradition's care for the logical method of Marx convincingly deals with the the bulk of Volume I of *Capital*, explicating it as a logical representation of the capitalist mode of production, as a set of relations, which mutually presuppose and systematically reproduce each other, and thus, potentially go into crisis together. In this reading the interest is in understanding the *specificity of capital*, of capital *as a mode of production sui generis*.⁴⁴⁵ It would seem that Althusser's critique of Hegel here equally applies to Marx:

Hegel ... argues that every consciousness has a suppressed-conserved (*aufgehoben*) past even in its present, and a world ..., and that therefore it also has as its past *the worlds of its superseded essences*. But these past *images* of consciousness and these latent *worlds* (corresponding to the images) never affect present consciousness as *effective determinations different from itself*: these images and worlds concern it only *as echoes* (memories, phantoms of its historicity) of what it has become, that is, *as anticipations of or allusions to itself*.⁴⁴⁶

Is the idea of primitive accumulation as a historical rupture between modes of production,⁴⁴⁷ an example of such historical narcissism? The only way to avoid such a conclusion is to show how this narcissism is produced by the temporal structure of capital itself, rather than the theory that describes it. Capital, just as its systematic critique, closes around the interiority of its own epochal present. It sees the past and future of this present purely in terms of a *break, a historical rupture*. However, as we will see, the chapter on primitive accumulation breaks with this complicity between interiority and the break.

A very different interest to the philosopher's – one sceptical to the positing of a break but interested in the question of systems – is that of the historiography of socio-

444 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rrough Draft)*, The Pelican Marx Library (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 461.

445 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1035.

446 Althusser, *For Marx*, 101.

447 See chapter 4.

economic systems, shared by Marxists, and often influenced by Braudel and the Annales School.⁴⁴⁸ These approaches try to combine the study of empirical history (what Marx calls 'a work in its own right') with the study of the laws of the present. This historiography aims at the comprehensive understanding of capitalism from its smallest beginnings in (to pick Marx's own contested example) early renaissance (or late medieval) Genoa and Venice. Here, the existence of capitalist development prior to the period of primitive accumulation is stressed, and if quantitative changes lead to qualitative shifts this is rarely interpreted as historical *breaks*, or leaps, but in terms of emergence, looking for the roots of capitalist development in feudal society. As Ernest Mandel writes in his introduction to *Capital Volume I*: 'the capitalist mode of production emerge[s] *historically* from the growth of commodity production.'⁴⁴⁹ In short, the question is conceived in terms of the transition between different modes of production, or systems, *considered as a historical process*.⁴⁵⁰

Jairus Banaji's historical approach also prioritises emergence, but he is fiercely critical of the 'scholasticism' of the focus on the 'capitalist mode of production' drawing on the Marxian definition of capitalism in terms of the dominance of industrial capital, and the transition from feudalism.⁴⁵¹ Instead, Banaji focuses on the existence of merchant capital before industrial capital, and sees the emergence of industrial capitalism as a part of the trajectory of accumulation of merchant capitals, who simply began to control production. In short, he does not speak of transitions between modes of production, considered as systems, but of the emergence of certain *social practices and forces prior to the emergence of the mode of production they came to characterise*. The following statement is exemplary:

primitive accumulation is no longer the best way to frame the early history of capitalism, and this not because the epoch of commercial capitalism did not contribute decisively to the rise of modern production – it obviously did – but because that remains a *purely teleological perspective* and one that diverts attention from the real lacuna in materialist historiography, which is the study

448 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism; with Capitalist Civilization* (London: Verso, 1995). Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century - Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, New and Updated Edition (London: Verso, 2010).

449 Ernest Mandel, "Introduction," in *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 14. Compare Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, 14–15.

450 Methodologically such systematic historiography often entails the risk of voiding the concepts developed in the critique of capitalism of their rigour and specificity when projecting them back on pre-capitalist history with an explanatory purpose. See appendix 5.1

451 Banaji, *Theory as History*, 61.

and, one hopes, ultimately a synthesis of the emergence of capitalism, which in the sporadic form that Marx described it as having was certainly in place by the thirteenth century.⁴⁵²

This sketch of the difference between what we can call logical, historico-logical and historical approaches to the study of capitalism, is necessarily brief and superficial, but it is nevertheless useful in situating our efforts. Next, we will discuss the reading that stresses the *emergent* beginning of capital. We will then contrast the latter with the reading that stresses the rupture of primitive accumulation as a *sine qua non of the capitalist mode of production*. In this chapter we will see that the beginning of the capitalist mode of production must be understood both in terms of continuity (section 3) and rupture (section 4), but that the irreducibility of these two accounts opens to a difference, which resists the inscription of the past, present and future into a dialectical synthesis (section 5).

3. Historical Emergence and the Question of Generalisation

The person who first developed a problematic of capital from the point of view of labour and production (the point of view of manufacturing rather than commercial capital) was Adam Smith. Smith attempted to break the circle of presuppositions and account for the beginning of capital by showing how this logical, elaborated system necessarily had to have a historical *beginning*. Thus overdetermined by the logic of capital, this narrative played, as Marx notes, the function of the Biblical myth of original sin. In Smith's narrative of 'previous accumulation' an intelligent and frugal elite slowly build up more and more wealth by its own resourcefulness, eventually allowing it to set to work all those 'lazy rascals [*Lumpen*] spending their substance, and more in riotous living.'⁴⁵³ These lumpen are too inept to accumulate their own surpluses, and too poor to refuse the employment offers of the elite; if the myth of original sin introduces a primordial debt to God, here the debt is internal to humankind itself.⁴⁵⁴

452 Ibid., 43. Banaji is here rejecting the previously dominant perspective on the problem, presented by Maurice Dobb. For two classical discussions of the problem of the transition to capitalism, which qua their historiographical interest shall remain outside my focus, see Rodney Hilton, ed., *The Transition from feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978). T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

453 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 873.

454 'Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin [*Sünde*] fell on the human race', Marx writes, *ibid.* The *Sündenfall* is the mythical origin of *Schuld*, the guilt and debt of mankind.

Against this legitimising morality-tale Marx notes, '[i]n actual history [*wirklichen Geschichte*], it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part.'⁴⁵⁵ Slavoj Žižek presents Adam Smith's mistake as that of fallacy of *petitio principii*: 'Like every myth, this is circular – it presupposes what it purports to explain: the notion of the capitalist.'⁴⁵⁶ Marx is making a different point here however, one about 'actual history'. For Marx the problem is not that Smith explains a structural transformation with recourse to a certain subjective mutation (in conjunction with the land and other labourers). The reason to note this is that whereas Žižek's argument consigns change to the level of the whole or of a structure, Marx's presentation does not rule out the possibility of emergent norms. Indeed he writes:

The transformation of produce into commodities occurred only at isolated points... Nevertheless, within certain limits both goods and money were circulated and hence there was a certain evolution of trade: this was the premiss and point of departure for the formation of capital and the capitalist mode of production.⁴⁵⁷

This does not, of course, prove that Marx's was aiming at a Smithian narrative of the quasi-natural emergence of capitalism.⁴⁵⁸ Indeed, Marx adamantly refused that human beings had a natural 'propensity to truck, barter, and exchange' despite the fact that markets have existed long before capitalism.⁴⁵⁹ His basic argument was that markets had initially been marginal to the reproduction of communities, and only necessary in trade with foreigners. However, for Marx trade has a tendency to posit its own conditions. About this process, Marx writes:

The first way in which an object attains the possibility of becoming an exchange-value is to exist as a non-use-value, as a quantum of use-value superfluous to the needs of its owner. Things are in themselves external to man, and therefore alienable. In order that this alienation [*Veräußerung*] may be reciprocal, it is only necessary for *men* [my emphasis] to agree tacitly [legal regulation is secondary] to treat each other as the private owners of those

455 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 874.

456 Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd ed (London: Verso, 2002), 211.

457 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1059–60.

458 For a discussion of the idea that Marx begins *Capital* with a quasi-Smithian abstract, yet historical analysis of 'simple commodity production', see appendix 5.0.

459 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1904), Book I, Chapter II.

alienable things, and, precisely for that reason, as persons who are independent of each other. But this relationship of reciprocal isolation and foreignness does not exist for the members of a primitive community of natural origin, whether it takes the form of a patriarchal family, an ancient Indian commune or an Inca state.⁴⁶⁰ The exchange of commodities begins where communities have their boundaries, at their points of contact with other communities, or with members of the latter. However, as soon as products have become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become commodities in the internal life of the community.⁴⁶¹

This interpretation is well documented in anthropology; most human 'economies' have historically not been characterised by the equivalent exchange, but by forms of reciprocity (gift-giving, sharing, potlatch) or hierarchical distribution (generational, gender based, etc.).⁴⁶² We must also note something that Marx does not see: exchange itself tends to deepen the hierarchy of any community or family in which the surplus product is not collectively managed. When exchange is an option, those that manage the surplus have to choose between exchanging it or sharing it with other more remote community members who might need it. The representatives of the community in relations of exchange, generally men, gain more and more prominence, the choice between selling or distributing the surplus product greatly enhances their power over their dependants.⁴⁶³ The deepening of exchange is also a qualitative transformation of hierarchies; from an explicit customary hierarchy between members of a community to an economical hierarchy between individual strangers; this is accumulation on a small scale, through trade.⁴⁶⁴ This account stresses the emergent patterns arising from everyday

460 This logical sketch is based on the more complicated but still rather schematic distinction between Germanic, Roman and 'Asiatic' forms of society in the *Grundrisse*, 483–96.

461 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 182.

462 David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

463 Silvia Federici's important work on the transition to capitalism, in focussing on the violence of the transition, looks into the consolidation of hierarchies involved in the expansion of everyday economic exchange. However, she makes the important point that it is only through primitive accumulation that the moral economies that dictate that the heads of the community have certain responsibilities for the reproduction of other community members is destroyed. Federici writes that 'while in the upper classes it was *property* that gave the husband power over his wife and children, a similar power was granted to working-class men over women by means of *women's exclusion from the wage*.' Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004), 98.

464 '...human beings become individuals only through the process of history. ... Exchange itself is the chief means in this individuation [*Vereinzelung*]. It makes herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 496. See appendix 3.2. on the decoupling of reproduction and community.

practices: The generalisation of exchange is the generalisation of *acts* of exchange, starting with contingent encounters between communities. The commodities'

quantitative exchange-relation is at first determined purely by chance. They become exchangeable through the mutual desire of their owners to alienate them. In the meantime, the need for others' objects of utility gradually establishes itself. The constant repetition of exchange makes it a normal social process. In the course of time, therefore, at least some part of the products must be produced intentionally for the purpose of exchange.⁴⁶⁵

The development of exchange – initially merely exchanging the surplus products of the reproductive work of the community – thus changes the very reproductive needs of the community as well as what, how and for what purposes it produces. This process is that of the widening separation between exchange and use, between production for the market and production for own reproductive consumption. This leads to a deepening need for money to mediate exchange.⁴⁶⁶ The existence of money is here seen as a 'solution' to the problem of exchange, which constantly arises, asserts itself, so long as the problem of the opposition, the *separation*, between buying and selling, between use-value and exchange-value, persists. 'From that moment the distinction between the usefulness of things for direct consumption and their usefulness in exchange becomes firmly established.'⁴⁶⁷ As Alfred Sohn-Rethel observes, exchange and use are mutually exclusive in time and space: the person who plans to exchange a commodity cannot consume it; the one who consumes a commodity cannot exchange it. 'Whenever commodity exchange takes place, it does so in effective “abstraction” from use. This is an abstraction not in mind, but in fact.'⁴⁶⁸ In other words, it is a real, or practical abstraction. Sohn-Rethel connects the structure of the real abstraction to the fetish character of the commodity in which the relations between producers 'take the form of a social relation between the products of labour.'⁴⁶⁹ Commodity exchange means that all commodities and the labour that produced them mirror themselves in money. Exchange is a practical abstraction from the qualitative dimensions of use-value and concrete labour, the establishment of a quantitative equivalence between the products.

Acts of exchange, however, amount to a 'commodity society', and do not entail that

465 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 182.

466 Ibid., 181.

467 Ibid., 182.

468 Sohn-Rethel, "Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology," 25.

469 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 164.

production becomes capitalistic. Insofar as people still own the land, there is a limit to the willingness to work for others, and a limit to the amount of time that is left after agricultural work for the production of goods for sale.⁴⁷⁰ Wage labour and production for exchange remain marginal to the overall reproduction of the members of such communities. Even if there is an odd Smithian entrepreneur, there will not be sufficient labourers to expand production, and even if there were, there would not be sufficient consumers. Under such conditions, labour can only be formally 'subordinated' to capital, while the mode of production itself has no 'specifically capitalist character.'⁴⁷¹ Under these conditions we only have the existence of the medieval commercial and money-dealing capital stressed by Banaji above. In his historical sketch on merchant's capital in Volume III of *Capital*, Marx shows that the problem of the generalisation of this type of capital is exactly that its *capitalist character* – its generation of a surplus (designated as C-M-C' as opposed to the the C-M-C of regular exchange), relies not on production, but on the mediation of exchange between commercially underdeveloped communities, and the exploitation of the price differences of goods in different countries. Commercial capital 'is simply mediating the movement between extremes it does not dominate and preconditions it does not create.'⁴⁷² As soon as the countries whose production it mediates develop their commercial capacities, differentials tend to equalise and commercial capital declines.⁴⁷³ While commercial capital *expands trade* it does so by exploiting existing surpluses rather than by systematically creating them. Thus 'this development [of commercial capital and commodification], taken by itself, is insufficient to explain the transformation from one mode of production to the other...'.⁴⁷⁴ While 'sporadic traces of capitalist production' are found as early as the fourteenth century in certain 'Mediterranean towns' (Genoa, Venice and Florence are obvious examples), it is only with the expropriation of a mass of people from their means of subsistence that the generalisation of capitalist *production and reproduction* becomes possible.⁴⁷⁵ We here encounter the limits of the tale of *emergence*: the pre-history of capital, in which merchant and usurers capital did exist, does not itself provide the

470 Also there is the problem of transportation: few goods in an economy that is overwhelmingly based on subsistence production will still be consumable after being transported to other regions that have insufficient indigenous production of that product.

471 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 900.

472 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1981), 447.

473 Ibid., 446.

474 Ibid., 444.

475 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 900. On the unevenness and initial reversibility of this process, see appendix 5.2.

conditions for the generalisation of the capital-relation, and the establishment of capitalism as a mode of production *sui generis*. As Marx notes in 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production':

a highly developed commodity exchange and the *form of the commodity* as the universally necessary social form of the product can only emerge as the *consequence of the capitalist mode of production*.⁴⁷⁶

This, in turn, is the condition of the law of value: 'the full development of the law of value presupposes a society in which large-scale industrial production and free competition obtain, in other words modern bourgeois society.'⁴⁷⁷ The existence of this mode of production is not merely a question of quantitative growth of merchant and usurers capital, but of a qualitative leap through which capital becomes a self-positing system: '[o]nce developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being)'.⁴⁷⁸

The problem is not that Smith presupposes 'the notion of the capitalist', but that this figure is insufficient for explaining the *generalisation* of capitalist production, as a condition for the generalisation of capitalist commodity circulation, as the generalisation of the exchange abstraction.⁴⁷⁹ This condition lies in a very different form of primitive accumulation than the one suggested by Smith: '[t]he expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process.' This is a process which at Marx's time had only been carried out 'in a radical manner' in England, but which was under way in all of Western Europe.⁴⁸⁰

It is for forgetting this violent break, rather than for his presupposition of the capitalist-prior-to-capitalism, in Adam Smith's explanation of capitalism that Marx indicts him. However, this lack of memory is conditioned by the very structure of the historical time of the capitalist mode of production itself: after onset of properly capitalist dynamics,

476 Ibid., 949.

477 Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," 300.

478 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 459.

479 Sohn-Rethel's definition of capitalism in terms of the mode of social synthesis based on the *exchange abstraction* rather than on the abstraction of labour, is thus insufficient, as also pointed out by Moishe Postone *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 177–9.

480 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 876. This refers to the French translation, which was supervised and re-edited by Marx himself. Kevin B. Anderson shows how the changes in this edition, many of which have not made it into the English translation, are crucial for understanding Marx's intellectual development further and further away from a uni-linear conception of history. See Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 179.

the original violence is perpetuated through the 'silent compulsion of economic relations'; increasingly extra-economic force used only in exceptional cases.⁴⁸¹ The myth or fantasy of the protocapitalist as the sole father of the present, is made possible by the absence of living memory. So let us now revisit Marx's reconstruction of a memory of the great rupture of primitive accumulation.

4. A Historical Rupture: Expropriation and Looting

The theory of what is *generalised* contains within it the question: by which process of generalisation is the generalised (re)produced? Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation, as Balibar points out,

depends on knowledge of the *result* of the movement ... The analysis ... is therefore, strictly speaking, merely the genealogy of the elements which constitute the structure of the capitalist mode of production.⁴⁸²

The history of primitive accumulation is not a history of genesis in the sense of a prospective analysis, but a retrospective genealogy of the elements of the capital-relation. As Balibar's use of the Nietzschean term *genealogy* suggests – an apt term for Marx's method in these chapters – this is a story that focuses on the establishment of right through the normalisation of violence. Behind the English words force and violence we find the German *Gewalt*, which positions us not in some pure extra-legal violence, nor fully within right, but at operation of force within right, or right as an operation of force. In another context Balibar outlines the semantics of this word:

In German . . . the word *Gewalt* has a more extensive meaning than its 'equivalents' in other European languages: *violence* or *violenza* and *pouvoir*, *potere*, *power* (equally suitable to 'translate' *Macht* or even *Herrschaft*, depending on the context). Seen in this way, 'from the outside', the term *Gewalt* thus contains an intrinsic ambiguity: it refers at the same time to the negation of law or justice and to their realisation or the assumption of responsibility for them by an institution (generally the state). This ambiguity . . . is not necessarily a disadvantage. On the contrary, it signals the existence of a latent dialectic or a 'unity of opposites' that is a constituent

481 Marx, *Capital*: Volume I, 899. Étienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 283.

482 Étienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 279.

element of politics.⁴⁸³

The issue in the chapters on primitive accumulation is not so much violence 'pure and simple' – an ideologically charged and historically unreliable concept⁴⁸⁴ – but the theorisation of the inauguration or generalisation of the *problem of bourgeois Gewalt*, and the perpetuation in a different form of this founding violence in the displacement-solutions of the problem and the struggles which attach to these. This *Gewalt* blurs the distinction between state and economic power, or, to be precise, this violence establishes the conditions under which the distinction between economic and state power can be established:

These methods depend in part on brute force [*brutalster Gewalt*] ... [b]ut they all employ the power of the state [*Staatsmacht*], the concentrated and organized force [*Gewalt*] of society, to hasten, as in a hothouse, the process of transformation of the feudal mode production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force [*Gewalt*] is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power [*Potenz*].⁴⁸⁵

Gewalt plays an important double role here: it is both extra-economic and economic. In its extra-economic brutality *Gewalt* breaks down resistances and forces the will of the state on subjugated populations. As an economic power it extends the reach and depth of capitalist firms, it helps actualise the capitalist system that was always the potential of the previous forms of proto-capital (merchant, usurers capital particularly). In terms of the modal categories, *Gewalt* is both a question of relations between *actual* forces – following the logic of domination, resistance, opposition, and war – and a concept of the temporal passage from potentiality to actuality. Only because it has also the latter characteristic can it institute a new actuality: it does not merely impose its will on resistant elements, it organises them when their resistance is broken down. Thus *Gewalt* in this double sense can result in the transformation of the economy into a self-positing, self-reproducing system with its 'silent compulsion', which only needs to resort to 'direct extra-economic force [*außerökonomische, unmittelbare Gewalt*]' in exceptional cases.⁴⁸⁶

This transition is reliant on the existence of resistant populations in a form where they

483 Étienne Balibar, "Reflections on Gewalt," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 1 (2009): 101.

484 Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011), 80.

485 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 915–6. For a critique of the metaphor of the midwife, see Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 118.

486 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 899.

can be organised, and the existence of the economic means to organise them. The basic components of this 'primary equation' of the capitalist mode of production is capital and labour in large quantities; while this chapter looks at the primitive accumulation of wealth and workers, the next will look at their combination, the first step of the emergence, the becoming-actual, of the capital mode of production.

5. The Primitive Accumulation of Free Workers

Nobody is forced to alienate his natural freedom, to sell, rent or hire himself, if he prefers to die of hunger.
- Moses Hess⁴⁸⁷

The chapters on primitive accumulation demonstrate the deep connection between organisation and reproduction. They provide the genealogy of a mass of workers who cannot reproduce themselves without engaging in wage labour, that is, without letting themselves be organised by capital. Organising workers, the economic power of protocapitalist firms itself changes character qualitatively. 'In themselves, money and commodities are no more capital than the means of production of subsistence are', Marx writes,

[w]ithout a class dependent on wages, the moment individuals confront each other as free persons, there can be no production of surplus-value; without the production of surplus-value there can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital and no capitalist.⁴⁸⁸

The capital-relation consists of owners of means of subsistence, money and means of production eager to valorise what they have by putting others to work, and free workers forced to sell their labour to gain an income. Such forms of capital already existed, according to Marx, in the form of usurer's capital and merchant's capital in the Middle Ages and Antiquity; 'before the era of the capitalist mode of production [they] nevertheless functioned as capital.'⁴⁸⁹ However, their generalisation through commodity circulation and production, without which there is no capitalist *mode of production*, is only possible when money and means of production can be put to work on a mass scale,

487 Moses Hess, "The Essence of Money," ed. Adam Buick, *Rheinische Jahrbücher Zur Gesellschaftlichen Reform, Darmstadt* (1845), 11.

488 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1005.

489 *Ibid.*, 914.

i.e. when there exists masses of 'free' willing workers. As Marx notes, 'the money capital formed by means of usury and commerce [two medieval phenomena] was *prevented* from turning into industrial capital by the feudal organization of the countryside and the guild organization of the towns.'⁴⁹⁰ That it was 'prevented' from transforming itself thus suggests that the drive was already there – as mentioned it was marginally realised in some larger towns – but that its *generalisation* was blocked.⁴⁹¹ These 'fetters' remained until the violence of primitive accumulation overthrew the old social relationships, by which the peasants was set free not only from feudal bondage, but from the land that had sustained them. Thus, Marx defines the free worker as a person free from 'the old relations of clientship, bondage and servitude' and from his or her means of subsistence.⁴⁹² In *Capital* he spells out their specificity in that they are

[f]ree workers, in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors.⁴⁹³

What this implies is a shift from direct wealth extraction through domination to capitalist exploitation, which happens through a structural compulsion to work. In the latter, the relation and quantity of exploitation is mystified.⁴⁹⁴ This relates to a crucial implicit change in relations of reproduction: the freedom from feudal ties also meant that former serfs were no longer 'part of the means of production.' The owner of the means of production has an interest in maintaining these means, i.e. taking care of their reproduction, whereas the reproductive expenditure is externalised in the case of free workers. Labour is therefore also 'free' in the sense that the capitalist does not have to pay the full reproduction/replacement cost (as long as there is a reserve of labour).

Whereas the worker is capital for the capitalist in the sense that he 'maintains himself', ... it is in the nature of this commodity, a labouring slave, that its buyer does not only make it work anew every day, but also provides it with the means of subsistence that enable it to work ever anew.⁴⁹⁵

490 My emphasis. *Ibid.*, 915.

491 Obviously this list is not exhaustive; for instance, the guild-system actively worked against the growth of capitalism. See appendix 5.6.

492 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 507.

493 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 874.

494 For a comparison between exploitation of serf-labour (in the *corvée* system), slave-labour and wage-labour, see *Ibid.*, 680.

495 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume II*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. David Fernbach, vol. 2 (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 516.

Serf and slave labour is a *constant* cost, wage-labour is a *variable* cost. With free labour it is thus possible to adjust production to market signals by cutting this variable cost.⁴⁹⁶ The fall of this price in the case of wage labour is borne only by the workers, whereas in the case of slaves it is also borne by their owners.⁴⁹⁷ The advantage of free labour is therefore not just that it produces a surplus over and above the outlay of the capitalist (so does slave and serf labour), but that free workers, unlike guild members, drive down their cost through mutual competition, and that loss in the value of their labour-power is to the gain of the capitalist. The definition of a 'free worker' suggests that beyond the legal figure of the free individual, which is at the centre of Marx's attention, there is a set of other reproductive strategies at play to make up for shortfalls in wages. In other words, the worker is not an atom, but an organism that reproduces itself through other relations of care and/or dependency.

We can distinguish between two moments of Marx's sketch of this side of primitive accumulation: First, the separation of commoners from their means of subsistence, through enclosures of common lands, direct expropriation of agricultural lands and forests, and often also of dwellings. This is directly an ecological separation, one that tears former agriculturalists and herders away from their directly reproductive relation to the land.⁴⁹⁸ Secondly, by being driven off the land, local community structures are destroyed, the now landless masses roam the land as more or less atomised families and individuals. Primitive accumulation hence separates the former peasants not only from the means of their (re)production, but from their previous relations of reproduction, from what Marx calls *the commune (die Gemeinde)* in the *Grundrisse*.⁴⁹⁹ This expropriation, in Marx's narrative, was not part of a policy to create a working class. The formation of a proletariat in need of wage labour was, instead, a coincidental product of the drive on the part of big landowners to expand sheep farming in order to profit from high wool prices, resulting from the expansion of wool manufacture in

496 Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development, and Political Conflict, 1620-1877* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 131–33. It should be noted that English labour was, at the time Marx was writing *Capital*, only free for capital, as workers were bound to their employers by the penal sanctions for breach of contract until 1875. Banaji, *Theory as History*, 14 and chapter 5.

497 On slavery, intensity of work and extraction of surplus-value, see appendix 5.3.

498 'It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 489.

499 'Forms which precede capitalist production.' Notebooks IV and V, *Ibid.*, 471–514.

Flanders, beginning in the late fifteenth century.⁵⁰⁰ While, as we have seen, the expansion of capitalist production had been limited by the guildsystem, feudal bonds and subsistence production, the growth of the proletariat rapidly outpaced the demand for labour. There was no way this rapidly expanding proletariat could be employed by the then only nascent British manufactures. Instead, the expropriated commoners became paupers, surviving as beggars, thieves, or vagabonds, subject to the control of the so-called ‘bloody legislation’:

at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth centuries, a bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced throughout Western Europe. The fathers [and mothers] of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as “voluntary” criminals, and assumed that it was entirely within their powers to go on working under the old conditions which in fact no longer existed.⁵⁰¹

The first existence of the proletariat was not as a class of workers, but as a heterogeneous mass of people surviving, illicitly or illegally, either through vagabondage or theft, or through poaching, food collection in forests and fields, some of which had recently been theirs by tenancy or customary right. The problem of the proletarian condition thus allows us to historicise the modern emergence of mechanistic-atomistic theories of the social in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. This very problem of the atomised individual is the problem faced by the early state.⁵⁰² Like the Roman proletariat, these folks could have continued to exist without becoming wage labourers. That they did become wage labourers needs to be explained. While legislation slowly forced proletarians into work (as we will see in the next chapter), the fact that there would eventually be work for a large part of the proletariat was an effect of the accumulation of wealth taking place side by side with the expropriations.⁵⁰³

500 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 878.

501 *Ibid.*, 896.

502 Hansen, “Crisis and Organism”; C. B. Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 1st Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

503 As Linebaugh and Rediker note, the first work given to expropriated peasants was often the work of primitive accumulation itself. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2002), 42–43.

6. The Primitive Accumulation of Wealth

Marx lists several sources of this wealth in pre-capitalist towns, particularly the wealth of merchants and usurers. However, these capitals might appear as 'emergent forces' that took hold of proletarians, and thereby produced industrial capitalism, only retrospectively. Capitalism proper was not a result of regular trade, nor protocapitalist production. Rather than a slow emergence, early capitals leaped ahead through violent processes of colonial looting. While rural populations were expropriated, new masses of wealth began to flow into England, the *loot* and *commercial gain* of colonisation, between which there is little difference: 'commercial capital, when it holds a dominant position, is ... in all cases a system of plunder.'

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes gigantic dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the shape of the Opium Wars against China, etc.⁵⁰⁴

The looted wealth itself could only be turned into capital in the mother countries, i.e. where there was a proletariat in desperate need of food and shelter, if need be through wage labour. The colonies themselves opened new markets for the commodities thus produced – and venues for the cheap production of raw materials for the English industries by native, African and English slaves (indentured servants).⁵⁰⁵ While the proletarians at home were punished for their strategies of survival, the colonial system was itself financed by public debts, granted by the old banking system, expanding in tandem with the conquests. Colonial expansion in turn became the main way to service national debts; the trade and commercial wars were 'forcing houses for the credit

504 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 915.

505 Ibid., 918. Thus slavery was not particularly racialised in the early period of English colonisation of America. It was only under the development of the regime of free labour that 'slave' would come to be synonymous with 'black' in the common imaginary and law. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997).

system.⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, the modern system of taxation and the modern fiscal system developed for the purposes of further financing colonialism and the servicing of state debts.⁵⁰⁷ Whereas Hegel demonstrated that public police and welfare institutions would have to develop in response to the problem of the rabble (cf. chapter 3), we now see how other aspects of the state developed in order to facilitate colonial expansion and the violent containment of the proletariat.

7. The Global yet Local History of Capitalism

Commercial capital was always transcontinental, and expropriation too. Both the emergent forces of capitalism and the violent rupture that allowed their generalisation were, from the start, part of the same intertwined process of trade, plunder, territorial colonisation, and enslavement in which commercial capital and the state were often indistinguishable, or in which commercial capitalists took on state-like characteristics in the form of chartered companies. So the history of capitalism is not European in any narrow sense. Back to question of history: why do we speak of the 'beginning' of capital as being the primitive accumulation of paupers and wealth if capital reaches back to way before this happened in England? Why do we, as Banaji complains, maintain this

intellectual prejudice against commercial capitalism [which] is so deeply rooted that whole swathes of the history of capitalism are ignored by Marxists, with the result that there is no specifically Marxist historiography of capitalism...⁵⁰⁸

Marx's own reason for focussing on Britain as the *nexus classicus* of the capitalist mode of production, is that it here the first generalisation of *commodity production* becomes possible in the form of first modern manufacture and then modern industry. It so happens, in Marx's analysis, because this is where we witness the first systemic combination of expropriated populations and accumulated wealth, giving birth to the industrial capitalist. Marx writes:

The different moments to primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end

506 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 919.

507 See appendix 5.4. on the role of national debt in primitive accumulation.

508 Banaji, *Theory as History*, 272.

of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection. These methods depend in part on brute force, for instance the colonial system.⁵⁰⁹

In the sketch above, the foundation for capitalism (considered as a system of generalised commodity production *and* circulation) is the combination of the *expansive yet for-themselves ungeneralisable tendencies* of commercial capitalism, and the creation of a workforce through expropriations. It is the *combination* of these processes that is the condition of the generalisation of commodity circulation *through* the expansion of commodity production. The 'previous' accumulation based on trade can be understood as emerging out of occasional and rather local exchange activities on the one hand, and more importantly out of the formation of merchant capital mediating between different localities. This latter mode or network of exploitation is surplus-value capturing, but not surplus-value producing. It was always already translocal, even transcontinental. Yet it did not, or only marginally, integrate the extremes it mediated. In other words, the producers mainly reproducing themselves through production for trade were few, while the vast majority of people had the vast majority of their needs covered outside the monetarised markets. Accumulation through pillage and expropriation, similarly, is described by Marx as both localised and transcontinental at once, yet such looting only transfers wealth, it does not constitute a mode of production, an organised system.

8. The Role of Violence in Transition

We have seen that the process described in the chapters on primitive accumulation is at once local and transcontinental, at once trade-based and violent, at once exploitative and expropriative, legal and para- or pre-legal, a long term *emergent development* and a break. Given the richness and complexity of these processes, and the many major points Marx makes in a rather summary way, it is not surprising that readings of the chapters on primitive accumulation often simplify the question of *transition* a great deal. These sometimes necessary simplifications can be used to group different readings, such as the historical and the logical readings outlined above. Despite fundamental differences, the narrative of the beginning of capital appears in either case to be a history of forms: the

⁵⁰⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 915.

existence of embryonic capitalist forms prior to capitalism proper or the eventual construction of the capitalist mode of production. Whether we speak of the continuity of capitalism or of primitive accumulation as a leap into capitalism, both tell the narrative retrospectively from the point of view of *developed* capitalism, they narrate the history, pre-history or genealogy of today. Whereas the narrative of emergence presents a process of incremental quantitative growth and integration, the narrative of the rupture sees only the qualitative leap that distinguishes modes of production. In Marx's analysis these two approaches are inseparable. Contra the apolitical mythology of Adam Smith, his genealogy of primitive accumulation demonstrates that violence was the factor mediating between protocapitalist conditions and capitalism proper. If the narrative of pure emergence is incapable of understanding that the *Gewalt* of primitive accumulation is a condition of possibility of the capitalist mode of production, a narrative of primitive accumulation which only sees *Gewalt* would fail to understand many of the protocapitalist dynamics leading to primitive accumulation, and the pre-existence of forces ready to exploit these processes.

It would thus seem that we need to combine the two narratives, of real teleologies and *Gewalt*: as Marx writes, '[f]orce is the midwife [*Geburtshelfer*] of every old society which is pregnant with a new one.'⁵¹⁰ It is possible that Marx is aware that the metaphor of birth risks lapsing into a historical rationalisation of violence in terms of stages, and natural processes, using the somewhat unusual masculine *Geburtshelfer* rather than the usual feminine *Geburtshelferin* or *Hebamme*. Still, in this schema violence is presented as a kind of vanishing mediator between two normalities, an event definitively past. This entails, as noted by Vittorio Morfino, a problematic teleological reduction of violence to its result, which keeps us from thinking the contingency, openness and continuity of the history of violence.⁵¹¹ Rather than a 'birth' considered retrospectively, violence and force is action in a situation of contingency, even if it is action attempting to reinforce 'necessity.' Any revolutionary orientation demands that we are able to consider violence *prospectively, in its openness*, as the moment of contingent force necessary to reproduce the necessities and compulsions of life under the capitalist mode of production.

But if we don't consider teleology retrospectively, but instead in terms of the

510 Quoted above.

511 Vittorio Morfino, "The Syntax of Violence. Between Hegel and Marx," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 3 (2009), 81–100.

combination of an emergent system, the passage from combination to organism, we understand how *Gewalt* can be thought in terms of actualisation. Furthermore, because this process of combination does not happen on the level of totality, but rather as a totalisation, it must be understood as always related to elements external and often opposed to it, which present resistances to it, i.e. which can only be dealt with through an external, extra-economic use of violence. If the actualisation of capital must be thought in terms of accumulation, the task here is to think the two sides of *Gewalt* as part of the same trajectory of accumulation.⁵¹²

9. Modes of Accumulation and the Continuity of *Gewalt*

Often the difference between accumulation and primitive accumulation is taken to mark the difference between *violent* appropriation of wealth and normalised 'economic' accumulation of surplus-value. For many years the most common position among Marxists was that primitive accumulation refers to the beginning of capitalism only, as a form of founding *Gewalt*. However, in recent years, the contemporary significance of primitive accumulation has been stressed, it being argued that it continues to this day side by side with regular accumulation, not merely as an empirical fact, but as a structural feature of capitalism, necessitated by the laws of accumulation as such. In order to stress the continuity of primitive accumulation, David Harvey has coined the term 'accumulation by dispossession'.⁵¹³ Hereby he also turns it into another form of capitalist accumulation, complimentary to accumulation by exploitation.⁵¹⁴ Terminologically, the continued existence of accumulation by *Gewalt* would only be 'primitive' in the sense of brutal, and certainly not *Ursprünglich* or original, to use Marx's and Smith's terms, rather than the translation of Marx. But as we have seen, the *Ursprüngliche* accumulation does not just refer to accumulation by brute force, but to accumulation through trade and some commodity production prior to beginning of the capitalist mode of production proper. In fact, the exposition above has shown that Marx speaks of five types of 'accumulation' (through trade, interest, tax, immediate expropriation and exploitation) as existing prior to the capitalist mode of production proper. We need to understand at once the existence of all five prior to capitalism, and the qualitative shift that marks the beginning of the capitalist mode of production. To do

512 We take the suggestive, but underdeveloped term 'trajectories of accumulation' from Banaji, but we use it for our own purposes here. It is thus becomes a different concept.

513 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, new ed. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2005), chapter 4.

514 See also Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, new ed (London: Routledge, 2003)

so, we reserve the term primitive or original accumulation for the historical, qualitative shift that created the conditions of the *mode of production*. Further, we will try to disentangle the questions of the *transition* between modes of production – a question on the level of reproductive totalities – from the question of different trajectories or modes of accumulation. While the former problematic is orientated towards the issues of *systemic structures and historical periodisation* (raising the question of economic 'laws' or historic modes of necessitation), the latter deals with the analysis of accumulation in terms of the relations between heterogeneous social forces, historically, conjuncturally (East Asia Companies, slaves from the Cross River region, Florentine weavers, the colonized subjects of Portuguese Goa, etc).

On the terms of historiography we can speak of these approaches to history as systematic-logical and genealogical respectively. But it also relates to the question of the orientation of practice: While the former is interested in the question of social form, the latter is interested in the question of social forces. Or, the interest of the former is revolutionary orientation, while the interest of the latter is strategic and conjunctural, i.e. the orientation of struggle and resistance.⁵¹⁵ If both deal with a difference between accumulation by *Gewalt* (what we will call accumulation by trade and by dispossession) and accumulation through exploitation (capitalist accumulation), they do so differently. *The systematic orientation* is interested in the epochal break through which accumulation through exploitation became dominant, *the strategic orientation* in the different character of struggles, between the oppositional struggles of expropriative accumulation and the the 'unity-in-opposition' (or contradiction) of exploitative accumulation, irrespective of historic periodisation.

In this chapter we have seen that the analysis of struggles and strategies explain the historical emergence of the system, while the system, once dominant, becomes self-explanatory, by positing its own presuppositions. Capitalism, in other words, is a process of actualisation facing the resistance of other modes of reproduction, which once it is dominant, becomes able to produce its own conditions. Yet the historical continuity of the five modes of accumulation, and of struggles and strategies, should not blind us to the epochal shift of the coming together of the capitalist mode of production. The question of this qualitative shift is that of the *generalisability* of capitalism, the question of the production of labour as an atomised mass seeking to be organised by capital in order to survive – all of this we will return to in chapter 6. The period of

515 See appendix 5.7.

primitive accumulation thus fundamentally alters the meaning of the five pre-existing forms of accumulation. With capitalism, the accumulation of abstract monetary wealth comes to structure all of society. This in turn transforms the meaning of taxes, interest and trade, as they now longer extract wealth from a relatively stable productive base, but become aspects of a systemic teleology of every expanded accumulation.

What created the conditions for this enormous extension of accumulation by *exploitation* was the violent intense period of expropriative accumulation. Massimo De Angelis provides a very useful *conceptual* explication of the relation between what we here call expropriative and exploitative accumulation.⁵¹⁶ De Angelis demonstrates in three simple points that *separation* is common to both forms of accumulation. Firstly, he shows that Marx in *Capital Volume III* insists that regular accumulation is simply 'the divorce [*Scheidung: separation or scission*] of the conditions of labour from the producers *raised to a higher power*'.⁵¹⁷ Furthermore, in the *Grundrisse*, we also find this theme: 'Once this separation is given, the production process can only produce it anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale.'⁵¹⁸ Once commerce becomes capitalist its corrosive force on communities is multiplied; now as before its effect is accumulation. Secondly, De Angelis notes how central the 'category' – or should we say *problem* – of separation is to Marx's critique of political economy. Thus, in continuation to the previous quote, Marx writes:

The objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it; the reproduction and *realization* [*Verwertung*], i.e. the expansion of these *objective conditions*, is therefore at the same time their own reproduction and new production as the wealth of an alien subject indifferently and independently standing over against labour capacity. What is reproduced and produced anew is not only the *presence* of these objective conditions of living labour, *but also their presence as independent values, i.e. values belonging to an alien subject, confronting this living labour capacity*.⁵¹⁹

This, as De Angelis points out, is the continuation of the problematic of the alienation of

516 Massimo De Angelis, "Marx's Theory of Primitive Accumulation: A Suggested Reinterpretation," *University of East London* (March 1999); Angelis, *The Beginning of History*, 136–9.

517 Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 354.

518 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 462.

519 *Ibid.*

labour from its own products and of the reification of social activity, present in his writings from the *1844 Manuscripts* onwards. Thirdly, and finally, having established the common feature and centrality of what we call accumulation through trade, tax, expropriation and exploitation in *separation*, we can establish that they are all aspects of the same problem, that they are all different modes or conditions of separation. The central epoch-making distinction, however, remains that between expropriation and exploitation:

The latter implies the *ex novo production* of the *separation*, while the former implies the *reproduction* – on a greater scale – of the same *separation* ... The *ex novo* separation of means of production and producers corresponds to the *ex novo* creation of the *opposition* between the two, to the *ex novo* foundation of the specific alien character acquired by labour in capitalism.⁵²⁰

While De Angelis stresses the continuous existence of both forms of separation under capitalism, he notes the epochal shift involved in the establishment of the capitalist mode of production, for which we have reserved the adjective primitive or original. He quotes Marx's point that while separation first arises in the interstices of pre-capitalist modes of production (trade, colonial plunder) and in the *decomposition* of feudalism (enclosures and expropriation), capitalism, 'once developed historically, ... itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being).⁵²¹ However, De Angelis fails to note that Marx proceeds to insist that these are '*historic presuppositions... which are past and gone...; they therefore disappear as real capital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for its realization.*⁵²² What is past and gone is *not* expropriative accumulation – of which Marx writes much in his texts on colonisation in particular⁵²³ – but a situation in which capitals can arise and accumulate on their own. After the beginning of the capitalist system any new capital arising heterogeneously is born into a capitalist atmosphere.⁵²⁴ Any new capital immediately finds itself submitted to the imperatives of the capitalist system. This must be related to the theme of the dominance of industrial capital over commercial capital; while the world market was a condition for the development of the capitalist mode of *production*, 'now it is not trade that revolutionizes industry, but rather

520 De Angelis, "Marx's Theory of Primitive Accumulation: A Suggested Reinterpretation."

521 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 459.

522 Ibid.

523 To mention but one example, see Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 451–2.

524 We here come back to Hegel's arguments against heterogenesis proper, cf. appendix 2.8.

industry that constantly revolutionizes trade.⁵²⁵ Accumulation is no longer primarily based on the exploitation of differentials in trade and the expropriation of wealth, but on the *production* of surpluses; any product looted under developed capitalism will have to compete with the an immense collection of mass produced commodities, to paraphrase the beginning of Volume I.⁵²⁶ As Marx states in the *Grundrisse*: 'individual capitals can continue to arise e.g. by means of hoarding. But the hoard is [now] transformed into capital only by means of the exploitation of labour.'⁵²⁷

If the strategic conception of capitalist accumulation stresses the exteriority and opposition of social forces and the contingent outcome of their struggles, the systemic conception stresses the integration and interdependence of these forces even in the struggle; capital and labour, for instance, as *dialectical* contradictions, i.e. as systemically mediated. While these perspectives can be taken as irreducible (we might say parallaxic), their difference is none other than a methodological expression of the tension between the orientation toward objectivity and revolution and subjective orientation towards practices of resistance and struggle. To speak of orientation and strategy on the level of history is to think these together, and to realise that revolutionary practice can only proceed through struggle and resistance, but that it can only be revolutionary if the implicit or explicit horizon of this practice is orientated by the need to overcome capital. The question then becomes whether to think the overcoming of capitalism as the revolution of a system or as the abolition of a problem, that of separation. Before we can raise this question, we need to elaborate how the theorisation of the capitalist system is possible through the materialist logic of combination and organisation, rather than the always-already of the systematic dialectic, as actualisation and totalisation rather than as actuality and totality.

10. Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how primitive accumulation must be seen as the *Gewalt* that makes possible the generalisation of commodity production and circulation, and thus a passage from the existence of many dispersed capitals to the capitalist mode of

525 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 918–9; Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 451–55. See also footnote 49 for an example of the effects of the dominance of capitalist production on the conditions of slave-labour.

526 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 125. See *Grundrisse* for a more general statement of this issue: 'In all forms of society there is once kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. ... Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society.' *Grundrisse*, 107.

527 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 460.

production proper. Furthermore, we have seen how capitalism as a mode of production extends as far as its conditions, the separation between wealth and labour, is in place. The chapters on primitive accumulation cannot therefore be taken to be exclusively about some primordial violence or virtuous trade, about rupture or continuity, or indeed about the emergence of *capitalist-relations* or of this or that individual capitalist. Rather it is focussed on the precise question of the conditions of capitalism as a *mode of production*, which is nothing but the question of the moment in which the combination ('the primary equation') which makes possible the generalisation of capitalist production and circulation became possible and actual.

We have seen that Marx gives force (*Gewalt*) a central place in his theory of history, from the remark that history progresses by its 'bad side' in *The Poverty of Philosophy* to the dictum in *Capital* that 'force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one.'⁵²⁸ The Hegelian figuration of force here, as the extra-developmental means by which historical development retrospectively shows to have happened, implicitly makes a distinction between two forms of *Gewalt*: that which helps bring about a new society and that which does not. One is the force serving a role in actualisation, the other not.⁵²⁹ The use of force is the moment of *contingency without which actualisation is impossible*. The use of force within an ongoing process of actualisation – i.e. one where political wagers and constructive efforts take the place of Minerva's owl – can thus be inscribed into the theory of the tendencies of that process. This makes the question of the transition to socialism or communism crucial: only if this transition can be thought of as an already initiated process of actualisation can the revolutionary use of force be given a *historical* meaning, as a constituent power – otherwise there is only the reactive force *against* actualisation. Proletarian violence or resistance has therefore no affirmative sense to an orientation within a process of actualisation unless this orientation also finds itself part of a process of what we can call *counter-actualisation*, the actualisation within-and-against the dominant process. It is in this connection that a formula such as that of communism as the actual (*wirkliche*) movement which abolishes the present state of things must be read. This thesis – which clearly is a wager based on an orientation vis-a-vis the unfolding present and its problems – means that revolutionary practice is not just resistance against an intolerable condition but a constructive force, one aiming to construct a new actuality.

528 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 915–6.

529 Étienne Balibar shows that the same figure is active in Engels' theory of *The Role of Force in History*. Balibar, "Reflections on Gewalt," 105.

Chapter 6. The Becoming of Capital

History up to now is nothing other than the history of the regulation, the justification, the completion and the generalisation of robbery with murder and slavery.
- Moses Hess⁵³⁰

1. Introduction

In the last chapter we have seen how the *capitalist mode of organisation* is conditioned upon a separation of the producers from the means and relations of production and reproduction. This chapter gave us the elements of the capital-relation, a history of the conditions, but not of the genesis of the capitalist mode of production. The present chapter will ask: how did labour and capital combine? Here we cannot presuppose the capital-labour contradiction and the teleology of the capitalist mode of production. We will see that this combination did not by any means happen by necessity, but only through an arduous process through which force (*Gewalt*), economic and extra-economic, played a major role in breaking down proletarian resistance. The use of force in the period of deep social crisis in which the capitalist mode of production took root in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was a means to abolish the disorder of the period. In this chapter we will focus on a reading of material history. However, we must note the connection between atomistic political theories and the problems of the period of the enclosures, civil war and developing market individualism, theorised in chapter 5.⁵³¹ The imagination of society as an artificial rather than organic, 'body politic' promoted by Hobbes at the time, is indicative of his sensitivity to a situation in which the collapse of the old order had not yet given way to any new order, a situation in which relations between possessive individuals were external and mechanic, characterised by enmity, chance and fear.⁵³² From the late eighteenth century on, we see

530 Hess, "The Essence of Money", section 4.

531 C.B. Macpherson provides an influential analysis of political theory in 17th and 18th Century England, which from our perspective fails to consider the importance of *primitive accumulation* as a condition for the intensity with which the questions of individualism and sovereignty were asked, as well as the strictly *patriarchal* nature of early possessive individualism. Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

532 Ibid.

how discourses on government were adopting the idea of the social *organism*, with its immanent laws of organisation and reproduction, in Rousseau, Quesnay, Kant and Hegel, in close tandem with the increasing integration of labour and capital and the new bourgeois philosophy of freedom, reconfiguring and normalising chance, enmity and fear.⁵³³ All these thinkers reflect on the fundamental problem of bourgeois society: the separation between individuals. Marx's early critique of atomism and his writings on the social organism for the *Rheinische Zeitung* analysed in chapters 1 and 2, belong squarely to this period. While it is impossible here to account for the intricacies of this transformation, these remarks point to the important fact that the shifts in the use of natural analogies in political theory strongly mirrored changes in social relations. Nietzsche points our attention to the relation between philosophy and revolution: '[d]id Kant not see in the French Revolution the transition from the inorganic form of the state to the organic?'⁵³⁴ Here, it becomes important to *distinguish* the moment of the formation of a compound social body under the sovereign and law, from the moment of the organisation proper of a social organism, which concerns social production and reproduction. We must thus complicate and open the narrative of the intimate co-production of labour and capital, which closes history in a retrospective reading. Foucault, perhaps surprisingly, provides a narrative that falls into the trap of intimacy, when he describes the developments of this period in terms of the functional interdependencies in something like *one* process of actualisation:

If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power, which soon fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection. In fact, the two processes - the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital - *cannot be separated*; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful

533 E-W. Böckenförde and G. Dorhn-van Rossum, "Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe - Historische Lexikon Zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Brunner, O., W. Conze, R. Koselleck, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1978). See appendix 1.16.

534 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) §11.

accelerated the accumulation of capital. At a less general level, the technological mutations of the apparatus disciplinary techniques sustained an ensemble of very close relations.⁵³⁵

While this passage beautifully points to the relationship between *Gewalt* and accumulation, its perspective is that of the result of the process, the development of the bourgeoisie and capital; it poses the problem of the over-accumulation of 'hands' in primitive accumulation in terms of its solution, the creation of a productive apparatus that could absorb them. What goes missing is the time-lag between the problem and the solution, and the alternative solutions to the problem, those coming from below, exerting the counter-force of resistance and aiming at other solutions.⁵³⁶

But why and in what sense was atomism and the contingency of social relations a *problem*, rather than, say, a *condition*? In the past 60 years or so, the ethico-political affirmation of contingency in existentialist philosophy and certain strands of autonomist and post-structuralist theory has given rise to the *doxa* that contingency is only a problem for a subject that nostalgically seeks a stable foundation for meaning and a system of habitual regularity. However, thinking contingency as freedom in relation to the 'double freedom of labour' requires both a rosy picture of labour under the capitalist mode of production and its contrast with slavery.⁵³⁷ Socio-political contingency, which is what we are talking about here, is a matter of the *reproduction of life* at its level of habits and expectations. Rather than simply a condition of freedom to be ethically affirmed, as stated by Marx and Epicurus in chapter 1, atomisation and contingency under capitalism is a *problem* of reproduction of both of individual bodies and existing relations of domination.⁵³⁸ In the face of the problem of such non-reproduction, the problematic of organisation imposes itself: How to organise one's own reproduction, or how to organise one's subjects in order to control them? And, what force is necessary to organise disorganised bodies, who, like Epicurus' says, have within their 'breast something that can fight against this force and resist it'?⁵³⁹ We must, however, be careful

535 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Penguin books, 1991), 220–1. My emphasis.

536 At the beginning of his important historical study of this period, Peter Linebaugh criticises Foucault for underestimating resistances to 'the great confinement.' Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, new ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

537 On the relation between the contingency of proletarian reproduction and compulsion, see Melinda Cooper, "Workfare, Familyfare, Godfare: Transforming Contingency into Necessity," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (Fall 2012), 643–661; Ken C Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

538 Cf. appendix 3.2.

539 Titus Carus Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Martin Ferguson Smith, 2nd Revised edition

not to ask this question of force from the point of view of its result. Rather than seeing practical processes of organisation and *Gewalt* as a process of historical actualisation and its midwife respectively, we must orientate ourselves towards the inventiveness and contingency of both organisation and *Gewalt* in the face of the problem of reproduction of bodies and/or of relations of domination.

The combination Foucault describes did not come about automatically, nor is this history exhausted by reference to its violent imposition. Other solutions to problem of the 'accumulation of men' were attempted, by those children, women and men who did not consider themselves accumulated, but in a situation of dire need, displaced as they were from their lands and commons. We must therefore understand organisation and *Gewalt* in the formative period of capitalism as parts of struggles over reproduction, which also entails a reinterpretation of political contingency as the contingency of reproduction. Struggles against proletarianisation were not merely reactive, but posing the organisational problems of alternative modes of reproduction, even if in mostly scattered and heterogeneous ways.⁵⁴⁰ Here I will first focus on the question of the *contingency* of the encounter between capital and what became labour, before I look at the conflictual process of their combination.

2. The Difficult Combination of Labour and Capital

Retrospectively, any mode of production can be seen as consisting of labourers and means of production. However, only under capitalism are they systematically in 'a state of mutual separation.' This means that they are 'only *potentially* factors of production.'

For any production to take place they must be combined [*verbinden*]. The specific form and mode in which this combination [*Verbindung*] is effected is what distinguishes the various economic epochs of the social structure. In the present case, the separation of the free worker from his means of production is the given starting-point, and we have seen how and under what conditions the two [elements] come to be united in the hands of the capitalist – i.e. as his capital in its productive mode of existence. The actual [*wirkliche*] process which the personal and material creators of commodity formation, brought

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001). quoted in Marx, *The First Writings of Karl Marx*, 171 and 197.

540 Jim Glassman, "Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession, Accumulation by 'extra-Economic' Means," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 5 (October 1, 2006): 608–625.

together in this way, enter into with each other, the process of production, therefore itself becomes a function of capital – the capitalist process⁵⁴¹

However, reading Part 8 of *Capital*, it becomes clear that the combination of capital and labour did not happen automatically once the elements were constituted in primitive accumulation. In a letter to the editors of the Russian populist journal *Otecestvenniye Zapisky* written ten years after the first publication of the chapters on primitive accumulation, Marx stresses that the mediation of what becomes labour and capital is in no way a necessary or automatic effect of their co-existence:

the plebeians of ancient Rome ... were originally free peasants, each cultivating his own piece of land on his own account.⁵⁴² In the course of Roman history they were expropriated. The same movement which divorced them from their means of production and subsistence involved the formation not only of big landed property but also of big money capital. And so one fine morning there were to be found on the one hand free men, stripped of everything except their labour power, and on the other, in order to exploit this labour, those who held all the acquired wealth in possession. What happened? The Roman proletarians became, not wage labourers but a *mob* of do-nothings more abject than the former “poor whites” in the southern country of the United States, and alongside of them there developed a mode of production which was not capitalist but dependent upon slavery.⁵⁴³ Thus events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historic surroundings led to totally different results.⁵⁴⁴

The separation between workers and the means of production is only the *condition* of generalised commodity production and circulation; the two elements do not automatically combine. The chapter on the 'Bloody Legislation' against vagrancy shows that it took a massive effort by the state to create the conditions under which the accumulated land and the masses of surviving proletarians would be combined, rather than face each other in a real opposition. This question is of crucial methodological

541 Marx, *Capital: Volume II*, 2:120. Translation altered.

542 Note that Marx follows here the patriarchal Roman property law, and the reduction of women, children, slaves and dependents of the person of the *pater familias*. See also appendix 3.4.

543 On poor whites, slaves and revolution, see appendix 6.1.

544 'By studying each of these forms of evolution ... one will never arrive there by the universal passport of a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical.' Karl Marx, "Letter from Marx to Editor of the *Otecestvenniye Zapisky*, 1877," in *Marx and Engels Correspondence* (International Publishers, 1968). ublishers, 1968).

importance as it opens for a theorisation of the historicity of the systematic dialectic itself, not in terms of a logical periodisation, but in terms of social struggles, resistances and practices of exchange and production. The question is: how did that, which became capital and labour, come to relate dialectically, how did they come to be mutually-yet-antagonistically presupposing? Marx's systematic dialectical logic is the logic of the always-already of the system, a synchronic or teleological vision of the dialectical whole, as seen in chapter 4.⁵⁴⁵ The logic of mediation we are interested in here is the logic of the *becoming* of the system, out of hitherto separate elements. This will allow us to orientate ourselves not just to the systemic contradiction inherent in this totalisation, but to understand the problem which both are articulated in response to. While the system is the set of relations between parts (machines, bodies, infrastructure, etc.) which reproduces itself even as individual parts are rendered superfluous, die or are scrapped, it only works as a totalising process insofar as it is successful in organising the bodies that reproduce it; the condition for its capacity to organise them is the *problem*, which the system is an answer to and which it reproduces: namely that of the separation-combination of proletarian bodies and the means of production. Before capital is the 'always-already' of the capital-labour contradiction it is the unsolved open problem of reproduction, which reoccurs in crisis, and which the permanent crisis of surplus-populations is constantly posing (chapter 7).

3. Contested Reproduction

Banaji and Balibar, as seen in chapter 5, read the chapters on primitive accumulation as a retrospective account of the historic emergence of the elements that make up the capitalist teleology. However, if we avoid considering the account in these chapters from the perspective of its result, we will see that the text, contrary to the common reading, deals not only with the 'accumulation' on opposite sides of the two components of the capital-relation, but with a *struggle* over the reproduction of the proletarians. This starts with the repression of alternative forms of reproduction such as vagabondage, theft and poaching, and proceeds to extra-economic regulation of wages and the working day. Already in the *Grundrisse* Marx notes that the 'propertyless are more inclined to become vagabonds and robbers and beggars than workers.'⁵⁴⁶ In the chapter

545 And as argued in Bue Rübner Hansen, "The Value-Form as Real Synthesis" (MA Dissertation, Kings College, 2009).

546 Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.736.

on the 'Bloody Legislation' in *Capital*, he shows how it took an extensive use of force to drive the poor into the workplaces. In Marx's description, the pauperised peasants only become wage workers *en masse* through the activity of the state.

Thus were the agricultural folk first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded and tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws into accepting the discipline necessary for the system of wage-labour.⁵⁴⁷

Marx lists a number of laws, issued in England by Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth I, James I, and in France and the Netherlands, by Louis XVI and Charles V respectively. He makes clear that these laws were needed to restore social order, and to instil labour discipline into the vagabonds and 'idlers'. Thus, vagabonds were arrested and forced to work at a given wage, or to work as slaves for food.⁵⁴⁸ Mobile 'free labour' under these conditions thus had to be coerced through violence and labour discipline. Yann Moulier-Boutang describes the response to this spread of free labor as the 'great fixation of labour'.⁵⁴⁹ Silvia Federici, as well as Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, invite us to read the history of vagabondage in this period as a mode of resistance against feudalism, and the Bloody Legislation as a means of the ruling class to regain control in the face of popular movements and micro-resistances. Thus Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos write that '[p]eople do not escape their control. People escape. Control is a cultural–political device which comes afterwards to tame and eventually to appropriate people's escape.'⁵⁵⁰ However, while escapes from feudal bondage were surely an ongoing cause of migration throughout the Middle Ages, in Marx's interpretation only the expropriation of the agricultural population and the enclosure of the commons can explain the sudden explosion in vagrancy in England in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Marx stresses here the protocapitalist motives of the new nobility⁵⁵¹ in this not-yet-capitalist society as a reason for the expropriations: a changing economic situation – the growth of wool manufacture in Flanders and the rise in wool prices – gave the feudal lords of England a means to bypass their dependence

547 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 899.

548 *Ibid.*, 897.

549 Yann Moulier Boutang, *De L'esclavage Au Salarial : Economie Historique Du Salarial Bridé* (Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 1998), 291.

550 Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 43.

551 'The old nobility had been devoured by the great feudal wars. The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers.' Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 879.

on the labour of a large section of the bonded peasantry and the struggles that came with this dependence. It became more profitable for them to fill the land with sheep than feudal serfs growing crops for direct consumption on the manor by themselves and the lord.⁵⁵² But the mobility of the new proletariat was not total and often not sufficient for capital. In many cases, former feudal serfs would now pay rents for their dwellings, and receive wages for the work on the lands of the lord. 'Free labour' was in this case indirectly coerced into work, a coercion made possible by their lack of mobility.⁵⁵³ This particularly hit women, whose mobility, as Silvia Federici notes, was constricted by their greater risk of sexual assault while travelling, and by their caring duties towards children and the elderly.⁵⁵⁴ On the other hand, the excessive number of hands in relation to work caused a surge in crime, while hitherto accepted activities became criminalised. The problem was not, strictly speaking, that there was not enough *work* for these workers, but that they were not "nomadic" enough; to solve this problem the otherwise imprisoned workers were kindly turned into immigrants, that is *forcibly* deported to the colonies as convict and indentured servant labour.

It may easily seem that the Bloody Legislation, introduced over several hundred years,⁵⁵⁵ was at first merely a means to deal with the destabilising effects of proletarian migration and crime, and only later became a way to drive proletarians into wage capitalist labour. However, the fact that such laws were *necessary* brings our attention to two further aspects of the proletarian condition, at least at this historical conjuncture: that proletarians had the will and the capacity to refuse work. While the profoundly abject and degrading character of work at the time explains their will to escape work, only the existence of alternative practices of survival and reproduction explains the ability to refuse. We are thus not only dealing with resistance in a relation of *Gewalt* but also with alternative attempts to organise reproduction. The central, merely implicit yet inescapable argument in Marx's account of the Bloody Legislation, is not the attempt to control the escape of labour (as claimed by Moulrier-Boutang) or to appropriate its flight (Papadoupoulos et al.), but another example of an attempt to direct the capacity of proletarians to *reproduce themselves*. The separation of labour from the means of (re)production was not itself sufficient to secure the imposition and stability of the

552 Ibid., 878–79.

553 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, The Pelican Marx Library (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 736; "Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated" Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 896–904.

554 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 127.

555 Marx's chapter on the Bloody Legislation covers the period from 1530 to 1825.

capital-relation, i.e. the regularity and sufficiency of the real abstraction or alienation of labour. Here we might mention three such forms of proletarian self-reproduction outside and inside the wage relation, all of which were addressed by the bloody laws, even if not mentioned by Marx.

Firstly, as noted by Federici, women of the growing proletarian masses regulated inter-generational reproduction through different forms of birth-control, the repression of which is the subject of her analysis of the early modern obsession with demographics, the nascent state and church regulation of reproductive health, and the witch hunts.⁵⁵⁶ Secondly, vagabonds as well as the less mobile could refuse wage labour because they found strategies of collectively or individually appropriating means of subsistence (theft, poaching, land occupations, food riots, etc.). Indeed, England was shaken by strong egalitarian and landless movements (the Levellers and the Diggers) and a large number of food-riots across the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, i.e. forms of what we can call re-appropriative and antagonistic reproduction.⁵⁵⁷ Finally, as mentioned by Marx, the anti-combination acts which were effective from the fourteenth century to 1825, were introduced very early on to ban workers' combinations (trade unions). In this lies a whole history of forms of solidarity and struggle to improve work conditions.⁵⁵⁸ Furthermore, Marx notes,

[t]he rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to 'regulate' wages, i.e. to force them into the limits suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day, and to keep the worker himself at his normal level of dependence. This is an essential aspect of so-called primitive accumulation.⁵⁵⁹

The issue common to struggles around mobility and wage labour was the struggle for or against the alternative or parallel relations of reproduction, as well as the struggles for improved reproduction waged by proletarians. The atomisation and separation of workers did not automatically lead to their mutual *indifference, or to their organisation by capital. When separated, these atoms swerved and composed in configurations of self-organised reproduction beyond the family.* If we see the introduction of these laws

556 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, particularly 87-91.

557 See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 15-29. For the Diggers, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, new ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), 110ff.; on riots, see Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

558 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 901, 903. For 18th century riots, see E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* no. 50 (February 1, 1971): 76-136.

559 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 899-900 .

and the institutional arrangements necessary to implement them as core moments of the development of the modern state, we begin to understand this state as a solution to the problem brought about by primitive accumulation, namely the separation of a great mass of people from the means of their reproduction. As a solution, the laws are crucially premised on not questioning the result of primitive accumulation. Rather they are attempts to ameliorate consequences of primitive accumulation, through organising the dispossessed into a system of social reproduction, thereby perpetuating the separation. Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos point in this direction when they write that

national sovereignty is not primarily organised around the oppression of singular potentialities. Its main objective is not the suppression of those social groups which attempt to escape. Rather, modern national sovereignty attempts to absorb unruly potentialities by including them in its social reproduction.⁵⁶⁰

However, the fact that core functions of the modern state, such as the police, labour law, and workhouses (as an example of an institution that pacifies, profitably or not, the unemployed) were created to deal with the destabilising impact of a proletarian class not fully and organically integrated into social reproduction, must also be related to the subversive effects of its self-reproduction. Thus, the repressive *depotentialisation* of labour's self-reproduction, its subordination under the wage, did play a role as a means to guide the actualisation of the potentiality of labour into capitalist social reproduction, through the wage. Before the power of the mass can be exploited, it must be disorganised, turned into a mass. The moment of *depotentialisation* is essential because it allows us to recognise a proletarian power which could not be included into the reproduction of capitalist social relations, a collective *negativity* vis-a-vis capitalist relations. The proletarian power was antagonised and antagonistic, first because it demanded *reproductive autonomy*, and only later *political participation*. Whereas early resistance against expropriations can be seen as a *defensive* struggle, the demands for land and access to the commons made by the Diggers at a point where the enclosures for many was an established fact, meant that what had been a *reactive struggle* for concrete communities (with all their internal hierarchies), mutually separated by distance, could become a *generalised affirmative* struggle for 'the abstract' – i.e. as yet unactualised – idea of *the commons*, of egalitarian *communes*.⁵⁶¹ Furthermore, such

560 Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*, 8.

561 On the relation between the memory of the commons and the emergence of a utopian imaginary in

demands were immediately radical insofar as they could only succeed through immediate *appropriation of wealth*.

A similar, but non-antagonistic development is described in the last chapter of *Capital*, titled 'The Modern Theory of Colonization.' Here Marx sarcastically shows how colonial administrators – who at home and in principle were proponents of the free market – had to set an artificial price on 'virgin soil' in the colonies in order to force new immigrants and colonists into wage labour. The aim was to 'prevent the labourers from becoming independent landowners until others had followed to take their place.'⁵⁶² Marx describes this drive to the land as the 'anti-capitalist cancer of the colonies', However, he doesn't draw wider theoretical consequences from this example, except to illustrate a point about political economists. This chapter is not really about the colonies, but about the secret discovered in the New World by the economists of the Old World, namely that 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things' and that this mediation has as a fundamental condition the 'expropriation of the worker', i.e. the destruction of alternative ways of reproduction.⁵⁶³

4. Proletarian Reproduction Under Capitalism

Primitive accumulation, as seen in chapter 5, violently destroyed previous modes of reproduction. It ruptured the old feudal bonds, as well as the peasants' organic tie to the land, and left individuals atomised and bereft of the means and relations necessary to survive and actualise their potentials. It posed reproduction as a historical human problem by posing it abstractly.⁵⁶⁴ Marx's retrospective view focuses on how this process lead to the creation of a mass of proletarians, who had to combine with capital as workers in order to survive. However, we also see in his narrative the outline of a different set of histories of struggles against the enclosures, food riots, and of the criminalised, and thus subversive strategies of survival and reproduction. The impotentiality of individuals had to be enforced by the state, their propensity to combine autonomously or within and against their workplaces made the process of the integration of the proletariat into work-life a protracted process.

More and Shakespeare, see appendix 6.2.

562 This is quoted from Wakefield's *England and America* by Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 939. From here we could develop an interesting analysis of the American settler and frontier mythology as an expression of popular desires to escape wage labour.

563 *Ibid.*, 931 and 940.

564 Cf. appendix 3.2.

In tandem with the repression of other modes of survival, money developed into a general condition for participation in society: if you don't have it you are compelled to obtain it, be it by working, stealing, selling yourself or by marrying someone who has money. In other words, proletarians had and have to reproduce themselves through exchange. However, this gives us nothing but the abstract social form through which labour is reproduced; indeed the ways in which labour takes this form are innumerable. Behind the common problem of the proletarians (dispossession of means of re/production) and their common 'solution' (money) lies a manifold of heterogeneous modes of life through which the proletarian condition can and must be lived. Thus, as Silvia Federici shows,

primitive accumulation ... was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as 'race' and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.⁵⁶⁵

What is also implied here is that as the reproduction of the proletariat became mediated through the wage, it did not abolish proletarian self-reproduction; the wage has very rarely been high enough for workers to obtain all the means of their reproduction (food ready for consumption, sex, cleaning, health care) directly on the market.⁵⁶⁶ Instead, the wage became a form through which the unpaid reproductive work of women, but also of children and other dependants, was mediated through the mostly male wage, producing what Mariarosa Dalla Costa calls the *patriarchy of the wage*.⁵⁶⁷ Whereas Marx's analysis focuses first on the accumulation of 'men', and then on their production and reproduction of capital through their exploitation, authors such as Federici, Fortunati, Dalla Costa and James provide a theory of the condition of possibility of Marx's analysis: the production and reproduction of labour power itself.⁵⁶⁸ To understand the history of how struggles over reproduction started to wane, it is therefore not enough to analyse the integration of proletarians in wage-labour and the criminalisation of alternative reproductive practices. We must understand with Federici

⁵⁶⁵ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 64.

⁵⁶⁶ Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (Boston: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1981).

⁵⁶⁷ Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973).

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. See also Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Capitalism and Reproduction," *The Commoner* 8, no. Autumn/Winter (2004).

how one effect of this war on women, whose most violent episode was the witch-hunts, was that the proletariat was split.⁵⁶⁹ This effect of this war was not just the primitive accumulation and disciplining of women's bodies by capital, but ultimately the subordination of proletarian women to proletarian men. For these men the struggle for reproduction was often – and once alternative routes were exhausted *mostly* – a struggle to find women who could reproduce them. To the *macro-Gewalt* of the clergy and the state, a *micro-Gewalt* of the everyday was added, often drawing on the discursive resources and images produced by the former. Economic compulsion and extra-economic violence are inseparable but yet distinguishable under capitalism.

The destruction of the different forms of reproductive self-organisation of the proletarians, did not entail a destruction of proletarian reproduction as such, but the creation of the modern nuclear family, within which unpaid reproductive work took care of the reproductive needs of children and wage workers, so the workers could remain free-floating mutually competitive productive atoms. Hence we can see the modern family as an essential survival-unity in a condition of insecurity.

5. From the Chemism of Money to the Teleology of Capital

If primitive accumulation is a process that tends to produce an atomised populace, we have seen why the basic unity of bourgeois society is mostly the family, and why 'individual' and 'person' could also in the modern period, as it had in Roman law, refer to a man and his dependants. This legal subsumption is merely another side of the subsumption of reproductive activities under the dominance of the person standing in an exchange relation with society, i.e. the person mediating the reproduction of the family with society. Here we shall look at this mediation, the *chemism* through which the social atoms are combined, and how these combinations are organised into the social 'organism' and submitted to the teleology of capitalism. This, following the layered relational logic of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* (see chapter 1), gives us the moment from the non-dialectical exteriority of the separated parts to the systemic-dialectical organisation.

We cannot presume that the first encounters of the new proletarian mass with paid labour for others was with *capitalist* wage-labour. As day labourers or servants, nannies,

569 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*; Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995).

soldiers, cooks, etc., many paupers engaged in wage and wage-like relations with the wealthy without producing commodities; the class opposition became mediated by money without inscribing itself immediately or without residue in the social teleology of capital accumulation. The practical abstraction from use-value that comes with any sale – of commodities and labour-power alike – became more and more common. In other words, *money* and *wage-labour* become the two primary mediations through which masses of people gain access to goods needed for their reproduction. Drawing on Hegel's notion of chemistry as the power of division and combination, Marx had already in 1844 noted the 'chemical power' of money:

If money is the bond which ties me to human life and society to me, which links me to nature and to man, is money not the bond of all bonds? Can it not bind and loosen all bonds? Is it therefore not the universal means of separation? It is the true agent of separation and the true cementing agent, it is the chemical power of society.⁵⁷⁰

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx insists that this power of money to mediate between atomised individuals is not a form of independence as much as a mutual indifference and separation. While individuals seem

free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom; ... they appear thus only for someone who abstracts from the conditions, the conditions of existence within which these individuals enter into contact...⁵⁷¹

Proletarians only become wage-labours because their separation from the means of production (partially violently maintained, as we have seen) compels them to be reconnected by money. Labour's own power to 'combine and separate', and to give form, can only be realised through the mediation of money.⁵⁷² The chapters on primitive accumulation allow us to historicise the monetarisation of social relations, and relate it to the question of reproduction⁵⁷³: only after the separation brought about by primitive accumulation do we approximate conditions under which '[t]he nexus of society is established by the network of exchange and by nothing else.'⁵⁷⁴ The 'abstraction, or idea ... is nothing more than the theoretical expression [*Ausdruck*] of those material

570 Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 377.

571 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 163–4.

572 See Marx's reference to Pietro Verri, also quoted in Chapter 4. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 133.

573 Matt Hampton, "Money as Social Power: The Economics of Scarcity and Working Class Reproduction," *Capital & Class* 37, no. 3 (October 1, 2013): 373–395.

574 Sohn-Rethel, "Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology," 29.

relations which are their lord and master.⁵⁷⁵

Here, the barriers to the generalisation of capitalist relations were removed, both through the destruction of the guild system and the creation of a mass market in workers and goods. This marks a shift in social reproduction from straightforwardly organic and generally local relations of reproduction, where people reproduced themselves communally and rarely moved around. In a monetary economy, social reproduction functions through the 'chemical' combination and separation of atomised individuals. Money pure and simple does not fundamentally change the elements which are combined, nor does it abolish their differences, or the contradiction characteristic of their mediated separation. Indeed, '[m]oney does not create these antitheses and contradictions; it is, rather, the development of these contradictions and anti-theses which creates the seemingly transcendental power of money.'⁵⁷⁶ Here again, we see the logic by which a solution to a problem, that of the opposition between buying and selling, does not abolish the problem, but perpetuates it and raises it to a higher level, by turning into a contradiction. Marx does not present the development of money, however, as simply a development from ordinary commodity exchange; the chemical power of money comes to prevail through *measures imposed by force*, such as the change of taxes and rents paid in kind into monetary taxes and rents, a point to 'to be developed further', as Marx notes to himself.⁵⁷⁷

The general separation enforced by primitive accumulation opens the question of the recombination of elements in order to make them productive and to guarantee 'public safety.' Here we must leave the noisy sphere of monetary exchange and enter into the hidden abode of production; not, however, to see how surplus-value is produced, but to see how the lost potentialities of the workers are recombined – through capital – into the body of social labour. The issue of whether and how to combine separated elements is a constant theme in the period of early capitalism, of political theory – in the notions of the state of nature and the social contract, for instance, as in Hobbes' artificial model of society as the formal subordination of individuals considered as mechanical forces, as in

575 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 164.

576 Ibid., 146.

577 Ibid. It is noteworthy that money, taxes and the commodification of land were particularly important for the monetisation of the colonies, as a way to force the colonised populations as well as proletarian settlers to produce for the market or engage in wage-labour. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, chapter 33. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982), 165. For an very useful discussion of colonial taxation, partially a corrective to Marx, see Mathew Forstater, "Taxation: A Secret Of Colonial Capitalist (So-Called) Primitive Accumulation," *University of Missouri – Kansas City Working Paper No. 25* (n.d.).

state, and in political economy, as in Mirabeau, a moderate in the French revolution quoted by Marx. Mirabeau takes the result of primitive accumulation for granted, when he discusses the relative merits of large-scale factories and farms (*manufactures* or *fabriques réunie*) consisting of the combination of many small expropriated sites of production, and isolated workshops:

The combined workshop (*fabrique réunie*) will prodigiously enrich one or two *entrepreneurs*, but the workers will only be journeymen, paid more or less, and will not have any share in the success of the undertaking. In the isolated workshop (*fabrique séparée*), on the contrary no one will become rich, but many workers will be comfortable.⁵⁷⁸

Marx clearly is of a different mind, yet he does not dispute Mirabeau's analysis, but simply situates it in relation to 'the contemporary [late eighteenth century] position of a large part of the Continental manufactures', for whom the development of 'combined workshops' still seemed 'artificial and exotic.'⁵⁷⁹ However, Marx notes, the small workshops and homesteads, consisting of families, would soon be competing with the large-scale industries and farms made possible by the emergence of a 'home market.'⁵⁸⁰

In chapter 14, titled the 'Division of Labour and Manufacture', Marx presents the development of co-operation based on the division of labour (i.e. manufacture) as an initially 'spontaneous formation' bringing together craftsmen of a certain trade or combining different trades in one workshop, within the limits of the guild system.⁵⁸¹ Capitalist production proper, as we have seen, requires the combination of a large number of dispossessed workers at once, and the destruction of the limitations of the guild system. This kind of production introduces the particular kind of proletarianisation which is the de-skilling of the worker.⁵⁸² But it also gives rise to the specifically capitalist form of large-scale co-operation (Vol. 1, chapter 13), which consists at once in the dis-empowerment of the individual, as noted, and the creation of a collective organic power:

Being independent of each other, the workers are isolated. They enter into relations with the capitalist, but not with each other. Their co-operation only

578 Quoted by Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 910.

579 Ibid.

580 Ibid., chapter 30.

581 Ibid., 485, 457.

582 On the crippling effects of proletarianisation and the division of labour in Marx and Adam Smith, see appendix 6.3.

begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves. On entering the labour process they are incorporated into capital. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they merely form a particular mode of existence of capital. Hence the productive power developed by the worker socially is the productive power of capital.⁵⁸³

The integration of proletarians into capitalist production requires the destruction of the former communal relations and means of (re)production, i.e. the destruction of the previous mode of production through which peasants, for instance, could reproduce themselves. The power of atomised individuals is merely *potential*, the path to its actualisation either goes through criminalised activities or wage labour; they are kept from composing in ways other than with capital. The chemical question of combination of labour and money through wage-labour is, however, still a question of *contingent encounters*. It is only when these encounters become regularised in a new mode of (re)production that we can speak of the development of systemic necessity proper.

Such only becomes possible because the vast productive potential of capitalist co-operation finds a *market* for the goods thus produced. This, finally, leads us to the establishment of an organic relation between capital and labour, one dialectically contradictory, relating to their mutual reproduction: Whereas previously, the produce brought to the market amounted to a small portion of the overall goods consumed, as most peasants produced their means of subsistence themselves, the expropriations have created not only the conditions of capital and labour – their existence as naked wealth and labour capacity – but also the demand for the goods produced capitalistically: only through the separations of primitive accumulation can the home market arise. The issue is that the destruction of a large number of the small workshops in the rural domestic industry makes the remaining incapable of satisfying the needs of social reproduction, and renders them vulnerable in competition with larger combined farms and industries precisely because these can supply this market with reproductive goods. It is this 'organic' question of the functional-relational capacity to satisfy the needs of social reproduction, rather than the question of the comparison and opposition between productive facilities of different magnitudes, which gives the conditions by which large producers can drive out or subsume smaller workshops, i.e. turn them into a network of subsidiary and low-paid producers of raw materials for larger industries.⁵⁸⁴ This opens

583 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 451.

584 *Ibid.*, 911. Note that such subsidiary producers can produce very cheaply because they depend on

the question of the new temporality, the synchronic, or *synchronising and expansive* temporality of capital:

The collective worker, formed from the combination of the many specialized workers, draws the wire with one set of tooled-up hands, straightens the wire with another set, armed with different tools, cuts it with another set, points it with another set, and so on. The different stages of the process, previously successive in time, have become simultaneous and contiguous in space. ... This simultaneity ... arises from the general co-operative form of the process of as a whole.⁵⁸⁵

It proceeds by imposing a rhythm on the manifold of workers it organises like a nineteenth-century conductor,⁵⁸⁶ but also by increasingly 'subdividing handicraft labour' and 'riveting each worker to a single fraction of the work.'⁵⁸⁷ Subordinated to the workday, bodily lived duration is not abolished but subordinated: 'constant labour of one uniform kind disturbs the intensity and flow of a man's vital forces, which find recreation and delight in the change of activity itself.'⁵⁸⁸

6. The Movement of Capital

Before the development of the capitalist mode of production, accumulation was mostly a non-reproductive process. Whether through expropriation, interest on debt or trade, surpluses were generally merely transferred from A to B. At this time, capitalist exploitation took place only in few branches of production in certain towns, and rarely included the whole commodity chain. The epochal shift introduced with the the capitalist mode of production is that this process is made reproductive. Capital comes back to posit its own beginning: M-C-M'. Whilst the line of regular trade begins and ends with the material consumption of wealth, C-M-C, two encounters between individual atoms that eventually compose each with a product, in capitalism this process

other forms of income or cultivate small plots of lands for the market on the side.

585 Ibid., 464.

586 'All directly social or communal labour on a large scale requires, to a greater or lesser extent, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of individuals, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the motion of the total productive organism, as distinguished from the motion of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor: an orchestra requires a separate one.' Ibid., 448.

587 Ibid., 464.

588 Ibid., 460. See also E.P. Thompson's seminal article "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38, no. 1 (December 1, 1967), 56–97.

gets a life of its own. Marx, as we have seen in the previous chapter, often likens the capitalist mode of (re)production to an organism. Life, notes Hegel, is a very precise moment designating the articulation of chemical component into a living process: 'life is a perenniating chemical process.'⁵⁸⁹ For him, complex life is distinguished from simple life by being an organised whole. The organising function is called the soul: '[e]ach member has the entire soul within it, and is only independent through its being connected with the whole.'⁵⁹⁰ For Marx, capitalism is precisely defined by being a 'self-valourising-value' or 'value in process', which he speaks of in several places as the *soul* of capital.⁵⁹¹ Thus he speaks of capital as a '*social soul*' that enters the body of labour and products,⁵⁹² when they are organised as elements in the life process of capital. Whereas the labourers had previously worked the land and made products for their own reproduction, the sustenance of their bodies is now predicated on helping the soul of this new mode of production wander:

While productive labour is changing the means of production into constituent elements of a new product, their value undergoes a metempsychosis [*Seelenwanderung*]. It deserts the consumed body to occupy the newly created one. But this transmigration [*Seelenwanderung*] takes place, as it were, behind the back of the actual labour in progress.⁵⁹³

Contrary to the common impression that this focus on the 'metaphysical subtleties' of capital is merely a satirical play with metaphors, our reading goes some way to show that these natural-historical concepts are precise notions of relationality, organisation, and reproduction. When money becomes capital, or rather when C-M-C becomes M-C-M' we have the shift from a chemical to a teleological process, i.e. from encounters that might produce sequences, to a self-reproducing and expansive system. This is the 'natural historic' logic of organisation which underlies what Antonio Negri calls Marx's 'method of the tendency.'⁵⁹⁴ However, the most precise layers of Marx's discourse are obviously those that critically work through the concepts of political economy, precisely

589 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature II*, 219. See also Cinzia Ferrini, "The Transition to Organics: Hegel's Idea of Life," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011).

590 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 13, §337.

591 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 253–57. See appendix 6.4. on the 'soul' of capital. David McNally is one of the few to give attention to this, even if his reading ultimately stretches the idea of the soul in a metaphoric direction. *Monsters of the Market* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 125.

592 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 909. My emphasis.

593 *Ibid.*, 314.

594 Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991).

because the concepts of political economy refer to real abstractions.

So the epochal beginning of the capitalist mode of production marks the moment in which accumulation becomes a self-expanding self-positing process of self-valorisation. The extraction of surplus-value which drives this process takes two forms. These two modes are the extraction of absolute and relative surplus-value: The former is related to strategies for increasing the total number of hours worked by increasing the workday and the workforce. The latter seeks to increase the intensity and productivity of work, by employing more and more machinery:

The production of *absolute surplus-value* turns exclusively on the length of the [social] working day, whereas the production of *relative surplus-value* completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour and the groupings into which society is divided. It therefore requires a specifically capitalist mode of production, a mode of production which, along with its methods, means and conditions, arises and develops spontaneously on the basis of the formal subsumption of labour under capital. This formal subsumption is then replaced by a real subsumption.⁵⁹⁵

In formal subsumption, capital exploits a given labour process as it finds it by extracting the difference between the cost of labour-power (i.e. its means of reproduction) and the products of labour. This difference is absolute surplus-value.⁵⁹⁶ In real subsumption, the *telos* of capital organises the labour process itself in order to extract greater surplus-value *relative* to other capitals, through the introduction of labour saving technologies.⁵⁹⁷ Real and formal subsumption, as well as relative and absolute surplus-value, are systemic-logical concepts, however, they often also play a periodising function in Marx. They can thus help us trace the narrative of the shift from the dominance of trade and manufacture to industrial capitalism, which we have seen above, is the historical expression of the development of real subsumption out of formal subsumption. As Marx writes, with real subsumption, 'capitalist production ... establishes itself as a mode of production *sui generis* and brings into being a new mode of material production.' What this means is that it produces not only profits, but capitalist social relations; capital thus begins to produce its own conditions.⁵⁹⁸

595 Ibid., 645. My emphasis.

596 Ibid., 1021.

597 Ibid., 1025.

598 Ibid., 1035.

[O]nly capitalist commodity production is an epoch-making mode of exploitation, which in the course of its historical development revolutionises the entire structure of society by its organisation of the labour-process and its gigantic extension of technique, and towers incomparably above all former epochs.⁵⁹⁹

As long as capital can *extend* this day, or more precisely *extend the time of surplus-labour absolutely*, by employing more workers who were hitherto out of work, or by lengthening the working day of the existing workforce, there is little pressure to invest in labour-saving machinery. The extraction of relative surplus-value happens exactly where the extension of the workday reaches the limit of the number of workers available within a given capital's field of operation, the limitation of the length of the working day whether by custom, struggle or law, and the 'natural' limitations of the working day, the 24 hours, or the number that a given body can labour before it collapses physically or psychically.

Capital's two fundamental strategies of exploitation, the production of absolute or relative surplus-value, give us two different logics of capitalist expansion (totalisation) on the level of social capital (in the process of expanded reproduction). On the one hand there is the connective and extensive logic of formal subsumption, and on the other the intensive and organisational logic of real subsumption. However, at this point we have only understood capital itself an expansive process of self-reproduction – and it cannot be understood as an organic process until we understand how it posits not only itself, but its presuppositions.

7. Simple and Expanded Reproduction

To reproduce itself, capital must reproduce its starting point, namely the elements of the capital-relation, capital and the proletarians. Marx calls the process of the constant renewal and perpetuation of the starting point *simple reproduction*.⁶⁰⁰ Capitalist reproduction is the reproduction of the problem of the capitalist epoch, the separation of proletarians from the means of production, i.e. a reproduction of a whole set of mediations and contradictions. In this process, the workers reproduce capital by reproducing themselves, and capital reproduces them as workers through its self-

⁵⁹⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume II*, 120.

⁶⁰⁰ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 716, 723.

reproduction:

the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him; and the capitalist just as constantly produces labour-power, in the form of a subjective source of wealth which is abstract, exists merely in the physical body of the worker, and is separated from its own means of objectification and realization; in short, the capitalist produces the worker as a wage-labourer.⁶⁰¹

Note that it is capital – the product of labour – that reproduces the worker as worker. As workers consume capitalistically produced goods, they benefit both the capitalist and the state since they reproduce the workforce. Whereas simple reproduction merely requires that value is realised as surplus-values and that any surplus is consumed, *expanded reproduction* requires that surplus-value is transformed back into new capital, variable and constant, i.e. that capital *expands*.⁶⁰²

As simple reproduction constantly reproduces the capital-relation itself, i.e. the presence of capitalists on the one side, and wage labourers on the other side, so reproduction on an expanded scale, i.e. accumulation, reproduces the capital-relation on an expanded scale, with more capitalists, or bigger capitalists, at one pole, and more wage labourers at the other pole.⁶⁰³

For this reason Marx can say that '[a]ccumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat.'⁶⁰⁴ While the relation that hereby comes to include ever more dead and living labour (capital and workers respectively), it is not by any means symmetrical. While the telos of the workers is to reproduce themselves, they can only do so by reproducing capital, i.e. by helping capitalism realise its goal, which is not the reproduction of the working class itself, but its own expanded reproduction. Capitalism, as Marx, notes is not aimed at production for needs, instead its *differentia specifica* is the valorisation of capital; 'The production of surplus-value, or the making of profits, is the absolute law of this mode of production.'⁶⁰⁵ This means that the ever-growing proletariat is not secured its reproduction in the process:

601 Ibid., 716. And: 'The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.' Ibid., 724

602 Ibid., 725, 727.

603 Ibid., 763.

604 Ibid., 764

605 Ibid., 769

'Proletarian' must be understood to mean, economically speaking, nothing other than 'wage-labourer', the man who produces and valorizes 'capital', and is thrown onto the street as soon as he becomes superfluous to the need for valorization.⁶⁰⁶

Again, we note that Marx's analysis is one of the reproductive necessities of capital, and of the proletariat insofar as it is under the systemic compulsion of the capitalist mode of production. Proletarian reproduction is secondary to the extent that it is rendered inorganic as soon as capital has no need for it (in fact the higher the *organic composition*, in Marx's terminology, the lower the ratio of living labour to machinery). Apart from driving capital's mode of expansion (intensive or extensive) and mode of subsumption (connective or organisational) the two forms of surplus-value extraction also determine this organic composition: the search for absolute surplus-value increases the component of variable capital (labour-power), while the search for relative surplus-value increases the component of constant capital.

8. The Industrial Reserve Army and Struggles Over Wages

Thus, again, we find that the proletarian condition is that of being in and out of work. 'This exchange', writes Marx in the *Grundrisse*, 'is tied to conditions which are accidental *for him [or her]*, and indifferent to his [or her] *organic* presence. He [or she] is thus a virtual pauper.'⁶⁰⁷ In an absolute sense, the separation of capital from the means of reproduction is what compels proletarians to sell their labour-power. Because of this enforced condition of proletarian non-reproduction, its virtual poverty, the contingency of the sale of labour-power can work as a systemic disciplining mechanism. This returns us to the question of the centrality of the *free* labourer for capital. Unlike the slave who is bought once and for all by the owner, and is thus a fixed cost that can only be sold at a loss if its value falls, the wage-labourer is a *variable* cost to capital, who can be let go when there is no need for their labour. The ultimate whip of free capitalist wage-slavery is homelessness and starvation.

The industrial reserve army [of the unemployed], during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of over-production and feverish activity, it puts a curb on

606 Ibid., 764

607 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 604.

their pretensions. The relative surplus population is therefore the background against which the law of the demand and supply of labour does its work. It confines the field of action of this law to the limits absolutely convenient to capital's drive to exploit and dominate the workers.⁶⁰⁸

Here, Marx explicitly states again how capitalism is not the meeting of two opposed classes, but the contradiction between two classes *mediated* by capital itself: 'capital acts on both sides at once. ... The movement of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital.'⁶⁰⁹ Marx mentions two situations in which the price of labour might rise, apart from 'violent conflicts' between labour and capital. Firstly, the price of labour may rise if it does not interfere with accumulation. Second, accumulation may slacken because of a rise in the labour cost, given that there are less profits to gain. This very slackening of accumulation lessens the demand of labour, whereby the price of labour falls again. Thus the rate of accumulation is *an independent variable, on which the rate of wages is dependent*.⁶¹⁰ This gives us a seemingly cyclical disciplining concept of capital's domination over labour.⁶¹¹

The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of the supply and demand of labour, and therefore wages, within narrow limits which correspond to capital's valorization requirements. The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker.⁶¹²

Marx is very well aware of the limitations of unionism that is limited to the workers already organised by capital. To suspend the action of the law of supply and demand of labour, a suspension of the competition between the employed and unemployed is needed. However, as soon as the creation of a reserve army is made impossible, capitalist reproduction is threatened. Under these circumstances 'capital ... rebels against the "sacred" law of supply and demand, and tries to make up for its inadequacies by

608 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 792.

609 Ibid., 793

610 Ibid., 770

611 As we will see in the next chapter, Marx points to a secular tendency underlying these periodic fluctuations of wages. This secular tendency will itself undermine workers combinations by producing an ever greater surplus-populations. See also Geert Reuten, "The Inner Mechanism of the Accumulation of Capital: The Acceleration Triple - A Methodological Appraisal of Part Seven of Marx's *Capital*, Volume I," in *The Constitution of Capital*, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore and Nicola Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

612 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 899.

forcible means.⁶¹³ Thus the problem of capitalist reproduction is not solved through the 'silent compulsion' of economic laws alone. This is the political side of the laws of the capitalist economy. In other words: the laws are only laws insofar as they are lived by *classes in themselves or for-themselves (unionisation is acceptable)*⁶¹⁴; the laws are no longer laws when faced with the proletariat for-itself. This means that despite its talk about the despotism of capital breaking down all resistance, *Capital* orientates us towards the openness of the relation of forces at the site where the economic and juridical passes over into *Gewalt*, where the economic-contractual regulation of relations between formally equal legal individuals, turns out to be a relation of force between extra-legal collective forces (unified or not): 'Between equal rights force [*Gewalt*] decides.'⁶¹⁵ Discussing the struggle over the working day, Massimiliano Tomba writes:

The *Gewalt* that seeks to determine the level of wages does not lead to civil war, but can, at most, achieve a provisional compromise; a compromise that, by its nature, is marked by violence. The compromise is never desired as such, but comes to be accepted, and as such contains within itself a coercive moment: it hides the intention to take up again as soon as it becomes possible the goal that it was necessary to give up. Compromise politics can be a "peaceful struggle", but does not eliminate violence; on the contrary, it reproduces it.⁶¹⁶

When Marx speaks of the struggle over the working day, we have a struggle premised on primitive accumulation; it is never fully managed nor legally stabilised. The exteriority of forces therefore remains in place, and, furthermore, is inscribed into the interiority of the capitalist mode of production.

The genealogy of the passage from the exteriority of the 'class' opposition to class contradiction does not show that the exteriority of forces of capital and labour is totally cancelled out, but that the relationship between them is determined by a set of rules and compulsions that are set by what Marx calls 'the pre-dominant kind of production.'⁶¹⁷

613 Ibid., 794.

614 Michael Krätke, following Rosa Luxemburg, goes as far as saying that there is no 'socially necessary labour time' without workers' combinations. The individual workers cannot gain a wage that allows their reproduction in the buyer's-market of capitalism without trade unions. Michael Krätke, "A Very Political Political Economist: Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Wages," in *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 139–174.

615 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 344.

616 Massimiliano Tomba, "Another Kind of Gewalt: Beyond Law Re-Reading Walter Benjamin," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 1 (2009), 128.

617 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 106–7.

But given the analysis we have established in the current and previous chapters, this is always also related to force and hegemony. No clear distinction between economic domination and extra-economic power is possible when we consider the system from the point of view of processes of combination and organisation. As Negri writes,

capital is always a *relation of power* (of force), that whilst it might be able to organize a solid and overbearing *hegemony*, this hegemony is always the function of a particular command inside a power relation.⁶¹⁸

The formal overdetermination of the field of struggle by one of its classes (this is what gives the dialectical formula: “capital = capital-labour”), does not abolish *Gewalt*, but sets out the rules and stakes of the struggle. Labour thus becomes a player within a game whose parameters are set up by capital and the state. E.P. Thompson puts this beautifully with respect to the historical process through which the proletariat combined with and was organised by capital:

The first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committees in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well.⁶¹⁹

Marx already points to the fact that this gradual integration of the working class is not just a matter of embodied labour-time but of subjectivity. As commodity production is generalised, there is the development of 'a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws.'⁶²⁰

9. Conclusion

Endnotes point out that the periodisation of capitalism helps us avoid the 'metaphysics of a theory of class struggle in which every historical specificity is ultimately reduced to

618 Antonio Negri, “Communism: Some Thoughts on the Concept and Practice,” in *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010), 155.

619 Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” 86. On the strongly racialised and colonial character of Marx's discussion of the work-ethic, see appendix 6.0.

620 *Capital: Volume I*, 899.

the eternal recurrence of *the same*.⁶²¹ In this chapter we have aimed to show how the struggles for proletarian reproduction went from being a struggle in opposition to the state and capital, to increasingly becoming a struggle integrated with capital and in contradiction with it, rather than in opposition to it. Yet the alternative of periodisation and invariable sameness obscures the fact that the proletariat lives the problem of its reproduction in many different ways within any given period, as well as the fact that proletarianisation and expropriation are ongoing processes (cf. chapter 5). As Federici says, primitive accumulation is also an accumulation of differences within the proletariat.⁶²² This means that the struggles of any given period cannot be reduced to any simple formula; the issue is not to ask which 'subject would be adequate to real subsumption' in this period, but how do we compose, combine and organise the struggles of the present.⁶²³

In the next chapter we will see how the drive for *absolute* and *relative surplus-value* analysed in *Capital* explains the tendencies which Marx and Engels observed in the *Manifesto*. In *Capital* it becomes possible both to see this as a real-teleological tendency, while also avoiding the unilinear projection that supports the exclusive focus on the working class. At the same time, the question emerges of the effects of this real totalisation of globalising capital: does it eventually exhaust and undermine countervailing measures, such as Hegel's ameliorating solutions, particularly the welfare state and colonialism? We will see how capital's chase for absolute surplus-value subsumes ever new swathes of population into its workforce (especially women, and former agricultural workers across the world), and how its quest for relative surplus-value compels it to replace workers with labour-saving technologies, thus generating *relative surplus populations*. All this, we will argue, results in the continuity of struggles over reproduction outside and at the margins of the capital-relation; first where new populations are subsumed, and second where proletarians are expelled from work. This reintroduces the question of self-organised reproduction on a terrain much different from that of seventeenth-century England; it reintroduces the questions of criminalisation and militarisation of the surplus-population, (neo-)colonial subsumption, land occupations, and much more.

621 Endnotes, "A History of Subsumption," *Endnotes* 2 (2010): 131.

622 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 63–64.

623 For a brief critique of totalisation in recent theories of real subsumption, see appendix 6.6.

Chapter 7: Organising the Proletariat in its Differences

But even though we are Lumpen, we are still members of the proletariat...In both the Mother Country and the Black Colony, the working class is the right wing of the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat is the left wing... We definitely have a major contradiction between the working class and the lumpenproletariat ...

- Eldridge Cleaver⁶²⁴

1. Introduction

In the *Communist Manifesto*, as seen in chapter 3, Marx's theory of revolution was predicated on an expanding socialisation of capital and a deepening immiseration and productive exploitation of the proletariat. He predicted how the globalising growth of the organised power and misery of the proletariat would prepare it for the revolutionary role. The revolutionary opportunity would come with one of the recurrent and deepening of crises overproduction. Drawing what we discussed in chapter 6, the present chapter will show how the insights of the *Communist Manifesto* were elaborated theoretically in *Capital*.⁶²⁵ But, as we have seen in chapter 4 where we visited the sketch of revolutionary transition that Marx's outlines in the chapter on 'The historical tendency of capitalist accumulation', the revolutionary prophesy allowed by this theorisation is premised on the projections of the Symmetry Thesis that capital would organise workers as its gravediggers.⁶²⁶ We have argued that deprived of the Symmetry Thesis, this leaves us with a purely accelerationist or messianic orientation to revolution, and beyond the horizon of organisation or strategy. Thus the idea of a revolutionary rupture, one way or the other, becomes premised on capital running up against its own limitations or into some absolute ecological or spatial exhaustion. But, we have to be careful, for history shows that capital tends to overcome its limits, something for which we saw Hegel's keen eye in chapter 3. For instance, Marx greatly

624 Eldridge Cleaver, "On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party," 1970.

625 We are inspired by Massimiliano Tomba, "Historical Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 4 (2009), 44–65.

626 '[T]here also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production'. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

underestimated how colonialism, neocolonialism and neoliberal globalisation would enable capital to extend its reach exponentially and diversify rather than homogenise struggles against capital.⁶²⁷ Furthermore, he underestimated the national-social state's capacity to ameliorate class antagonism and the worst effects of unemployment. For a long time it seemed social democratic and fascist, Keynesian and Rooseveltian state management, confirmed Hegel's conception that the rabble was a manageable if unfortunate problem.

The years after 2008 have not resulted in a resuscitation of the Symmetry Thesis, but in a resurgent interest in the other side of Marx's projection of the end of capital: not in the organisation of workers by capital, but the constant increase in 'the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows', the re-awakening of a negative proletariat, as also seen in chapter 3.⁶²⁸ This tendency has particularly been re-actualised through a re-reading of the 'generalised law of capitalist accumulation' and the capitalist tendency to produce surplus-populations, by currents of communisation theory, *Théorie Communiste, Sic!*, and Endnotes and taken up by Fredric Jameson. This theorisation is of interest to our project, because it is one most sophisticated among the (in any case few) contemporary Marxist attempts to think the conditions of revolutionary, communist practice today. A lot speaks for the orientation to surplus-population today: after the Great Financial Crash and during the Great Recession, the arguments that capitalism is imminently running up against both external and internal limits appears intuitively correct, in its contrast between the bubble years (and the Golden post-war-years) with the current non-recovery.⁶²⁹ Furthermore, the crisis has spread the knowledge that debt and cheap East and Southeast Asian commodities have for long masked the slow squeeze on European and American working-class households, related to a longterm socio-economic downturn. Finally, the discourses of development, which saw the former colonies as simply needing to catch up, have been challenged by the fact that capitalist development in the Global South is mostly synonymous with rural expropriation, environmental degradation, and low-wage competition with Western wages, and the production of enormous urban slum-dwelling surplus-populations.⁶³⁰ In short, the spatially differentiated, gendered and racialised effects of the 'General Law of

627 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*; Hirschman, "On Hegel, Imperialism and Structural Stagnation."

628 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

629 Jameson already takes this spatial exhaustion as a maker of post-modernism. See appendix 7.0.

630 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2007).

Capitalist Accumulation' on the proletariat, are precarisation and unemployment, migration, create the temptation of new projection, this time catastrophic, pushing us in the direction of what Eldridge Cleaver has called the *lumpenisation of humanity*.⁶³¹ From the point of view of orientation, the situation is promising: if in the past, the mode of life of large sections of the proletariat made it conformist in the problems and solutions it posed, now, as the problem is changing, so, in theory, will their political orientation. But this still leaves us with the question of *organisation*.

While the emergence of the problem of surplus population after the end of the Symmetry Thesis points towards the abstract possibility of revolution in the deepening separation of proletarians from their means of reproduction, it does not in any way provide us with a new concept of organisation, nor does it answer the question posed by the Black Panther Party: how, under the condition of *lumpenisation*, is it possible to build the capacity of resistance, pending revolution?⁶³² While these are of course practical questions to be answered in practical ways, we will ask the more formal question: what forms of organisations and active class composition become possible and necessary under conditions here described?

If Marx saw the concrete possibility of revolution in the organisation of the proletariat by capital, we are today faced with the abstract possibility of revolution, without a strong concept of organisation. Marx always gave a dual definition of the proletariat: in terms of the *problem* of their separation, their existence as 'virtual paupers', and in terms of their *exploitation* as workers.⁶³³ Where the symmetry thesis starts with the solution to this separation – wage-labour organised by capital – and the attempt to reverse it, today we must start with the problem of proletarian separation, the genealogy and persistent re-imposition which was analysed in chapters 5 and 6. To pose the question of proletarian organisation starting from here, means to pose it immediately as a question of *self-organisation*, within and beyond the workplace and other forms of capitalist and state organisation.⁶³⁴ To pose the question of self-organisation, as defined in chapters 1

631 Eldridge Cleaver, "On Lumpen Ideology", in Grass Roots - Black Community Newspaper, 1972, 4. We might speak of the years since 1989, and particularly since 2008 as the period of the end of the welfare state exception. See appendix 7.1.

632 On the Panthers' distinction between resistance and revolution, summarised in Huey P. Newton's statement that 'The vanguard party only teaches the correct methods of resistance', see Howard Caygill, "Philosophy and the Black Panthers," *Radical Philosophy* 179, no. May/June (2013).

633 Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66, no. November-December (2010).

634 It should be clear that this definition of self-organisation differs from that of Théorie Communiste, who define it in terms of the idea of the autonomy and self-affirmation of the *working class*; this, we agree, is a mode of organisation proper to the period of the Symmetry Thesis. TC can only imagine a concept of self-organisation around the identity of the worker, and not as the emergent result of

and 2 is to pose the question of 'idealisation' emerging from a process of combination. Thus, we reach the question of theory not as an external orientating supplement to practices, giving them maps and principles, but as a part of the material process of organisation, of inventing solutions to the problem of proletarian separation.

2. General Law of Capitalist Accumulation

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the history of the capitalist mode of production can be understood as the tendential organisation of proletarians according to the telos of capitalism, and the elimination of alternative strategies of reproduction. Class opposition thus tendentially becomes class contradiction even if never absolutely. Methodologically, then, the dialectical study of capital is always a study of the results of a contested process, and the necessities of its success: the systemic dialectical analysis of capital gives us a theory of capital from the point of view of its 'normal' reproduction. However, this is a normality that has to be enforced by the constant latent threat of force, a threat which is renewed through its occasional exercise. Systematic, dialectical understandings of capital are thus strictly limited, and insufficient for thinking practice. Here, however, we are interested in such a theory in so far as it gives us a sense of the terrain of struggle, and the movement of the class antagonism.

The proletariat is defined by its separation from the means of reproduction, and its compulsion to reproduce itself by reproducing capital. We have seen how the reproduction of proletariat (the value of its labour-power) is kept in line with the reproduction of capital through the 'normal' working of the law of value. If wages raise too high, capital will hire less workers, thus creating a reserve army exerting a downward pressure on wages.⁶³⁵ The point here is that as long as the employed and unemployed do not combine, wages will always fall back in line with the requirements of capital accumulation. We saw how Marx pointed out that state violence is generally unleashed should such a combination force the law of value temporarily out of function. However, there are two other crucial limitations of such organising, which are both

combination around shared problems, which is the line we will pursue here. *Théorie Communiste*, "Self-Organisation Is the First Act of the Revolution; It Then Becomes an Obstacle Which the Revolution Has to Overcome," *LibCom* (September 5, 2005).

635 Marx here brackets the role of the state, which complicates this picture, without abolishing the general dynamic, particularly under conditions of strong inter-state competition for capital investments.

based on the long-term secular tendencies of capital. First, the production and accentuation of differences within the proletariat along gendered and racialised lines, leads to competition between and within national workforces. As Marx notes with regards to the national and religious conflicts between the English and the Irish,

this antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this.⁶³⁶

This is not merely a strategy of divide and rule, however, but an effect of capital's chase for absolute surplus-value, which – as soon as it has extended the existing workday as much as possible – brings it to incorporate the labour-forces of areas where the reproductive cost of labour is lower, and where necessary labour is thus less relative to surplus-labour time. In *Grundrisse*, Marx writes:

Surplus time is the excess of the working day above that part of it which we call *necessary* labour time; it exists secondly as the multiplication of *simultaneous working days*, i.e. of the *labouring population*. ... It is a law of capital ... to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting *necessary labour* in motion – i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population – population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. ... It is equally a tendency of capital to make human labour (relatively) superfluous, so as to drive it, as human labour, towards infinity.⁶³⁷

Second, Marx discovers that the chase for relative surplus-value itself replaces workers with machinery, leading to an internal secular tendency towards the growth of surplus populations.⁶³⁸ Thus, by enrolling new populations as workers and by expelling existing workers in favour of machinery, capital produces ever larger working classes along side ever greater surplus populations, which makes the challenges of suspending the law of value through organisation ever greater. We see here two tendencies of capitalism: whether in crisis or in periods of growth, existing lines of production will shed labour.

636 Marx's letter to Vogt and Mayer, April 1970 in *MECW - Marx and Engels: April 1868-July 1870*, vol. 43 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 475.

637 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 398–9.

638 Here we can only present Marx's systematic analysis of this tendency, to which he notes there are many modifying circumstances. That this tendency is observable empirically is suggested by Endnotes and Aaron Benanav, "Misery and Debt," *Endnotes 2* (2010); Davis, *Planet of Slums*.

Despite periodic crises, capital will accumulate ever more capital, and employ ever more proletarians. This gives us 'the general law of capitalist accumulation':

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. ... But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.* Like all other laws, it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here.⁶³⁹

If we try to break this down we have three effects of this law: the expansion of the mass of employed ('active') proletarians, of the number of unemployed ('reserve') proletarians, and of the mass of unemployable ('consolidated') proletarians.⁶⁴⁰ The effect of the latter two categories is to press down wages, i.e. the monetary part of the reproduction of the working population. Indeed, capital constantly produces a relatively redundant working population, i.e. a population which is superfluous to capitals, to fulfil capital's drive for valorisation.⁶⁴¹ The expanded reproduction of capital is thus *both* the expanded reproduction of the employed and unemployed populations, positing an ever greater relative surplus, a 'disposable reserve army' bread by the capitalist mode of production.⁶⁴² 'Modern industry's whole form of motion therefore depends on the constant transformation of the working population into unemployed or semi-employed "hands"'.⁶⁴³ The tendential expansion of capitalist productivity along with the growth of

639 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 798. Marx does not present what such modifying circumstances might be, and leaves this as a simple *ceteris paribus* clause. Henryk Grossman has a useful list of the economic factors from which Marx abstracts in his systematic analysis. "3. Modifying countertendencies" in *Law of the Accumulation and Breakdown*, trans. Jairus Banaji (Marxists.org, 1929).

640 Marx distinguishes between four different modes of existence of surplus populations: 1. floating form: urban in and out of work. 2. latent form: the masses that can be called in from rural areas. 3. stagnant: extremely irregular employment. 4. Pauperism: lumpenproletariat; consisting of those unemployable, either because they refuse work, or because they cannot work. This is what we can call *absolute surplus-population*. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 794–97.

641 Ibid., 782.

642 Ibid., 783–4.

643 Ibid., 786.

poverty means that the reproductive cycles of capital and labour become increasingly decoupled. 'In and through these cyclical crises, a secular crisis emerges, a *crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labour relation itself*', write Endnotes.⁶⁴⁴

3. Secular Crisis and Revolutionary Hopes

This perspective is that of antagonistic reproduction, i.e. the struggle for reproduction of those who can only reproduce themselves by appropriating what they need. Following a similar logic of exhaustion of frontiers and possibilities of intensive capitalist development, contemporary Endnotes posit a deepening crisis of the reproduction of the class relation itself, whereby the reproduction of capital and of the proletariat will enter into a deepening antagonism:

With its own reproduction at stake, the proletariat cannot but struggle, and it is this reproduction itself that becomes the content of its struggles. As the wage form loses its centrality in mediating social reproduction, capitalist production itself appears increasingly superfluous to the proletariat: it is that which makes us proletarians, and then abandons us here. In such circumstances the horizon appears as one of communisation; of directly taking measures to halt the movement of the value form and reproduce ourselves without capital.⁶⁴⁵

This invites us to imagine present struggles that are neither modelled on a desire for a return to pre-capitalist conditions or on an escape from history through its dissolution, nor on an *Aufhebung* of the immensely destructive process of capitalist globalisation. This orientation is immanent to the actuality of the capital-relation, an orientation not towards something more modern and exciting, or more of the same without the bad stuff, but of a real movement beginning with the desires and needs of today as they are increasingly unsatisfied under conditions of capitalist crisis. The orientation of these needs and desires is of paramount importance, and a matter of organisation. Disorganised, their orientation will increase the competitive pressure among the global proletariat, but if organised, these needs and desires will be objectively antagonistic insofar as they demand something that capital cannot or refuses to provide.⁶⁴⁶

However, we can only see this as immediately and imminently *revolutionary*, if we

644 Endnotes and Benanav, "Misery and Debt," 32.

645 Endnotes, "Crisis in the Class Relation," 19.

646 For a remark about the relation between proletarian organisation and the capitalist downturn since the 1970s, see appendix 7.1.

claim that capitalism has reached some absolute limit to expansion, some exhaustion of the capitalist teleology itself. Otherwise, capital will have room to manoeuvre and give concessions, and we would thus be dealing either with a contingent limit, which poses nothing but a window of revolutionary opportunity, or more fluid fields of struggles. Staking everything on one global totalising process of subsumption and abjection, communitarian theory describes a process that is heading for its limit. Like with Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*, deepening misery becomes the occasion for a *conditional* belief in progress, a kind of perverse faith that history will progress by its bad side – or perhaps the thesis is merely that *if* it progresses by its bad side, it will do so in a more communist way this time, unmediated by trade unions and parties, and free of the labourist productivism of former epochs. Curiously, this hope is premised precisely on the *absence* of the positive tendency on which Marx and Engels hung their hats, namely the growing organisation and productive power of the proletariat. However, the debate which is of interest here is not one between forms of hope, and the possibility of good abstract reversals of good or bad abstract tendencies. Neither from surplus population to communitarianism, nor from the multitude to commonwealth, as it were. This takes us no further than the Kantian concept of orientation, to a theoretical indication of hope, which might keep practical reason from falling into cynicism, melancholia or opportunism. Even if this concept, unlike Kant's, is founded on a systematic materialist and dialectical understanding of the laws of movement of capital, such a theory does not, as we have seen, provide us with a strategic, practical orientation of class formation, nor with a concept of state *force*.

As Albert O. Hirschman provocatively notes, in the late 1840s Marx thought that capitalism was reaching its final limit, not recognising the capacity of imperialism to displace capitalism's contradictions and postpone its crisis. Thus, as we saw in chapter 3, Marx saw colonialism as a progressive force, the driver of the process that would make the proletariat a global reality, and thus communism a global possibility. This implication is premised on an abstract formal dialectical reversal, which completely effaces how the effects of the global division of labour is divisive and disciplining, and hence the necessary difficult task of developing cross-border solidarity. Similarly, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg only really recognised this power of imperialism when they could say it was close to having run its course, i.e. when this recognition did not contradict the idea that revolution is imminent. The question Hirschman's provocation raises is the following: does the orientation of the revolutionary desire of Marxists – insofar as it is

sustained by the theory of capital's real teleology running its course – orientate them away from the problem that there might still be venues for capitalist expansion as well as other modifying circumstances to the general law?⁶⁴⁷ And furthermore, does capital not have the capacity to re-subsume areas and populations it had previously spat out as if they were new to it – once they have been sufficiently devalued? The problem with the thesis of exhaustion is that in order to give hope it needs to suggest a uniform deepening of the proletarian antagonism with capital. This allows theory to avoid the question of strategy and organisation, and allows it to 'solve' the problem of the proletarian condition through a simple dialectical schematic *à la* 'the expropriators are expropriated.' While we might agree that that is indeed the formal concept of communist revolution, it says nothing whatsoever about the real movement that abolishes the present state of things.

The proletariat is defined by a negative commonality, yet it exists as a positive heterogeneity of forms of living and surviving. As we saw in chapter 5, the proletariat is defined by the common problem of reproduction, by its separation from the means of production. In chapter 6 we saw that this is a problem which is necessarily faced and tackled in various different ways. This, furthermore, entails that the modes of struggle of the proletariat are extremely diverse: from the limit condition of peasants fighting against becoming proletarianised, to the classical figure of the wage-labourer on strike, lies a whole range of struggles, to which feminists and post-colonial writers are more attuned than most Marxists. Once we recognise this constitutive heterogeneity of the exploited and expropriated populations of the world, we recognise that any general theory of 'the proletariat' as a revolutionary agent will have to start from the self-organisation of differences. Here we can merely elaborate the appearance of this challenge in relation to the critique of political economy and the tendencies of global capitalism.

What is interesting and challenging about the re-actualisation of the theory of surplus populations today, is that unlike the immiseration thesis of the *Communist Manifesto*, it is not predicated on a thesis of the gradual shaping of the world in the image of the bourgeoisie or the homogenisation of the proletariat. As we saw in chapter 3, the privileging of the revolution of the working class over the many different struggles against capital (against proletarianisation, colonialism, gendered oppression, etc.) is partially a result of the strong theoretical orientation of the Symmetry Thesis. The

647 Hirschman, "On Hegel, Imperialism and Structural Stagnation," 6–7.

reality of surplus-populations poses instead the issue of a generalised crisis of reproduction, and the multitude of survival strategies that arise from it, including modes of wealth appropriation far short of revolution proper. Reversing the relation between theory and practice, it poses the question: *what does it mean to orientate revolutionary practice from the standpoint of the problem of the proletarian condition and the manifold ways to live it?* Here we cannot, of course, raise this question of the actuality of the proletariat in all its forms. Rather, we merely try to elaborate the *theoretical place* of this standpoint in Marx, and to ask what resources he provides to think revolutionary class formation from this standpoint.

Firstly, Marx recognised that the proletariat also attempts to survive outside the capital-relation, as *lumpenproletariat*, rural or urban. This class lives as an excluded insider to 'the silent compulsion of economic relations', instead constantly faced with the '[d]irect extra-economic force which is still ... used, but only in exceptional cases.'⁶⁴⁸ If we are to think the common problem of dispossession as the common problem through which those living it differently might be united, then the problem must be thought in its full range.

Secondly, in times of crisis, capitalist actuality is disrupted by contagious contingency. Capitalist crises have always been crises of the reproduction not only of capital, but of the proletariat, in its many modes. In crises, workers who are thrown unto the streets must find other means to survive. When these efforts to solve the reproduction problem outside of capital become more urgent and more powerful, they are faced with the force (*Gewalt*) which sustains capitalist actuality when it is faced with its own contingency. It is from such moments of crisis and contingency – and the deepening crisis of surplus population – that the thinking of proletarian self-organisation must start.

4. Lumpen/Proletariat

In chapter 3 we saw how Marx, from 1843 to 1848, continued to be invested in the negative revolutionary figure of the proletariat, as the harbinger of a revolution of radical needs, also as he increasingly stressed the positive, productive side of the proletariat. Before 1848, Marx affirms that universal communism is both *possible*

⁶⁴⁸ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 899. On the notion of the inclusion of the excluded as excluded, see Colectivo Situaciones, *19&20 Notes for a New Social Protagonism*, trans. Nate Holdren and Sebastián Touza (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2011), 103–106.

because the proletariat has become a world-historical producer, and becoming *necessary* because the proletariat will increasingly struggle to survive. This deepening necessity was seen as springing from the contradictory development of civil society, its dual production of excess populations and surplus wealth. Thus the prediction of revolution is premised not only on the growing productive powers of the proletariat, but on its pauperisation.⁶⁴⁹ In this final part of this chapter we return to the period immediately after 1848, which bear witness to a profound moment of crisis, that of the 1848 Revolution in France and its aftermath. This crisis shook and complicated Marx's belief in progress (both by the good and the bad side), and complicated the idea of the relation between radical needs and revolution. This led to the composition of the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx's perhaps most important strategic reading of how, in a moment of crisis, contingency breaks out, *Gewalt becomes decisive; here the problem of social revolution is no longer one of economic tendencies, but about organisation, class-alliances and articulations of interests, in a situation where it turns out that the issue of political class composition is rather more complicated than economic class analysis tends to suggest*. Our interest will here be to read these issues in relation to the problems of the inner differences of the proletariat, and in relation to proletarian needs and reproduction.

We have already seen in chapters 5 and 6 that Marx conceptualises the problem of the proletarian condition in two ways: in terms of its exploitation and in terms of its expropriation. If the former relates to the (waged) working class the latter refers to anybody separated from the means of re/production, a pauper virtual or actual. The lumpenproletariat is the central category for understanding that part of the proletariat which falls solely into the second category. Marx first introduced the lumpenproletariat in a discussion of Max Stirner's romantic vision of non-productive and work-refusing ragamuffins and lazzaroni. After 1848, the problem of the lumpenproletariat becomes a problem of a failed revolution, of the proletarians who sold themselves to the reactionaries. This approach, which stresses the difference between the working class and the lumpen, and contains certain moments of moralisation from the perspective of the work-ethic and law and order, has since been at the mainstream of Marxism, with the most notable exceptions in Frantz Fanon and the Black Panther Party. In appendices 3.5 and 3.6 we see how Marx's focus on the productivity of the proletariat produces the lumpenproletariat as an incoherent residue which helps constitute the unity and social

⁶⁴⁹ Marx did not hold to theory of absolute immiseration. See appendix 3.2.

productivity of the proletariat in opposition to it. Here, however, we shall consider not the opposition between the lumpen and the working class, but rather the possibility of their composition, starting from the point of view of their common problem. To think the proletariat as differentiated into workers and lumpenproletarians means not prioritising the problem of exploitation over domination or vice versa, but rather to see these as different ways in which proletarians live their condition: at the extremes some suffer only one or the other directly, but mostly, proletarians are faced with some mix of both. And through the mediation of competition of jobs and state hand-outs, etc., all proletarians are always indirectly submitted to both, but in a differentiated way in which some are *relatively privileged* over others.

.....

The 18th Brumaire is prefaced by a meditation on the time of revolution.⁶⁵⁰ Here the temporal orientation of the potential social actors in history, and their proximity to the flow of history becomes central to the analysis. Class here becomes much more than a category determined by its place in the social order, the class in-itself, but a question of the class for-itself its internal composition, the relations between classes, the articulations of common problems, and of the spontaneous and possible temporal orientations of the class, etc.. If the proletariat was ready to accept the leap into history, other classes were not, and as they became functional to the *Gewalt* of the counter-revolution, the force of the proletariat was defeated.

If the *Communist Manifesto* stressed a gradual polarisation of society, the *18th Brumaire* considers a number of classes, and *sub-categories of classes*. The question of revolution here is not one of a world-historical clash or transition, but of navigation in a crisis, it is not about the consummation of necessity, but of relations between forces in a situation of *contingency*. This chapter will analyse Marx's description of these classes and their modes of political composition and representation with a view to asking *how* they might relate to the problem of history, indeed be in closer contact to it than Marx thinks. The proletariat was ready to leap, because *it* was in circumstances calling out for a leap, while other classes were treading water or joining the forces of reaction. First, the petty bourgeois are, as we saw in the previous chapter, too stuck in the present, too realistic and philistine, incapable of conceiving of an overcoming, rather than a mediation of the problematic relation of capital and wage labour. Second, the small-

650 See appendix 3.7.

holding peasants live a life on the margin of history, exploited by it, yet living in relative isolation. Finally, and most peculiarly, the lumpenproletariat re-enters as a problematic figure for Marx's schema of revolution: as a class the lumpen are irrefutably a product of bourgeois society and its dynamics, and a class of radical needs, yet one organised *against* the 1848 revolution in France.

The February Revolution had cast the army out of Paris. The National Guard, that is, the bourgeoisie in its different gradations, constituted the sole power. Alone, however, it did not feel itself a match for the proletariat. Moreover, it was forced gradually and piecemeal to open its ranks and admit armed proletarians, albeit after the most tenacious resistance and after setting up a hundred different obstacles. There consequently remained but one way out: *to play off part of the proletariat against the other*.⁶⁵¹

Thus enter the lumpenproletariat in the narrative of the failure of the revolution, made historically relevant by the 24,000 young men recruited to the Mobile Guard to suppress the revolutionary proletariat. Already in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels had warned against this group:

The "dangerous class," the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.⁶⁵²

Marx's scepticism with regards to the lumpenproletariat is a result of his awareness of how the political allegiances of a class are shaped by the ways in which this class reproduces itself. However, this did not lead him to suggest that *political* recomposition can be achieved through recomposition of reproduction. Instead, he conceptualised the chaos of the revolutionary crisis solely in terms of its *political* contingency, rather than its *reproductive* contingency. Thus the question of strategy and force becomes reduced to the question of recomposing the political contingencies with a view to establishing new class alliances. This nevertheless gives us one of Marx's most interesting reflections on the dynamics of political representation in relation to class interest, and the decisive role of *Gewalt* in a situation of crisis. This is, incidentally, most relevant in relation to classes such as the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, whose basic needs are satisfied,

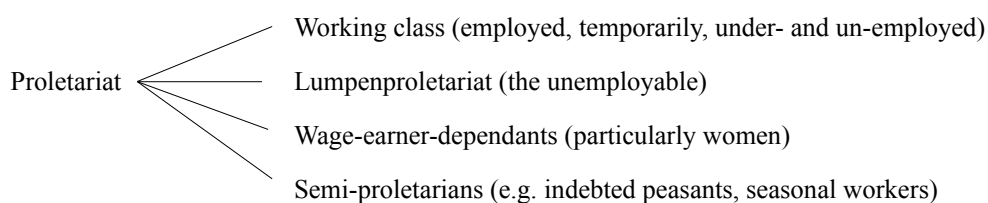
651 Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 219.

652 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 118.

whose problem is not immediately that of their reproduction. We will turn to these classes now.

5. Proletarian Difference

With regards to the proletariat, we have seen that wage labour is one of many ways in which proletarians try to solve the problem of separation. If the proletarian is a *virtual* pauper, the proletarian *condition* (to take this word in the sense of the 'human condition', but historicised and negative) is the common problem to which different 'classes' live different solutions:



The proletariat in Marx's analysis is not limited to the actively-working industrial proletariat, which was so central to trade-union, socialist and communist strategy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If the proletariat consists, as Engels claimed in 1888, of 'the class of modern wage labourers, who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live', we must note that this does not imply that they find willing buyers.⁶⁵³ The proletariat thus consists both of the employed and the unemployed. If the proletariat and lumpenproletariat are not agglomerations of concrete individuals, but modes of life which individuals slip in and out of according to the need and availability of work or other strategies of survival, the distinctions begin to blur. Yet it is clear that frequent conflicts might arise between these populations, both for moral reasons – in the context of the protestant work ethic – and the negative impact of crime on the everyday of working people.⁶⁵⁴ What distinguishes the lumpenproletariat from the unemployed is its mode of life, its everyday strategies of hustling, theft, and sex work, a subjectivity or conduct that tends to make it

653 In a note to the English edition of *ibid.*, 108. Denning, "Wageless Life."

654 Marx's analysis of the interplay between the common sense and day to day common *sensibility* of work and law-abiding behavior among 'working people' has been usefully updated in Hall, S., C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 142, 149.

unemployable, whereas the unemployed law-abidingly look for work. Similarly, there are conflicts between the unemployed and the employed, most obviously the downward pressure on wages and conditions exerted by the former, or struggles for job-security by the latter. These groups therefore cannot share the same strategies for dealing with their class condition: the workers reject the parasitism and crime of the lumpen. The unemployed compete with each other and press the wages of the employed. The employed struggle against the inclusion in the labour market of new groups of workers (women, lumpen, migrants), to maintain their position. Finally, those reproducing the labour force – mainly women – are under pressure from the labour force itself, to reproduce it. This is what it means that different parts of the proletariat live the proletarian condition differently. Therefore we can define these classes *in-themselves* not as categories of people, but as different *ways of dealing with the problem-condition*, as it is expressed in the 'laws', i.e. the inner necessitation of bourgeois society and the capitalist economy.

This complicates the question of the revolutionary composition of the proletariat, because it can no longer consist in a simple appropriation and reversal of capital's organisation of the proletariat. We here have to ask the question of the relation between political composition and problems. Is the task of composition that of enlightening all proletarians about their common condition through the exposition of the system and genealogy of capital? Or is it to homogenise all proletarians – despite their differences – around a common ideology? Is it, in other terms, a problem of *representation*, and more precisely of the relation between three forms of representation?

6. Representation, Problems and Solutions

Three quite distinct German words are often translated as 'representation': *Vertretung*, *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. The first belongs, as Spivak notes, to the problematic of persuasion and rhetoric, the second to tropology; the third, which she doesn't mention, refers to real imaginaries, such as God and money (cf. chapter 1).⁶⁵⁵ *Vertretung* means 'speaking for' (as in political representation), while *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* refer to 're-presentation'. *Darstellung* is Marx's key term when it comes to the problem of *exposition* in *Capital*.⁶⁵⁶ In *Capital* Marx suggests that the method of inquiry should be

655 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 259.

656 Postface to the Second Edition of *Capital: Volume I*, 102.

separated from the *Darstellung*, such that the 'real movement' [*wirkliche Bewegung*] can be appropriately represented, which, if done successfully will make it appear 'as an *a priori* construction.'⁶⁵⁷ In *Capital*, a methodological principle is that abstract concepts refer to real abstractions. Theoretical representation is crucial for political practice, because it orientates it towards the real abstractions ruling people. Thus, while the proletarians described in the systemic analysis of capital are heterogeneous they are the same formally and functionally subsumed under the value-form (as labour-power and abstract labour). The individual members are hence 'ruled by abstractions' and mere bearers (*Träger*) of social relations, they 'can be expressed, of course, only in ideas.'⁶⁵⁸ The 'abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression [*Ausdruck*] of those material relations which are their lord and master.'⁶⁵⁹ This theoretical description has the advantage over the immediate experience of exploitation and domination that it shows how this particular misfortune is in fact one particular expression of a "class" condition; furthermore, *Darstellung* explains the causes of the imaginary relation to this situation, the *Vorstellung*.⁶⁶⁰

The classical reading of the relation between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* suggests that because the real relations are abstract and impersonal they can only be represented in the two modes of ideology and science, in the imaginary form of *Vorstellung* and the scientific form of *Darstellung* of the actuality of abstraction. For Althusser, for instance, the task of science is to lay bare the 'real conditions', which necessitates ideological representation, and to understand *ideology* itself as the imaginary supplement to these real relations. In other words the task of class composition becomes one of producing the right knowledge of objectivity, and inventing modes of its imaginary representation. The necessity of both *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* comes from the fact that social relations are not immediately transparent to the people who live them; they must be represented, either in the form of abstraction or as imaginaries. Political struggle then becomes centred around the *articulation/representation* of the real relations, as a manner of class *consciousness*. Yet, such a correct representation does not in itself

657 'Of course the method of presentation [*Darstellungweise*] must differ in form from that of inquiry [*Forschungsweise*, mode of research].' Ibid.

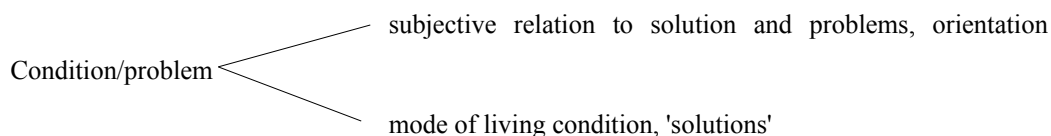
658 Ibid., 92. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 164.

659 Ibid., 164.

660 Which, remembering chapter 1 are real and effective, yet illusory in as much as they hide the real powers that generate them; 'illusions are not nothing; they are real, yet only one side of the real. ... Errors relate to solutions only, whereas illusions take place primarily in the realm of problems, to which they refer back.' Miguel De Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy As Differential Ontology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 312.

destroy what it reveals, in fact it confirms its necessity: 'the knowledge of [ideology's] conditions of possibility, of its structure, of its specific logic and of its practical role, within a given society, is simultaneously knowledge of the conditions of its necessity.'⁶⁶¹ Althusser's theses on ideology are deeply informed by the question of the reproduction of the mode of production, and do little to suggest openings for their non-reproduction. From the point of view of class formation these differences are essential.

To sum up, we have here three distinct issues: First, there is the fact that people living the same conditions live these conditions differently. Second, there is the issue of how people represent their position to themselves (ideology/science). Third, there is the issue of their non-position. This is problem of the proletarian condition, of *virtual poverty*. The proletarian condition is *not* a class position, not a role one can carry, but the name of the problem, or negativity, the precariousness of proletarian existence.



The condition/problem is here what gives rise to different modes of life and subjectivity. It cannot be represented or lived purely, its practical solutions are always situated, its representation always *orientated: resigned, indignant, brave, practical, lazy, aspirational, revolutionary, or keeping calm and carrying on*, etc.. With intellectuals, clerics and politicians, there emerges a class which is specialised in orientating subjects. This logic appears clearly in Marx's analysis of the petty bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals and politicians who represent them:

What makes them representatives [*Vertretern*] of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their *minds* they do not get beyond the *limits* which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent [*vertreten*].⁶⁶²

We have already seen in chapter 2 how Marx describes the petty bourgeois ('philistines') as 'such prudent realists that none of their wishes or wildest fancies ever extend beyond

661 Althusser, For Marx, 230.

662 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 424.

the bare actualities of life.' In 1848 an alliance between the representatives of the workers and the petty bourgeois formed, the so-called *social-democratic party*, aiming to establish democracy not as a means to bring about the dissolution of the contradiction between capital and wage labour, but with the aim 'of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony.'⁶⁶³ The issue here is not that the petty bourgeoisie wants to enforce its own egotistical class-interest, but that its idea of the conditions of universal liberation are limited to the conditions of its *own* liberation. In other words, the democratic representatives and intellectuals of the petty bourgeois believe that the problem of the times can be solved if the problems of the petty bourgeoisie are solved, their solutions implemented; think of Thatcher's tax cuts and the idea of a nation of shop owners.

Through his polemical writings after the demise of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx had himself become a representative of the proletariat. The standpoint of the proletariat promised a partisan perspective which went beyond any mere class-perspectivism.⁶⁶⁴ The partisan standpoint of the proletariat offers the truth of the whole of social totality, because the proletariat is the universal exception, the victim of the universal crime of the totality, the class with radical needs pressing it toward a radical revolution. But if Marx is then driven to the same solutions, theoretically, that the proletariat is driven to practically, there can be no revolutionary theory except as a part of revolutionary practice, i.e. a practice that aims to overcome these problems practically. The prospect of revolution is premised on the deepening of these needs. Theory is then a *Darstellung* of the problem, and how its deepening will have to produce new and radical solutions. The only thing that brings theory out of the loop of actual problems and solutions is a projection of a tendency, *and* of the supposedly necessary revolutionary response. However, short of a revolution, the 'radical' needs of the proletariat simply produce strategies of survival and mutual competition; practice seems caught in the loop of the reproduction of the present, just as theory is simply a reflection on the necessary relation between problems and solutions, from the point of view of the reproduction of actuality. The revolutionary proletariat is not merely found, but invented, *sub specie futurae*, as what Sartre calls a 'prediction of the present', based on the creation made possible by the tendency of the present.⁶⁶⁵ Proletarian paupers must compete, organise

663 Marx, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," 202. "18th Brumaire," 423–4.

664 For a discussion of the distinction between partisanship and perspectivism, see Toscano, "Partisan Thought."

665 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason - Volume 2*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, new ed.

where possible, and make up for the rest by shadow work. In the absence of revolutionary practice there is no revolutionary theory, but simply a critique of badly posed problems. A posing of a problem, according to Althusser,

is *ideological* insofar as this problem has been formulated on the basis of its 'answer', as the exact *reflection* of that answer, i.e. not as a real problem but as the problem that had to be posed if the desired *ideological* solution was to be the solution to.⁶⁶⁶

The problematic is itself an answer to '*the objective problem posed for ideology by its time*'. It consists in a problematisation of what appears as a condition of a historical *problem*.⁶⁶⁷ It entails a relation to actuality which is not orientated by a principle (i.e. freedom) nor by a promise (i.e. progress), but by a method of orientation in relation to 'real' problems. For Althusser one needs to compare the 'objective' or '*real problems*' posed *for* ideology by the times, with the problems posed *by* the ideologist.⁶⁶⁸ He therefore needs a *tertium*, a measure of badly and well posed problems; this is the gate through which Althusser will introduce his notion of *science*.⁶⁶⁹

Yet, Althusser's formulation precludes the very dimension of invention opened by the problem as problem. Furthermore, as we have already seen in chapter 6, what science or systematic critique makes appear as an '*a priori* construction' must be understood as the result of a struggle over reproduction which is only propped up by force. The range of attempted solutions is wider than that of the solutions that sustain the status quo. Within the speculative projection of a revolutionary solution, but operating on the level of composition rather than totality, we find the principle that poverty requires an invention that turns this into a problem, something that can be solved. The old discussion about the relation between the '*a priori* construction' of the theoretical re-presentation and its imaginary representation ('ideology') hides the actuality of constant inventions of practical solutions to and problematisations of a shared condition of life. As Bergson notes with regards to problems:

stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. Discovery, or uncovering, has to do with what already exists, actually or virtually; it was

(London: Verso, 2006), 407.

666 Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 52.

667 Althusser, *For Marx*, 67.

668 Ibid.

669 Indeed, with Gaston Bachelard, Althusser defines science as the introduction of a new *problematic* through a break with an un-scientific problematic. See Patrice Maniglier, "What Is a Problematic?," *Radical Philosophy* 173, no. May/June (2012).

therefore certain to happen sooner or later. Invention gives being to what did not exist; it might never have happened.⁶⁷⁰

A theory orientated in this direction will see that sometimes such inventions become contagious, and generalise, and potentially revolutionarily so, even if that is not usually the case. Whether revolution is the construction of new solutions to old problems or their abolition, there is no revolution that does not build on such experimentations and constructions. Revolution also entails practical inventions. This opens the question of a method of inquiry (*Vorschungsweise*) that does not stop at the *Darstellung*. Revolutionary theory might posit the conditions of possibility of revolution, abstractly, but only revolutionary practice can invent new revolutionary possibilities. This is not just a matter of theory letting itself be orientated by struggles, but about taking part in the invention of and experimentation with solutions.⁶⁷¹

In the *18th Brumaire*, to which we limit ourselves here, Marx presents three conditions for revolutionary class formation, which might open the circle of *problems and solutions toward revolutionary invention*. We relate all of these to what we have described as the common problem of the proletariat (separation) as well as the thesis of the tendential deepening crisis of proletarian reproduction. These three conditions are: 1. Class formation in struggle rather than through *Vertretung*. 2. Practices that go beyond problems and solutions. 3. The existence of the material ground for class formation. Finally he poses the issue of the importance of *force*.

7. Class Formation Through Struggle

Operaismo's notion of class composition has both a passive and an active form: the composition of the class as workers, and the active effort of composing the elements of the class, autonomously. 'The political class composition ... is determined by how the 'objective' conditions of exploitation are appropriated 'subjectively' by the class and

670 Quoted by Elie During in “‘A History of Problems’ : Bergson and the French Epistemological Tradition,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 35, no. 1 (January 2004).

671 Contemporary attempts in this direction count militant research practices and workers' inquiries. See Colectivo Situaciones, *A New Social Protagonism*; Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, eds., “Workers' Inquiry” no. 3 (2013). What is interesting here, is how the new theoreticians of the increasingly precarious and unemployed proletariat in the Argentine rebellion of 2001-2002 brought strategies of resistant communities (e.g. the unemployed workers unions like the MDT Solano) and tactics for community appropriation of state private wealth (the *piquetes*) back on the agenda. Liz Mason-Deese, “The Neighbourhood Is the New Factory,” *Viewpoint Mag*, no. 2 (2012).

directed against those very conditions.⁶⁷² Marx, similarly, would distinguish between the *forms* that subsume classes (the value-form, money-form, capital-form, state-form, etc.), and the active process of *class-formation* in struggle.⁶⁷³ It is here useful to recover a passage from *The German Ideology* describing active and passive class formation:

The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hand, the class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it. This is the same phenomenon as the subjection of the separate individuals to the division of labour and can only be removed by the abolition of private property and of labour itself.⁶⁷⁴

Individuals are *formed* as a class, through their subsumption and limitation in the web of necessities of their social condition, but are *forming* a class through a common struggle. When there is no common struggle, those who could form a class fall back in internal competition or mutual indifference, even if they share a common problem to which there is a common solution. The nature of a problem, however, means that it cannot be solved individually, but it also cannot be ignored: it insists. This creates a market for other solutions: *representatives, religion, opium*. In order not to compete with God, drugs and Napoleons, class composition must provide solutions to lived problems. In doing so, it supersedes the ways in which a mass lives its problems in the everyday. Or more precisely, it changes these modes:

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance — combination. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can

672 Matteo Mandarini, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Time For Revolution*, by Antonio Negri (London: Continuum, 2004), 265.

673 In terms of the philosophy of nature, the vocabulary of *composition* suggests exteriority, juxtaposition and conjunction, while the concepts of *form* suggest interiorising organisation, either as subsumption or self-organisation. Marx’s early concept of the crystallisation and self-organisation of the mass gives us a logic of the passage from class composition to class formation.

674 Marx and Engels, “The German Ideology,” 1969, 65.

carry on general competition with the capitalist.⁶⁷⁵

The class is formed around a shared problem, and it immediately provides a partial solution to one aspect of the problem by partially suspending competition between workers. There is no class formation which is not based on solutions to lived problems which supersede existing identities, hereunder individual interest. Organised practical thought goes beyond its own immediate pragmatic aims: by projecting possible solutions it poses problems in a concrete manner, and thereby politicises what otherwise is merely a condition of misery, exploitation and domination. A common problem is only a problem if a solution can be imagined; if not, it is simply a condition, a given if troubling fact, which might as well instil cynicism and opportunism into the subject. Indeed, the slogan of 'communism' is in itself a merely ideological principle of hope, which does little to construct capitalism as a practical problem.

Thus, when theory aims to show proletarians that struggle is abstractly possible or necessary it is merely ideological, and not a part of the practical construction of possible solutions which does not respect the institutionalised division of labour between theory and practice. Marx presents his argument against Proudhon's theoreticist rejection of workers' combinations as orientated by the practice of the English workers. Proudhon argues against workers' combinations, for what will they achieve, even if they win wage rises: the capitalist class will push down wages to make up for lost profits, the cost of organising will itself be higher than what is won, and at the end of the day the workers will still be workers, the masters still masters.⁶⁷⁶ While questioning the economic side of Proudhon's argument, Marx also focuses on the experiences of the Bolton workers, which suggests that something more, and more important than wages, can be gained from combinations and struggles:

If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favour of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in

675 Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," 1976, 210.

676 Ibid.

favour of wages.⁶⁷⁷

The self-interested combinations of workers thus produces a surprising surplus: not a final telos, but an immanent, self-organised telos. The suspension of individualism, happens in the production of social bonds of solidarity, self-defence and living. As Marx wrote after his first encounters with the Paris proletarians, as we saw in chapter 2, conviviality which becomes an end in itself, gives content to the struggle for communism, and allows a combination of individual interests to become organisation proper.⁶⁷⁸

However, the problem of the proletarian condition is much wider than any existing or even possible organisation of proletarians. The problem of proletarian separation can only be tackled in those nodal points where common solutions can be produced. The general problem gives, rather abstractly, the field of separated individuals, but crystallisation only happens where some common aim can be produced. We thus face the challenge of thinking the conditions of the composition of those that are *not* part of a workplace. The *18th Brumaire* only gives us the most scattered and isolated: the small-holding peasants, a mass of semi-proletarians who are largely being undermined by the developing markets in food, taxes and debts.

8. The Material Conditions of Composition

The counter-revolutionary section of the lumpenproletariat was organised by Bonaparte, because he offered not merely *Vertretung*, but a temporary solution to their condition of insecurity and poverty: pay, comradeship and a mission. While the lumpenproletariat secured the dominance of Louis Bonaparte in the Parisian streets, it was the peasantry that elected him in December 1848. Marx asks what it is about peasant life that made them susceptible to electing a leader so alien to them. Unlike the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry does not easily produce or come into contact with more or less organic intellectuals. This gives us the basis of Marx's often criticised statement that the small-holding peasants are

incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent [*vertreten*] themselves, they must be represented [*vertreten*]. Their representative must at the same time

677 Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," 1976, 211.

678 Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 365.

appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself.⁶⁷⁹

But what is it in their mode of life that makes the peasants susceptible to this mode of *Vertretung*? Here we must ask how Bonaparte became an answer to the peasantry's need for orientation and representation. By understanding this need we understand how it might instead be satisfied by a movement of revolutionary composition. Marx's inquiry into this problem starts not with the consciousness of the peasants, but with a description of the peasants' specific mode of life, their problems and the possible solutions:

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. ... Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient... and thus [the peasantry] acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, the peasant and his family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.⁶⁸⁰

Thus the everyday and the mode of (re)production of the peasants separates them from one another, making it hard to constitute any political collectivities. And unlike the isolated urban proletarians who live in close proximity and attend the same workplaces, peasant families live stationary lives with few neighbours.⁶⁸¹ Where a discourse that starts from the need of science and ideology would ask: how can the peasants be represented, and how can they be enlightened about the conditions under which they live, an inquiry starting with the way the peasants are living their condition comes up

679 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 479.

680 Ibid., 478.

681 On the often misunderstood phrase 'idiocy of rural life', see appendix 7.2.

with different results:

Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class.⁶⁸²

The peasantry lives this common problem, but the very character of the problem itself, as well as the peasants' limited means of communication and its localised mode of life, means that it cannot form a class. This shows the strictly *relational and self-relating* character of Marx's concept of class; the peasants share certain problems (market fluctuations on their goods, competition, their enslavement to capital through debt),⁶⁸³ but the ways these are formulated and dealt with are local. While this might create strong bonds of local communities, the peasant population as a whole is a mere mass. It does not find the collectivity in which these problems could be articulated as *common* interests, where the everyday struggles of each peasant family or village could become a common struggle.

The isolation of the small-holding peasants meant that they were lost for the revolution: instead they were homogenised by Bonaparte, a man in whose fame and power these individual peasants found a protector. Their trust in him as their representative was based on the historical memory of their alliance with the old Napoleon. A mass, whether heterogeneous and connected by locale (like the lumpen) or relatively uniform and separated (like the peasantry), is most easily united under a master or master-signifier. However, the isolation also points to the fact that a movement which develops the technical means and organisational forms through which peasants can communicate and link up is one that will abolish the need for a *Vertreter* and enable the peasantry to represent itself.⁶⁸⁴

Marx, however, did not think along this route, but instead invested his hopes in the revolutionary organisation of the small-holding peasantry on its worsening condition. In

682 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 479.

683 '...the feudal obligation was replaced by the mortgage...'. Ibid., 481.

684 For an example of successful political project to mobilise and connect peasants in the Europe of Marx's times, see appendix 7.2.

order words, Marx pointed to the possibility that a change in the character of the peasants' problem would lead them to seek its *Vertreter* in the *proletariat*. In short, Marx did suggest that the peasants cannot be revolutionary:

The Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant who strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather one who wants to consolidate his holding; not the countryfolk who in alliance with the towns want to overthrow the old order through their own energies, but on the contrary those who, in solid seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves and their small holdings saved and favoured by the ghost of the Empire.⁶⁸⁵

Marx defines revolutionaries as those who aim to abolish the old order, rather than improve their position within it, who opt for a different future rather than a repetition of the past in the present. Further, he notes that the ranks of the revolutionary peasants are likely to swell with the growth of the rural lumpenproletariat, 'the five million who hover on the margin of existence and either have their haunts in the countryside itself' or move back and forth between town and countryside with 'their rags and their children.'⁶⁸⁶ As the small-holding peasant class is drawn further into the bourgeois order, the conservative consolidation will become an option for still fewer peasants; in other words, the strategies and modes of living the peasant condition will change as this condition changes. Now, Marx writes (in what is certainly also a political intervention in a process of class *composition*), the interests of the peasants are close to those of the urban proletariat, in which they will find a 'natural ally and leader' – while many young lumpen peasants will be lost to the army.⁶⁸⁷ The terrain of struggle and political class composition also changes – the majority of the peasants no longer find their interests aligned with the bourgeoisie, as under Napoleon, but as turning against it. Thus, while Bonaparte would like to appear as the 'patriarchal benefactor of all classes ... he cannot give to one class without taking from another', severely constricting his capacity to unite

685 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 479.

686 Ibid., 482. Thus the number of rural paupers in France, according to Marx's numbers, is greater than the urban lumpenproletariat, which he sets at 4 million; also Fanon finds the most important group of lumpenproletarians in the colonies and post-colonies among the landless peasants. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st Evergreen Black Cat Edition (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), 111. The total number of paupers, 11 million, would thus have been almost one third (32.7%) of all inhabitants in metropolitan France, which in the period in 1848-52 was around 36 million. This, incidentally, is the exact same percentage as that living in 'extreme poverty' (less than \$1.25 p.d.) in India in 2010, as estimated by the World Bank. "Poverty & Equity Data | India," The World Bank, 2010.

687 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 482-3.

different classes under his representation.⁶⁸⁸

Curiously, the proletarian *leadership* of the peasantry advocated by Marx seems to install it in position of *representation* of the isolated peasantry, similar to that of the modern Prince Bonaparte. It would thus seem that our reading brings us to the very traditional interpretation that Marx – according to the iron logic of his own argument – could only be champion of the industrial proletariat. However, Marx is not hostile to peasants *per se*, nor does he present the peasants as necessarily counter-revolutionary. The arguments around their subordination to proletarian leadership mainly relate to the development of the means of communication and combination, i.e. the means of relating and composing in struggle, and of *representing* themselves. As we see in the case of the petty bourgeoisie, it is the character of their mode of life, its problems and solutions, which keeps them conformist: as their problem is changing, then so will their political orientation. In *The Civil War in France*, written in 1871, Marx asks: 'how could it [the peasants' earlier loyalty to Bonaparte] have withstood the appeal of the Commune to the living interests and urgent wants of the peasantry?' The reactionary rural assembly of landowners, officials, rentiers and tradesmen...

knew that three months' free communication of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants, and hence their anxiety to establish a police blockade around Paris, so as to stop the spread of the rinderpest.⁶⁸⁹

In the *18th Brumaire* Marx was hostile to the lumpenproletariat, sceptical of the peasantry's revolutionary capacities, and hopeful about the urban proletariat. The whole issue here is to keep in mind that Marx's reflections, while informed by a structural analysis, are first of all conjunctural. They are focussed on the material conditions of combining or allying what is separate around common struggles, and on the invention and construction of new solutions to the problems of the times and of life. Technologies of communication (means of contagion, as it were) and the capacity to overcome or bypass the force of the state are here decisive. But first of all, it is a question of aligning and shaping the interests of populations. In his rebuttal of Bakunin's critique that he wishes to make the proletariat the master of the peasants, Marx remarks that it is simply an issue of composing interests. With owner-peasants it is a matter of the proletariat

688 Ibid., 486.

689 Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 226.

doing for them at least what the bourgeoisie is able to, while proletarianised agricultural workers can organise with the proletarians immediately, because of shared interests. Finally, with respect to the rural workers, the goal is not a mere class alliance, but to effect a reorganisation of their reproduction toward communal ownership, without antagonising the peasants, i.e. without forcibly collectivising them or removing their rights to the land.⁶⁹⁰

In the final part of this chapter we will attempt to investigate how the analysis of the developing proletarian condition, with its tendencies towards proletarianisation, surpluspopulation and disorganisation of the class relation, might orientate and be orientated by revolutionary practice.⁶⁹¹

9. Starting from Reproduction

We have seen how the proletarian condition is best understood as one of separation from the means of reproduction. This is the condition of capital organising proletarians as wage labourers. New *separations* are constantly produced by capital's *expansive* drive for absolute surplus-value, a tendency through which ever new populations are included in the workforce; women and agricultural producers primarily.⁶⁹² Furthermore, we have seen how the drive for relative surplus-value tendentially spits out more workers, rendering them superfluous to capitalist production. In the course of long periods of mass-unemployment, and as an effect of the secular decline in employment we see a growth of the *consolidated* surplus-population, i.e. a population unfit, unable, unwilling to work, because of poor health, age; *or, which Marx does not mention*, because it has adopted another mode of reproduction.

Thus, if our reading of Marx's chapters on primitive accumulation are combined with his analysis of the general tendencies of capitalist accumulation, we must conclude that struggles over reproduction are becoming an increasingly important issue, not merely in the form of struggles over the wage and working day, but as defences of welfare (the social wage), and struggles to appropriate the means of reproduction. However, even if communisation, the reproduction of the proletariat as the non-reproduction of capital,

690 Karl Marx, "From Comments on Bakunin's Book, Statehood and Anarchy," in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 410–411.

691 See also appendix 7.3. on class formation through radical solutions, i.e. the politics of communist appropriation of wealth.

692 This analysis will be based on Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of Marx's theory of expanded reproduction. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*.

here becomes the horizon, it does not necessarily come onto the agenda as an aim. If the proletariat is, as Endnotes and Benanav write, 'rather a working class in transition, a working class tending to become a class excluded from work', it is also a class increasingly in need of alternative ways to secure its own reproduction. Before this becomes a matter of revolutionary struggle it is a matter of everyday solutions and resistances. The question is how the individualism of such solutions is or can be suspended. To investigate this, it is useful to look to the class whose solutions has traditionally been most vilified as selfish, amoral and opportunistic, those of the lumpenproletariat.

In the *18th Brumaire* it would seem that Marx lapses into the organicist idea of parasitism when, invoking the nation, he writes that the lumpen, like their chief Louis Bonaparte, 'felt the need of benefiting themselves at the expense of the labouring nation.'⁶⁹³ However, Marx's 'nation' as a victim appears ironically, in relation to Louis Bonaparte's own consistent self-representation as the saviour of the nation. What Bonaparte and the lumpenproletariat have in common is their character as floating elements in the situation – if Bonaparte eventually becomes the figure uniting contradictory class interests, it is precisely because of his apparent elevation above the classes. On the other hand, the lumpenproletariat was exploited exactly as an element who has no stable station or stake in society. For Bonaparte – as for the financial aristocracy – it takes abstractions and money to exploit an unstable situation. A significant example is the case of the young members of the Mobile Guard, who were captivated by their Bonapartist officers' 'rodomontades about death for the fatherland and devotion to the republic.'⁶⁹⁴ On top of this ideological seduction, it took monetary corruption (1 franc 50 centimes a day) to bring the malleable young lumpenproletarians into the Bonapartist ranks.⁶⁹⁵ The problem of the lumpenproletariat might not be that they are the paradoxical product of bourgeois society standing in the way of the world-historical revolution, but that their untimely up-rootedness is so contemporary in times where 'everything solid melts into air', that its organisation in the revolution requires a wholly different mode of political composition, their organisation *ex novo*.

It is clear that the counter-revolutionary character of this group of overwhelmingly young and male lumpenproletarians does not allow any general points to be made about

693 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 442.

694 Marx, "The Class Struggles in France," 220.

695 Ibid.

the lumpenproletariat as such. Consider Marx's numbers: 25 000 in the Mobile Guard compared to 4 million 'recognised paupers, vagabonds, criminals and prostitutes in France.'⁶⁹⁶ Furthermore, even this particular section enrolled in the Mobile Guard, 'capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption', cannot be said to be counter-revolutionary *per se*.⁶⁹⁷ Indeed, while Marx does not suggest any tactics by which the lumpenproletarians can be won for the revolutionary cause, his description of *how* they became counter-revolutionaries, implies that other ideological articulations and other ways of satisfying their needs could bring them to another cause. Here we have radical needs that are not definable in terms of stable class interests, but as the wavering interests of a heterogeneous group who can compose with whomever can help satisfy their needs and desires, with whomever it can share a slogan, an idea and a meal (just like, we should add, the working-class itself before it is ideologically and organisationally homogenised by the workers movement). From this perspective of needs and the thirst for ideas and conviviality, the problem with the lumpenproletarians for the revolution is no longer that their modes of life are essentially counter-revolutionary, but that they, unlike the workers who are fed by capital, will not be satisfied by slogans, but only by cash pay and food (and a bit of moral licence). There therefore is no *structural reason* why Marx's strategic orientation couldn't heed the urgency of Frantz Fanon's call to organise the lumpenproletariat, whose alliances are never given in advance, but who will always take part in the conflict: 'If this available reserve of human effort is not immediately organised by the forces of rebellion, it will find itself fighting as hired soldiers side by side with the colonial troops.'⁶⁹⁸

The willingness of young lumpenproletarians to enlist in the Mobile Guard brings up the question not just of radical needs and their revolutionary potential, but the question of their practical organisation around concrete solutions: the *problem* of all those that cannot or will not work is of an immediate everyday character. The needs of the lumpenproletarian are more *immediate* than those of the employed, and more non-conformist than those of the unemployed; in the absence of exploitation their modes of

696 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 482.

697 Even if, as mentioned by Trotsky and Fanon, the danger of a rightist cooption of the lumpenproletarians remains. Trotsky: 'Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie and the bands of declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat – all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy'. Leon Trotsky, "Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It," *Pioneer Publishers*, August 1944.

698 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 137.

life are criminalised, their neighbourhoods colonised, in the terms of the Black Panthers, by the police.⁶⁹⁹ Thus the *programmatic* demand of an abolition of bourgeois property will be inefficient if it does not address the immediate needs of those that will otherwise sell themselves to the counter-revolution.⁷⁰⁰

In order to think the composition along the whole range of ways people live the proletarian condition (through wage-labour, precarity, as semi-proletarianised seasonal workers with small plots of land, as subsistence peasants in the process of being expropriated, as lumpenproletarians, etc.) we must think through the problem of reproduction from the point of the heterogeneous need of proletarians for other modes of reproduction, and the actuality of attempts to construct such modes and foremost the actuality of struggles over reproduction. The history of the proletariat outside the wage-relation, of the proletarians rendered superfluous to capitalist production (if not necessarily indirectly purposeful as a reserve army) and the proletarians that always were superfluous, is a history of constant attempts to create other modes of reproduction, their victory, co-optation, or suppression. If proletarian self-reproduction against capital – i.e. a reproduction that opens for the self-abolition of the proletariat as proletariat – is to come on the agenda, it is not enough to state that such communisation is an invariable revolutionary project of the proletariat (Gilles Dauvé and Karl Nesic) or a project only possible today, a deepening radical need (Théorie Communiste, Endnotes).⁷⁰¹ To open the historical orientation of communisation theory to the practical question of organisation, it becomes unavoidable to relate it to ongoing practices of de-proletarianisation. To go beyond this we need to see not only possibility and growing existential need, but potentialities which can be – or are striving to be – actualised. To do this is to open for the question of composition, emulation, organisation, and contagion, between heterogeneous strategies of reproduction, as they exist or are needed to satisfy the practical situated needs of proletarians in relation to the many different ways they live this condition-problem.

While the reproduction of large sections of the Western-European proletariat was mediated by the welfare state (what Balibar calls the 'national-social state')⁷⁰², another

699 Cf. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1991).

700 For this demand, see appendix 7.3.

701 For a collection of texts from the debate between Théorie Communiste and Dauvé & Nesic see Endnotes, Gilles Dauvé and Karl Nesic, and Théorie Communiste, *Endnotes*, vol. 1 (London, 2008).

702 Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 134.

range of struggles have taken hold, among migrants in Europe and proletarians in the 'Global South.' Informal work and illegal activities, squatting and land occupations most significantly, but also what Asef Bayat calls quiet encroachments, a popular version of what Italian autonomists called auto-reduction in poor Levantine and North African neighbourhoods and slums.⁷⁰³ Even where such activities are carried out on a small group or individual basis, attempts to crack down on those modes of reproduction have often resulted in mass popular resistance as Bayat points out; in short, we can speak of these as emergent moral economies of the proletariat.⁷⁰⁴ Such strategies, along with existing organisations of resistance such as workers unions, informal communities around mosques, and the football fan clubs, were all practical conditions for the capacity of the spontaneous uprising to pose the existence of Mubarak's regime as a *practical problem*.

In appendices 7.4. and 7.5. we raise the question of proletarian struggles for reproduction in relation to violence and resistances to proletarianisation. What such struggles point to is that, while the immediate contradiction between the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of the proletariat might orientate us to the 'condition of possibility of communism' today, it gives us nothing but a practical condition of the perpetuation of misery and proletarian competition.⁷⁰⁵ What matters here are strategies that might build the proletarian capacity to resist and thus to project solutions to its misery, i.e. see it is a problem rather than a fate. Today, the tactics and strategies for dealing with, and abolishing the proletarian condition can thus only be reduced to the questions of the welfare state and trade unions through gross neglect. Furthermore, such strategies will become increasingly important in a Europe that is provincialising itself and abolishing welfare rights in bundles. The forms of organisation and class composition possible and necessary under conditions of surplus population and the squeeze on proletarian reproduction starts with 'survival' programmes.⁷⁰⁶ If not, the current violent and economic annihilation of the proletarian capacity to resist and combine will prevent any revolutionary crystallisation.

703 Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2013.

704 To speak with Edward P. Thompson "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* no. 50 (February 1, 1971), 76–136.

705 This phrase is from Endnotes, "Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture," *Endnotes* 3 (2013).

706 On the relation between reproduction and self-deference in the survival programmes of the Black Panther Party, see appendix 7.4.

10. Conclusion

The final chapters of this thesis have argued that the proletarian problem must be defined more broadly than by exploitation. The lumpen, the unemployed, unpaid reproductive workers and the working class live the same problem-condition – the separation from the means of (re)production.⁷⁰⁷ Yet they live it *differently*, in terms of daily practices, which are stratified according to gender, ability, race, etc..

The systematic dialectical orientation to the conditions of possibility of communism poses the question of solution adequate to the radicality of this problem: the proletariat becomes the name for the only solution to this problem. Theory is then in a place to point out the limitations of existing struggles from the point of view of the theory of the whole and/or content by showing what form such a revolution must necessarily take to be adequate. Theory proves to intellectuals the logical form and possibility of revolution, and to proletarians the inadequacy of their efforts. Merely pointing out the limitation of any one struggle by reference to the epochal radicality of the problem, however, might as well produce cynicism and indifference. It is not enough to be faced with a common problem; this gives nothing but an understanding of the proletariat in-itself. Unless there is the development of common strategies to *(dis)solve the problem*, the different mutually competing strategies for dealing with it will prevail. Any revolutionary practice must start with and always proceed by way of solutions that are situationally more convincing or desirable than existing ones. Theory, considered as a part of such movements – rather than withdrawn to its own niche in the division of labour out of habit or fear of violating the purity of struggles – is the active effort to disseminate strategies of combination and struggle, and of elaborating commons and transversal points of connection between different struggles.

The problem of the revolutionary organisation of proletarian difference is one of strengthening and inventing *common solutions to the common problem of the proletariat*, whether lumpen, employed or unemployed. This entails recognising that the strategies of the struggle will *differ* significantly, according to the different ways the problem is lived and survived... If the struggle proceeds successfully these class-differences will be abolished both gradually and in leaps – in other words, the self-abolishing proletarians will be stuck less and less in the mode of life they had developed to deal with a problem of their separation. De-separation, further, is not exactly

⁷⁰⁷ Included in which is the *relations of reproduction*, among those communal structures of care.

unification, but free composition and association. While these only make sense starting from the lived desires and needs of more or less separated proletarians, they produce a telos in excess of themselves, a suspension of individuality as seen above, and by Marx, when he participated in the Parisian proletarians' conviviality. He noted that the means to create communism is communism itself: that is, communism practiced produces itself as a need and an aim in itself.⁷⁰⁸ In this sense, which does not distinguish between macro and micro, communism is not an abstract Kantian 'ideal' nor a plan, but the emergent telos in a process of combination, when it folds back on itself and becomes self-perpetuating and self-organised. This is the abstract and 'idealising' yet fully materialist form of the 'real movement' that abolishes the present state of things.

708 Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 365.

Conclusion, and another introduction

1. The Path Travelled

Our introduction started from the premise that the best theorisations of contemporary capitalism are based on Marx's *Capital*. Or rather, we started with an immediate caveat to this proposal: Marx's own articulation of the critique of political economy and revolutionary practice is in deep crisis, premised as it was on the prediction that capital would not only produce its abstractly possible gravediggers, but create the conditions for their *organisation into an actual unified counter-subject*. It has not been our object to criticise, reject or resuscitate this idea, which we have referred to as the Symmetry Thesis. We have, however, taken its crisis, which is both a crisis of organisation and orientation, as an occasion to raise the question of the limitations of the Symmetry Thesis. This, in turn, leads to the question of what room and logics can be found in Marx for a concept of the revolutionary organisation of struggles starting from reproduction in general, rather than the wage-relation in particular. This, we argued, is particularly relevant in times of crisis, unemployment and growing surplus-populations. The question has then been: *what space is there in the critique of political economy for thinking the revolutionary potentiality of struggles today, beyond the Symmetry Thesis?* This is ultimately a question of how the critique of political economy can orientate and be orientated by struggles falling outside the classical workers' struggle.

To narrow down this problematic, we have asked: *what is the orientating role of concepts of organisation in revolutionary theory and practice, according to Marx?* In Part I, the mode in which we elaborated this question was both critical and constructive. On the one hand, we saw how the theoretical concepts of organisation central to Marx's version of the Symmetry Thesis conceived revolution as an *Aufhebung* of the process of capitalist history. This was premised on the central position of the working class in the production of capital and the regressive or insignificant role of struggles against proletarianisation, colonialism and the gendered division of labour. On the other hand we excavated, via a reading of Marx's use of concepts from the Hegelian philosophy of nature, an inherently constructive concept of organisation, a kind of materialist dialectic, in the words of Alfred Schmidt. This allowed us to find in Marx not just a critical, systematic logic of capital, but an open logic of organisation, and one of

struggle, strategy, and violence.

In chapter 4 we argued that Marx transforms the contemporary analogy between the problem of social organisation and organisation in nature into a conception of the natural history of modes of production, considered retrospectively. This allowed, in Part II, to rethink the relational concepts of the philosophy of nature – separation, composition, combination, organisation – as historical logics of social organisation. We saw how the starting point, separate atomised individuals, can here be thought of as the invariable problem of the epoch of capitalism and the modern state. This allowed us to think the historicity of Marx's systematic dialectical method in *Capital* through an analysis of the epoch-making period of primitive accumulation which produced this general separation and atomisation: trade and expropriation gave rise to possessive individualism and large, pauperised masses, processes of separation that are constantly repeated today, and which pose the main challenge to workers' organisations and their capacity to organise. Further, we saw how this fundamental exteriority was mediated by money in the combination of labour and capital, and how it became the fundamental equation of capitalist organisation as it established itself as the social teleology of capitalist production, through the use of force against resistances and alternative modes of organisation. Marx predicted that capital's search for absolute surplus-value would lead to increasing proletarianisation of new populations and that the competitive drive towards relative surplus-value would increase surplus-populations on a global scale. We argued, that this tendentially increases the importance of struggles over reproduction. Under these conditions, the task appears to be one of proletarian self-organisation, starting from the immediate problem of reproduction, rather than just from exploitation; here struggles over labour-rights and the wage are merely one part of the terrain.

Through these arguments we have confirmed the hypothesis that what connects Marx's methodology and ontology, his dialectical theoretical method and his historical materialism, is found in the logic of organisation and disorganisation. To start from the natural history of capital allows us to think the systematic dialectic – modelled on the Hegelian Idea – as a *result*, while remaining open to questions of contingency, resistance, strategy and revolutionary organisation. If we do not start from the always-already of the capitalist totality, but from a process of totalisation which modulates between contingency and necessity, organisation and disorganisation, we can read the critique of political economy in political and strategic terms, without renouncing on the

systematic ambition of *Capital*. Thus we can affirm that the Marxian logics of organisation inspired by the philosophy of nature must be understood as *practical* concepts. As such they become relevant to the critique of actuality from the point of view of potentiality, as well as for the organisation and disorganisation of social relations, and for comprehending violence and force as intrinsic aspects of these processes. This thesis thus draws a set of concepts of orientation and organisation out of Marx – in determinate relation to his systematic critique of capital – which neither presuppose the always-already of the totality, whole or organism, nor disavows the existence of real teleology, of totalisation.

Thus, we can begin to think the ways in which immediate struggles and resistances, even when not directly related to exploitation and the wage-relation, might be composed as resistances to proletarianisation and struggles for de-proletarianisation, of a proletariat which is constantly stratified, divided, and heterogeneous, yet resistant and self-organising. The proletariat here is not a sociological category, the unitary subject of revolution, a radical negativity or the industrial working class. Rather it is the differentially lived condition of atomisation and virtual poverty, and the task of posing this condition as a problem, which can only be done through combination. Thus the proletariat becomes the name of the possibility of the emergence of collective subjects organising themselves to solve and abolish the problem of separation, and which thereby enter into antagonism against the exploitation and domination that attempts to uphold and profit from their separation and alienated co-operation.

2. Three Speculative Trajectories of Orientation and Organisation

Writing this conclusion I realise that this thesis has been orientated in many ways by news from Greece, and by the challenge the Greek crisis poses to think the possibility of crisis and resistance after the Symmetry Thesis.⁷⁰⁹ The situation in Greece has posed three problems that underlie the orientation of this thesis: What are the possibilities and necessities of organising in a situation where extreme levels of unemployment, global competition and legal assaults on workers' rights undermine the power of trade unions while global capital and international governance (the *Troika*) undermine the

⁷⁰⁹ Apart from media reports, I rely on conversations and updates from Stathis Kouvelakis, Clara Jaya Brekke, Dimitra Kotouza, George Caffentzis, Efi Papapavlou, Katerina Anastasiou, Giorgos Kano, and interviews I conducted outside the remit of this project with Mohammed Numan, who passed through Greece on his way from Pakistan, and with Makis Anagnostou, from the occupied and worker-run factory Vio.Me. in Thessaloniki.

effectiveness of political solutions on a national level? Secondly, what is the role of riots and self-defence in a situation where the capacity of the state and the law to command obedience is in deep crisis, and where fear of a social implosion attracts many to the brutal racist order promised by fascists, and leads many others, who have lost so much, to defend the state's desperate use of violence against the social movements? Finally, what is the role of immediate need in the formation of political movements, what are the mechanisms by which it becomes individualised as personal tragedies and socialised as re-appropriation, mutual aid, solidarity or charity? These questions are not by any means answered in this thesis, of course, but merely posed, in relation to Marx and the theoretical apparatus we have developed here. The hope is that they may help us clarify the usefulness of this apparatus, as well as its lacunae and limits. Thus, speculatively, we turn this conclusion into an introduction, orientating us to future research and the possible approaches to the problems of our contemporaneity.

a. What is the orientating use of the logics of atomism, chemism and organism today?

The current crisis can be seen as a crisis of the organic, national social state, as it was developed in the dialectic of the capital-labour symmetry after the Second World War. Of course, given the lack of a developed theory of the state in Marx, and his writing before the welfare state, leads us to leave many questions open. Marx was writing at a time when the modern state's capacity for organic integration was still developing. While the crisis can be seen as a moment of re-atomisation, many things make this a different situation than Marx's, particularly the existence of an often ossified labour movement, the dense integration of global networks of military and police violence, and the differentiated patterns of surplus-value production, which modulate between labour-intensive industries and mechanisation. This invites us to give greater attention to the problems of finance and logistics as mechanisms that ensure global competition between workforces and undermine the power of nationally organised trade unions. Here, localised attacks on supply chains (such as the harbour blockade carried out by Occupy Oakland in solidarity with the port workers) and forms of transnational supply chain organising (such as the newly-formed Global Garment Workers' Union) become increasingly important; such combinations, unheard of in Marx's time, have been made possible by new means of communication and travel. Furthermore, the current global

system, while deeply integrated, has not developed the kinds of governance typical of nation states. Thus, if we speak of a global 'organism' it is a curious amoebic one, which increasingly cannot constitute itself in relation to an outside. An organism which has swallowed up its environment can only cannibalise itself, and abandon those parts of itself it cannot reproduce, only to reabsorb them after their putrefaction.

Theoretically, the above tendencies invite a clarification of the historical passage mentioned at the beginning of chapter 7 from a mechanistic to an organic state theory. Here we might find the Foucauldian analysis of the folding of biopower over sovereignty useful, while the question of how to theorise the new paradigm of governance (Empire, the camp, neoliberalism?) and how it reconfigures sovereignty and biopower, remains open.

b. How do the concepts of organisation reconfigure our conception of power, struggle and violence?

The question of the natural-historic organisation of state and capital is also a question of different regimes of violence, struggle and power. Starting with the proletarian condition rather than with exploitation means to start with the different modes of living the same abstract condition of virtual poverty and separation, and the task of turning this condition into a common problem. To think proletarian self-organisation as starting with any combination that suspends separation might allow us to rethink traditional theories of power and struggle. For instance, where Foucault starts with difference and resistance, and thinks this in terms of the paradigms of war and ethics of the self, a re-conception of resistance from the point of view of reproduction promises greater sensitivity to issues of gender and sociality. At the same time the clarification of the logics of relations in Marx's 'natural history' of the period since primitive accumulation, taken from natural philosophy, gives us the tool to think the determinate relations between three classical paradigms of power:

- The logics of separation and contractualism, which theorise the problems of law, exchange and latent civil war according to the logic of the atomism of individuals, and the need for their mechanic submission or organic articulation with sovereignty (present in Hobbes, Kant, and Hegel).
- Closely related hereto are the logics of opposition and resistance, which interpret the problem of war and enmity in terms of the natural philosophy of

the clash between exterior composite bodies, be they mechanic or organic (as in Clausewitz and Schmitt).

- Finally, the logics of contradictory class interdependence and negotiation, which articulates the problems of class struggles and parliamentary democracy in through the logic of organism (at the heart of social democracy and theories of bureaucracy).

In fact, we might have opened for a general disorientation of the modern vocabulary of power, which fully orientated by the organisational solutions (mechanical sovereignty and organic integration) to the problem of separation. If this whole vocabulary takes separation for granted, the perspective of proletarian combination orientates us toward the abolition of separation, that is of the problem to which sovereignty and organic integration are responses.

Further, the theorisation of the epochal and strategic primacy of self-organised struggles for reproduction disorients the three classical Marxist notions of power, and gives another inflection to traditional leftist notions of power and antagonism. Firstly, the notion of self-organisation which includes but goes far beyond the classical workers' organisation shows the narrowness of the Marxist-Leninist and social democratic conceptions of class struggle, which are premised on the Symmetry Thesis. This reopens the questions of proletarian and communist culture and of 'dual power', but no longer from the perspective of the workers' identity. Secondly, while this theorisation does not in any way exclude the logics of class war and civil war, as theorised by Mao or Guevara, it sees any collision between camps not as the aim of a final battle and decision, but as one possible outcome of workers' self-organisation. Antagonism in this sense would be the moment which coheres a number of initiatives for self-organised reproduction: either as a result of such activity – provoking the state into such attacks – or as a way in which self-organised struggles attempt to overcome their own limits, by appropriating the wealth needed to do so directly or indirectly.

c. What does it mean to ask the question of revolution from the point of view of struggles for reproduction?

Struggles for reproduction start as resistances to pauperisation, precarity and as collective strategies of survival. But such resistances do not necessarily pose the

problem of revolution. Thus, while different forms of self-organisation might revolutionise sociability, be forms of 'revolutionary becoming' to speak with Deleuze, self-organisation easily leads to forms of self-sufficiency, withdrawal and fantasies of autarchy. However, this should not lead us to affirm, dogmatically, revolution as the only solution, forcing concrete struggle into the interpretive framework of the ultimate end of capital. Theoretically, such approaches fail to compose with the immanent orientation and organisation of struggles, and practically, they threaten to disorientate and disorganise them. The question is rather to ask by which mechanisms the revolutionary solution can be posed.

Pauperisation and precarity are often lived in individualised and family-based ways, or used as pretexts to subsume, represent or organise those suffering from lack, through logics of charity or nationalist solidarity. Thus, in Greece, the George Soros-funded and NGO-driven 'Solidarity Houses', which offer rudimentary replacements of previous state services, a coalition of the Orthodox church, working with Skai-TV and large supermarket chains to encourage customer-financed food distribution, and Golden Dawn's 'Food for Greeks' programme all compete with mutual aid initiatives, time banks and the initiative Solidarity4All, a project of the leftist party Syriza, which attempts to coordinate and fund self-organised initiatives. In this rather extreme situation the problem of proletarian reproduction outside the wage relation reveals itself as the politically decisive issue it always is, in its naked undecided form. The political question here is not one of reform or revolution, but of the mechanisms through which need and anger can organise themselves, rather than fall back in the logics of hope, belief and supplication. The mechanism, abstractly speaking, is that of organising around concrete problems and their concrete and imaginable solutions. Here, grand slogans and orientating concepts such as capital, revolution and communism are abstract and ideological answers, until the limitations of concrete solutions pose the question to which these concepts are possible answers. Just as we strive to position ourselves beyond the symmetry/asymmetry binary, the concept of self-organisation here tries to place itself beyond the binary of disorganisation and existing organisations: it does not pose itself in opposition to the latter, nor necessarily starts from the former.

The concept of self-organisation does not imply a choice between Black Panther Party, Solidarity4All, Pop-up unions, quiet encroachments, community groups, square occupations and anarchist support networks. The decisive point is whether situated

actors develop a situated capacity to think the singularity of the organisational possibilities of a situation, and thus to think struggles in their irreducibility to the wider socio-political conjuncture. Thus, while the preceding pages contain many scattered proposals for how to raise these questions in determinate relation to Marx's critique of political economy, and hence to situate them within a theory of global capitalism, this does not mean that the critique of political economy is the final horizon for struggle and strategy. The concept of orientation attunes us to the danger of hierarchising the priorities of practice according to a general theory, rather than the emergent possibilities of a situation. Living the proletarian condition means to be determined by need; *combination* is the name of a collective subjectivating operation which turns determination into a problem for practice rather than a condition. To combine means to suspend individuality, as we have seen, or to 'revolutionise sociability' in the words of Colectivo Situaciones.⁷¹⁰ This entails appropriating and inventing possibilities for action in a situation, and combining its elements in ways which allow for the emergence of self-organisation, i.e. for association to become an end in itself. Furthermore, to orientate oneself from the standpoint of self-organisation means that it is not possible to formalise and objectify collective interests and strategies according to a theory of the global totality. Self-organised resistant and revolutionary practices orientate themselves in the singularity of their situations, striving to produce their own irreducibility to the global, macropolitical conjuncture. They do not disavow that fact of the articulation of the global system with the situation, but resolutely *situate* their orientation in the conjuncture. They focus on the timing and organisation of concrete situations and antagonisms and ignore the urgencies and orientations projected by the media, the enemy and those militants who let the prose of the past go before the poetry of the future.

So what then, is the use of Marxism? First of all, to readers of Marx, the critique of political economy is an orientating device that helps us theorise the problems and organisation of our times. However, the question is what function Marx might have for those who do not have the interest, time or training to pick it up as a theory or an ideology. Our contention is that it may only help others orientate themselves if they live the problems and pose the question to which Marx has so many answers – including the bad ones, some of which we have tried to highlight. We might thus say that Marx can only become useful in struggles if it is a part of a self-critical pedagogy of the problems

710 Colectivo Situaciones, *A New Social Protagonism*, 109.

and questions that tend to arise in struggles today – including, at the atomised extreme, the lonesome individual resistance of the bodies that resist the overwork the mind imposes on them. Marx gives concepts with which we can get a handle on all the problems of our epoch as well as the potentialities of co-operation and communism. This is no mere matter of an ideal theory, be it a cognitive mapping of the conditions and abstractions which are our lord and master, or a utopian or axiomatic supplement. It is also, and most importantly perhaps, a form of cognitive mapping that allows for the de-individualisation of the imagination and gives an outline of possible combinations and alliances.

Finally, we can argue that revolutionary practice today cannot rely on some irruption of proletarian negativity, the spontaneity of a global insurrection nor on a theory of capital. What is possible and necessary now is to build the capacity for proletarian resistance, pending revolution. This starts with minimal acts of re-appropriation of time, resources and space. The problem of revolution poses itself as the challenge of overcoming the limitations of self-organised resistance, as well as the limitations of the Symmetry Thesis. The problem here is not to overcome self-organisation, but to generalise it, something that is only possible through generalising the re-appropriation of the wealth of this world.

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Introduction

0.0. The problem of revolutionary theory

In his famous text 'What Is To Be Done?' Lenin presented the paradigmatic articulation of theory and practice in the Marxist tradition.⁷¹¹ For Lenin the answer to the question was relatively straightforward: revolutionary theory orientates a practice that is otherwise blind, by providing explanations for the dynamics of the present, and thus prescriptions for practice. Writing against the 'theoretical disorder' of his times, Lenin polemicised against 'opportunism' which saw practice as the one and all of revolution: '[w]ithout revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'.⁷¹² As already Marx had stated, theory is necessary for practice because the social totality which governs people's lives is not immediately available to experience. In the *Grundrisse* Marx makes the following observation about the historical specificity of the epoch of the capitalist mode of production, and its relation to theory:

These objective dependency relations ... appear, in antithesis to those of personal dependence (the objective dependency relation is nothing more than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals) in such a way that individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on

711 As I have learned from conversations with Amithab Rai and Alexei Penzin from the Russian collective *Chto Delat*, The Hindi translation as “हम क्या करना है?” – “*what do we do?*” – and the German “*was tun?*” – “*what to do?*” – brings us closer to the literal meaning of the Russian *Что делать?* (*Chto Delat*), which can also be used as a colloquially exclamation: “*what are you gonna do?*”. While the English suggests not a doing, but *something* which must be done, the question posed in Russian, Hindi and German can express a moment of indecision, perhaps even resignation and confusion, but certainly an admittance of a certain indeterminacy of the answer. In short: a moment of *disorientation*.

712 V. I. Lenin, “What Is To Be Done?,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 119 – 271, chapter 1., Section B.

one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master. Relations can be expressed, of course, only in ideas...⁷¹³

The objective dependency relations of capitalism are *abstract*, thus material relations must be comprehended with *ideas, i.e. by theory*. It is for this reason Marx can affirm the necessity of science, in the manuscripts that Engels' published as *Capital* volume III: 'all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence'.⁷¹⁴

For Lenin, further, *revolutionary* theory is needed to orientate practice towards the historical potentials for revolution, which are not merely given by practice, but by the state of the social totality. Thus 'the *role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory*'.⁷¹⁵ From the standpoint of Lenin's Marxism disorientation is only really a problem for a practice that is not orientated by Marxism. Marxism becomes synonymous with orientation within and against the reality of the capitalist system. This leads to Lenin's famous dictum:

the concrete analysis of the concrete situation is not an opposite of "pure" theory, but – on the contrary – it is the culmination of genuine theory, its consummation – the point where it breaks into practice.⁷¹⁶

Lukács takes this conception to extremes in his presentation of Marxism as the science of the always-already of capitalist totality. For Lukács struggles only receive their revolutionary significance by being aimed at the concrete totality, which 'governs reality'.⁷¹⁷ The knowledge of this totality is not the knowledge of the proletariat in its efforts of organisation, but a knowledge developed from the standpoint of proletarian struggle.⁷¹⁸ In his pamphlet on Lenin – if we resist the temptation to read it as a vulgar eulogy for a Hegelian 'historical individual' – the revolutionary implications of proletarian struggles, i.e. the actuality of revolution⁷¹⁹, can only be grasped theoretically:

it is the totality which correctly points the way to the class-consciousness

713 *Grundrisse*, 164. My emphasis.

714 Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 956.

715 Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", chapter 1., section D.

716 V. I. Lenin, "The Junius Pamphlet, October 1916," in *Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Marxist.org, 2000), 305–319.

717 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. R. Livingstone, new ed. (The Merlin Press Ltd, 1971), 22 and 10.

718 *Ibid.*, 21. For the notion of partisan knowledge, see Toscano, "Partisan Thought."

719 Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, 2nd ed. (Verso, 2009), 11–13.

directed towards revolutionary practice. Without orientation towards totality there can be no historically true practice. But knowledge of the totality is never spontaneous, it must always be brought into activity ‘from the outside’, that is, theoretically.⁷²⁰

The implication of revolutionary theory and practice is here unbreakable: the revolutionary orientation of Lenin's theory is not premised on theory itself, but on *the actuality of revolution*. As the moment after the Great Symmetry Thesis reveals, the theory of global capitalism easily leads to profound pessimism when not supplemented by a revolutionary practice which promises its own globalisation or by a theory which predicts the eventual demise of capitalism due to its own contradictions. As Marx argues that theory can become revolutionary only if it relates to two actualities: on the one hand the actuality of proletarian class struggle, and on the other the development of the productive forces 'necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat and for the formation of a new society'.⁷²¹

0.1. Rancière and Foucault against revolutionary theory

In the past decades the classical partisan theory has been challenged by a rejection of 'totality' in favour of a perspective which insists on the irreducible complexity of the world, and the necessarily *partial* and limited character of any theory and practice. Foucault and Rancière will stand loosely for the two central breaks in the past half-century, 1968 and 1989, understood as turning points in the crisis of Leninist conception of theory. In the first moment struggles rejected the mastery of official theory over practice, and in the second, theory itself became performatively of dis-empowering. Rejecting the image of thought that proposes a gap between knowledge and consciousness on the one side, and practice and social relations on the other, Foucault and Rancière are part of a wave of theorists who since the 1960s have insisted on rejecting the objectivist pretensions of classical Marxism, and its implicit gap between theory and practice, and thus the division of labour between theoreticians and the masses. As Foucault states in conversation with Deleuze:

the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better

720 Ibid., 95–96. See also appendix 4.0.

721 Marx, “The Poverty of Philosophy,” 1976, 177.

than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves.⁷²²

According to Foucault, practice does not need theory to guide its circle of struggles after 1968:

In such struggles people criticize instances of power which are closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals. They do not look for the “chief enemy,” but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolutions, end of class struggle).⁷²³

It is no longer a matter of practice being blind without theory, but of theory blinding practice with its totalisations. Against this Foucault suggests a different conception of theory which is performative and descriptive, rather than explanatory and prescriptive. If the discourse of Foucault was aimed at affirming the autonomy of struggles, against the hegemony of Marxist parties and intellectuals, in Rancière's more recent writings the problem is not the danger of Leninist domination, now negligible, but rather of the dis-empowering effects of Marxism itself. The Marxian logic of capitalism must be rejected because it dis-empowers by demanding too much, a wholly new mode of production, the all or nothing of global revolution or capitalism, and by placing the theoreticians of revolution and capitalism in a position of mastery. Against this he writes that ‘there is no unity of a global process’,⁷²⁴ and that instead emancipatory politics must start from the ‘assumption is that the disabled are able, that there is no hidden secret of the machine. There is no huge beast swallowing all energies and desires in its belly, no global process of dissimulation’.⁷²⁵ Both Rancière and Foucault proceed through a disavowal of the problem of the totality, a manoeuvre that dismisses the macropolitics of Marxism in favour of a micropolitics of situated struggles. Here the division between ethics and politics begins to blur. In the tradition of the Enlightenment philosophy of autonomy it starts from the ethical premise that subjects are free and capable of their

722 Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power - a Conversation,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 207. Spivak discusses the implication of this statement at length in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

723 Michel Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 211.

724 Jacques Rancière, “The Mis-Adventures of Critical Theory,” in *The Emancipated Spectator*, Reprint edition (Verso, 2011), 48.

725 Ibid.

own autonomy as long as they have the courage to be autonomous.⁷²⁶

Lenin's conception of theory is concerned not with an ethics or micropolitics, but an economy of the whole: autonomy is for him not a fact, but something to be won by class struggle guided by the reflexive knowledge of the social whole and one's position within it. When Foucault and Rancière write against the mastery exercised by the theoreticians of totality, they do not exit the realm of theory, but adopt a different orientating strategy, by introducing a principle of immediate struggles based on experience: the unbearable and the desirable, which despite its empirical referents is easily transmuted into a philosophical principle (such as that of the primacy of resistance over power). Thus, from the point of view of the Kantian problem of orientation, Foucault and Rancière can be read as insisting on the need for subjective principles in the face of the overwhelming objectivity of global capitalism. For these principles to play this role, this overwhelming objectivity must either be downplayed or presented as a theoretical fiction, and the revolutionary ambition must correspondingly be lessened. Thus Foucault proposes that if 'we accept that we are not dealing with an essential capitalism deriving from the logic of capital, but rather with a singular capitalism formed by an economic-institutional ensemble, then we must be able to act on this ensemble and intervene in such a way as to invent a different capitalism'.⁷²⁷ Today the defeat of the closed benevolence of welfare-statist capitalisms, as well as the impossibility of not seeing the catastrophes to which such words as *poverty*, *climate*, *ecology* and *war* refer as products of the world system, means that the question of revolution constantly imposes itself on a global scale, generally far divorced from the levels of any effective and consistent political agency.

0.2 'Capitalism is crisis' and the limitations of crisis theory

In the year of the square occupations, a large banner was raised and then removed by protesters occupying the area in front of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It read

726 Foucault's ethics of the self, and Rancière's ignorant school master, can both be read as radicalisations of the Kantian dictum 'sapere aude' (dare to know), rejecting the idea of education as submission to mastery in favour of pedagogics self-emancipation and practices of self-care. Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984 (New York: New Press, 1997); Jacques Rancière, *The ignorant schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

727 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France, 1978-1979* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 167.

'*CAPITALISM IS CRISIS*'.⁷²⁸ The location of the camp next to the London Stock Exchange and the removal of the banner which was deemed to 'anti-capitalist' to represent the whole occupation is symptomatic of the prevailing response to the crisis. The cause of the social misery of the crisis is seen to lie in the *abstraction nature of financial capital*, in speculation, 'greed', the dominance of credit money, fractional reserve banking, etc. The articulations of antagonism and alliance drawn up around this orientation is that of the 99% against the 1% of the modern financial aristocracy. The strength of Marxist analyses of the crisis, on the other hand, is to think together the 'abstract' crisis of finance not only with various crises of production, but with what we can speak of as multiple crises of the everyday – contraction of wages, social spending; increasing unemployment and disciplining of the workforce, etc..

This text is written in the macro-context of the crisis, which has renewed the topicality of Marx's analyses of capitalism. However it is not a text on Marx's crisis theories as such, but rather an inquiry into the presuppositions of these theories, in a context where crisis holds different historical promises than at Marx time. If crisis for Marx signalled the painful events necessary for the transition between modes of production, crises in the period of decline of the workers movement and international communist movement are promises of apocalyptic rather than messianic times. To find hope in crisis today must be part of a voluntaristic reversal according to which either consciousness or the urgency of the naked need produced by unfolding catastrophe is supposed to produce the action required to turn crisis into opportunity. Theories of crisis produce only a knowledge of the contradictions, crises and struggles of history, but not of the potentialities that might produce the qualitatively new. They point to an irruption of contingency but not its articulation to destroy the necessities of actuality, or replace them with a different actuality. As Peter Osborne notes,

Crisis 'theory' is thus in principle inadequate to thinking the historico-political meaning of crises – and this includes Marx's own account (or 'theory') of capitalist crises, however central to such a thinking it might be.⁷²⁹

It is through a critique of the presuppositions of Marx's crisis theory – its implicit modelling of society, historical time, and conception of strategy – rather than of this theory itself that we can begin to disentangle Marx's theory of capitalist crisis from the

728 The banner was originally made for Climate Camp in 2009, and was eventually moved from the central St. Paul's occupation to the smaller occupation at Finsbury Square.

729 Osborne, "A Sudden Topicality - Marx, Nietzsche and the Politics of Crisis," 21.

historico-philosophical context in which Marx's theory of crisis is inscribed in Marx.

0.3. On the concept of crisis

Drawing out the genealogical roots of the term in Hippocratic medicine, Reinhart Koselleck has show how the concept of crisis is inextricably a concept of period of decisive convulsion of a systemic complex, of an organism or an integrated process; the necessary positive determinacy correlate to crisis as indeterminacy, is found in notions of normality, homeostasis, equilibrium, interiority. The concept of crisis, taken in its specificity, refers not generally to chaos or catastrophe or caesura, but more precisely to a systemic/organic problem of reproduction. From medicine the concept of crisis retains an existential urgency and diagnostic character as it is imported into political thought. Thus crisis in its ancient and medieval medical as well as modern economic and socio-political sense, invokes the need to make a decision, an intervention: that of the doctor, the technocrat or the virtuous movement leader. Koselleck defines crisis as 'that point in time in which a decision is due but has not yet been rendered'. He encapsulates this nicely in the idea that crisis implies a 'knowledge of uncertainty' and a 'compulsion towards foresight'. Or, as a Danish witticism from the time of the Great Depression goes: 'a crisis is when nobody knows what needs to be done – *in a rush*'.

The necessity of a decision arises in the moment of the necessities of the system's self-reproduction are undermined by inner irruption of contingency; this contingency is always possible (or actual on a micrological level), but only in the crisis does it threaten the actuality of the organism as a whole. In his *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel theorises the organism in the following terms: 'these (elementary powers of objectivity) are ... continuously ready to jump to begin their process within the organic body, and life is the constant fight against such a possibility'.⁷³⁰ Accordingly, '[t]he living body is always on the point of passing over into the chemical process ... perpetually exposed to danger, and always bears something alien within it. ... If life were realistic, it would respect that which is external to it, but it is perpetually checking the reality of this other term, and transforming it into its own self'.⁷³¹

Hegel describes the constant possibility of crisis as an effect of the contradiction within the organism between its teleological self-positing and the latently

730 (Hegel 1992, p.293, §219 addition, translation ammended),

731 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature* III, 10, 337.

rebellious/decomposing forces that it organises. By making crisis an essential possibility of the organism Hegel also introduces the possibility of thinking aspects of the organism as so many attempts to master and control the constant possibility of crisis.⁷³² The inner organisation must be thought as a solution to the problem of the possibility and past actuality of crisis. It is of some note, that Hegel's use of the term "crisis" in his *Philosophy of Nature* inscribes it into a logic of *reproduction*, as a self-regulation of the organism:

'The crisis is the organism's mastering of itself, reproducing itself, and putting this power into effect by excretion. It is not the morbid matter which is secreted of course; it is not the case that the body would have been healthy if it had never contained this matter, or if it could have been ladled out of it. The crisis, like digestion in general, is at the same time a secretion!'⁷³³

Thus in a crisis the organism *secretes*, renders superfluous chemical compounds and physical elements that had hitherto been part of its life. Marx's concept of crisis carries with it and elaborates this set of meanings. It is thus pre-formed by a number of thought models which are rarely made explicit in Marxist theory, particularly the conception of society in systematic dialectical terms, which stresses the mutual dependency of the different parts of the capitalist 'totality' and the internal contradictions of this totality, which is the condition of possibility of both crisis and political action.⁷³⁴ Peter Osborne notes that the originality of Marx's approach to crisis is that it posits the solution to the crisis as immanent in the conditions of the crisis itself, first in the pauperised proletariat and then in the collective worker.⁷³⁵ While Osborne points to a shift in Marx's focus from the writings of the 1840s to *Capital*, his concept of the proletariat remains *both* an

732 A physical process might be out of equilibrium, but not in crisis; only organic or self-reproducing processes enter into crisis. The positing of contingency and chance as *problems* – the establishment of defenses crises – can thus be taken to be the defining moment of the establishment of a properly *organic* process. The aim of self-reproduction combined with the possibility of such contingency (non-reproduction) is what establishes the necessity of a range of defensive mechanisms to protect and purify the organism.

733 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 201. The logic is the same, yet the interest different, when Marx writes about the possibility of crisis in reproductive process of the 'organism' of bourgeois society: 'These two processes [of sale and purchase] lack internal independence because they complement each other. Hence, if the assertion of their external independence [*äusserliche Verselbständigung*] proceeds to a certain critical point, their unity violently makes itself felt by producing a crisis. ... these forms therefore imply the possibility of crises, though no more than the possibility'. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 209.

734 For instance Simon Clarke's extensive synthesis of Marx's theories of crisis does not discuss the semantics and history of the concept of crisis itself. Simon Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994).

735 Osborne, "A Sudden Topicality - Marx, Nietzsche and the Politics of Crisis," 23.

element which is superfluous waste, yet indispensable to social reproduction, both pauper and collective worker. But since the crisis is an aspect of the social organism defined by its reproduction – on the level of the mode of production, the crisis, while politically meaningful, is 'politically irresolvable (that is, is not amenable to political action). The historical concept of crisis thus registers an aporia in the historical concept of politics'.⁷³⁶ This opens the question of praxis on the level of the mode of production itself, a 'politics', if by this we understand one not of the *polis*, but of the mode of production. Such action is only possible through autonomous proletarian organisation which overcomes the separation between the necessary and the redundant.

Marx's theory of crisis functions in two temporal registers: that of periodic crisis (what has later been theorised in terms of 'the business cycle') and that of the long term tendencies of capitalist development: the question of a *secular crisis*, whether thought in terms of the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall', or necessary continual growth of working and unemployed proletariat, in the so-called 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'.⁷³⁷ At the heart of both theories lies the question of the organic composition of capital (the proportion of dead to living labour, constant capital to variable capital), and how the tendencies given by capital's teleological drive (M-C-M') result in a disproportionate growth of capital, resulting in crisis both of the reproduction of capital and of the proletariat itself.⁷³⁸ The predictions possible on the grounds of this real teleology is that capital's search for absolute surplus-value with force it to subsume ever greater numbers of people as workers, and that the competitive drive for relative surplus-value will force capitalists to invest in labour saving technologies, thus producing an ever greater population of proletarians surplus to the requirements of capitalist production. The historical optimism of Marx's theory of crisis relied on the idea that a proletariat, working as well as unemployed, whose organised and desperate

736 Ibid.

737 The former tendency has been much debated recently. Michael Heinrich, "Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx's Studies in the 1870s," *Monthly Review* 64, no. 11 (2013). Kliman, A., A. Freeman, N. Potts, A. Gusev and B. Cooney, "The Unmaking of Marx's Capital - Heinrich's Attempt to Eliminate Marx's Crisis Theory," *Social Science Research Network* (July 22, 2013). Whereas the sections on the rate of profit were written in 1863-65, and never finished, the chapter on the general law of capitalist accumulation was written in 1866-67. Endnotes and Benanav, "Misery and Debt."

738 Note that a rising organic composition of capital means a higher proportion of constant capital; thus the 'inorganic' component of capital, living labour, falls. We can only understand this if we related to the definition of nature as man's 'inorganic body', in *1844 Manuscripts*, and 'inorganic being' in *Grundrisse*. Inorganic in the sense that it is not an *organ*, but sustenance, an exterior necessary condition. Living labour, thus, is capital's inorganic body. "1844 Manuscripts," 328; *Grundrisse*, 489.

ranks would continue to grow, would be capable of seizing the opening for revolution by the secular crisis producing it.

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.⁷³⁹

All this happens through 'the immanent laws of capitalist production', through what Marx in the Preface to *Capital* calls the 'development of the social antagonisms that spring from the natural laws of capitalist production'.⁷⁴⁰ The 20th Century did not confirm this prediction, as imperialism, globalisation and successful workers movements created a global division of labour in which sections of the growing global work-force could achieve the gains of public welfare and collective bargaining, while populations in and migrants from the periphery were pauperised and excluded from the regime of social rights and collective pay deals.

Today 'we' no longer live in the 'post-scarcity economy' of the 1960s or with the 'confidence' of the consumer-debt economy of the decades that followed – and neither did or do the majority of the world's population. Capitalism has always been characterised by the production of absolute or relative poverty alongside wealth. Further, the global competition of a fiercely stratified proletariat, mobile capital and migratory or forcibly fixed reserve armies of labour increasingly complicates the classical North/South divide.⁷⁴¹ If Marxists projected that the conditions of socialist revolution would result from the simultaneous growth of proletarian need and unification through organisation, and the intermediate period saw the geographical

⁷³⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 929 and 91.

⁷⁴¹ As Denning points out the current situation forces us to push beyond the clear core/periphery divide implicit in the unemployment/informal sector approach. Denning, "Wageless Life."

separation of these two trends, today we see a growth of proletarian need everywhere with what looks like a decline in traditional proletarian organisations.⁷⁴² Furthermore, throughout the whole period activists and writers have pointed out the internal stratifications of the global proletariat along lines of gender, race and citizenship status. All this means that the historico-political meaning of crisis has changed. Peter Osborne notes that

The political significance of the concept of crisis motivating Marxist debates depends upon some projected articulation of these two levels [the political and the economic], some conjunctural political effectivity at the level of the mode of production, in response to 'periodic' crisis.⁷⁴³

The thesis of a *secular* crisis, more strongly, which gives crisis a significance which is not merely political but *epochal*, as the opening of the possibility of the transition between modes of production, is derived from the projection of the tendencies given in the movement of the past-and-present of the capitalist mode of production as an unfolding teleology. The epochal *opening* of crisis signifies something deeper than the political opening of a given conjuncture or general abstract possibility of an event; it refers to an *organic* disintegration predicted on the basis of an extrapolation of a *Wirklich*, that is to say actual, effective and real *teleology*.⁷⁴⁴ The topicality of Marx's theory of crisis and predictions of 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation' and the failure of his historical predictions of the epochal revolutionary implications of these tendencies, *makes it urgent to reconsider the relation between the politics of crisis and the modelling of social relations and systems*. We have seen how the theorisation of crisis is based on the modelling of society or mode of production in organic terms, as a contradictory whole, organising 'elements', which might be rendered inorganic in the crisis. Crisis suggests a certain notion of the conditions of reproduction of a system. And we have seen how crisis is a moment of exception – where contingency opens for political decision – as well a part of the auto-adjustment of a system.

742 This is at least the case in the old bastions of labour in Europe.

743 Osborne, "A Sudden Topicality - Marx, Nietzsche and the Politics of Crisis," 21.

744 The connection of organism and teleology was current in German thought starting with Kant, *Critique of Judgement*. Kant took the organism to be teleological in the sense that it has itself as its own end, it is minimally a self-reproducing and self-organised system. See also Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "Organismus," *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von H. Hirzel, 1854)

0.4. Some notes on method, reading and the return of Marx

In some sense Marx was always a critical philosopher – perhaps always in a sense heretical to the Kantian project – analyzing the conditions of possibility of the given, of his object. However, this given, as a given that is, politically speaking, *too* given, and therefore all more a *problem* for thought and practice, shifted throughout his journey as a writer and activist. Anticipating the results of this inquiry, we can say that Marx's central objects, central in so far as they overdetermined his relation to other objects and questions, was always a problematic *relation* between immanence and the abstract, something presenting itself as transcendental or transcendent. Simplifying in the extreme we might say the early Marx's focus shifted, just in the 1840s from abstract atomism↔practical philosophy, to God↔species and philosophy↔sensuousness, over religion↔real human beings, to capital↔labour.⁷⁴⁵ It is important to note that these are not binary oppositions, but folded into each other in mutual presupposition and tension – the distinctions are thus *modal* or *organic* (let's not pick yet). The focus is therefore not a relation pure and simple, but the active relation of co-constitution, the *activity of that co-constitution*. In turn I suggest that we approach Marx's own activity as a writer through the shifting focus of his critique, i.e. in the shifts within and between problematic 'objects' (e.g. from religion and state to capital) and the conditions given for these objects (e.g. from species-being to the mode of production), and of the very way of thinking the relation between the two (e.g. from alienation to exploitation). This relates to a changing modelling, which is driven by a need for orientation; this is not an abstraction need, but one shifting with Marx's shifting practice: from *Bierstube*-radical and aspiring academic, to editor-journalist, to movement intellectual, etc.

When Marx impressed 'there is no royal road to science' to the communitarian Lachâtre, the editor of the French translation of his major *Critique*, he was complicating the invocation of method as a tool which one 'employs' or 'applies', drawing instead on the Greek etymology of method, in speaking of it as an arduous path, a steep climb which

745 Other pairs are state-democracy, superstructure-basis, forces of production-relations of production. Whether these shifts involves breaks, leaps or *salto mortales* we will have to discuss. Althusser's thesis of the break in Marx happening around the *German Ideology* (1846). Lenin saw *Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Communist Manifesto*, both 1847, as the first mature works of Marxism. Recently, Kojin Karatani and before that Hans-Georg Backhaus, have pointed out that a crucial 'shift' took place in Marx's thinking between the pre-Capital critiques of political economy (*Grundrisse* and *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) and *Capital* (1867) itself. Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (MIT Press, 2005). Hans-Georg Backhaus, "On the Dialectics of the Value-Form," *Thesis Eleven* 1 (1980).

the reader would have to follow.⁷⁴⁶ The way of travelling changes with the path made, which changes with the terrain. Method is not simply a tool reflected and stabilized in thought as *meta-hodos*, 'after the way'; before that it is an open activity of constructing a path, making (and not necessarily '*clearing*') a way: *meta odos*.⁷⁴⁷ This understanding of method is one that goes beyond what Lukács affirmatively spoke of as orthodox as opposed to doctrinaire Marxism or vulgar materialism:

...orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*. It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders.⁷⁴⁸

Before this stabilization and inscription of the ~~royal~~ revolutionary road to science in the genealogical line of forefathers, method arises, as Hegel notes, in the arduous 'labour of the concept'; here we can agree with Hegelian Marxists.⁷⁴⁹ But method is also a singular path of becoming, a durational engagement with the problematics of one's time (the space of *contemporaneity*⁷⁵⁰). Method in this sense is not a truth procedure of a science, nor critique, but something more like practice. Stathis Kouvelakis has demonstrated the productivity of reading Marx's intellectual-political development in terms of its problems, contradictions, and the displacement of these into new problems, contradictions and mediations.⁷⁵¹ It is perhaps impossible to distinguish between a path traced in the text of Marx and one constructed; we make-and-find a reading-and-writing-path, on which new readers might follow according to the reading's ability to engage with contemporary problematics. These problematics, from the point of view of the deadlocks of contradictions and antagonisms – if not their positive historical instantiations – might very well, such is the hypothesis that makes this text more than an exercise in intellectual history, be the *same* problems through which Marx cleared a road of which *Capital* remains the most comprehensive map. To speak of the same *problems*, is not to speak of the 'same' as such, but to speak of the *same epochal*

746 French preface to Karl Marx, Marx, *Capital: Volume I*.

747 If we follow the etymology proposed by Ryan Bishop and John Phillips, "Of Method," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2007).

748 Georg Lukács, "What Is Orthodox Marxism?," in *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p.xx.

749 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 43.

750 The question of the simultaneity or complex differentiability of this space is a discussion we will have to pass through.

751 Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso Books, 2003).

difference, the same set of insisting challenges.⁷⁵² This brings us to a level where what is at stake is not the topicality of Marx's analyses of actuality, but the contemporaneity of the problems to which the actuality of the 19th and 21st century are different, if related, replies. The continuity of a problem, antagonism or contradiction as a matrix of historical difference is the continuity/discontinuity between Marx. It offers the promise of an explanation to the real question which is not 'why return to Marx?', but 'why does Marx keep on returning to us?'⁷⁵³ If Marx does not, in some sense, return to us through the recurrence of the problems he mapped, any 'return to Marx' will be nothing but a voluntaristic, habitual, or nostalgic endeavour.

But this repetition comes with a difference, or rather with many; we cannot be silent about or take for granted everything about which Marx did not speak or took as simple presuppositions, we must be sensitive to his symptomatic silences. Any reading of the past is of the present, the past is the past of the present. The reverse danger of reading or judging the past from the present, is mirrored by the danger of reading the past as if the present and the years in between did not happen. Perhaps we can say, simplifying somewhat, that if the first anachronism is a mistake of historiography, the other is political, that of rendering oneself anachronistic in the present.

Given that our interest does not lie in a reading pure and simple or in the development of method as such, but in an "activation" of Marx's writings today as a mode of activity in the terrain of capitalism, the question of abstraction seems a good starting point. Abstraction, in Marx, and in the philosophers on which he drew, reappears as a problem of method in the extended sense given above, both as a problem *in and for philosophy* (what is abstraction?) and *of theoretical activity* (how does philosophy abstract, and what does it do by doing it?), and as a question of the terrain we have in common with Marx, namely the problem of capital(ism), i.e. a society in which material relations reproduce an abstract rule over individuals. Ideas for Marx are at once indispensable in an age of abstract relations – relations can only be expressed in ideas, he writes – yet to be treated with utmost caution against their hypostatisation, reification and legitimising use.⁷⁵⁴

752 It is to speak of truth in the negative sense of Leonard Cohen's line '*there is a war between the ones who say there is a war / And the ones who say there isn't*'. 'There is a War', in *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*.

753 ...this is a reading which does not merely reach into the past to understand the positivity of the present, but into the antagonism of the past as the antagonism of the present, thereby a reading which reaches into the capitalist part of the future.

754 Ideas, as opposed to religious beliefs, can play this role exactly because the 'new age' of impersonal relations cannot be comprehended without them. Ideology, in this specific sense, thus refers to a

In Post-Kantian German philosophy, as well as in Marx's analysis of capitalism, abstraction presumes a separation or difference between what subsumes and what is subsumed.⁷⁵⁵ Abstraction comes with subsumption, subsumption with abstraction: what is subsumed by the “universal” (the idea, money, capital, state, God...) is subsumed through a procedure of abstraction, by which it is separated from (aspects of) itself, as well as from its “environment” or “context” (the scarecrows here mark the hesitation of someone who has gotten ahead of himself, even in terms of posing questions). Yet we must quickly hint at the way these questions might set us out on: speaking of how *'individuals are now [this extended now that we share with Marx] ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another'* is to pose at once the question of the *prehistory* of the present, as well as of a future in which dependency is reorganised or abolished. It is to raise the question of autonomy and heteronomy historically, both as a conceptual distinction within philosophy and as a historically shifting mode of comprehending and reproducing social relationships.

If we ask the question *what is the contemporaneity of Marx?* we do not ask the obvious question of which aspects of his theories that are still valid and which are dated (as Benedetto Croce's question *'what is living and what is dead in the philosophy of ...?'*), nor suggest that there is some method that is alive despite the dated character of his insights (as Žižek's reversal of Croce's question, into *what are we in the eyes of...?*). The limitation of both framings is that they beg the deeper question of contemporaneity itself. How can we say we are still living in the historical epoch of Marx, when so much seems to have changed? Marx's method and theory might simply be alive in the weak sense that the Marxian problematic is constantly reproduced and elaborated within certain academic and activist milieus. Its contemporaneity cannot be established by comparing facts of the early 21st century with facts the mid 19th century, or by clinging onto orthodoxy. Method is alive in so far its object persist and is problematic for thought; but method is more than an engagement with an object, it is an engagement with the problem to which an objectification is a crystallisation, a problematic is a

particularly modern phenomenon, rather than an invariant feature of societies, as theorised by Louis Althusser. Jacques Rancière correctly pointed out the proto-Durkheimian functionalism at play in this notion of ideology. Althusser, *On Ideology*. Jacques Rancière, “On the Theory of Ideology – Althusser’s Politics,” in *Ideology*, ed. Terry Eagleton (London: Longman, 1994), 143–5, *Ibid.* Jacques Rancière, “On the Theory of Ideology – Althusser’s Politics,” in *Ideology*, ed. Terry Eagleton (London: Longman, 1994), 143–5, *Ibid.* Marx, *Grundrisse*, 164.

755 For a useful, and usefully simplified, distinction between the Kantian and Hegelian notions of subsumption in relation to the distinction between form and content, see I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Delhi: Aakar, 2008), 117–118.

problematization. Method passes into practice when it is not only a way to study a problematic-object (its internal relations and movement) or to critique it (show its conditions of possibility in the problem), but a way to rearrange the conditions themselves, a way, as it were, to dissolve the problem. This is a question is not only of the contemporaneity of Marx – or his articulation of the *contretemps* of capitalism itself – but of untimeliness.

Obviously this point cannot be proven except through the road itself, or, the failure to prove the point here, is exactly the proof itself. What we have here is merely an introductory *pointing ahead* towards a road that will have to be travelled in the coming chapters.

chapter 1

1.0. The practical energy of philosophy

Our chronologically first chosen encounter with the young Karl Heinrich is in 1837, in a letter. In it he carefully sketched out his intellectual development to his father, who had sent him to the Prussian capital to get him away from his hedonist and drunken lifestyle in Bonn and Cologne.⁷⁵⁶

If Marx's was later to speak of Hegelian philosophy's highest achievement that it at least manages to think itself as '*alienated science*', even if it continues '*doing philosophy*',⁷⁵⁷ in Marx's earliest texts we have a testimony to the de-habituating and energising force of philosophy. If Marx's eventual rejection of philosophy follows the path we are accustomed to – and thereby agrees with the philosophical tradition's self-description of philosophy as an overcoming of mere passion, embodiment and affect – the letters of the young Marx bear witness to the visceral force of ideas. In his first encounter with Hegel's writings the visceral effect of philosophy was a headache, their '*grotesque craggy melody*' produced little resonance.⁷⁵⁸ However, soon the dialectic revealed its force in ways recounted by few Hegelians. The attempt to think and write in Hegel's style turned into its Dionysian opposite:

For some days my vexation made me quite incapable of thinking; I ran about madly in the garden by the dirty water of the Spree, which “washes souls and dilutes the tea”.⁷⁵⁹ I even joined my landlord in a hunting excursion, rushed off to Berlin and wanted to embrace every street-corner loafer.⁷⁶⁰

756 Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* (New York: Norton, 2001), chapter 1.

757 Marx, “1844 Manuscripts,” 386.

758 As Hegel himself notes, thought requires practice: 'It is through ... habit that I come to realize my existence as a thinking being. Even here, in this spontaneity of self-centred thought, there is a partnership of soul and body (hence, want of habit and too-long-continued thinking cause headache); habit diminishes this feeling, by making the natural function an immediacy of the soul'. *The Philosophy of Spirit* (Marxists.org), §410.

759 A quote from Heinrich Heine's *Heinrich Heine's Pictures of Travel* (Philadelphia: F. Leypoldt, 1863), 121.

760 Karl Marx, “Letter from Marx to His Father, November 1837,” in *The First Writings of Karl Marx*

This young man, enrolled at the university in Berlin to be made a lawyer like his father, was becoming something quite different, putting his body on the line in philosophy and the heavy-drinking-heavy-philosophizing circles of young radical Hegelians: 'During my period of poor health I had gotten to know Hegel from beginning to end, including most of his students'.⁷⁶¹ The young Karl's engagement with the Left and Young-Hegelians was intense, physically and intellectually. In the letter to his father he wrote of how the tense engagement with contemporary philosophy brought him into 'a true fit of irony ... as could easily happen after so many negations'. His letter to his father returns again and again to the lived contradiction between the stuffy reading room and the fresh air, the lofty halls of the university and the dirty banks of the river Spree. The thrust to establish that 'the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body',⁷⁶² took total immersion (the image given: 'I wanted to dive into the sea'), but also the cleansing of the soul in shallow waters, and the tracing of animals in the Brandenburg countryside. He was, in some maddening sense, carried into the rhythm of the living concept, the 'mediating' activity between contradictory opposites, as a matter of life and philosophy. This tension (here with a surprising affirmation of the mind in the terms usually ascribed to the 'material') can easily be reduced to that between idealism and materialism, yet this is clearly insufficient: if there is a tension, it is one both lived and thought, that is, thought in life as well as lived in thought: the tension or negativity cannot be isolated as a theoretical or practical problem. And so the very work on this tension, the labour of mediation, takes place in both 'theory' and 'practice'. Karl's existential effort, in this letter to his father, was to conceptualise, *begreifen* with all the connotations of 'grappling with, getting a handle on, rendering conceptual'. While the lived (everyday, affective and bodily) stakes of these issues is clear in Marx's letters, they are rarely noted upon by commentators keen to avoid 'psychologising' Marx (as if the 'psychological' is purely individual, private and limited to its singular moment, and as if only the strictly conceptual – what can be rendered in logical, argumentative form – deserves to be communicated).⁷⁶³ The

(Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2006), 79.

761 Ibid., 80.

762 'die geistige Natur ebenso notwendig, konkret und festgerundet zu finden wie die körperliche'.

763 It is curious how Marxists self-limitation to the consideration of the strictly conceptual often disappears when we speak of other of the Marx's situated and conjunctural everyday day concerns around issues of organisation, and the strategies and internal power games of the International Working Mens' Association, for instance. The main difference is, of course, that Marxists have developed a language much richer in dealing with questions of organisation and propaganda than questions of affect. But in so far as organisation cannot be understood purely in terms of their structures and conscious ideas and beliefs, such understanding is impoverished by its lack of a

personal, affective, and psychological are only 'merely' individual and thus irrelevant for the universalising ambitions of social, political and philosophical activities to the extent that one accepts a certain number of individualising mechanisms.⁷⁶⁴ But of course our interest in Marx, a marker of the limitations as well as qualities of his work, lies in his critiques of philosophy and political economy (and the style of my writing will express this).

1.1. Beyond Kantian subsumption - the idea in reality itself

In Berlin the young romantic poet and law student had at first aligned himself philosophically with Kant and Fichte, developing the draft for a formalist theory of law. However, he soon rejected the opposition between the form and matter of law, between the conceptual and the given, turning to Hegel, and his critique of transcendental idealism.

From the idealism which ... I had compared and nourished with the idealism of Kant and Fichte, I arrived at the point of seeking the idea in reality [*im Wirklichen*, actuality] itself. If previously the gods had dwelt above the earth, now they became its center.⁷⁶⁵

The trope of the worldliness of rather than non-existence of Gods runs through all Marx writings – all the way to his remarks on the 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' of the commodity in *Capital*. But more importantly to our concerns here, is that Marx opens the possibility for an orientation without a God-postulate. What he refuses is the Kant's conception of God as a necessary *transcendental postulate* grounding the validity of practical judgement and the possibility of disjunctive judgement in theoretical reason. While Kant's operation was essentially subversive religions claims to intuitive access to God, reducing the God-hypothesis to mere conceptual function of reason, Marx rejected this transcendental dualism. If God in Kant is the name of the regulative idea that guarantees the unity of practical and theoretical reason in the face of

language enabling affective analysis – and more importantly perhaps – the collective refinement and development of affective sensibilities. For an attempt to do this, see The Nanopolitics group, *Nanopolitics Handbook*, ed. Bue Rübner Hansen, Paolo Plotegher, and Manuela Zechner (London/New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

764 Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, 1st Ed. (Duke University Press Books, 2007).; Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Guiseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).; the nanopolitics group, "Nanopolitics - a First Outline of Our Experiments in Movement," *Lateral* 1, no. 1 (2012).

765 Marx, "Letter from Marx to His Father, November 1837," 78.

the chaotic multiplicity of the phenomenal (the content of any judgement), the simple rejection of God would only unleash this unconceptual chaos. Rather, the point becomes to show how concepts are not external to the manifold contents of the world, but the active part of the process which produces form out of content, that reason is *real*, not a contribution of human cognition: 'The Concept [*der Begriff*] is ... the mediating link between Form and Content'.⁷⁶⁶ This was a move away from the Kantian notion of subsumption of content under concept, towards a Hegelian conception of the rationality of the real. In Kant subsumption involves a process of abstraction through which the truth of the manifold of sensual impression is obtained. The form for Kant is external to the content; the form brings out the truth of the content; but these are not juxtaposed in an external relation, they must have something in common for the operation to work. This is the *transcendental schema* as the "third thing" enabling the comparison (in *Capital* Marx will return to this logic when speaking of value as the *tertium comparationis* of commodities). Hegel's critique of this logic, hugely influential on the young Marx, aimed at subverting the binary between form and content, and the subjective idealism according to which the mediation of the two sides is the work of the transcendental subject, rather than that of the material itself:

Subsumption under the species alters what is immediate. We strip away what is sensory, and lift out the universal. [...] It seems absurd, if we what we want is knowledge of external objects, to alter these external objects by our very [abstractive] activity upon them. ... The alteration consists in the fact that we separate off what is singular or external, and hold the truth of the thing to lie in what is universal rather than in what is singular or external.⁷⁶⁷

Instead of this abstractive process of subsumption Hegel searches for the concrete universal present already in particulars, mediating and mediated by the relation to the particulars. In Isaak Rubin's pithy summary, 'Kant treated form as something external to the content [...]. [In Hegel] through its development, the content itself gives birth to the form which was already latent in the content'.⁷⁶⁸ In his article on Marx's *Dissertation* Martin McIvor relates Marx's philosophy to Hegel's critique of the transcendentalism of Kantian philosophy. Drawing on recent anti-foundationalist readings of Hegel (Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard in particular), McIvor suggests that Marx adopted Hegel the

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁶⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Logic: Berlin, 1831*, trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 12–13, §22, .

⁷⁶⁸ Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, 117–18.

project of affirming the immanent self-determination of reason against – or rather from the inner contradiction *of* - the Kantian 'reflective' standpoint which posited a strict distinction between the given “appearance” and underlying “essence”.⁷⁶⁹ In short, the production of the form from the concept is taken to be descriptive of a process of *thought*. However, Marx's was explicitly not limiting this activity of rationality to thought, but understood it as the self-ordering or self-organising activity of the reality, or actuality (*wirklichkeit*). Thus

in the concrete expression of a living world of ideas, as exemplified by law, the state, nature, and philosophy as a whole, the object itself must be studied in its development; arbitrary divisions must not be introduced, the rational character of the object itself must develop as something imbued with contradictions in itself and find its unity in itself.⁷⁷⁰

What McIvor misses, is that Hegel's program of a science extends to nature itself. Hegel is not merely interested in the movement of thought, but in the ‘movement in the object itself’, and similarly Marx's describes all true and real [*wirkliche*] science as dealing with the nature of things themselves.⁷⁷¹ The question is whether real manifolds can organise themselves into compound bodies or if the unity of natural phenomena is supplied by the understanding. Kant, in his *Inaugural Dissertation*, had insisted that wholes and compounds, respectively are only given when a totality or a multiplicity of parts (*multitudo*) is recounted for, leading to infinite regress. Thus the concepts of *simple parts* and *a whole* can only be supplied by the understanding by subsuming such multitudes from without.⁷⁷² Hegel's suggestion is that nature in organic beings reach 'concrete totalities'.⁷⁷³ In fact, in the *Critique of Judgement* Kant had come close to such an idea with his concept of organisms as self-organising beings; however, he made clear that such 'natural ends' could not be proven, but merely presumed by us, regulatively and from the point of view of reflection.⁷⁷⁴ While Hegel agrees with Kant, contemporary physics and the ancient Atomists that mechanical nature is pure exteriority, he insists that self-organisation and individuation, and thus rationality (understood as free self-

769 McIvor, “The Young Marx and German Idealism.”

770 Marx, “Letter from Marx to His Father, November 1837,” 74.

771 Marx, “Doctoral Dissertation,” 145.

772 Immanuel Kant, “Inaugural Dissertation (On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World),” in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, ed. David Walford (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 377–8.

773 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, Vol. I, trans. M. J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 215

774 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 200–205, §65-66.

organisation⁷⁷⁵), is proper to nature itself. 'Matter involves itself into life, and evolution is therefore also involution'.⁷⁷⁶ Thus nature is capable of synthesising itself into compounds and organisms. Marx was familiar with this position, as we can see from his plan of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* in his preparatory notebooks⁷⁷⁷, but in the *Dissertation* itself we find only passing references to the logics of (self-)organising, typically in oblique passing remarks about what the atomists *cannot* think. However, as noted Marx's was writing *after Hegel's system, or in its crisis*. Thus what Marx learned from Hegel was not a stable method, nor was it, as Marx noted, for Hegel 'something received, but something in the process of becoming, to whose uttermost periphery his own intellectual heart's blood was pulsating!'⁷⁷⁸ We go to Marx's notebooks to see how the crisis of Hegelianism was registered by Marx, and thus how he conceptualised the need for reorientation.

1.2. The Left-Hegelians and the Young-Hegelians

We find Marx in the middle of a lively discussion in Berlin. Much has been written of the Young-Hegelian circle and Marx's relation to it, but here I will make only a few remarks: this circle is in fact two overlapping circles, that of the Left-Hegelians (a split internal to the Hegelian school) and the Young-Hegelians (a split from the Left-Hegelians).⁷⁷⁹ John Toews points out that the distinction between Left and Right Hegelians was originally a quite context-specific and slightly misleading joke of David Strauß'. Somewhat complicating Strauß distinction Toews shows that there were in fact two sets of Left-Hegelians, the "Old Left," "New Left", with Strauß belonging to the latter. The main difference between the Old and the New Left Hegelians in Toews schema is the relation to Christian theology: While Old-Left Hegelians such as Eduard Gans, a contemporary of Hegel, stressed the modernist and republican elements of Hegel's thoughts and a Protestant notion of secularisation, the New Left Hegelians

775 The reality or actuality of reason or 'the idea' can be taken in two senses here, that of *order*, which pertains to law, and *organisation*, which pertains to a self-referential system. Thus order and organisation refer to two modes of universality, one sovereign and transcendent, the other emergent and immanent. Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History*, 25.

776 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I*, 218–19, §252.

777 Marx, *MECW I*, 510–16.

778 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 148.

779 For a useful attempt to untangle of the relationship between the Left and the Young Hegelians, and Marx's relation to both intellectual movements, see Emmanuel Renault, "The Early Marx and Hegel: The Young-Hegelian Mediation" (presented at the Marx and Philosophy Society Annual Conference, London, June 2, 2012).

approached secularization from a strictly atheist immanentist perspective.⁷⁸⁰

After the death of Hegel in 1831 the Left-Hegelians, among them David Strauß, had argued against the Right-Hegelians' adoption of the Hegelian dictum 'the actual is rational, and the rational is actual' and 'freedom is insight into necessity'. They did so by adding a simple '*not yet*', effectively turning Hegelian philosophy into a philosophy of the future, a future conceived as the extension of an ongoing process of realisation of reason, which is nothing but a process of actualisation of freedom. The Young-Hegelians, on the other hand, took the Hegelian system itself as a part of the past, unwilling to commit itself to a radical change of the world. The philosophical system itself – with its defence of the Prussian state in the *Philosophy of Right* – was seen as standing in the way of a true realisation of philosophy, i.e. the actualisation of freedom in history. Before Marx's supposed break with Hegel he was, as Young-Hegelian, a philosopher of such a break. The positions of these authors converged in these few years in the late 30s and early 40s, united not by a shared doctrine, but in an intellectual milieu in which the elaboration of a critique of Hegel as the main priority, but always in relation to the Left-Hegelian critique. This critique was strongly political, and taken as such by the authorities who attempted to suppress it, yet by and large limited to intellectual circles.⁷⁸¹

In *The German Ideology*, written four years after the *Dissertation*, Marx and Engels note that 'as we hear from German ideologists ... [t]he decomposition of the Hegelian philosophy, which began with Strauß, has developed into a universal ferment into which all the "powers of the past" are swept.'⁷⁸²

1.3. After the deluge: Prometheus and Hegel drowned

In a notebook from 1839 on Epicurean philosophy, preparatory for his *Dissertation* which was completed two years later, Marx gauged the state of philosophy and the contemporary pertinence of *Epicurus*, by dramatized the crisis of Hegelianism in a myth.⁷⁸³ The term *dramatization* is used advisedly, for Marx is not interested in exploring a unified system of thought or a historical sequence, but an event in and of thought. On the one side something like a *philosophical event*, the 'nodal point which

780 John Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism, 1805-1846," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

781 Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*.

782 "The German Ideology," 1969, 17.

783 The text was written in 1839, two years after the letter. Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 198.

raises philosophy ... into concretion ... and breaks of the rectilinear process' of philosophical history, on the other the moment where 'philosophy turns its eyes to the external world, and no longer apprehends it, but, as a practical person, weaves, as it were, intrigues with the world...', what we can speak of as an *event of philosophy*.⁷⁸⁴ More than a myth, Marx interlaces history and a thought of the contemporary situation with myth, drawing on three stories: Prometheus and Deucalion against Zeus, Democritus and Epicurus after Aristotle and Plato, and the exhaustion of systematic Hegelian philosophy. Here, in a narrative told retrospectively, according to the dictum that one knows a hero's life by his death, Hegelian philosophy, just as Prometheus' project, itself was seen as a force of cosmic unbalancing.⁷⁸⁵ The basic narrative connecting these layers by analogy is the following: a great totalising project – Prometheus, Plato-Aristotle, and Hegel, breaks of the linear path of history and becomes a historical force turning against the world. The totalisation is self-defeating, impossible to uphold. The attempted creation of a world or a system fails, philosophy turns outward and disintegrates into worldly engagement; carnal, sensuous, materialist. This period Marx calls 'the carnival of philosophy'; Epicurus and Democritus are two of the characters of such an ancient carnival, which is what makes them the contemporaries of Marx, contemporaries of the avowed materialism of the Young-Hegelians (we imagine Marx and the characters of the time – whom he would later dress up as saints – disputing in the famous Café Hoppel).⁷⁸⁶ If the carnival of philosophy comes after the totalising philosophy, how then characterise this philosophy? Here enters the mythical narrative of Prometheus who stole the fire from the Gods and gave birth to civilization⁷⁸⁷, and his son Deucalion. Marx compared Hegelian philosophy with the Promethean endeavour of building and settling upon the earth, expanding 'to be the whole world'.⁷⁸⁸ But Marx made clear that such an expansion must necessary lead to, and proceed through a turn against the world of appearance. A total philosophy becomes total only through abstraction, or, in other words, the heterogeneity, or heteronomy of the world is not abolished, but abstracted from. Such

784 Ibid., 197–8.

785 Ibid., 201.

786 Marx does not mention Aristotle or Plato, but clearly implies that Epicurus and Democritus are both reactions to a totalising philosophies analogous with Hegel's. The fact that Democritus was Socrates' generation makes it clear that this is not a historical/chronological narrative, but a narrative that has a mythical function in the present.

787 For a brief sketch of the Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment significance of the figure of Prometheus, see appendix 1.9.

788 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 198.

abstraction is presented as at once philosophical, historical and practical. Philosophy sealing itself off, as totalisation and abstraction is an effect of its own internal development, yet this internal development stands in a *practical relationship* to the world.⁷⁸⁹ It becomes possible to make two important points here: while Hegel's drive towards totalisation in thought finally makes his philosophy also a subsumptive philosophy – and one less humble than Kant's – such subsumption is not merely an event in thought, but in practice, effecting a diremption within the world:

...the totality of the world in general is divided within itself, and this division is carried to the extreme... The division of the world is total only when its aspects are totalities. The world confronting a philosophy total in itself is therefore a world torn apart.⁷⁹⁰

The attempted global totalisation as abstraction achieves the opposite of its end, it tears the world apart, through its own totalisation. The casting of Aristotle and Hegel as Promethean figures goes further than to noting the world-subduing process of their activity; the failure of the projects is written into them from the beginning: '[I]ts objective universality is turned back into the subjective forms of individual consciousness in which it has life'.⁷⁹¹ This objective universality is not that of substance (Gaia in the terms of the myth), but of the totalising Promethean system-subject.

It is important to take note of that fact that Marx, in the face of Epicurus' hostility to myth⁷⁹², and Hegel's and the later Marxist tradition's talk of the superiority of prosaic history over mythical poetry, registered the end of the Hegelian system and the period that followed it in the form of myth rather than history.⁷⁹³ As noted, what Marx's is interested in is *events in philosophy* and *of philosophy*, not a sequential history. The montage, the superimposition of myth, history and the contemporary, presents three historical events as *repetitions* of the same structure. However, this repetition does not suggest something like the possibility of the repetition of a certain dialectic, the repetition of a figure of sublation, but rather the repetition of a certain *failures of sublation*. Reversely, this means that Marx does not present us with a wholly

789 Ibid.

790 Ibid.

791 Ibid.

792 Which Marx refers to on several occasions in the dissertation, e.g. Ibid., 90, 141.

793 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel: Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-1823*, ed. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (OUP Oxford, 2011); For the intimate connection between myth and history respectively poetry and prose in Hegel, see Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

indeterminate situation of disorientation – a pure chaos – nor with an indeterminate problem of reorientation. Rather, he attempts to outline the precise structure of the crisis of orientation, and thus to come to understand the structure of the openness of the situation. The crisis does not pose the question of orientation *in nuce*, but the more precise question of orientation *after the failure of a project of totalisation*. This is where the young Marx is the contemporary of the post-1989 period.

So, Marx describes a situation in which world philosophy turns into its opposite – 'a world torn apart', and the succeeding period in which 'mediocrity is the normal manifestation of absolute spirit'.⁷⁹⁴ The post-Hegelian situation is like the night after the setting of 'the universal sun', in which the moth of philosophy seeks the dim lights of the lamp of the 'private individual'. In these times of disorientation and hopelessness, where the 'Absolute has ... fallen into the measureless', Marx's text suggests two possible orientations, *exodus* or *waiting*, based on a new world-building practice or the promise of a 'new goddess'. The practice suggested by Marx's text is that of the figures of Deucalion, Prometheus son, and of Themistocles who attempted to persuade the Athenians to found a new Athens at sea, when Athens was about to fall. Deucalion, like Marx after the death of father-Hegel, attempted to create 'a world' following the failure of his father's grand global project and after the great flood, by creating a people by 'throwing the bones of his mother' (Gaia) behind him.⁷⁹⁵ Deucalion, the Greek equivalent of Noah, is here proposing a very different and materialist notion of post-apocalyptic times, than the classical Messianic figures.⁷⁹⁶

The new goddess, on the other hand, is the promise given in the depth of the night which, after the flight of the owl of Minerva:

...titanic are the times which follow in the wake of a philosophy total in itself and of its subjective developmental forms, for gigantic is the discord that forms their unity. Thus Rome followed the Stoic, Sceptic and Epicurean philosophy. They are unhappy and iron epochs, for their gods have died and the new

794 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 199.

795 Ibid., 198.

796 It would be interesting to reread the young Marx with Walter Benjamin on this point. Howard Caygill suggests that Benjamin's messianic language toward the end of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* must be read in terms of the task of building a new world after the end of the storm of progress: Benjamin's 'work is certainly full of intimations of last things, but not necessarily in the sense of a Messianic completeness. A better biblical precedent for his thought is the appearance of the rainbow to Noah after the flood, marking the advent of a new covenant between Divinity, Nature and Humanity. Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin the Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 149.

goddess still reveals the dark aspect of fate, of pure light or of pure darkness. She still lacks the colours of day.⁷⁹⁷

The Deucalian and Themistoclean orientations are properly *hopeless*, it has not hope in the current world nor in the one beyond, but aims at the construction of a world in exodus or after the deluge. The new goddess, on the other hand is a figure of the coming of hope and orientation, the promise of an orientated practice within an actuality that is only in the process of formation; Marx only found his new goddess years later, when he encountered the practice of communism.

1.4. A Promethean Philosophy

Two years after having pronounced the death of Hegel's Promethean philosophy⁷⁹⁸, Marx strongly declared himself a devotee of Prometheus 'the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar'.⁷⁹⁹ He denounced the gods of all religions, heavenly and earthy alike, in an affirmation of 'human self-consciousness as the highest divinity'.⁸⁰⁰ Instead Marx affirms the immanent power of philosophy 'whose *sovereign authority* ought everywhere to be acknowledge'.⁸⁰¹ 'Philosophy', he continues 'as long as a drop of blood shall pulse in its *world-subduing* and *absolutely free heart*, will never grow tired of answering its adversaries with the cry of Epicurus'.⁸⁰² Against the today consensual dismissal of "Promethean activism" as the 'deification of man as a disastrous form of hyper-humanism' Alberto Toscano notes:

The Promethean act is first and foremost the emblem of the revolt against the infinite "super-power" of authority. Prometheanism is precisely the refusal of the articulation between divine (or political) authority and human mortality.⁸⁰³

Did Marx give up his diagnosis of the failure of the Promethean project of Hegel or should we read his exclamation as a call to repeat the Promethean gesture under other circumstances? In a note written between the preparatory note written close to the

797 Ibid., 199–200.

798 Cf. appendix 1.3. 'After the deluge: Prometheus and Hegel drowned'

799 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 90.

800 Ibid.

801 Ibid., 89. Marx is here quoting the German translation of David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Digireads.com Publishing, 2010), 104.

802 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 90.. My emphasis.

803 Alberto Toscano, "A Plea for Prometheus," *Critical Horizons* 10, no. 2 (August 2009).

completion of the thesis,⁸⁰⁴ we find a hint towards the answer. Here Marx presents his new philosophy against the pupils of Hegel. Where they, in Marx's scathing critique, turn their moral indignation against their old Master's idiosyncrasies [*Einseitigkeiten*], their critique amounts to nothing more than the complaints of disappointed acolytes who have at last noticed the faults of what they thought was the perfect science of the Master. At least for Hegel, Marx exclaims, science 'was not something received, but something in the process of becoming, to whose uttermost periphery his own intellectual heart's blood was pulsating!' Hegel's relation to his system was substantial and living, theirs is only reflective.⁸⁰⁵ Marx knows that the moment of this father is over, and that the any battle against the ruins of Hegel's project happens at the risk of merely resurrecting its individual moments. He cannot adopt it, he cannot negate it; he cannot but affirm its energies.

In the notes to the missing fourth chapter of the *Dissertation* Marx returns to the questions raised two years earlier in his notebooks, but with a crucial twist. He has found a philosophy that neither points towards a Deucalian construction of a world, nor the orientation of new goddess, but a destructive-constructive philosophy. The practical energy of abstraction is not just turning *against* the world, or onto its own individuality. It does both, and in so doing it is changing that world:

What was inner light has become consuming flame turning outwards. The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realisation is also its loss... That which opposes it and that which it fights is always the same as itself, only with the factors inverted.⁸⁰⁶

1.5. The labour of Pyrrha

The rejection of patriarchal authority, in the Prometheus myth, is a struggle over the world, what is *given* and without agency, namely Gaia and Pyrrha. Importantly these two figures are missing in Marx's adoption of the Prometheus myth. Thus, in the myth as told by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, it was not Deucalion alone who repopulated the earth after the flood. Pyrrha, who had Deucalion as her husband, also worked the earth –

804 The title of the fragment refers to the title of a chapter of the *Dissertation*, which is now missing, but which occurs in the final dissertation index. We thus gather that this note was not a preparatory note, but rather written during the period in which Marx was writing the thesis, in late 1840 or early 1841.

805 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 148.

806 *Ibid.*, 149.

Gaia their common mother – and from her created a new people (after the advice of the goddess Themis each threw a 'bone of their mother', a stone, behind them, creating respectively a man and a woman). The new world after the destruction and fragmentation of the flood, was a product not just of Promethean synthesis, but of sexual reproduction, and the daily activities of reproduction which sustained and multiplied the living while they were still fragmented. Where Marx inscribes himself and Hegel in the male lineage of the conquering father and his son, we might see the forgetting, or (in so far as mythical characters stay alive as long as the rituals they support) the continued *exclusion* of Pyrrha and Gaia, an exclusion not to an outside, but to an invisible inside. Marx, in rejecting the patriarchal authority of the King of Gods, Zeus, comes no further than to align himself with the rebel father, Prometheus, while forgetting the son's wife and her labours. This, I would argue is not merely an absence or an oversight on the part of Marx, rather 'an inner darkness of exclusion' something which remained structurally invisible for Marx, the inventor of symptomal readings, as well as for the inventor of the invention of symptomal readings, Althusser.⁸⁰⁷ Behind the freedom of the Promethean abstraction lies what we might call the prior abstraction of separation from the earth; to sustain an element in abstraction requires a labour, the reproductive labour of Pyrrha and the gifts of the soil, of Gaia.

As Althusser notes, our sighting of the oversights of past writers only becomes possible with an '*informed* gaze, a new gaze, itself produced by a reflection of the “change of terrain” on the exercise of vision'. This can only happen through a transformation of 'the production of the visible'.⁸⁰⁸ Anachronism is not a fallacy, but a given of our vision itself, one that is a condition for historical experience. Here we might mention the feminist movement and the (re-)entry of women into the waged-labour market as the historical condition that made possible this seeing of this oversight. However, it is not that such seeing has suddenly become possible through the arrival of the new, but that these struggles has forced philosophy and history, fields historically excluding female practitioners and testimonies, to begin to recognise what retrospectively will appear to having been there all along.⁸⁰⁹ What I want to note here, as a question to pursue, is a certain silencing that is perhaps necessary in the post-Kantian tradition: even when Kantian heteronomy and autonomy (or necessity and freedom) are dialecticized, the 'labours' of women and 'typically female or effeminate characteristics' (affectiveness,

807 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 24–28.

808 *Ibid.*, 27.

809 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

care, passion, sensuousness, corporeality, etc.) are either directly made invisible or assigned a 'natural' or pathological place (the effect of which is silencing in a philosophy for which speech proper and autonomy become one).⁸¹⁰

The problematic of separation is common to Hobbes and Epicurus, both writing at times of social disintegration. But where Hobbes became a philosopher of absolutism, Epicurus became the founder of *The Garden*. This withdrawal into a world of friendship and ataraxy brings him closer to Voltaire's *Candide* at the end of his journey than to the Diggers, Hobbes contemporaries, who in squatting first St. George's hill in 1649, and later a great many fields across England, aimed to found elective communities in which the self-reproduction of the life of the community and of the individuals coincided. Both they and Epicurus arrived at the practical recognition that the human organism is not an atom; it cannot exist long outside relations of reproduction, and must invent them where they are absent.

What Epicurus, Hobbes, the young Marx and the late Althusser's materialisms have in common is a certain blindness to questions of reproduction; the pure world of atoms, clinamen or forces opens no questions of how bodies and societies are reproduced. The problem to which combination, the covenant, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, etc., are answers is the problem of fragmentation or separation. Through the introduction of the swerve this solution becomes a creative, generative one in which the parts abolish the separation through their own activity, without abolishing the swerve itself, whereby the atoms remain 'free', while the possibility of disintegration remains; the problem remains, and thus the process of solution can perpetuate itself. However, the above suggests a different work on the problem, one that subtends this solution, namely the work of maintaining what is fragmented. The actualisation of freedom in social bodies is premised on the 'female' world of heteronomy.⁸¹¹

1.6. Hegel on idealisation and actualisation

Empiricist readings and critiques of Hegel and Marx often rely on a misreading the notion of *Wirklichkeit*, so that 'reality' or what is 'real' is construed as a passive

810 "The Gender of Enlightenment" in Robin May Schott, *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* (Penn State Press, 1997). As we know from fashion advertisements and humanitarian aid campaigns alike, silence does not always entail invisibility. Marxism, and our text, will be haunted by this silence.

811 Of course talk of Goddesses and female powers is still a poor replacement for engaging with female 'native' informants, and less yet for any the feminist movement.

collection of elements and relations, and actuality as what is what is simply present, the passive object of perception or theory. *Wirklichkeit*, contrary to this, speaks to the primacy of *Tätigkeit* (activity) over *Tatsachen* (lit. “act-things”, the results or objects of an activity). In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, just to measure a distance by way of linguistic clarification, *Tatsachen* are mere facts (the fact of *Sachverhalten*, combinations, between things, *Sachen, Dingen*).⁸¹²

In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel discusses how nature (the realm of the Epicurean analysis) is what is external not just to us, but *in-itself*; *it is multiplicity, not one*. On this level of externality there is no actuality, only possibility, or rather actuality can only be imposed on nature on the outside:

Both in nature and in spirit too, Concept, purpose, and law, so far as they are still only *inner* dispositions, pure possibilities, are still only an external inorganic nature, what is known by a third alien power, etc.⁸¹³

If merely held in the mind a concept, purpose and law, are only mental abstractions and possibilities. Rather than informing matter itself organically as its own emergent powers, they are known from outside, by an observer, 'an alien power'. However, contra to Epicurus, Hegel refuses to hypostasise this abstract understanding of nature, and to reject teleology and rationality tout court just because it is not found in nature considered in its abstract externality. The point does not become to order chaotic nature, but to trace its own self-ordering, self-actualisation. So while the actual is always an actualised 'idea', it is not a mere idea (a form of knowledge external to its object), but an idea to its immanent, or organic, to its actualisation, something like the 'principle' or 'goal' (rather than 'structure', which would be too passive) that organises the manifold of which any one complex object consists.⁸¹⁴ Idealisation is not an goal *governing* individuation, however, nor certainly an idea subsuming what is different. Idealisation is

812 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ogden & Ramsey, and Pears & McGuinness, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus / Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 2013), 1 - 2.011. Fredric Jameson, *Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 1st edition (Verso, 2010), chapter 6, “The Ethics of Activity (die Sache Selbst).” See also Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 213–225, §142-149. particularly §142 and §148.

813 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 210, §140.

814 Just as Hegel is here not an empiricist, neither is he an idealist in the Platonic sense. Hegel explicitly agrees with Aristotle in his polemic against Plato, which 'consists in his designation of the Platonic Idea as mere *dynamis*, and in urging, on the contrary, that the Idea, which is recognised by both of them equally to be what is alone true, should be regarded essentially as *energeia*, i.e., ... as the unity of inward and outward... actuality in the emphatic sense'. *Ibid.*, 215, §142. For a commentary on the relation to Aristotle on this issue, see Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139.

simply the name of the emergent teleology, which emerges when a 'chemical' process (which is self-organised in the sense that the combination is given with the properties of the elements themselves and no external principle) flips back on itself and becomes self-reproductive. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel stresses that the organic does not come about by necessity, but it is a result, the last thing, which returns into itself, it becomes 'the first thing'. The organic emerges from this loop, it does not produce itself, 'does not engender something, it merely conserves itself'.⁸¹⁵ The telos (*Zweck*) the movement appears in the moment it is actualised [*verwirklicht*]. That the actual is idea means that it is rational in itself and thus that it can be made intelligible.

In Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic*, the precise determination of *Wirklichkeit*, actuality, is that it is the actualisation of a certain essence, an essence which doesn't just exist contingently, but which exist necessarily, which posits itself. He argues against the error of taking essence, or an idea as something 'inner', merely realised in the outer being of a thing.⁸¹⁶ For instance, while a child is a 'rational essence', the child's rationality is merely an essential disposition or possibility. It is only through education that a child's inner essence (or potentiality) comes into *existence*, becomes a true essence, which is also outwardly expressed, *appearance*. Thus the potential is actualised. We might say that for Hegel a real potentiality – capable of actualisation – is more than a mere logical or imaginary possibility, however, it can be *known* only retrospectively, once actualised. So what is the relation between idealisation and idealism? The atom, for Hegel, is always-already caught up in the demands of philosophy, which are always caught up with figures of the infinite, of which the finite is merely a part. In a wonderful dialectical phrase Hegel writes: 'The claim that the finite is an idealization defines idealism. The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in the recognition that the finite is not truly an existent'.⁸¹⁷ What truly exists is the infinite of idealism, of which the finite – even if an idea – is merely a product. He continues:

Every philosophy is essentially idealism or at least has idealism for its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is carried out. This applies to philosophy just as much as to religion, for religion also, no less than philosophy, will not admit finitude as a true being, an ultimate, an absolute, or as something non-positated, uncreated, eternal. The opposition

815 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §256.

816 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 209, §140.

817 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 2010, 124.

between idealistic and realistic philosophy is therefore without meaning. A philosophy that attributes to finite existence, as such, true, ultimate, absolute being, does not deserve the name of philosophy. The principles of ancient as well as more recent philosophies – whether “water,” “matter,” or “atoms” – are universals, idealizations, not things as given immediately, that is, in sensuous singularity.⁸¹⁸

This point draws on the classical argument according to which a manifold of exteriorities or differences (the manifold of sensual impressions, abstract individuals, God's heterogeneous creation) is only cognizable through a moment of unification (in the transcendental subject, the idea, God).

1.7. The actuality of representation and the need for social critique

In a note written at the time of the composition of the thesis Marx provides us with an fragment of a materialist theory of religion. While Marx follows Epicurus in picking apart the gods by looking to their component parts, he insists on a certain materiality of such existing abstract beings. It is in this incipient critique of the mystifications of religion that Marx introduces the notion of the *actuality*, the real effectivity, of social ideas.

The actual, in Hegelian terms, is not just active and effective, but is so on its own accord. It is a causality which cannot be reduced to its preconditions, to a series of external causal relationships. Characterised by a causal circularity, it reproduces itself, it has itself as an end, it is, in the terminology of German Idealism, *teleological*. Not all teleology is theological: To reject the power of God is to reject any final absolute teleology, but not to reject teleologies as such. A *finite* teleology, such as an organism, posits itself and its conditions, i.e. it is not the mere result of what came before, but organises it as its own elements. Against Hegel, who in Marx's (mis)understanding had attempted to posit the existence of the absolute on the back of finite teleologies (“Since the accidental does not exist, God or Absolute exist”⁸¹⁹), Marx rejects this absolute without rejecting the organising power of teleologies. Hegel's argument, according to Marx is 'upside-down'; it merely reverses the 'hollow tautology' of the classical

818 Ibid.

819 Marx, “Doctoral Dissertation,” 160. Marx here misrepresents Hegel's position as noted by David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism*, First U.S. Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

argument for God's existence, which Marx paraphrases as "what I really imagine is an actual representation for me".⁸²⁰ That this is a tautology does not make it false, Marx notes. The imaginary character of God and money does not make it any less effective: '...it works on me (*das wirkt auf mich*). In this sense all *gods*, the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence (*eine reelle Existenz*)'.⁸²¹

For Marx the existence of God is neither purely symbolic nor empirical. Indeed Kant 'might have enforced the ontological proof' by comparing God to something as actual yet ideal, as money. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argued against this argument that existence does not add anything to a concept; the actual is not 'more' than the merely possible, being is not a predicate that is added to a thing: A hundred taler (or dollars, pounds...) in my wallet is not 'more' than a hundred talers in my mind. In the latter case, the 'more' is not a mere conceptual determination, but a synthetic, empirical external, i.e. contextual addition to the concept. In this sense, considered *a posteriori*, the real talers are of course 'more' than imagined ones, they constitute real wealth. But nothing about existence can be proven by pure conceptual argument: existence can only be granted *a posteriori*, empirically. There is a discontinuity between our concepts and real relations, and the standards by which we judge either are not the same.⁸²²

Marx picked up on Kant's empirical demand for any proof of existence, but coupled it with a very Hegelian insistence that matter and form do not relate externally, but are moments of the same process of actualisation. God or money might appear as empty imaginary representations (*Vorstellungen*), yet they operate with some force within certain finite settings.

If somebody imagines [*vorstellt*] that he has a hundred talers, if this concept is not for him an arbitrary, subjective one, if he believes in it, then these hundred imagined talers have for him the same value as a hundred real ones. For instance, he will incur debts on the strength of his imagination, his imagination will work, in *the same way as* all humanity has incurred *debts on its gods*. Real talers have the same existence that the imagined gods have.⁸²³

Imagined talers, for the imagined possessor with a willing creditor, is worth as much as

820 "was ich mir wirklich (realiter) vorstelle, ist eine wirkliche Vorstellung für mich".

821 He continues 'Did not the ancient Moloch reign? Was not the Delphic Apollo a real power (wirkliche Macht) in the life of the Greeks?' The translation, which renders 'vorstellung' as 'concept', has been amended. Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 160.

822 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A600/B628.

823 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 160.

real ones. But this 'real' soon shows itself as relative one, founded – as religious belief – in social belief:

Has a real taler any existence except in the imagination, if only in the general or rather common imagination of man? Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination. Come with your gods into a country where other gods are worshipped, and you will be shown to suffer from fantasies and abstractions. And justly so.⁸²⁴

Representations can be real, a form of common imagination, which is effective and actual (*das wirkt*) in so far as it is practised in a definite 'country', through exchange or worship.⁸²⁵ Representations can thus construct a world through the embodied practices that give it life. Marx here does not conceive of money and God as transcendent forces nor as simple illusions, but as fantasies and abstractions, alien to 'the country of reason'. Certainly the abstractions 'money' and 'God' represent a certain world, within which they structure the very relations of existence. But Marx's argument is not that they are irrational because they are imaginaries of the real relations of existence. Rather, he writes, the ontological argument is an argument that there is an *essentially self-grounding autonomous existence*; God is no such existence, human self-consciousness is.⁸²⁶ The idea of God is thus *false and irrational* not compared to the material practices – of which he is indeed the necessary, real and effective representation – but because God is only *apparently* self-grounding. The 'rational' is what does not merely take the actual at face value, but comprehends *actualisation* (*Verwirklichung*), what truly posits itself. Indeed the proof of God – the essence that can only be thought of as existing – is a proof of human self-consciousness itself, because the latter can be the *causa-sui* that the former purports to be. The problem with the imaginary is that it understands the actual only as a representation, as a given, as semblance rather than appearance. The point is not that the semblance is a pure illusion, but that it has the very real effect of mystifying the power of actualisation of what has constituted actuality. God and money are strictly immanent – ideas born by a collective social and 'conceptual' activity. This

824 Ibid., 160-61

825 We are here reminded of Althusser's thesis that ideology has a material existence; 'I shall talk of actions inserted into *practices*. And I shall point out that these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus...*'. Althusser, *On Ideology*, 42.

826 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 161.

activity is *immanent* in the sense that it is cause of itself and its products, God and money, in the same sense (*eo sensu*, in Spinoza's terms).⁸²⁷ The rejection of religion is not premised on a notion of illusion, but the critique of how religion renders invisible the true force that sustains it, thus blocking the affirmation and actualisation of that force.

1.8. Freedom of first and second nature

It deserves mention that for Hegel the freedom of pure indeterminacy or self-reflection, is merely natural freedom, a freedom every limitation and content, including drives, needs or desires. As such it is singular, or abstract. Such will is particular through the *I*, as an act of differentiation, and determination of form and content. Only the will that is not just *in itself*, but *for itself*, which takes itself as an object, is rational and autonomous, of 'second nature'.⁸²⁸

1.9. A note on the Modern use of Prometheus

There are, of course, several diverging surviving versions of the Prometheus myth, of which Marx is likely to have known most, given his solid classical education: Hesoid and Aeschylus; Sappho, Aesop, and Ovid. In the latter three Prometheus created mankind, in the former he merely stole fire from the Gods and gave it to mankind. Here we are not concerned with the classical versions of the myth, but with Marx's use of it. In this context it is important to note the importance of Prometheus for the Enlightenments self-mythologization; Kant, for instance, called Benjamin Franklin a 'modern Prometheus' after hearing of his experiments with electricity, while Goethe in 1770. After the French Revolution Prometheus become an important figure of rebellion against authority. Thus Percy Shelley, in his *Prometheus Unbound*, rewrote the

827 Evald Ilyenkov, a dissident Soviet philosopher friendly to Spinoza as well as Marx, supports this interpretation, when he shows how Marx's in this note theorises ideas as embodied and processual immanence. Thus, in Ilyenkov's reading the *Vorstellungen*, or 'ideal images', even if 'fetishized' (his reading of 'abstractions and fantasies'), can only be sustained as long as the activities they sustain continue. E.V. Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic - Essays on Its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell Creighton (Delhi: Aakar, 2008), 279. Ilyenkov's analysis, however, focuses on idealisation as a result of the alienation of human intentionality as a *causa finalis*. Thus his interpretation leads towards an image of a 'negative' ruse of reason, rather than a more general theory of real abstraction. For a brief introduction to Ilyenkov, see Alex Levant, "E.V. Ilyenkov's The Ideal in Human Activity," *Marx & Philosophy Review of Books* (2011).

828 Hegel: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §4-11, and the following paragraphs.

Aeschylus story in such a way that it no longer ended with the reconciliation of Prometheus and Zeus (Jove), but with the downfall of the latter ('in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind').⁸²⁹ Mary Shelley's modern Prometheus, Victor Frankenstein, was, as is well-known, an altogether more ambivalent figure.⁸³⁰

1.10. The time of actualisation

In Marx's reading Epicurus does not provide principle of actualisation; his atom is either *too* self-reliant and external, or the mere content of a form (of *this* animal body, *this* comet, *this* stone) which is external or indifferent to it, which subsumes it from without. In the absence of an actualising principle of the atoms, they merely lie side by side uninterested and unrelated, they cannot become the principle of the intelligibility (idealisation) of concrete nature. While posing as materialism this atomism is merely abstract timeless philosophy.

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel claims that the atomists fail to move beyond passive spatial 'composition' (*Zusammensetzung*); the thought of the atoms under the same concept in the same space is one that fails to bring them into active relation; however much the atom has a duration, it appears as timeless to thought.⁸³¹ Composition in this sense is purely spatial, whereas *time* is the active form of concrete nature. However, in Marx's reading only Democritus falls on Hegel's critique, since Epicurus introduces time not as a mere imaginary conception of atoms that are otherwise eternal, but as the principle of the realm of appearances, indeed as '*the absolute form of appearance*'.⁸³² *Time* is described as '*the accidens of the accidens*', the explanation of change, not pure and simple as was 'chance' but substantially, 'reflecting in itself'.⁸³³ Appearance becomes

829 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* (London: C and J Ollier, 1820)

830 For an introduction to the cultural history of the Prometheus myth, see Carol Dougherty, *Prometheus* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

831 In the *Science of Logic* Hegel defines composition as 'an *external* relation of the ones to one another, in which the one is maintained in its absolute brittleness and exclusiveness', and ascribes this position particularly to atomism. He continues 'But it has been shown that the one essentially and spontaneously passes over into attraction, into its ideality...' Quoting Spinoza's *Ethics* at length (I, XV, scholium), Hegel makes clear that the mistake of atomism is that sees the pure quantity (externality) in the mode of the imagination, abstractly, rather than through intellect, as substance. Marx explicitly levies this critique against Democritus ('[t]he imagining intellect ... does not grasp the independence of substance...'). It seems clear that Marx's commentary is written with this section of Hegel's in mind. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 188.

832 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 132.

833 Substance can be considered as possibility, and as such it passes into accidentality. But it becomes necessary as relationship of causality: 'Substance is *cause*, because – in contrast to its passing over into accidentality – it is inwardly reflected'. The inward reflection Marx proposes here is that of

objective as *sensation*, 'human sensuousness is ... embodied time, the existing reflection of the sensuous world in itself'.⁸³⁴ Time is sensuous perception reflected in itself, it is the 'abstract form of sensation'; no appearance without time, no time without appearance. This means that time is proper to appearance, it cannot be defined by analogy or correlation with the atoms; it is simply the criteria of itself. Yet it is not *separate* from the atoms, sensuousness is the *natural* medium of the reflection of natural processes: 'in hearing nature hears itself, in smelling it smells itself, in seeing it sees itself'.⁸³⁵

It is in this way time becomes the explanation of change *despite* the persistence of the atoms in timeless exteriority, the senses the medium of comprehending concrete nature, nature in its appearance. But is there not, behind this concept of time, several other notions of temporality at play in Marx's discussion of Epicurus? Given the definition of time as appearance and appearance as conglomeration of atoms, we can derive *three additional concepts of temporality from that given above*:

Firstly, under and below appearances, there is also a 'timeliness' to the immanent movement of the atom, 'in time, in place unfixt'. If the singular movement of an atom – as the extensive expression of its intensity – is absolute it cannot be *in* time, nor space, yet it must, in its movement, be durational, temporalising itself.

Secondly, there is the Epicurean notions of friendship and the covenant, something like a politics of love, an encounter which temporarily suspends exteriority. Given that these pre-political conglomerations do not abolish the exteriority of their component parts, yet do move beyond mere spatial composition, they open the question of *temporal* composition, against Hegel's and Marx's understanding of composition. However this cannot be the interior time of an organised being, but that of an assemblage, the relation of velocity, let's say, of two or more atoms composed in their movement.

Thirdly, with regards to the Hegelian criterion of actualisation, i.e. the question of how the abstractly universal, the separate atoms, become concretely universal, an integrated multiplicity: This criterion demands the introduction of an operator of – to express it in extremely general terms – *reflexive* spontaneity, a process-subject which is not just irreducible to a chain of causality (spontaneous), but self-positing (autonomous).⁸³⁶ As a

accidentality itself; inwardly reflected accidentality, or contingency, becomes considered as necessary movement of substance, and therefore not purely accidental. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 227, §152-3.

834 Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 134.

835 *Ibid.*, 135.

836 The problematic to which Marx looks for an answer is not just his, but characteristic of the 18-19 Century German philosophy; it is that of the Kantian (or Enlightenment) affirmation of the

teleology it is not accidental, but an essence that has its reason of existence in itself, and appears as such. If time is still of appearance this, however, gives us another concept of time which is not merely that of accidents and perpetual change, but that of a teleology whose actualisation entails a certain con-temporalisation of a manifold, which organises itself, its time, according to its inner finite necessity, its principle of integration-and-organisation. With this we would have, in Hegelian terms, the basic temporal structure of an organism, of the state, and of history (history being conceived minimally as a temporal narrative rationality-intelligibility). This is a temporalisation over and beyond that of sensuousness and philosophy, a time which is neither the embodied time of the perceiving consciousness, nor the abstract time of the philosopher (whether a *concept* of singular duration or a Newtonian container time, the homogeneous-continuous time-*within-which*), but the *temporalisation* proper to a process of actualisation of a manifold.

1.11. Hegel's dialectic of time and space⁸³⁷

I here enter into a close reading of first section of the *Philosophy of Nature* presents as the dialectic of time and space under the heading of the mechanics of free motion.

Hegel starts with the category of space given as the 'abstract generality of nature's self-externality'. This is not a Kantian 'form of sensuous intuition', but a simple form of thought, an abstraction. Space is *pure quantity*, the otherness and externality of plurality.⁸³⁸ In other words, this abstract universal space is the world as externality, abstracted from all the difference that makes something external from something else. Or, in other words, it is merely the possibility rather than the positedness of difference.⁸³⁹ With this abstraction externality can be considered as continuous. This is 'unmediated indifference' in so far as it is a 'wholly ideal juxtaposition', which is 'entirely abstract'. It is indifferent in the sense that it is abstracted from the difference that makes it a plurality, unmediated in the sense that it is does not form a one or a unity. Only this procedure of abstraction gives us a notion of homogeneous and continuous

autonomous and moral will as an end-of-itself, and of romantic art's affirmation that in true art the content itself gives rise to its form. It also resonates with the political questions of how the multitude constitute itself as state, and how the will of individuals become the general will.

837 From Hansen, "Hegel's Concept of Time."

838 See also, Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 186–201. Quantity here is characterised as the unity of continuity (attraction) and discreteness (repulsion) sublating being-for-self.

839 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I* §254.

space, abstract space, *indeterminate* exteriority.

However, this pure externality is immediately negated by *the point*; indifferent indeterminate space is negated by the *determination* of spatial difference: the point as determinately different – here from space rather than from other points. The point is the negation of space-as-undifferentiated-self-externality.⁸⁴⁰ Since the point negates space, but is itself spatial, its essential characteristic is *self-negation*. The point is absolutely non-relational, except to itself: it is abstractly *singular*.

The point cannot be divided by its negativity, but it forces it to pass beyond itself; in the terms of the Science of Logic on quantity, it is an internal difference, an intensity, which is the motor of the movement of the different into space, its becoming *extensive*, to become *line*. Only what is extensive becomes the object of perception; intensity is this not 'actual', but 'possible' in Hegel's terms, not as something which awaits actualisation, or something posited as the ground of the actual, but as always already there, insisting in the extensivity it constitutes. **The line** is the self-sublation of the negativity of the point. It is the point existing outside of itself relating itself to space; in the line space negates its own self-negation, it negates the point. That the negation of space is negated does not mean a return to abstract homogeneous space, but the beginning self-overflowing of the spatial through its inner negativity. Space, which was first purely abstract is now, we might say, singularizing itself. The abstraction from the particular differences that make up our spatial environment into a pure externality, discovers in that externality, a negativity traversing space, a motor of singularisation, where the ordinary perspective would only see positive, particular diversity.

The truth of the otherness of the point, that is the truth of the line is *the plane*. As opposed to opposed to line and point, the plane is the re-establishment of spatial totality, now containing the negative moment within itself as an enclosing surface, separating off a distinct part of space. Only here does space become totality, a totality which is not total; as Hegel makes clear – in the abstract plurality of space there is no limit; 'No matter how far away I place a star, I can always go beyond it, for no one has boarded up the universe. [...] Space is still at unity with itself as its otherness beyond its limit; and it is this unity in extrinsicality which constitutes continuity'.⁸⁴¹ Abstract space is infinite, uncontainable in any closed totality.

What we have seen is a certain negativity which 'as point relates itself to space and in

840 Ibid. §199.

841 p.224

space develops its determinations as line and plane'. However, Hegel stresses, in the sphere of self-externality, this negativity is for itself, whilst it appears indifferent to the motionless coexistence of space.⁸⁴² Negativity thus posited for itself is TIME.

Time, to repeat, is the *for-itself* of the negativity inherent in space. It arises because space in itself is contradictory:

Space is in itself the contradiction of indifferent being outside of others [I.e the point] and undifferentiated continuity [abstract space], and thereby the pure negativity of itself and the transition into time.⁸⁴³

While this for space is merely an inner negation, the truth of this negation is, Hegel writes, 'the self-transcendence of its moments'. He continues: 'It is precisely the existence of this perpetual self-transcendence which constitutes time. In time therefore the point has **actuality**'.⁸⁴⁴ But the point, as we have seen, is pure singular non-relational intensity, the line is the extension of that intensity in space. The 'time' we are dealing with here is not relational, not measured, except by itself; it is 'absolute'.

Time, in other words, is the negation involved in the point negating space. Therefore Hegel can say of time that 'since it is, is not, since it is not, is'. Time is a circle of emergence-passing away-emergence.⁸⁴⁵ In the Greater *Logic* Hegel is clear that time is not continuity pure and simple, but the continuity of discontinuity and continuity. It is the mediation of self-repulsion, a 'creative flowing away of itself', an 'uninterrupted continuity' of '*differentiation*'.⁸⁴⁶ Time is not always the same as it self, it differentiates itself, and thus temporalises itself. Here comes the *line* of time, the notion of a 'linear' time, but a quite curious one: only universal as the universality of the negativity of space; always singular.

'The truth of space is time, so that space becomes time; our transition to time is not subjective, space itself makes the transition.' The truth of the 'absolute objectivity' of space is time as absolute subjectivity, a subjectivity developed out of objectivity as the flowing of the inner negativity of that objectivity. It is 'intuited mere becoming, pure

842 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I* §257.

843 Ibid. §260.

844 Ibid. §257.

845 'time itself is this becoming, arising, and passing away, it is the abstraction which has being, the Cronos which engenders all and destroys that to which it gives birth'. Ibid. §258.

846 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 187–188.

being itself as sheer coming out of itself'.⁸⁴⁷

Moreover, also in the *Logic*, Hegel states that **space** – as externality passing into point, line and place – as well as **time** 'are expansions, pluralities which are a coming-out-of-self, a flowing which, however, does not pass over into its opposite, into quality or the one'.⁸⁴⁸ In other words **space and time are irreducible to the One, they are uncontainable in any dialectic producing a closed totality.**

Time is the for-itself of the externality of space, as such it is universal flowing-out-of-itself. But why is there ONE HOMOEGENEOUS TIME rather than many, if there is a plurality of points negating space?

A clue as to why time, from one perspective, is uniform and universal, characterised by *one vanishing* present drawing up *one continuous-discontinuous* time, lies in the fact that Hegel, when introducing the negation of space, speaks only of 'the point' not points. Why? Because the negation intrinsic to all points is the negation of the abstractness of their spatiality; it is uniform with regards to what is negated; time as the inner negation of space can then be considered as universal. However, time and space as quantity overflowing itself are determinations of the manifold, not of abstract indifference, this is clear both in the section on quantity in the *Logic* and the talk of juxtaposition in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Only because Hegel starts with the abstract unity of space rather than the plurality does he arrive at a **universal notion of time**. So why does he do that?

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel makes it clear that he wishes to derive time and space not as '*compositions*' of external things (mentioning the example of atomism). Rather he is trying to demonstrate time and space as *substance, of immanence*. This rejection of composition is not a rejection of composition in the Deleuzian sense, because what he rejects is the atomism of simple substances on the one hand, or the substrates of sensual impressions, on the other, both of which have no principle of difference in themselves. In fact, Hegel refers to Spinoza – not Kant! - in defending the decision to prioritize the question of substance: he wishes to construct space and time as concepts of the intellect, rather than as figures of the imagination. If one starts with compositions, as does Kant (time and space synthesizing the manifold of sensual impression), the unity of the

847 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I* §258. And then, we can posit that if abstract time is the pure subjectivity of becoming, standardized time is the abstract objectification of time. This remains external, never managing to fully dominate the force of the perpetual becoming of time, the ceaseless death and birth of moments.

848 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 189.

composed can only be formal (the composition of sensual impressions according to the *a priori* categories of relation, founded in the synthetic principles of the understanding in permanence (substance), succession (causality) and co-existence (community))⁸⁴⁹. Kant made a similar argument in his *Inaugural Dissertation* where he argued that a totality cannot be constructed on the basis of induction (drawing on Hume).⁸⁵⁰ Kant's logic here is one of subsumption of the indifferent plurality by the universal cognitive apparatuses, whereby the particular is abstracted out, as what is essential about the indifferent. Hegel, on the other hand, is keen to avoid this transcendentalism, which relies on a dualism between form and content, composer and the composed, between the conditioned and the conditions. He attempts to propose a universal concept of nature as not just external indifference, but self-relating difference (in his critique of Observing Reason in the *Phenomenology* he speaks of the importance of tracing the movement in the object itself); but by doing so, to arrive at the universality of self-relating difference rather than always different regions of difference (different species), he must abstract from what makes exteriorities exterior, and from what makes difference differ, he must start with substance. In this Hegel is closer to Spinoza than Kant, starting with a, let us say 'univocal substance' which is immediately determined as different. For Hegel this is not the positivity of difference, but the negativity internal to the substance, the immanent subjectivity of substance. The truth of space is neither the abstraction of indifferent coexistence or the manifold of external differences; rather the negative relation, or contradiction between the two proves to be immanent to difference, which is thus dynamised as *differentiation*.⁸⁵¹

If, thus, we take our starting point in the manifold of non-coinciding points – and Hegel points to the possibility of this perspective when he speaks of time as *intuited becoming*⁸⁵² – we have a manifold of lines, and hence, a **manifold of singular durations**.⁸⁵³ As intensive we are not dealing with time as a 'measure of movement', and

849 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

850 'Inaugural Dissertation', Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, ed. David Walford (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 377–383.

851 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 188–189. This substance is not immediate: '...nature begins with quantity and not with quality, because its determination is not a primary abstract and immediate state like logical Being. Essentially, it is already internally mediated externality and otherness'. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I* §254.

852 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I* §258.

853 It is important to note that with the plurality of points we have not a diversity of individuals, since the points are not posited for-self, but rather a pre-individual field of singularities. It is only possible to universalise this field of singularities as ontologically fundamental by passing through the abstraction which it negates – difference as substance is only cognized through the abstract notion of substance, the abstraction which produces its 'homogeneity' or 'continuity' – some would say

hence not with a spatialisation of time, but with a temporalisation of space as realm of exterior differences, or a subversion of space as abstract.⁸⁵⁴ This subversion is a that of a manifold subjectivity acting within and against abstract objectivity of space. However, the intensive difference of absolute singular durations is still only determined abstractly; while space becomes concrete as *place*, singular time becomes concrete only as *motion*, the '*passing away and self-regeneration of space in time and time in space*'. The unity of motion and place, is *matter*. Matter, or more precisely dead or inert matter, is motion considered as self-identical, i.e. in abstraction from the negativity of time. *It is a motion which is always in the same place, the place of itself*. Hegel quotes Zeno's said: 'the arrow is always in the same place'. Matter is eternal-and-stable only as being in non-relative motion: it is only in *chemism* matter in motion encounters itself, creates composites and combinations.

But motion can also be harnessed. Against, and explaining the ordinary conception of clock time, Hegel suggests that only way to contain the negativity of time is to paralyze it: He states that time, as the negativity of space '...cannot be expressed spatially, unless 'the understanding has paralysed it and reduced its negativity⁸⁵⁵ to the unit'. The unit of external measure, in mathematics, is at once a domination of time and space: think of the controlled movement of the spring or the pendulum, or the circular movements of the heavenly bodies. For Hegel there can be no immanent science of time. The control of time requires first its spatialisation and later its objectification, in externality, external measure. Such objectification, we might extrapolate, can only happen by establishing one stable or controlled movement as the equivalent of all times, that is instating it as the representative of the universal: through this technology measure, relativity of durations is established: singular durations are reduced to particular instantiations of standardized time.

univocity.

The point is self-negating, but cannot be divided; this gives it an inner instability or vibration (we could speak here of *intensity*, what Hegel calls degree or *intensive quantum*), the line is the movement or self-overcoming, it is *extensive*, a *differential function*. Both are measures of themselves. The plane, finally, is the attempt to draw a circle: here we can start to speak of individuation, an sublation of degree and extension which proceeds towards (good), i.e. circular infinity. See *quantum*, Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 202f.

854 Interesting to creating an encounter with Deleuze on this point. 'We think lines are the basic components of things and events'. Deleuze (1995), "On a Thousand Plateaus" in Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-90* (Columbia University Press, 1995), 33.

855 A negativity we must affirm is the universal self-relating *difference* of space points, the universal multiplicity-negativity of times in relation to abstract ideal space.

We saw before that when universal time becomes represented, it does so through a particular motion. The immanent quantity of the movement becomes the measure of movement in general. The genus of universal standardized time has itself as one of its species. We can say that in relation to this time measure singular durations appear as *particular durations*: the singularity of singular durations is effaced to make it a mere particular instantiations of measured 'abstract universal time'. Singular times in their difference are indifferent to the abstraction of universal space, and hence subversive of it.

1.12. Chemism, organism

In the dissertation Marx reads Epicurus' notion of the atom according to the logic of 'mechanism' in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature [PN]*, drawing on the notions of space, time, exteriority of forces, real opposition, composition. He also focuses on the question of the freedom of self-consciousness, the issue of the freedom of *Geist*. These are the issues of the first and last parts of Hegel's Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences. Given Marx's and his readers would have been navigating (whether critically or not) in a Hegelian conceptual space, we can say that Marx's text resonates with the sections of the *Philosophy of Nature* that follows mechanism, namely chemism and organism, as well as those that follow the consideration of the freedom of *Geist*, namely the state in the *Philosophy of Right*. In short, the concepts and questions of the actuality (the process of actualisation, as well as the effective rationality) of the organism and the state resonate in the theoretical space of the *Doctoral Dissertation*. In this, further, is the question of the state as organism (as Marx would discuss in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and the organism as state (self-organised, integrated body ruled by a unitary will).⁸⁵⁶

However, rather than raise these questions of the abolition of the exteriority or real opposition of forces (*mechanism*), the combination of elements (chemism⁸⁵⁷) or of self-

856 This issue is important to Foucault's analysis of why sovereignty persists under the regime of biopower, and also to the persistent rejection of organicist metaphors in Deleuze, Foucault, Agamben, and Derrida. (is a reference to Malabou's lectures ok?)

857 For instance, when sodium and chlorine (Hegel speaks of acid and alkali) combine they form a new compound, sodium chloride, which can only be broken by external intervention of electrolysis. In short, the swerve of the component parts is suspended, the process of breaking up the compound cannot be a spontaneous, immanent result of the compound itself. Hegel himself was familiar with Volta and Berzelius, two pioneers of electrolysis, and severely criticised Berzelius' *electrochemism* for ignoring the difference between electricity and chemism. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I*, 191ff, §330.

organised, self-reproducing beings (*organism*), Marx shifts the discussion of Epicurus' limitations to a philosophical register; he follows Hegel's philosophical critique of atomism in the *History of Philosophy [HP]*, and relates it, as demonstrated by McIvor, to the discussion of the doctrine of essence in the *Logic*.⁸⁵⁸ These priorities carry Marx in the direction of a consideration of philosophy and the freedom of self-consciousness, and autonomy; this is where he shares the presupposition with Epicurus: both propose a freedom strictly opposed to heteronomy.⁸⁵⁹

In short the dissertation can be read as an under-labour on the relation between two modes of philosophy. On the one hand the analytical and critical questions – picking apart the actual (state, organism) to understand its structure, parts, and conditions of possibility. On the other hand, Marx developed the basic concept of a practical active philosophy, of the actuality of philosophy as a 'revolutionary', world and history-making practice. Philosophy interpreting the world, philosophy changing it, to invoke a phrase made famous many years after Marx jotted it down in the spring of 1845.

1.13. A note on the social context of atomism

It deserves mention that Epicurus was writing during the period the disintegration of the Alexandrian empire, a period of political turmoil and political crisis in Athens, yet a period of commercial expansion and unprecedented expropriations of peasants and even the landed aristocracy by the new Hellenic monarchs. Like Hobbes' England, this was a world in which the constant threat or actuality of civil war made convincing – for the protagonists of the struggle at least – a mechanistic philosophy of opposed forces, and the concomitant strategies. However, even if Epicurus can be read in terms of the Hobbesian problematic, his answer is different, the formation of elective communities rather than sovereignty. In Epicurus the fact of separation does not entail the establishment of a sovereign to police the peace; the combinations do not give rise to social *bodies but to social compacts*, it do not necessitate the unification of forces in one will or reproductive social organism.

As we will argue in chapter 5 and 6, the modern emergence of atomism in political theory must be understood in relation to the separations between people introduced by

858 Martin McIvor, "The Young Marx and German Idealism: Revisiting the Doctoral Dissertation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2008): 395–419.

859 On the distinction between freedom and autonomy, see appendix 1.8.

exchange and violence. Richard Seaford has an interesting argument for the close connection between the abstractions of Pre-Socratic philosophy and the emergence of a monetary economy, an argument that is in concert with our overall theorisations of the relations between social form and thought, as unfolding in chapters 4-6 particularly.⁸⁶⁰

1.14 Modes of abstraction - philosophy

So where does this take us with regards to *abstraction*? We saw that the atom for Marx was too *abstract*, because it did not give access to a principle of idealisation. The *idea*, or *principle* of the atom does not give us a notion of the atom as *material substance* which would allow us to derive the idea from this substance. The atoms – as abstract decontextualised singularities – only appear to consciousness through the operation of an abstraction in thought; the abstract is a product of an external abstraction. The *analytical abstraction* of the atom and the subsuming *synthetic abstraction* of the idea are symmetrical, a dualism where the former, the content, is ruled by the latter, the form: The universality of the conceptual abstraction posits the singularity of the atom. Marx's and Hegel's critique of Epicurus is that he fails to reverse the movement of abstraction, posit the production of the abstract on the side of the content, i.e. produce the idea as a movement immanent in matter itself.⁸⁶¹ Epicurus presupposes the knowledge of the abstract manifold, shows its condition in the idea, but he does not demonstrate the genesis of the idea and hence of knowledge. Marx's problem with this is *not* abstraction as such, or the duality abstract/abstraction, but the one-sidedness of its transition between the two, which renders it a dualism, and which – for all its posturing around the immanence of the atomic swerve, leaves transcendence in place: That transcendence is that of the idea, subsuming a content which is essentially either alien to it or merely a metaphysical postulate. However, this problem is not merely philosophical, but *practical*; **it does not concern immanence as idea, but as material movement, it concerns the activity, the energy and directionality of thought**. When it comes to the *activity* of abstraction – the third notion of **abstraction, that of immanent self-positing singularity** – Marx has no problem; he does *not* criticize this

860 Richard Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind: Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard Seaford, "Monetisation and the Genesis of the Western Subject," *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 78–102. See also Sohn-Rethel, "Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology."

861 The underlying demand is given by Hegel: 'Form acts on matter and brings it into existence; but what "appears as activity of form, is also no less a movement belonging to matter itself, the negativity and ought (Sollen) of matter. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 453.

abstraction, but its lacking reflexivity, a practical energy turning against universality, yet not aware of itself as such. This practical energy of singularity is exactly a principle of abstraction *from and against subsuming* abstractions, not an alien idea or form subsuming a content, but a form-giving fire (to play on Marx's later definition of labour), a force free not just to swerve singularly, but to actualise itself in complex self-organised formations. in the idea, but he does not demonstrate the genesis of the idea and hence of knowledge. Marx's problem with this is *not* abstraction as such, or the duality abstract/abstraction, but the one-sidedness of its transition between the two, which renders it a dualism, and which – for all its posturing around the immanence of the atomic swerve, leaves transcendence in place: That transcendence is that of the idea, subsuming a content which is essentially either alien to it or merely a metaphysical postulate. However, this problem is not merely philosophical, but *practical*; **it does not concern immanence as idea, but as material movement, it concerns the activity, the energy and directionality of thought.** When it comes to the *activity* of abstraction – the third notion of **abstraction, that of immanent self-positing singularity** – Marx has no problem; he does *not* criticize this abstraction, but its lacking reflexivity, a practical energy turning against universality, yet not aware of itself as such. This practical energy of singularity is exactly a principle of abstraction *from and against subsuming* abstractions, not an alien idea or form subsuming a content, but a form-giving fire (to play on Marx's later definition of labour), a force free not just to swerve singularly, but to actualise itself in complex self-organised formations.

1.15. Party of the concept and the actualisation of philosophy

Marx mapped out the contemporary carnival of philosophy, characterized by a struggle between the of the concept, and the party of the non-concept (the contemporary the party of Epicurus, and the party of Democritus, we gather). The activity of the first side is that of *critique*, the turning to the outside of philosophy we have just seen. The other deals in *positive philosophy*, and so turns towards the inside of philosophy, merely applying, developing and entrenching its categories. 'This second side knows that the inadequacy is immanent in philosophy, while the first understands it as inadequacy of the world which has to be made philosophical'.⁸⁶² Both parties inhabit an inverted world, but while the one that finds contradictions only in thought is forced to live the inversion

⁸⁶² Marx, "Doctoral Dissertation," 151.

[*Verkehrtheit*] as madness [*Verrücktheit*], the party of the concept achieves real progress, because it knows this madness to be real. While philosophy's notion of freedom provides a measure by which the world can be found wanting, it cannot actualise it without transforming itself; that its system is 'lowered to an abstract totality', means that philosophy is no longer what it was – and that it only becomes a force of change by loosing the system, by becoming worldly, by actualising itself as a part of worldly struggles.

The realization of philosophy here is thus far away from the left-Hegelian realisation which weighs the world against the absolute system and finds it wanting. Its break with the system, however, is not one that rejects philosophy in the name of a materialist position (whether sensuous or atomistic, Marx has found materialism itself to be metaphysical), but of a philosophy which is itself a material force in, against and beyond the inverted world which, for instance, can host at once the Prussian state and its Left-Hegelian critics. That the world is *Verrückt* is if anything a given in these writings, it is not taken as an object of analysis. If one does not factor in the young-Hegelians' acute awareness that such analyses would be targeted by state's censorship and repression, their lack of real social critique might make it seem as if they only see the world as inverted because the system, which they had taken for the correct description of the world, had been proven to be upside-down. While mistaking the categories and systems of philosophy – as well as their crises – for the systems of the socio-political and economic world is a constant danger as the young Marx and the young-Hegelians, such a reading becomes too intellectualist, by neglecting that the writings of these men were informed by their lived experiences of, and struggles against, fear and unfreedom. Marx's intervention into the young-Hegelian scene positions itself against such positions based on arguments from morality, systematic coherence, or a transcendental standpoint. Marx is from now on, as Stathis Kouvelakis notes, operating on the plane of immanence, affirming that philosophy cannot be but a part of a partisan struggle.⁸⁶³

This struggle is *philosophical*; Marx pursues the concept and practice of a philosophy that turns against a world split into the atomism of private individuals, rather than

863 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 239; It should be noted that Kouvelakis' notion of plane of immanence is not exactly Deleuzian, but rather working on the register of what I will speak of as 'systemic immanence' as opposed to 'ontological immanence'. See Alberto Toscano, "Partisan Thought," *Historical Materialism* 17 (September 2009): 175–191 for a discussion of the notion of partisan science in relation to Lenin, Foucault and Schmitt. See also appendix 0.0.

towards a politics of composition, a politics of new covenants, or of love. In the terms imported above, Marx struggle in and against contradictions is a politics of the real, and yet a constructive politics of truth, of fidelity to the event of philosophy as actual freedom.. In terms of anachronistic anticipation of concepts, yet of a time quite close to Marx of 1841, we notice an absence of the category of the primacy of *political* practice, or of the forces and relations of production, or of a notion of 'the real communist movement'.

1.16. From the body politic to the social organism

Given that sovereignty and the state had long been thought in natural-philosophical terms as a *body politic* (Hobbes), or '*corps organisé*' (Rousseau) with a will situated in the 'head' of state, it required no great stretch of the imagination from the political economists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to think the social economy in organic terms. The medical concept of crisis was taken up in political thought, via the bridge established by the resurgence of the ancient metaphor of the *body politic* in seventeenth century pre-revolutionary England and eighteenth century pre-revolutionary France and America.⁸⁶⁴ In order to outline this history we will use two articles from the *GG*, Koselleck's article on crisis and Dorhn-van Rossum and Böckenförde on *Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper*.⁸⁶⁵

When Hobbes introduced his notion of the Leviathan as a body politic, an artificial body, we can see him as reaching back to the ancient notion of the *polis* as a body (*σώμα*), which for Plato had been a part of a sequence of metaphorical resemblances (*polis*, psyche, human physiology, and for Aristotle a question of the unity of the many conceived in terms of the analogical structure between an animal body and the *polis*, that is unmetaphorically.⁸⁶⁶ More immediately, however, Hobbes was reworking the medieval doctrine of the two bodies of Christ.⁸⁶⁷ But while this doctrine had been primarily interested in resemblances, leading to sometimes mad lists of metaphorical replacements underlining the overall order of the universe,⁸⁶⁸ Hobbes started from the

864 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crises: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, Reprint (MIT Press, 2000), 167. Koselleck, "Crisis," 362.

865 Böckenförde and Dorhn-van Rossum, "Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper."

866 *Ibid.*, 522–3.

867 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997).

868 Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things:*

premise of civil war and the exteriority of humans from one another, and asked the question of the construction of order out of chaos. If the creation of human society in Hobbes is analogous to God's act of creation, this is not merely a question of a secularisation of political theology, but a proposal for a materialist theory of the construction of the social, in which the body politic is imagined as a mechanical body following Descartes' theory of animal mechanism, and the act of political constitution as the construction of a clockwork. Mirroring the atomistic paradigm of natural science at the time, Hobbes imagines individuals and society as composed of a multiplicity of originally exterior forces, whose unity and equality is established in their difference from the sovereign; their self-identity is guaranteed by their recognition as actors and authors of their actions, conceived in terms of *self-ownership and representation: actors are those that can represent themselves, and others*.⁸⁶⁹ Unlike the Christian *corpus sociale*, Hobbes is not interested in the *unio spiritus* and solidarity of the members, but in their external determination, and the necessity of submission.⁸⁷⁰ Because the basis of this theory is individuals standing in an alien relation to one another, Hobbes can construct the fiction of a social contract that establishes sovereignty through the decision of free individuals.

While Hobbes does not himself speak of crisis in *Leviathan* the context he writes in, marred by the English Civil War in particular, but also of the widespread poverty caused by the enclosure-movement, can clearly be described as one of crisis, as it was by Hobbes' contemporaries Rudyerd and Baillie, writing about the struggle between parliament and the crown, and the civil war in 1627 and 1643 respectively.⁸⁷¹ Then, in the period before the Revolution, crisis became a political catch-word in France. Crisis itself did not refer to the later integrated self-organised social organism, but to the mechanical, composite body of the sovereign. The problem of crisis was not yet one of reproduction and organisation, but of the stability and need for sovereign rule, fending off the chaos of civil war. If among French revolutionaries crisis became the occasion for the organisation of a constituent power (*pouvoir constituant*), it still relied on Hobbes' basic individualist-mechanistic presuppositions; it stayed within the paradigm of sovereignty, law and contract. In the period from Hobbes to Rousseau it is never the

Archaeology of the Human Sciences, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2002), 19.

869 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text : Backgrounds Interpretations* (W W Norton & Company Incorporated, 1997), 89. Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

870 Böckenförde and Dorhn-van Rossum, "Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper," 555.

871 Koselleck, "Crisis," 362.

body politic that is in crisis, rather the body politic is a solution to a threatening crisis (whether based in the experience of the crisis of the divine creation, feudalism or absolutism). Sovereignty, whether popular or monarchic, posits an opposition between crisis and order.

At the end of the 18th century something interesting happens: within the artificial body politic, the notion of a natural and immanently ordered *social organism* arises. For Cartesians there had been no sharp distinction between mechanic and organic bodies as technics were seen as mimetic of nature. However, the continual extension of the Cartesian world-view pushed it up against its own limitations. What had been a productive model became an obstacle. In the early eighteenth century this paradigm began to disintegrate, a process signalled by Christian Wolff's distinction between organic bodies and mechanical bodies. Organism detached itself from mechanism to become its opposite, physiology gradually emancipated itself from mechanism through the eighteenth century, leading eventually to the establishment of the distinction between physics and biology, one a science of exteriority and mechanic causality, the other of interiority and self-organisation and self-reproduction.⁸⁷²

The central shift from the composite body of the body politic, to the *organised* body of the social organism happened in the late eighteenth century. Nietzsche points our attention to the relation between philosophy and revolution: 'Did Kant not see in the French Revolution the transition from the inorganic form of the state to the organic?'.⁸⁷³ Where teleology had in previous Deist philosophy been an argument for the purposefulness and harmony of the world (as Leibniz's God who guarantees that we live in the best of all worlds) Kant introduced the possibility of a notion of an immanent or intrinsic teleology, when he theorised organisms as self-organised beings.⁸⁷⁴ The revolution, as suggested above, is the historical event that makes this re-theorisation possible. In this period, the organised body of society appears in two guises, one 'economic', the other political. The economic conception of the social body appears first of all in the writings of the physician and physiocratic *économiste* François Quesnay and in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Where Quesnay's *Tableau économique* (1758) represents the social body not through the image of the body of the sovereign, but as a complex flows of produce, income and taxes as a model of the necessary conditions for

872 Böckenförde and Dorhn-van Rossum, "Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper," 558–560.

873 The Anti-Christ in Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols* §11.

874 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 201, §63.

the reproduction of the whole, Kant defined natural organisms as teleologies with their own immanent ends, self-reproducing and self-organised beings.⁸⁷⁵ This notion of organism came into wide usage in German.⁸⁷⁶ Kant also refers to the state as an 'organism' and 'organised being' albeit this use is explicitly marked as an analogy. Like the natural end of an organism the state-body (*Staatskörper*), can be described as a whole in which the parts are not merely means but ends, playing a role in the achievement of the end of the whole.⁸⁷⁷ This entails a fundamental renunciation of the old imaginary of the body politic in that it is no longer focused on the relation between the head and the members (the idea of dominance of the head, i.e. the will/sovereignty), but the combination of the parts in the unity of the whole in a way in which their forms are the mutual cause and effect of each other.⁸⁷⁸ The political implications are far-reaching: Kant does not raise the question of the creator/first cause, nor of the forces of which the organism is composed. His perspective is that of the immanence of the actuality of the organism, ruling out at once the need for transcendent sovereign mediation *and* the existence of a potentiality that may fundamentally restructure that actuality beyond its given organic development.

Böckenförde cogently points out how Kant's ideas of organism, his '*politische Immanenzvorstellungen*', can be read as an example of *political theology*. Their structure could be traced with Agamben to economic theology – however, it falls far short of anything we can call political economy.⁸⁷⁹ Kant's focus on immanent order pushes in the direction of a conception of government beyond sovereignty; if the task of the sovereign is to guarantee the social order – the existence of the body politic against the threat of civil war – the task of government is to facilitate the self-organisation of the social organism itself. Böckenförde keenly shows how Hegel, following Kant, describes the state as an organism, while no longer taking this as an analogy, but as a precise structural model. However, Böckenförde misses how Hegel's *Philosophy of*

875 Ibid., §63.

876 Grimm and Grimm, "Organismus."

877 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §65.

878 Böckenförde and Dorhn-van Rossum, "Organ, Organismus, Organisation, Politischer Körper," 581.

879 Ibid., 582. Giorgio Agamben demonstrates the theological roots of the modern distinction between economy and politics, in the distinction between 'political theology, which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God' and 'economic theology, which replaces this transcendence with the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent ordering – domestic and not political in a strict sense – of both divine and human life' Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: for a theological genealogy of economy and government* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1.. However, while this helps us understand how certain intellectual structures were transmitted into the new discourse of political economy, it does little to help us understand why this discourse emerges, namely because new problems imposed themselves on thought.

Right also draws on another tradition, reaching back to Quesnay. This tradition offers something beyond Kant's conception of organic self-ordering, namely an aetiological and diagnostic gaze on the social body. This in turn gives us the elements for a historicisation of the political theology and politicised medicine of the state and the economic theology or economic medicine of political economy not merely as forms of thought, but as conceptual tools to tackle real social crises.

To open for a historical and materialist reading of the distance separating the mechanical and an organic conceptualisation of the social body it might be useful to point to Foucault's analysis of the shift from sovereignty to biopower.⁸⁸⁰

880 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76: Lectures at the College De France, 1975 76*, trans. David Macey (Penguin, 2004); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France, 1978-1979* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). I have tried to show the connections between these narratives in Hansen, "Crisis and Organism."

chapter 2

2.0. Hegel on the imperfection of the state organism

But since it is easier to find defects than to understand the affirmative, we may readily fall into the mistake of looking at isolated aspects of the state and so forgetting its inward organic life. The state is no ideal work of art; it stands on earth and so in the sphere of caprice, chance, and error, and bad behaviour may disfigure it in many respects. But the ugliest of men, or a criminal, or an invalid, or a cripple, is still always a living man. The affirmative, life, subsists despite his defects, and it is this affirmative factor which is our theme here.⁸⁸¹

2.1 Into Journalism

Philosophy, according to the Marx of the *Dissertation* and the note on religion and money has as its task to work on and against the common imagination, its fantasies and abstractions. This task is at once practical and theoretical, critical and pedagogical, it aims at the change of social objectivity by means of a subjective change. The young Marx saw himself as an intellectual with the mission of effecting such a change; first as an academic and then as a journalist. It was as a journalist Marx first began to intervene into public debate, and engage in the criticism of existing actuality, of the Prussian state. His interventions as well as his analyses were from the beginning shaped by the vision of a humanity capable of free self-actualisation yet caught in a reality which did not yet live up to this ideal.

While Marx had the ambition of becoming a university teacher, and planned several work on aesthetics, he never got far as a state licensed educator.⁸⁸² After finishing his

⁸⁸¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* § 258, addition.

⁸⁸² Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 32.

dissertation in April 1841 he returned to Bonn to seek an academic chair under his friend Bruno Bauer, and waited with some patience as the promises faded. When Bauer was dismissed on political grounds in early 1842 Marx had to seek another living. He found a job first as a writer and then editor for the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne.⁸⁸³ Marx's entry into journalism was not just, or did not remain, an externally imposed condition of making a living; he carried it out as a Promethean project to actualise the potential of freedom. The most obvious example of the grandeur and civilising role ascribed by Marx and his colleagues to the task of the press lend us the striking illustration which occurred in the *Zeitung* in 1843, after Marx was suspended from his position after pressure from the Russian Tsar via the Prussian magistrate. This cartoon depicts Marx as Prometheus, chained to his printing press, his liver picked by the eagle of the Prussian censorship, at the industrialised banks of the river Rhine, with young damsels lying about, the free birds of nature flying in formation above.⁸⁸⁴ The philosopher-critic is so autonomous that the theologically hovering authorities can only curb his power with chains and censorship. His freedom of intellect is bound to his means of intellectual production and circulation: the printing press. A heroic man, at once mythical, historical and modern. Confident in humanity, philosophy, and having learned the main lesson of Epicurus – have no fear of Gods or Worldly powers – he started his work in journalism communicating the principles of philosophy to German humanity, and for the first time found himself engaged in public political controversy. As a journalist Marx covered the social tensions and occasional busts of mass politics and repression characteristic of what came to be known as the *Vormärz* period. For this reason he came under the scrutiny of the Prussian censorship of the 'Christian' Prussian monarchy of Friedrich Wilhelm.⁸⁸⁵

2.2. Truth, expression and composition

However, it is important to note that while it might appear to philosophical readers that Marx brings philosophical concepts to public polemics from the outside, such ideas as 'the freedom of man', the historico-political trope of the 'stunted development' of political freedom in the German states, etc., had currency with an audience extending far

883 Its full name gives a hint as to the liberal-bourgeois composition of its audience: *Rheinische Zeitung Für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe* (Rhine Newspaper of Politics, Trade, and Crafts).

884 Note how the illustration positions the real of industry on the ground, and while the state hovers in the clouds, profaned by its representation by a meagre weasel, the puppet-master of the eagle.

885 Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 246–49.

beyond specialised philosophical circles. For instance, listen to the 'ill-humoured but excellent speech' by a member the peasant estate in the Rhineland Assembly, as reported by Marx:

The human spirit must develop freely in accordance with its inherent laws and be allowed to communicate its achievements, otherwise a clear, vitalising stream will become a pestiferous swamp. If any nation is suitable for freedom of the press it is surely the calm, good-natured German nation, which stands more in need of being roused from its torpor than of the strait jacket of censorship.⁸⁸⁶

This reminds us, conversely, that we must read even Marx's strictly philosophical works (which, apart from the *Dissertation*, all took the shape of notebook) not as ivory-tower exercises, but as elaborations, critiques and radicalisations of themes and political concepts circulating in the broader liberal circles in the Rhineland and beyond. If philosophical concepts sometimes becomes an aim in itself for philosophers, most of their power comes from the ways in which they raise the questions of the day in their most general or universal form, whether they attempt to pose common problems or invent in the face of them, or to express universal truths. Regarding the latter, Marx wrote, echoing Feuerbach's question, '[i]s it man that possesses love, or... is it love that possesses man?':⁸⁸⁷

Truth (...) is common to all – it does not belong to me, it belongs to everybody, it possesses me, I do not possess it. What is my property is a form, my mental and spiritual individuality. *Le style c'est l'homme*.⁸⁸⁸ Indeed! The law permits me to write, but I am to write a style that is not mine! I may show the profile of my mind, but I must first imprint on it the prescribed expression!⁸⁸⁹

If truth, like Hegel wrote, is 'the whole', or as Marx writes 'belongs to everybody', Marx makes a crucial addendum: this whole can only be expressed in a living, form-giving manner. So, truth is not the Absolute of the system or the state, but a shared force which pulls us along, and which can only be expressed singularly. A person's expression of this truth is not something given and invariable; all 'objects of a writer's activity' cannot be

886 Marx, "Freedom of the Press," 180.

887 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 4.

888 The most famous sentence from Georges-Louis Leclerc, the later Comte de Buffon's 1753 *Discours sur le style*.

889 Marx, "Freedom of the Press," 112; Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 34.

usefully subsumed under some general idea of 'truth'.⁸⁹⁰ In other words, truth can only be practiced, it cannot be proven abstractly, accessed through mythical inspiration, or imposed by decree.

Truth includes not only the result but also the path to it. The investigation of truth must itself be true; true investigation is developed truth, the dispersed elements of which are brought together in the result. And should not the manner of investigation alter according to the object? ... You [the proponents of censorship] conceive truth abstractly and turn the spirit into an examining magistrate, who draws up a dry protocol of it.⁸⁹¹

Unlike conceptual subsumption⁸⁹², defined as the violence of imposing an alien form on the matter and the mind, or standardizing this relation between the two through a fixed procedures and style of writing, the production of truth involves a method of *composition* and organisation of what is dispersed according to its own characteristics. The form arising from matter is not a product of the one-sided work of the writer-investigator, but emerges in the conjuncture between the writer and his matter. This might be critical and analytic or poetic and constructive. Because writing works on common problems and matters, the truths that are produced belong to everyone. Censorship, we understand, is not just a block on the individual writer's 'freedom of expression', but an attempt to repress the formulation of common problems and common creations.

2.3. The Feuerbachian problematic, and the affirmation of the species

Historically philosophers have deemed that God is what is most actual, or the only concept of true actuality, the only true final end. And with God Marx had to start, writing in a Germany that, in Althusser's description was then

*without any possible comparison the world that was worst crushed beneath its ideology ... that is, the world farthest away from the actual realities of history, the most mystified, the most alienated world that then existed in a Europe of ideologies.*⁸⁹³

890 Marx, "Freedom of the Press," 113.

891 Ibid.

892 See chapter 1.

893 Althusser, *For Marx*, 74. For a recent analysis of the role of the critique of religion in the young

But was Marx's initial attack on what he later called ideology itself ideological, as Althusser suggests? Or rather, what can of answers does such a way of posing the question propose, and which does it exclude?

When Marx attacked religion and claimed the sovereignty of philosophy in the foreword to his dissertation, he was at the same time affirming the movement of counter-actualisation driven by philosophy and human self-consciousness. Against religion, which he claims suffocates human freedom, Marx introduces *human self-consciousness* – and later the Feuerbachian notion of 'species-essence' – as the true originator of God, which can potentially be freed of the image of God. Althusser's critique of the young Marx through the application of the 'Marxist science' is well-known: Althusser judges the early Marx by a standard Marx himself later established, that of the science of historical materialism. Althusser justifies this not as a reading in the *future anterior*, which would see the in the young Marx the seeds of the old Marx which grow forth in a logic of supersession or organic development, but through a Bachelardian notion of science established in an 'epistemological break' with ideology, specifically the 'ideological philosophy' of Marx's earlier formation.⁸⁹⁴ According to the Frenchman, the young Marx, as his mentor Feuerbach, were still haunted by the Hegelian *problematic*, most insidiously when they reversed it.⁸⁹⁵

Marx's dissertation was finished in March 1841, at which point he could not yet have read Feuerbach's famous *The Essence of Christianity*, published later in 1841. However, minor texts by Feuerbach were circulating at the time and, more importantly, so was – in the coffee shops frequented by Marx - his ideas and body. The book had an immense influence on Marx in the period after he finished his studies.

The Essence of Christianity is a stern rejection of the hypostatisation of the concept of God. Man, for Feuerbach, is alienated in the figure of God. Thus, when it comes to the critique of religion, the proper object of study is humankind itself; not in relation to God, but in its species-essence (*Gattungswesen*). Feuerbach defines this species-being in two ways: in its *differentia specifica*, its difference from other species, on the one hand, and as *causa sui*, as a cause of itself, on the other. For Feuerbach, what

Marx, and of Marx's critique of the enlightenment critique of religion, see Alberto Toscano, "Beyond Abstraction: Marx and the Critique of the Critique of Religion," *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 1 (2010): 3–29.

894 Gregory Elliott, *Althusser - The Detour of Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 75–82. Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008) with Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970), 52.

895 Althusser, *For Marx*, 73.

distinguishes humans from ‘the brutes’ (literally the animals, *die Tiere*) is the human ability to think itself as a species (*Gattung*), to be conscious of its own essence, to think itself simultaneously as identical with others humans and different from other things and species.⁸⁹⁶ Hence, the *differentia specifica* of man is its species-consciousness (*Gattungsbewußtsein*), differentiating him from the ‘brutes’, who have no such consciousness.⁸⁹⁷ Here the act of pointing out the *differentia specifica*, what we could call the thought-synthesis of humankind’s species-being (*Gattungswesen*), is in itself an enactment of this species-being: humankind’s species-consciousness is not just a relative differentia, but a self-differentiation, what makes humankind *causa-sui*. In this sense *Gattungswesen* is more properly translated referring to its other English cognate, genus, as *generic essence*. Reflecting on itself humankind finds not *one* being, but its own *infinite abundance of predicates and individuals (individuen)*. ‘Each new man [*Mensch*] is a new predicate, a new phasis of humanity. As many as there are men, so many are the powers, the properties of humanity’.⁸⁹⁸ Humankind, in its *species-being*, consists like any animal species-being, of individuals relating not individually to their species, but always to the species directly through other members of it. In both cases species-being is not a generality which predicates or inhabits its members, but a generic capacity, which is at any point defined and redefined by its members; these are not mere particulars, but singularities.⁸⁹⁹ The species-*essence* is the specifically human capacity to speak, and be conscious of this infinitude. While the individual animal’s (or ‘brutes’) species-being is exterior, the capacity to reflect and communicate the infinity of the species means that the individual can be a part of the species all on his own; the species-being is internalised, the infinity is no longer merely the extensive infinity of predicates and members, but the intensive infinity of consciousness: ‘The consciousness of the infinite is nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of the consciousness’.⁹⁰⁰

896 Whereas Eliot translates the German ‘*Mensch*’ as ‘man’, and uses the pronoun ‘he’, it is possible to opt for a more gender-neutral translation, considering Feuerbach’s insistence to think ‘*der Mensch*’ as the unity of man and woman. Nina Power goes as far as calling Feuerbach a feminist. Eliot often translates the German *Wesen* as Nature, whereas – taking into account the general philosophical meaning in German, and the Hegelian resonance of the concept in particular – it would more precise to translate it *essence*.

897 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1.

898 Ibid., 23.

899 Ibid., 2. Feuerbach is clear that animals can exercise their species functions (*Gattungsfunktion*) through encounters with other members of their species; in this case the species as *actual* is something more like a *population*. Marx will later call this reproductive function (which is not merely sexual) in human *bodies*, for species-being (*Gattungsdasein*). Thus, given the alternative translation of *Gattung* as genus, we can also speak of a *generic* capacity for reproduction, which, given the multitude of different individuals, is a capacity *generic of singularities*. Ibid., 23.

900 Ibid.

Mankind's communal species-being is, however, alienated in the idea of God⁹⁰¹; humankind's immanent unity in difference is projected onto a transcendent principle of unity:

Man [*Der Mensch*] – this is the mystery of religion – projects his being into objectivity [*vergegenständlicht*] and then again makes himself an object [*Gegenstand*] to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he thinks of himself as an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself.⁹⁰²

It is important to note that this is not just an issue the symbolic representation (*Vorstellung*) of man in the image of God, itself an inversion of man's self-image. In addition this is an inscription or submission of *ends*, the intrinsic teleology of mankind (as *causa-sui*) transformed into an extrinsic teleology of God: 'Humankind only makes itself its own end in and through God'.⁹⁰³

In Christianity the concept of God serves as a transcendent principle of the symbolic and teleological unity of humankind, and of humans and nature. However, Feuerbach argues, since God is the principle of the unity of the world, i.e. the transcendental unity or universal *tertium comparationis* of differences, he can only be a principle of sameness, not of difference. I.e. *difference and plurality are only given with the world itself* – and subsumed, reduced into abstracted sameness, under the idea of God. God becomes the negation of difference, the alienation of difference from itself. 'Real difference can be derived only from a being which has a principle of difference in itself', something which God does not possess qua principle of unity and identity.⁹⁰⁴ Thus the world, and whatever we can correctly describe as species, has its basis in itself. The God-function is strictly superfluous since everything the concept can ground, can be grounded with the concept of the world as a phenomenal reality. All species have a *differentia specifica*, which is the 'peculiar character, that by which a given being is what it is, is always in the ordinary sense inexplicable, undeducible, is through itself, has its *cause in itself*'.⁹⁰⁵ Each species is thus a '*causa sui*'; it is not defined

901 'God is the highest subjectivity of humankind abstracted from itself'. Ibid., 31.

902 Ibid., 29–30.

903 Ibid., 30. Translation heavily modified; the original reads: 'So bezweckt der Mensch nur sich selbst in und durch Gott'.

904 Ibid., 85.

905 Ibid., 84. My emphasis. Marx later took this as the starting point of political criticism: 'The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved forsaken, despicable being'. Marx 1844, *Preface*,

taxonomically in its difference from other species, its difference to other species is defined by its self-causation, its intrinsic teleology (to use Kant's term⁹⁰⁶) as a self-organised, self-reproducing being.⁹⁰⁷ Rather than worship the external unity of God, we 'must celebrate our distinction, or specific difference'.⁹⁰⁸ The human species-essence is not something that inhabits every individual as a natural essence, as Marx charges against Feuerbach in his thesis IV written in 1845⁹⁰⁹, but the awareness of the species developed as a product of 'mutuality', 'conversation', 'listening', as Feuerbach writes, 'they are products of culture, products of human society'.⁹¹⁰ Knowledge, for Feuerbach, is a product or rather moment or aspect of a continuous social activity. The species-essence is the product of social interaction and cultural development,⁹¹¹ it proceeds through the separation of writing from speech and the development of a 'power of abstraction', according to which the species-essence can finally be cognised, not as something that was already there, but something that is *actual*, because it is developing.⁹¹² Feuerbach is here relying on the distinction between species-being and species-essence: the being is a mere natural being, the essence is a potentiality that can only be cognized once it has been actualised, retrospectively. It is only real, *wirklich*, in the process of actualising itself. The animal has itself – its own reproduction as an *intrinsic* end – while humanity can make itself its own *final* end, by consciously affirming itself as such; humanity's teleological self-relationship can be one of infinite self-differentiation rather than mere reproduction. The distinction of humans from animals on the level of essence does not run between biological species, but within the human species, just as Marx could later, given Aristotle's definition of the human as a

906 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*.

907 Feuerbach is here in agreement with Hegel's critique of Observing Reason, which merely describe species from without, failing to reach their own inner movement. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 147–49. See also the discussion of the reproduction of the organism, pp.160-164.

908 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 276. In the context Feuerbach stresses the distinction of humankind from nature. Note, however, the insistence that all species are *causa sui* – differentiating themselves from the ground of nature, or God. There's a great levelling implicit in this statement, which Marx expressed thus, in an attack on Hegel's: 'In a certain sense, every necessary being is "purely self-originating"; in this respect the monarch's louse is as good as the monarch'. Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 85.

909 And Althusser repeats in 1964. Althusser, *For Marx*, 228.

910 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 83.

911 Feuerbach here writes in the slipstream of Hegel's theorisation of the human as *second nature*. Cathrine Malabou's gloss on Hegel's *anthropology* is here useful: 'the transition from nature to spirit occurs not as a sublation [or mediation], but as a *reduplication*, a process through which spirit constitutes itself in and as a *second nature*. This reflexive reduplication is in a certain sense the 'mirror stage' of spirit, in which the first form of its identity is constituted. Man appears as the inverted lining of the animal and not as its opposite. The concept of 'second nature', synonymous with habit, allows us to bring to light the great originality of the *Anthropology*.' Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 26.

912 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 83.

political animal, describe the Germans as *animals*, referring to the unpolitical 'actuality' of the German states.⁹¹³ George Eliot renders this nicely when she translates *Tiere* as 'brutes'. The human being is a *generic animal*, only the human essence is *human*, capable of *generic* universality. In religious communities – as subjects of God – human animals are capable of abstraction and of cognising the infinite, yet do not see that this shared abstraction is in fact their common capacity, their common potentiality for producing a common knowledge of themselves as community without the alienated mediation of God.⁹¹⁴ The cognition of the infinite potentiality of the human species – as a universal characteristic unevenly actualised – this thus based on the prior universal abstraction/projection in God, as what Marx called an *actual representation-fantasy-abstraction*.⁹¹⁵ Philosophy, as the cognizance of the species, is itself a moment of the actualisation of the species. As an activity of abstraction, rupturing the *form* of representation, and as the affirmation of potentiality; the unity of the species is purely the knowledge of the infinity of the species; the notion of species-essence is a knowledge of the 'human' potentiality for infinity. All species differentiate themselves; only the human produces a *knowledge* of differentiation, which makes possible a cosmic affirmation: 'we can affirm nothing without affirming ourselves'.⁹¹⁶ It is a teleological philosophy, but politically so: the telos is mankind in its infinity and unity, its universality and manifold singularity. Species-essence is a rallying cry against all religious institutions, a program to *make visible* the common and singular powers of self-actualisation of human beings in the present. This is what is missing in Althusser's otherwise important critique – important for posing the problem of problems, his theorisation of intellectual problematics and solutions as different attempts to deal with

913 We will encounter this description, taken from a letter to Arnold Ruge, later in this chapter.

914 The human species is infinite in that there is no limit to 1. its accomplishments, 2. the number of members, and range of abilities, 3. its species-powers, which transcends limitations of individuals. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 7.

915 Here the discussion opens, if non-Christian or non-monotheistic peoples are capable of cognizing the species, a discussion replayed in the discussion whether pre-capitalist people need to pass through the stage of capitalism to arrive at communism. The old Marx answered 'no' in the case of Russia. The Russians in his analysis could go directly to communism bypassing capitalist development, because it could learn from capitalism elsewhere. Thus he still implicitly considered capitalism a necessity for global communism ('species'). And indeed there is no one world without the violent integration brought about by capitalist colonialism, imperialism and the world market. See the letter to Karl Marx, "Letter To Vera Zasulich," in *MECW, Volume 24* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 346.

916 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 6. In this sense, to open for a thought rather than make a point, Feuerbach's becoming-human coincides curiously with Deleuze & Guattari's becoming-animal: 'A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity.' 'demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale'. Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 240.

problems *imposed* on theory by the times. What is missing, despite this, is a sensitivity to the temporal-affirmatory character of the fiery politics of Feuerbach's 'solution', the fact that it is a 'philosophy of the future', to invoke a later title of his. The modal categories of possibility and actuality are not substantial, but temporal, in Feuerbach. This of course reintroduces the problem of actualisation of an essence on the level of a progressivist philosophy of history.

2.4. The 1840s did criticise humanism

Despite the caveats above, this does not mean that our reading of Marx can simply dismiss Marx's early humanism with reference to the classical 20th century critique, as is now habitual within certain sectors of academia (a critique which certainly still has its important points to make, as has been amply demonstrated by feminists and post-colonial activists and thinkers). To avoid anachronism – something that is of course not a priority when early Marxian humanism is taken up as if it should orientate struggles today – it is most useful to look to the critique of humanism emerging as Marx, Engels and Stirner exited the Young-Hegelian scene. The basic tenets of this critique is that humanism is still structured like religion, and insufficiently capable of historicizing the notion of mankind itself (Marx and Engels) or of grasping the singularity of the individual human being, which is neither God nor Human but *this* ego (Stirner).

2.5. Marx's critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state

Kouvelakis shows how the very *organicity of the state* for Marx is an 'incessant production of new life, a movement that unifies social life by acknowledging the constitutive role of its internal differentiation' rather than a formal universal and abstract principle enveloping the particular contents.⁹¹⁷ This pushes Marx beyond Kant's formal liberalism, with Hegel. The problem of freedom of the press is not just one of formal rights and their limits, but one of *Sittlichkeit*, the objective morality, the *actuality* of moral reason in the social body, the rational overcoming of the contradiction between autonomy and heteronomy.

We will see that Marx compared the social organism with the truth of the species, thought initially along the lines of the Aristotelian notion of the *zoon politikon* rather

⁹¹⁷ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 265.

than the Feuerbachian Species-being. In Marx's use of this notion, political man not as subjected to a state or member of a democratic *polis*, but as a *potential* inherent in a situation of subjection, realised in democracy. Marx's critical point was that freedom only appeared in perverted form, as state, as a social yet apolitical organism. The dissertation had argued for the practical strength of Epicurus' notion of essential freedom, as an ethics of freedom capable of actualising itself in elective political communities, a covenant.

In the spring and summer of 1843, after his forced resignation from the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx wrote a long critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state.⁹¹⁸ This commentary is helpful in giving some background for the correspondence with Arnold Ruge, which was going on in the same period. We have already seen Marx contrast the potential freedom and generic capacity of mankind, an ideal at once real and unactualised, with the real unfreedom blocking its realisation. And from the beginning of the *Critique* Marx engages in a close immanent critique of the question of concrete freedom and the social organism in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (PR). Where Hegel in the *Logic* had defined actuality – the realisation of an idea, of reason, as the unity of inner and outer, of essence and appearance, in the PR, the work that celebrates the actuality of the (Prussian) state, he defined the state in the following way:

In contrast with the spheres of private rights and private welfare (the family and civil society), the state is *on the one hand* an *external* necessity and their higher authority; its nature is such that their laws and interests are subordinate to it and dependent on it. *On the other hand*, however, it is the end *immanent* within them...⁹¹⁹

Marx was quick to point out that the idea of 'external necessity' of the authority of the state, is nothing but a defence – against Hegel's own notion of actuality and necessity – of the subordination and dependence of family and civil society in relation to the state. As external, this subordination and dependence does not describe the actualisation of the immanent ends and tendencies of society, but the dominance of the state *over* society. In fact Hegel does not theorise the potentials in the 'immanence' of the family and civil society, but merely posits it as the sphere of contingency of the everyday, in which the individual 'is visibly mediated by circumstances, his caprice and his personal

918 He focussed on paragraphs 261-313 of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

919 §261 in Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*; quoted in Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 58.

choice of his station in life'.⁹²⁰ Thus, in Marx's reading of Hegel, the family and civil society appear 'as the dark ground of nature from which the light of the state is born'; they are a mere material for the state, the passive content subsumed under the state form.⁹²¹ For Marx the real, i.e. the *actualising* relationship is the opposite: 'The family and civil society are the preconditions of the state; they are its true agents; but in speculative philosophy it is the reverse'; here they are 'not regarded as true, necessary and self-justified'.⁹²² But when Hegel fails to show how state grows out of the needs of families and civil society, his description is both 'false', undialectical in so far as it does not trace the movement from content to form, *and* 'correct' in so far as it describes the Prussian state, its lack of true actuality. The problem is *not* straightforwardly that Hegel does not comprehend the 'real relations', as in Althusser's notion of ideology, but that his mode of argument takes the form of 'Vorstellung', which sees contingency instead of potentiality; in short it precludes the perspective of affirmation.

Marx's early inversion of Hegel thus takes the perspective of the rationality and freedom of the species: the real everyday material relations and exchanges of bodies, in the spheres of reproduction (the family) and production and social exchange (civil society). The problem, for Marx, is that Hegel takes these spheres as mere phenomena, realising the idea of the state, whereas the state for him has no other content than this. The empty idea is taken as subject, rather than as predicate. Thus Marx could critically agreed with Hegel that: 'the state is an organism, and... its various powers are no longer to be seen as [inorganic/mechanical] but as the product of living rational divisions and functions'.⁹²³ But against Hegel, who in Marx's reading started from the actuality of the state – what is rational is actual and vice versa – Marx insisted on the priority of what we here call potentiality: Hegel's actuality was in fact a false actuality, an abstract imposition of an idea on material external to it, instead of the derivation of the idea from this material. Or, in another variation: Hegel does not develop the thought from the object, but the object from the system; the object thus remains abstract, a mystification.⁹²⁴ '[T]he various powers are not determined by "their own nature" but by something alien to them'.⁹²⁵ Or, '[t]he soul of an object, in this case of the state, is established and

920 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §262; quoted in Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 61.

921 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 61.

922 Ibid., 62.

923 Ibid., 66.

924 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 69–70.

925 Ibid., 70.

predestined prior to its body which is really just an illusion'.⁹²⁶ Where Hegel says that the organism of the state is the subject, 'the differentiation of the Idea into various elements and their objective reality', Marx reverses subject and predicate: the differentiation of state or constitution is *organic*; rather than the noun organism, Marx proposes the adjective organic, which comes to work as a concept of the organisation of society. The concept of an organism or a body, does not answer the question of the *specificity* of that body or organism: the noun organism itself does not tell us if it is an animal or political organism.⁹²⁷ This specificity is not one of a conceptual distinction, but a *differentia specifica*, or *Gattungswesen*, i.e. a *generic* difference. If the state-organism is the level of the totality, its component parts are nothing but a determination of a passive content, of diversity, or the many subsumed under this one. Against this Marx states that the '*real differences* or the *various aspects of the political constitution* are the presupposition, the subject. (...) the Idea must be developed from the real differences'.⁹²⁸ Thus Marx criticises Hegel for presupposing the universal and deriving the particular from it. Instead of developing the state from the immanent contradictions of civil society itself Hegel starts with the Idea of the State (of the whole, the One), and then goes on to examine its internal differences, or parts. He starts with the state and then goes on to the family and civil society. As we see in appendix 2.10., Marx's line of argument here follows Hegel's own critique of 'Observing Reason' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁹²⁹ The basic point of this critique is that if one does not understand specific essence, one cannot comprehend actualisation, but only approach it through 'mere names', through re-presentation. So what is the effective, actualising subject of the state, what is the power that constitutes this state? Marx's answer is the not individuals, but the *people, demos, not as an agglomeration of individuals, but as a collective life*.⁹³⁰ For Hegel the people is only sovereign as state, through its representation in the particular body of the sovereign, the monarch. For Marx, on the contrary, the monarch can only be 'representative and symbol of sovereignty of the people. The sovereignty of the people is not based on him, but he on it'. Marx continues: 'The state is an abstraction. Only the people is a concrete reality'; thus Marx can speak of the monarchical constitution as a 'form' which 'subsumes' what really has produced it,

926 Ibid.

927 Ibid., 67.

928 Ibid., 66.

929 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 146–148.

930 Chitty, "The State in Marx."

namely the people.⁹³¹ Hegel dismisses democracy as an aberration from the Idea of the state, in so far as it fails to provide a concept of the unity of the state or, if you will, the monarchical principle of sovereignty (of course this idea of a 'final' arbitrator, i.e. an 'arbitrary' will, is the reason liberal democracies still have 'heads of state'). Instead of positing the subjects of the state as those who produce the state, Hegel suggests that the state produces its subjects. We are here reminded of Althusser's 'ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects', and 'there can only be such a multitude of possible ... subjects on the ... condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*', i.e. the king in this case.⁹³² Marx, on the other hand, insists on seeing the 'Subject' as a *result of democracy*, despite the obvious fact that Prussia is lacking a democratic constitution! He can do this because his measure is not the 'real relations', but the potentiality inherent in actuality. Against the surprising alliance of Althusser and Hegel Marx claims democracy as the truth of monarchy, as democracy in contradiction with itself. Why? Because democracy gives a principle of constitution (it is 'the generic constitution [*Verfassungsgattung*']'), whereas monarchy is merely the result, constituted, which negates its process of constitution: power can only be centralised in the one through the activity of the many. In monarchy the sovereignty of the people – the whole – is represented and determined by one part, the monarch, whereas in democracy form and content are one. Democracy generic not just in the sense taxonomical sense that it is the genus of all species of constitution, but more fundamentally because it is the *generative* force of all existing constitutions.⁹³³ Monarchy can only 'produce' monarchy, while the activity of the people can produce democracy as well as tyranny. Democracy is not some primordial source of political systems, but the principle of the people considered not as one but as many – or rather multitude – in its immanence, i.e. without its representation. Democracy is the 'virtual multitude' which is effective in any actual particular constitution, democratic or not. Democracy is a site a popular genericity which can be realised differently, *and* a political constitution of its own, where it becomes its own common 'subjective' principle:

In democracy, man does not exist for the sake of the law, but the law exists for the sake of man, it is human existence, whereas in other political systems man is a legal existence. This is the fundamental distinguishing feature

⁹³¹ Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 85.

⁹³² Althusser, *On Ideology*, 47 and 52.

⁹³³ Kouvelakis argues convincingly against the idea that Marx's notion of democracy is adopted from Spinoza. Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 304f.

[*Grunddifferenz*] of democracy. Every other political formation is a definite, determinate, particular form of the state. In democracy the formal principle is identical with the substantive [*materielle*] principle.⁹³⁴

This gives us a sense of what Marx meant by the actualisation of the species essence (*Gattungswesen*) in this period, namely the actualisation of democracy as the actualisation of freedom in society, the process by which the contradiction between autonomy and heteronomy is overcome. We can call this the problem of freedom, a problem which takes the political form of the contradiction between bourgeois private freedom and the unfreedom of the state. Kant proposed the practical postulate of God as an answer to practical reason's need of a subjective principle, and progress as an answer to the need for historical orientation – within an objective situation which is complex and which does not offer clear criteria of action itself. Feuerbach's anthropological gesture was to suggest if religion is an answer to human need (for creation, eternity, perfection), then it must be possible to think of another satisfaction of this need, one that looks to the generic power of humankind itself, rather than to God. The answer to the problem of orientation was not to suggest that there is no problem, but to suggest a generative way to deal with it, that does not entail positing a transcendent force over and beyond humankind. Likewise we can see Marx's notion of democracy as an orientating principle of a generative potentiality in relation to a contemporary problem. However, Marx is at this point still a Kantian, in the sense that history is on the side of actualisation, that if the species is given room to develop itself and not stunted by regressive governments, it will tend to develop its potentials over time. Marx's journalistic practice was developed to help along this process, devised under the closely connected figures of the social organism and historical development.

934 Marx, "Critique of Hegel," 88.

2.6. Spießbürger

In medieval times *Spießbürger* referred to a citizen who defended his town armed with a spike. As bourgeois society began to dominate and replace feudal relations, *Spießbürger* and the adjective *spießbürgerlich* came to refer to the narrowminded smug and hypocritical subjectivity produced by membership of the middle-class; a subjectivity which is always per definition apolitical, or political only in the self-interested defence of the status quo and the nation. English, perhaps the language most in need for a word to convey the meaning of this concept, tries to make up for its lack of the word by borrowing 'petty bourgeois' from French or the biblical 'philistine' via German; the inauthentic existential disposition the *Spießbürger* has a great history as an aversion to existentialist philosophy from Kierkegaard's *Spidsborger* to Heidegger's *Das Man*. However, unlike Marx, these thinkers do not go far in thinking the social production of this subjectivity, either as a more or less spontaneous class disposition or a product of what Althusser called 'ideological state apparatuses'.⁹³⁵

2.7. Luther and the inner priest

In the generally forgotten passage following this, Marx seems to distinguish this from a purely theoretical demonstration. In a passage reminiscent of both Max Weber and Michel Foucault⁹³⁶, Marx compares the coming German revolution of the 19th Century to the Reformation, the German philosopher (himself?) with Luther:

Luther certainly conquered servitude based on *devotion*, but only by replacing it by servitude based on *conviction*. He destroyed faith in authority, but only by restoring the authority of faith. He transformed the priests into laymen, but only by transforming the laymen into priests. He freed man from external religiosity, but only by making religiosity the inner man. He freed the body from its chains, but only by putting the heart in chains.⁹³⁷

Marx here notes that Protestantism posed the *problem correctly*, namely that of external authority, its solution, the 'the struggle of the layman with the *priest outside himself*, but

935 Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "Spieszbürger," *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von H. Hirzel, 1854).

936 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Martino Fine Books, 2010); Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, 38. I will return to Marx's analysis of the importance of (work)discipline for the emergence of capitalism in chapter 6.

937 Marx, "Critique of Hegel. Introduction," 251.

rather of his struggle with his *own inner priest*' was not a *true solution*.⁹³⁸ The problem of Protestantism is that its subjectivating procedure amounts to an internalisation of authority and faith rather than the abolition of it. The practice of philosophy here is a subjectivating process that sets humans free from inner and outer priests, and not just individuals, but the people, not just against church property, but against property in general. However, Marx immediately declares, subjectivation processes if necessary are not sufficient, they only happen under the right conditions.

2.8. *Generatio aequivoca*

While the concept of *generatio aequivoca* or *heterogenesis* from self-replicating chemical processes that Hegel is drawing on has a remarkable similarity with contemporary theories of original abiogenesis from catalysis, from Pasteur onwards the theory of continual abiogenesis has been considered disproven in biology. However, the contemporary argument for biogenesis still relies on an initial abiogenesis. Alexander Oparin's still paradigmatic argument for the impossibility of abiogenesis after the beginning of life is remarkably similar to Hegel's: any pre-biological process happening in an environment where (especially micro-)organisms are omnipresent will immediately be consumed by existing biological process.⁹³⁹

2.9. Ships and stars

The trope of the *Narrenschiff* was first proposed by the conservative theologian Sebastian Brandt in the pre-reformation period, which as the Prussian *Vormärz* was characterised by social unrest and instability. From this there is a long way to messianically charged boat at the end of the Alfonso Cuarón *Children of Men* (2006) or Marx's youthful poem, pious when fearful, yet secular and secure:

<i>And I battle with wind and waves,</i>	<i>Und ich kämpfe mit Wind und</i>
<i>Wellen, And pray to the Lord,</i>	<i>Und bete zu Gott, dem Herrn,</i>
<i>And let the sails swell,</i>	<i>Und lass die Segel schwellen,</i>
<i>And navigate by a safe star.</i>	<i>Und halt' mich an sich ein Stern.⁹⁴⁰</i>

938 Ibid., 252. Again a reference springs up, Augusto Boal's theatrical method for getting rid of the 'cop in the head'.

939 Alexander Oparin, *The Origin of Life*, 1924.

940 Marx quoted in Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 9.

The star as the privileged means of naval navigation at night before the invention of the marine chronometer, is an important classical metonymy for orientation. Thus Kant famously speaks of his two compasses 'the starry sky above, and the moral law within'. Hegel, on the other hand, is reported by Henrich Heine to have dismissed the young poets' enthusiasm for the night sky. Looking out the window the old man grumbled 'the stars, hum hum, the stars are only the gleaming leprosy of the sky'. 'So there is no reward beyond', Heine asks. Hegel replies: 'so you want a reward because you have cared for your sick mother, and not poisoned your brother?' Hegel's metaphor suggests that spiritual orientation to the beyond is like a bodily orientation to the decomposition of the body: both fail to take into consideration the immanence of morality and health.⁹⁴¹

2.10. Hegel on *differentia specifica* and essence

Hegel's critique of 'Observing Reason' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is lodged within a critique of Kantian idealism. In this section Hegel first agrees that the *differentia* allow cognition to distinguish one thing from another, and that 'existence is defined as Species'.⁹⁴² The need for the search for *differentiae* appears to Hegel when *Reason* desires to learn about things *qua* things, to apprehend them as sensuous things opposed to the 'I' of *Consciousness*. Reason is demanding 'that difference, that being, in its manifold variety, becomes its very own...'.⁹⁴³ Reason is thus caught in a possessive desire, trying to conquer the multiplicity of being which to it appears both as manifold sensuous particulars and as One (as the Other of Reason itself as I – the universal of *Being identical with itself*). However, in describing things in their particularity Reason only superficially raises them out of singularity (their pure multiplicity) in relation to an equally superficial form of universality. In its activity of description, or representation, Reason does not yet grasp 'a movement in the object itself'.⁹⁴⁴ Marx's argument against Hegel's definition of the state as organism highlights the importance for him of the concept *differentia specifica*:

An explanation which does not give the *differentia specifica* is *no* explanation.

The sole interest here is that of recovering "the Idea" simply, the "logical Idea"

⁹⁴¹ Heine's *Confessions* quoted in Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 119.

⁹⁴² Other names by which Hegel designates being include *Eidos*, *Idea*, and *determinate Universality*. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 34.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

in each element, be it that of the state or of nature; and the real subjects [wirklichen Subjekte], as in this case the “political constitution”, become their mere names – consequently, there is only the semblance of a real understanding. They [the real subjects] are and remain uncomprehended because they are not understood in the determinations [Bestimmungen] of their specific essence [spezifischen Wesen].⁹⁴⁵

In deriving the many from the one you only arrive at the many in so far as they are part of the one; you fail to grasp their *specificity*, their ‘specific essence’. Essence, in Hegel's terminology, is not immediate or something like an ‘inner kernel’ of a thing, indeed it is *relational* and *mediated*, it is a set of *determinations*.⁹⁴⁶ ‘Essence’, to approach it one way, is the abstract concept that holds the place of the answer to the real and often experienced problem that things are not what they immediately seem to be. What then are they? But the problematic, the question developed from this problem of course differ widely: what is x? How does x work? What is the power of x? What makes x x and not y, etc.

For Hegel essence is a rather abstract determination, it does not speak of a total determination of something existent by its contexts or relations – not because these are not important, but because essence is an attempt to isolate the specificity or difference of something. But it is not a concept that looks for a comparison, like the question ‘in what way does x differ from y?’ Nor does it look for an absolute essence of the thing ‘what is x in itself?’ Rather it positions itself between the two questions, neither of which really answer the question: ‘what is it?’: a thing considered relatively does not get to the question of its inner difference, and a thing considered absolutely is indeterminate (and this is precisely the point of the atom considered absolutely: the swerve is another way to say *indeterminate*). Essence is neither absolute, nor relative, but neither, or both. Essence is not absolute, but relative in the sense that it is the reflection of what is outside it. But it is absolute rather than relative in the sense that what is reflected in it is *subtracted, abstracted from*, when one considers the essence. Essence, in other words, is

945 ‚Eine Erklärung, die aber nicht die differentia specifica [besondere Unterscheidung] gibt, ist *keine* Erklärung. Das einzige Interesse ist, »die Idee« schlechthin, die »logische Idee« in jedem Element, sei es des Staates, sei es der Natur, wiederzufinden, und die wirklichen Subjekte, wie hier die »politische Verfassung«, werden zu ihren bloßen *Namen*, so daß nur der Schein eines wirklichen Erkennens vorhanden ist. Sie sind und bleiben unbegriffene, weil nicht in ihrem spezifischen Wesen begriffene Bestimmungen.‘ Marx, “Critique of Hegel,” 67.

946 ‘*Bestimmung*’ here and generally in Marx as well as Hegel does not refer to causal determinations, but to what gives the *determinacy* of a thing or concept.

the *specificity of reflection itself*. Or, to put it in different terms: essence is *how* a thing resonates, bracketing *what* it resonates with. There is more to this metaphor: sound and light are cast back. Hegel speaks of essence not just as the quality of the reflection in itself, but as its re-reflection into exteriority. This is the basis of the famous: 'Essence must appear'.⁹⁴⁷ Essence is always also appearance (unless it is purely thought, abstract possibility), it has its own '*shine*', a singular expression.⁹⁴⁸ Essence in this sense is concrete singularity (as opposed to the abstract singularity of the intensity of the atom). Essence, to put it in terms of a discourse that has recently won much popularity, is it at once affected and affects. But we need to pass beyond the abstract analytics of essence to understand *actuality*, i.e. the network of relations in which any thing exists.

947 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 199, §131.

948 *Ibid.*, 175–6.

chapter 3

3.0. Capitalism and its gravediggers

It is significant to discuss these three tendencies, because they remain influential in the Marxian and Marxist orientations to revolution. Marx's *Capital* does not so much question them, as elaborate the economic 'laws' governing their movement. Thus we find these three tendencies at the basis of Marx's conception of revolution at the end of Volume 1 of *Capital*. According to this brief dialectical sketch, capital will eventually generalise its rule to envelop the global and previously uncommodified activities, and centralise itself to create an ever greater mass of proletarians. This growing mass of workers will be employed as co-operative socialized labour on means of production that can only be used in common. Finally centralised and socialised production grows to become 'incompatible with [its] capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The expropriators are expropriated'.⁹⁴⁹ 1. The dynamism of capitalism will produce 2. the gravediggers, the gravediggers *qua socialised* will 3. bury capital. We might simply say: "1 => 2 => 3".

There are two dialectically related versions of the argument that the dynamism of capital will produce its gravediggers: "A. *capitalist dynamism => pauperisation, radical need => revolutionary break*" and "B. *capitalist dynamism => proto-communist productivism => sublation into communism*". In fact the argument at the end of *Capital I* in chapter 25 ('General Law of Capitalist Accumulation') suggests that the tendency to pauperisation and to socialisation of production are at work at once: the working proletariat must constantly grow as capital searches for absolute surplus-value. Meanwhile, and more and more, the surplus-population must grow as capital searches for relative surplus-value and replaces workers with labour saving machinery, rendering them unemployed. The relation between these two tendencies depend on the mobility of capital: the more the ability of capital move to low labour cost areas in the search for

⁹⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 929.

more absolute surplus value is limited by national and other borders, the more intense the tendency to replace workers with machinery in the search for relative surplus value. What lies at the root of this projection is a notion of the incessant and unbounded expansion of civil society, its tendencies to subsume other modes of production and to spread on a global scale. In other words, the orientation is here shaped not only idea of the real teleology of capital, but of the belief in the symmetry of the development of capital with the development of the forces of revolution.

3.1. The Ends of Man

In his talk 'The Ends of Man' Derrida suggests that this secular teleology of the cunning of reason refers to 'the ends of man'. History and the species considered and judged from the superior vantage point of a retrospection. The species, the globe and history all come together in this totalising teleology. To his audience of philosophers Derrida proposes strategies of dispersal in the face of this unification, the interweaving and interlacing of the strategies of deconstruction with a change of terrain, the invention of a different, plural style of writing. Against the teleology of man, he proposes two Nietzschean figures of the end man, here understood as the ending rather than telos: that of superior man (*höhere Mensch*), distressed and pitiful, and the superman (*Übermensch*), actively forgetting and erasing his traces.⁹⁵⁰ *Avant la lettre*, it suggests only two replies to Fukuyama: live as the last man, or affirm the end of 'the End of History'. But clearly this cannot simply be a question of a new style or an affirmation, if history and its ends is *Wirklich* rather than a narrative and evaluative figure. But what if the 'ends of man' refer to the daily sacrifice of individuals to the cunning of reason. In this case we might follow a different line of inquiry than the one suggested by Derrida in his critique of humanism in philosophy.⁹⁵¹ The actuality of sacrifice raises the question of the material conditions of this sacrifice to the teleology of humankind. What does this tell us about the concepts of mankind and history itself, as they arise in this process? Beyond the discursive deconstructionist solutions, Marx invites us to consider the problems of mankind and history as historical problems and terrains of struggle – such cannot be overcome through forgetting, nor salvaged merely by new styles or subjectivities. The problem is not the philosophy of history with its teleological figures

950 Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 135–6.

951 "The Ends of Man."

in itself, but the historical conditions and dynamics which give rise to this philosophy of history as an orientation within an otherwise overwhelming historical process.

3.2. On the concept of need and the problem of reproduction

The concept of need in Marx is curiously underdeveloped. While recognising the availability of new products introduces new needs⁹⁵², he generally bracketed the 'historical and moral' element of the value of labour-power, and treated it *ceteris paribus*: 'in a given country at a given period, the average amount of the means of subsistence necessary for the worker is a known datum'.⁹⁵³ Partly this is useful in simplifying the analysis of value (even if this abstracts from struggles over need), partly Marx is following capital's own abstraction from the reproductive needs of workers:

The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation.⁹⁵⁴

Despite the centrality, and underdevelopment of the concept of the concept of need in Marx, there has been very very few studies of it. One exception is Agnes Heller's *The Theory of Need in Marx*, posits an opposition between *radical needs* and *material needs*. The former are qualitative human needs for self-realisation and conviviality, while the latter are the quantitative and merely reproductive needs that keeps workers chained to capital. It should be clear, however, that the context where Marx introduces the concept of 'radical needs' does not allow for such a distinction, which is more proper to a polemic against consumerism: radical needs refer both to deepening poverty and to the deprivation of political rights, and the freedom to actualise the highest potentials of mankind, the promises of philosophy.⁹⁵⁵

Michael Lebowitz, further, has developed the Marxist concept of need. He distinguishes

952 'The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. ... Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object'. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 92.

953 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 275. Michael Lebowitz writes: 'given that the subject of study is capital, to understand the nature of capital, it is necessary to treat the level of workers' needs as given and determinate'. Keeping wages constant allows Marx to focus on link between productivity increases and relative surplus-value. Lebowitz, *Beyond Capital*, 48.

954 Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 718.

955 Ágnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976). For two contemporary critiques see Michael A. Lebowitz, "Review: Heller on Marx's Concept of Needs," *Science and Society* 43, no. 3 (1979): 349–355, and Hans-Jørgen Schanz, *Træk Af Behovsproblematikkens Idéhistorie Med Særligt Henblik På Marx Og Engels* (Århus: Modtryk, 1981).

between a physiological, a minimum, lower limit (PN), a necessary need, set by habit and custom (NN), and social need, which is the upper limit of need (SN).⁹⁵⁶ He suggests that the growth of capital necessarily entails the growth of the working classes' unfulfilled needs.⁹⁵⁷ This is not because of tendency to absolute pauperisation (a decline towards PN), but because of a growing divergence between NN and PN. The denial of social needs is denial of self, it brings man in conflict with himself, causes misery. This allows Lebowitz to define 'the degree of immiseration' as the relation $(SN-NN)/NN$.⁹⁵⁸ Thus growing wages and growing immiseration can exist side by side, according to Lebowitz.⁹⁵⁹ While Marx's early theory of absolute immiseration of the proletariat, which is most strongly expressed in *The Holy Family*, has been much derided in the period of social democracy, Marx himself nuanced it in the early 1850s, moving towards the theory of *relative* immiseration, that we see in chapter 25 of *Capital*.⁹⁶⁰

An important, but relatively unknown contribution to the intellectual history of Marxist concept of need is Hans-Jørgen Schanz'. Schanz proposes a materialist theory of the emergence of the theoretical question of need:

The problematic of need only arises in the history of theory after lack primarily becomes a historical product – i.e. after it becomes a consequence of the mode of production more than a consequence of the stinginess of nature or pestering of catastrophies – and its universal ... negation as an existential threat or means of force becomes a historical possibility.⁹⁶¹

Schanz, however, only marginally relates it to the problem of reproduction, through which the problem of need is posed on a social level, which brings it into relation with Marx's theorisation of the relationship between proletarian separation and capitalist reproduction. In chapter 4 we suggest that to approach capitalism solely as a contradictory system is to approach the problem of capitalism one-sidedly; chapter 5 argues that we need to pose the problem of proletarian reproduction before we ask the question of the capitalist system. To broach the question of proletarian reproduction is to raise the problem of the reproduction of life under capitalism.

956 Lebowitz, *Beyond Capital*, 39–40.

957 Ibid., 35.

958 Ibid., 41.

959 Ibid., 43.

960 Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital,"* trans. Peter Burgess, vol. 1 (London: Pluto, 1977), 300–307.

961 Schanz, *Træk Af Behovsproblematikkens Idéhistorie Med Særligt Henblik På Marx Og Engels*, 34. My translation.

The problem of human reproduction is perhaps *the* human problem, the *differentia* of the species-history, defined by the existence of modes of (re)production of social human life. Carolyn Merchant speaks of the four dimensions of human reproduction, inscribing them into a natural history of ecological revolutions:

(1) the inter-generational reproduction of the species (both human and non-human), (2) the intragenerational reproduction of daily life, (3) the reproduction of social norms within the family and community, and (4) the reproduction of the legal-political structures that maintain social order within the community and the state.⁹⁶²

Species-history is minimally the history of 1 as modified by 2, while the history of modes of (re)production is the histories of 1 and 2 as modified by 3 and 4. However, the concept of 'mode of (re)production in general' is a theoretical abstraction, which only becomes possible under capitalism. In previous epochs reproduction is lived as a concrete problem by towns, villages and families:

...human beings become individuals only through the process of history. He appears originally as a *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*], *clan being*, *herd animal* – although in no way whatever as a ζῶον πολιτικόν [*political animal*] in the political sense. Exchange itself is the chief means in this individuation [*Vereinzelung*]. It makes herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it.⁹⁶³

This superfluosity resides in the fact that individuals can reproduce themselves as individuals only through a market in the necessities of life (food, housing, care, etc.); in the absence of a market individual human beings rarely attempt to survive outside communal bonds. Under capitalism reproduction it appears as an abstract problem for individuals, and a problem of workforces and populations for capital and the state. To understand while this abstraction, which is valid for previous epochs, has become historically possible under capitalism, we only need to understand that only under capitalism does reproduction become a real abstract problem mediated by money. In this sense we can say that it is only with capitalism that social reproduction has become a problem of governance, theory, and politics, rather than a question of 'natural' or arbitrary factors such as climate and the custom of a people. Thus, from the perspective

962 Carolyn Merchant, "The Theoretical Structure of Ecological Revolutions," *Environmental Review: ER* 11, no. 4 (1987): 265.

963 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 496.

of capitalism, human history can appear as a series of different attempts to solve the question of social reproduction. Only in capitalism is the reproduction of life subordinated to production; perhaps this is the main reason that reproduction here, for the first time, appears as a truly historical problem.⁹⁶⁴ Only under capitalism does the solution to the general human challenge of reproduction become possible. Reproduction thus becomes a social and political problem for the first time, irresolvable as long as the proletariat exists as proletariat. Beyond the schema of the Symmetry Thesis, we have here a definition of capitalism, which allows us to see the historical, and potentially revolutionary epoch-making meaning of struggles for proletarian reproduction.

3.3. Sismondi versus Malthus

It is clear that already in 1815 Sismondi criticized Malthus for making poverty into a natural-historic effect of demographic growth:

Mr Malthus established as a principle that the population of every country is limited by the quantity of subsistence which that country can furnish. This proposition is true only when applied to the whole terrestrial globe, or to a country which has no possibility of trade; in all other cases, foreign trade modifies it; and, farther, which is more important, this proposition is but abstractly true, - true in a manner inapplicable to political economy. Population has never reached the limit of subsistence, and probably it never will. Long before the population can be arrested by the inability of the country to produce more food, it is arrested by the inability of the population to purchase that food, or to labour in producing it. ... It is those variations in the demand for labour, this sort of revolution so frequent in the lives of poor artisans, that gives to the state a superabundant population.⁹⁶⁵

Hegel could thus have had Sismondi's critique of Malthus in his mind.

3.4. Proletarian, proletariat

The root of the term proletarian in Roman Law – with which Marx was intimately

964 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 495; Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 176.

965 J. C. Simonde De Sismondi, *New Principles of Political Economy: Of Wealth in Its Relation to Population* (Transaction Publishers, 1991), 528-29. For Marx's later assessment of Sismondi, see Marx, "Theories of Surplus-Value," 248.

familiar – is interesting. It refers to citizens whose property was too low for them to qualify for military service; men who were registered as heads of families (*capite sensi*) and nothing more. The word comes from *proli*, 'offspring', referring to the sole contribution of the *proletarii* to Rome: not only the reproduction of the population, but the production of a surplus-population useful in colonising conquered territories.⁹⁶⁶ Hegel made propertylessness central to his notion of the *Pöbel*, whereas the contemporary definition in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* did not. In this latter definition *Pöbel* comes closer the Latin *vulgus* or Gustave Le Bon's later concept of *the crowd*: a crowd or multitude [*Volksmenge*], a mass of lowly, raw or rude common people.⁹⁶⁷

Étienne Balibar has pointed out how there is an underlying dialectic at play between the idea of the proletariat as *mass* and the proletariat as *class*. To grasp this helps us avoid two symmetrical pitfalls. While a reading of the proletariat merely as *mass* creates a vision of a negativity in no need of political mediation (what Spivak calls the 'necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production'), a reading of the proletariat only as class tends to privilege the class' self-identity through its representation in trade unions and particularly 'the party'. While the former sees the abyss of the problem and produces a fantasy of spontaneity, the latter proposes a solution that fails to grasp the radicality of the problem, the problem not as a common identity, but as shared problem which is necessarily lived differently.⁹⁶⁸

It is here a more positive vision of the proletariat as the representative of the best of the species emerges, one which grapples with the problematic of representation and species-alienation, which is what renders homologous the problems of God, money and the state.⁹⁶⁹ In his discussion of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1844), Marx described money as a 'veritable God'.⁹⁷⁰ For Marx this analogy went beyond mere descriptive comparison or the extension of an anti-theological argument beyond its initial field. For Marx money, God and the state function are all alien mediators between human beings; they all present the essential powers of social men and women to individuals as an external power ruling them: 'the *divine* power of money – lies in its

966 Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 1953), 657. "On Commonwealth," in *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations*, trans. C. D. Yonge (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 411.

967 Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "Pöbel," *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von H. Hirzel, 1854).

968 Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, 94–5; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 255.

969 As Lucio Colletti remarks '...there is an evident parallelism between the hypostasis of the state, of God, and of money'. Colletti, "introduction" in Marx, *Early Writings*, 54.

970 Karl Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 259–278.

character as men's estranged, alienating and self-disposing *species-nature*. Money is the alienated *ability of mankind*'.⁹⁷¹ Thus they are also signs of the potentiality of mankind, the harbingers of a different future.

Conceptually Marx's account for the socio-genesis of religion, money and state in the *1844 Manuscripts* – their practical hypostatisation or, in other words, the establishment of their quasi-transcendence – follows a Feuerbachian logic according to which the *species-being of humankind* (*Gattungswesen des Menschen*) – or the *essence* of humankind (*Wesen des Menschen*) – takes the shape of an alien power ruling over humankind itself. Through its alienation of itself humankind is faced with the objectification of its own species-being. In his *1844 Manuscripts*, written in exile in Paris, Marx recognised the *importance of Hegel's development of these concepts*:

The importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final result – the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle – lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] as loss of object [*Entgegenständlichung*] as alienation [*Entäusserung*] and as sublation of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man as the result of his *own labour*. The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being, or the realisation [or actualisation] of himself as a species-being ... is only really possible if he really employs all his *species-powers* – which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history – and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of self-estrangement.⁹⁷²

Humanity must lose itself in order to develop itself, to, eventually, regain itself fully. The human is not merely a human animal, but *becomes* human through its alienation, including in itself not just the human, but its alienation.⁹⁷³ But where Hegel's commensuration is written in the present tense, Marx's affirmation follows Feuerbach's concept of species-essence as consisting in the cognisance of the species' potentiality for open ('infinite') self-actualisation, as a fiery philosophy of the future based on the

971 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Early Writings*, 1st ed. (Penguin, 1992), 377. As Marx would write with Engels in *The German Ideology* a year later, money is a third party holding together individuals whose 'natural' communal bonds had been severed.

972 *Ibid.*, 386. For a conceptual clarification of the relation between the terms alienation, estrangement and objectification and their relation to Hegel's terminology, see chapter 5, of Christopher J Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

973 But this is not in fact the case in say the coevolution between a wasp and an orchid, or freedom and technology.

present. It is of some importance to note that Marx's first adoption of an explicitly Feuerbachian humanism arises at the precise point at which he begins his engagement with political economy in 1844. Marx's appropriation of Feuerbach's atheistic appropriation of the Hegelian theme of alienation is from the beginning filtered through an *economic* understanding of the activity of alienation. Alienation is not merely seen as species-activity, but as *labour*, the channelled and exploited activity of human beings under the rule of private property.⁹⁷⁴

In the 1843-44 introduction to his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* Marx had stated that 'To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for humankind the root is humankind itself'.⁹⁷⁵ However Feuerbachian these formulations might seem, a statement such as this was already – prior to Marx's adoption of the alienation concept – related to a rejection of the idea of Man in general. The basic insight of Feuerbach, that '*Humankind makes religion, religion does not make humankind*', was for Marx too abstract:

...*humankind* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Humankind is *the world of humans* – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*.⁹⁷⁶

Hence Marx's 'humankind' was not an *Abstraktum*, but a concept of the concrete living human beings in determinate socio-political relations. In *The German Ideology*, Marx was to clarify this idea with the introduction of the concept of a *mode of production* leaving behind the horizon of Feuerbachian anthropology.⁹⁷⁷ However, the introduction of the concept of mode of production does not leave behind anthropology as such, but insists on the historical determinacy of any actual human being. Man must be 'seen in his real historical activity and existence'.⁹⁷⁸ In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels say of the species-being of humankind:

974 See chapter 1 of Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel*.

975 The sexist and colonial implications of this term (*der Mensch*) should be clear – even if it less blatantly sexist than the common English translation 'man' – to 19th century as well as contemporary feminists and liberation fighters. Marx, "Critique of Hegel. Introduction," 251.

976 *Ibid.*, 244., translation altered. However, as we see in chapter 4 the concept of species history remains operative in Marx.

977 As Nina Power writes: 'It is therefore incumbent upon Marx to cease using 'Man' at all in this text, which he duly does, preferring instead 'real, active, men' as 'individuals' wrested away from their creative, productive capacities, which, in any case, are always more specific than Feuerbach's generic universalism'. Nina Power, "Marx, Feuerbach and Non-Philosophy" (presented at the Marx and Philosophy, Royal Holloway, London, 2007).

978 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1976, 512.

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.⁹⁷⁹

Far from the philosophical perspective of the species as the *indeterminate, pure possibility* of any (mode of) production, Marx begins to think the species in terms of labour, the activity that creates the current actuality. His concept of potentiality is now much more specific than the Feuerbachian generic human potentiality; any potentiality of radical change is now always *this* potentiality within a given mode of production. Like in some sense Feuerbach's species-essence is itself developed through Christianity, Marx's situated potentiality is developed by the mode of production itself, as the possibility of the abolition of alienation. Thus the proletariat is its own developing power and knowledge, still less in need of philosophers to impregnate it. The initial formulation of the problem of the proletariat in terms of the *negativity* of an inorganic dispossessed mass is now specified in terms of a *contradiction* between proletarian productivity (positivity) and its alienation (negation), as it is developed historically. The question of actualisation is no longer that of a meeting between philosophy and the proletariat, but rather the question of an sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the aforementioned contradiction, the proletarian negation of its negation. However, the *problem* of the proletarian condition, and of developing proletarianisation, is suffered by others than those who make up this contradiction – as we have already seen in the case of the Moselle forest dwellers. In other words, the problem is not by any means exhausted by its formulation in terms of either negativity (as we saw above) nor contradiction (as we see here).

3.5 The problem with the lumpen

Already in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels had warned against the lumpenproletariat:

The "dangerous class," the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it

979 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 20.

far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.⁹⁸⁰

So what about their 'conditions of life' makes the 'social scum' dangerous? Before we come back to the question of the role of the lumpenproletariat in the 1848 Revolution and the reasons it can be bribed, it is useful to look at the conceptual workings of Marx's introduction of the concept of the lumpenproletariat.

Where Marx's initial concept of the proletariat, following Hegel's rabble, is an abject product, the unemployed and negative element left over from social production, the new concept of proletariat Marx and Engels became interested is that of the *employed, exploited* producer of society, whose activity itself is what gradually expels it from society.⁹⁸¹ This move is a significant trans-valuation of poverty in history and political economy itself; where the rabble were shiftless, Marx's proletariat are heroes and paragons of virtue. As Nicholas Thoburn remarks, the introduction of the *lumpenproletariat* played the role of 'freeing up his concept of the proletariat from the bourgeois image of the seething rabble'.⁹⁸² While this makes sense as a discursive move to rid the proletariat of its negative connotations, it also results in a fundamental redefinition of the problematic of the proletariat, and thus of the problem of actualisation of freedom, towards the priority of a class perspective, and the deepening valorisation of productive labour, at the exclusion of 'unproductive' populations.

The distinction between the two proletariats is first made in *The German Ideology* in 1845, where Marx and Engels' criticize Max Stirner's notion of the 'unique' proletariat:

The latter consists of “rogues, prostitutes, thieves, robbers and murderers, gamblers, propertyless people with no occupation and frivolous individuals”. They form the “dangerous proletariat” and for a moment are reduced by “Stirner” to “individual shouters”, and then, finally, to vagabonds”, who find their perfect expression in the “*spiritual* vagabonds” who do not “keep within the bounds of a moderate way of thinking...⁹⁸³

Lumpen in colloquial German means *rags*, suggesting a poor person, but, as Hal Draper notes, the word also refers to *Lump*, the plural of which is *Lumpen*, which means

980 Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” 118.

981 As it said in Engels 1888 note to the English edition of the Manifesto: 'By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live'. Ibid., 108.

982 Nicholas Thoburn, “Difference in Marx: The Lumpenproletariat and the Proletarian Unnamable,” *Economy and Society* 31, no. 3 (2002): 439.

983 Marx and Engels, “The German Ideology,” 1976, 202.

'knave' or 'rogue'.⁹⁸⁴ The equivocation of the term *lumpen* itself, suggests both the difference and the commonality of the lumpenproletariat and the proletariat. For Marx proletarians are not paupers *per se*, only 'ruined proletarians' are; but this does not mean that 'ruined proletarians' are necessarily lumpen; the lumpen maybe be ruined, but they also find criminal or illicit ways to survive; in short they become *knaves, lumpen*.⁹⁸⁵ While both proletarians and lumpenproletarians are *virtual paupers – people without property – the difference is in the mode of living this condition*. In short, the two proletariats share a problem, but they live it differently. Despite their shared proletarian condition, their conditions are different, one class proud the other ruined and incapable of resisting the pressure from the bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels reserves the term 'lumpen-proletariat' for the supremely heterogeneous mass, which is defined negatively by its non-engagement with wage-labour on the one hand, and the antagonism between its mode of life (rather than its consciousness) and public law and morality. While the proletariat can form itself as a class, the lumpenproletariat is marked by its unassimilable heterogeneity, its inertial *mass character*. The lumpenproletariat

forms a mass sharply differentiated from the industrial proletariat, a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without any definite trade, vagabonds, *gens sans feu et sans aveu*,* varying to the degree of civilisation of the nation to which they belong, but never renouncing their *lazzaroni character*.⁹⁸⁶

It might seem that the lumpenproletariat is more radically negative than the proletariat, or that the negativity and inorganicity of Marx's first proletariat (the one modelled on Hegel's rabble) is excised from Marx's final *definition* of the proletariat. The difference between the negativity of the proletariat and the negativity of the lumpenproletariat reveals an interesting logical problem with the latter category. Whereas the proletariat was initially defined *not* as a given population, but as an expanding social negativity, its inner heterogeneity was not a problem: it was defined in terms of its radical and deepening antagonism with society, as the name of the subject of the coming revolution, a figure in a historical orientation and affirmation. The function of the lumpenproletariat is different, it is objective stumbling block of that revolution. Here the difficulty arises:

984 Hal Draper in Thoburn, "Difference in Marx," 440.

985 "The German Ideology," 1976, 202.

986 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 219. *folk without hearth or home.

For Marx to say anything coherent about the lumpen he has to assume at some conceptual level that the term corresponds to a given population. Yet, he has defined them in such a way as to preclude its identitarian closure.

The lumpenproletariat and the proletariat both have in common what they do not have: control over the means of re/production. But where the proletariat is defined through its common exploitation by capital, the lumpen have nothing in common, except what they are not; productive, and in a direct relation to capital. The difficulty with the concept of the lumpenproletariat is that it is at once a strongly objectifying category, yet one that cannot name anything but a heterogeneous residue, the mere abstract name for a number of different ways to live the problem of being dispossessed.

3.6. Lumpen parasites?

Thus inorganicity of the rabble, and their apparent parasitism, rather than their poverty, is crucial. For Stirner the lumpenproletariat is promising in so much as it provides a model for life against wage-labour, a kind of proto-communism. While Marx and Engels agree that communism entails the abolition of work, Stirner's attempt to derive communism from the opposition of the bourgeoisie and proletariat as the proletarian withdrawal of labour, is too immediate and falsely concrete. The two comrades quote Stirner:

“The workers have the most tremendous power in their *hands* ... they have only to cease work and to *regard* what they have produced by their labour as their property and to enjoy it. This is the meaning of the workers' disturbances which flare up *here and there*.”

To this Marx and Engels somewhat sarcastically point out the issue is not a 'here and there', but a long history of worker's disturbances since Medieval time, indicative of a *continuous problem* which is not addressed by occasional struggles. Furthermore, Stirner's incapacity to understand the proletarians as workers makes him think workers could simply cease working and enjoy what they have produced, as if their products would continue to exist and be reproduced automatically.

If Stirner's “ragamuffins” ever set up a vagabond kingdom, as the Paris beggars did in the fifteenth century, then Saint Sancho will be the vagabond

king, for he is the “perfect” ragamuffin, a man possessing not even ideal wealth and therefore living on the interest from the capital of his opinion.

What Stirner misses, according to Marx and Engels, is the centrality of the labouring proletariat in the reproduction of the means of subsistence. And, as in the implicit critique of Hegel's rabble, the mistake is to claim that the proletariat is the product and refuser of civil society, rather than that civil society and the proletariat is the product of the proletariat itself. This makes the difference between a revolution in which the proletariat ceases its activity and one in which it *seizes*, between negating work or subverting it.

Already Hegel mentions two forms of rabble-mentality: the poor and the rich rabble, are both a-social, shamelessly idle.⁹⁸⁷ This curious and apparently contradictory doubling of the term, in my interpretation, is possible because of the strength of what Max Weber has called the protestant work ethic⁹⁸⁸, but more importantly because the term is developed in relation to a theoretical field structured by the organic metaphors (e.g. the body politic and state as organism), which, as mentioned, subtend the introduction of the concept of crisis into social analysis: both the rich and the poor are non-reproductive of the social organism.⁹⁸⁹

Also for Marx the apparently unproductive character of the lumpen allows the semantic shift of the term to the 'finance aristocracy': 'in its mode of acquisition as well as in its pleasures, is nothing but the *rebirth of the lumpenproletariat on the heights of bourgeois society*'.⁹⁹⁰ While dual rejection of the 'parasites' of productive society might appear as a repetition of the classical paradox of anti-Semitism, we must note that both these sentences appear in the context of Marx ironising over *bourgeois* anxieties. Thus he compares the 'moral indignation' of bourgeois pamphlets against “The Rothschild Dynasty” with the moral crazes that frequently drive the lumpen to the workhouses,

987 Hegel's lectures of 1819-20 quoted in *Ibid.*, 454.

988 Ruda remarks the following: 'That the rabble is lazy and evil at the same time due to the standpoint which he takes on the negative as such refers particularly to Kant. Adorno once remarked of Kant that he has “taken the work ethic of bourgeois society . . . as his own supreme philosophical standard” and therefore for him “radical evil is nothing other than laziness ...”.' Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 191. Theodor W Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 131.

989 Hegel's sole usage of the term “crisis” in his *Philosophy of Nature* refers to excretion: 'The crisis is the organism's mastering of itself, reproducing itself, and putting this power into effect by excretion. It is not the morbid matter which is secreted of course; it is not the case that the body would have been healthy if it had never contained this matter, or if it could have been ladled out of it. The crisis, like digestion in general, is at the same time a secretion'. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 201.

990 Karl Marx, “The Class Struggles in France,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 208.

brothels and mental asylums.⁹⁹¹ Furthermore, in both Marx and Hegel the rich/poor lumpen/rabble distinguishes itself in two very important respect from that of the Nazi fantasy of the banker/proletarian-communist Jew: while in the latter these are intruders or deceases of an otherwise healthy body politic both the knaves of the criminal bottom and of the financial top of society are products of the normal running of bourgeois society, i.e. forms of life not only made possible but necessary by the principles of bourgeois society itself. Secondly, neither Marx and Hegel suggest that the rich and the poor lumpen/rabble are 'really one'; the similarity of their knave-character and non-productive relation to society merely displays the profound polarising dynamics of bourgeois society itself. The Jew as the abstract figure implied in their alleged identity is exactly a product of this tendency towards polarisation of capitalist society, as is the fantasy of an alliance between migrants and the 'multiculturalist elites' against the 'working people'.⁹⁹² Indeed, if the lumpen-proletarian is a quintessentially *racialised* figure, the financier appears as the apotheosis of cosmopolitanism. If we consider these under the thematic of endo- and exo-colonisation, the deep antagonism of these two orientations of life becomes clear: we might say that the lumpen are colonised subjects who *refuse assimilation or are refused integration*, while the *financial aristocracy* are colonisers profiting from the very differentials of separation, integration and assimilation.

However, for Marx as for liberals and fascists, the lumpenproletariat remains a residue, an useless excess; the difference is that he blames this on the dynamics of bourgeois society itself. The lumpen itself does not become an actor as long as history and revolution is defined along the matrix of progress and its down-trodden producers, the dynamics of the organism of bourgeois society itself. Further, as long as the focus is *production*, the lumpenproletariat can only be thought of as *parasitic*, a problem for the police. However, if we change the perspective from the *producers of capitalist history*, to the problem of the reproduction, the status of the lumpenproletariat shifts radically.

991 Ibid. Indeed, the only two occurrences of the word 'parasitism' in the text refer to the *executive power*, its integration with the bourgeoisie and its role in keeping order, even at the expense of the stated bourgeois interest in democracy. Ibid., 432, 477.

992 We can here follow Werner Bonefeld: 'Marx ... approached the 'Jewish Question' through the lens of the critique of the fetishism of bourgeois relations of production. Expanding on Marx's critical question, 'why does this content [human social relations] assume that form [the form of capital]' it asks why does the bourgeois critique of capitalism assume the form of antisemitism?' "Antisemitism and the (modern) Critique of Capitalism," *LibCom* (2009).

3.7. Post-script: The 1848 failure of history

Where chapter 3 has attempted to characterise the effects of the general temporal orientation of Marx's theorisation of bourgeois development on his field of intelligibility/visibility and his historical judgement, chapter 4 will attempt to uncover some resources in Marx capable of opening the perspective to these other actualities and potentialities. We find this opening after the failure of the 1848 revolutions, when historical developments again threw the singular body-mind Marx into a crisis. What is of specific interest to this project in the writings of this period – particularly the 1852 '18th Brumaire' – is the paradoxical way in which the proletariat failed to play its expected revolutionary role. Against the hopes pitched on the negative energy and courage of the proletariat as mass, the bravest and most negative proletarians, the *lumpen*, turned out to be a mass so negative that it was turned against the revolution. And contrary to the hopes attached to the working proletariat, the working class of Paris turned out to be too '*positive*' on the eve of the revolution, to lack the sufficient negativity.

The revolution predicted in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written in late 1847, took off in the week the text was published, in early 1848. However, as is well-known the revolutions failed. Balibar notes that maybe Marx's own theory was challenged by 'the bad side of history', here not understood in Marx's sense as the side of struggle, but as the side of that which remains unforeseen by theory, challenging the representation of necessity, indeed the idea that history advances at all.⁹⁹³

Something went wrong in the making of history in 1848 and the revolution had played out as a farcical repetition of past tragedies, Marx noted in his famous introduction to *the 18th Brumaire*. However, the problem was not so much that the *circumstances* had not been in place, but the fact that 'the tradition of dead generations' had weighed the 'brains of the living' 'like a nightmare':

...just as [the living] seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to

993 Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 97.

present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.⁹⁹⁴

Contrary to this, the revolutionary proletarians had sought the creation of a social republic, a project which 'was in the most singular contradiction with [what] could be immediately realised in practice'.⁹⁹⁵ While this seems like an invocation of 'unripe' circumstances, no circumstances no matter how ripe will bring about the revolution by themselves. Marx thus describes the proletarian revolution as a process of self-critique, interruptions, new beginnings, until a situation has been created in which the circumstances themselves cry out for a *leap*: '*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*'⁹⁹⁶ The cry was sounded, but the revolutionaries fell short of the leap precisely because they were weighed down by the past. Against this Marx affirmed the need for a new poetry to express the truth of the revolution:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.⁹⁹⁷

Poetry is here a means not to express, but to *discover* the social content of the revolution. The content is not there, but arrived at *via* the philosophy of the future. The social content is what is there – the circumstances – *sub specie futurae*. Marx raised the question of the leap, in the context of his analysis of the approaching world historical revolution. Thus the leap into the future is a leap *with* the movement of history, it consists in accepting the challenge of the circumstances themselves *from the viewpoint of what could be, a timely untimeliness*.

We have seen that Marx's rejected the abstract ideal of communism in favour of a communist politics of *radical needs*, and their deepening in the face of the contradictory development of bourgeois society. While this in the *Manifesto* took the form of a theory of *absolute needs*, i.e. an immiseration thesis, his later developments, as we will see,

994 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 398.

995 Ibid., 403.

996 Ibid., 401.

997 Ibid., 400.

carried him away from this path, towards one of *relative* pauperisation, not attached to theory of *basic bodily needs*.⁹⁹⁸ To encompass both, we can say that Marx's critique is based on question of the *radical problems of the bourgeois mode of production*, which tend to become more intensive and extensive, i.e. world-historical, extending over the globe and enrolling our souls, calling for *radical solutions*. Marx's communist politics, are not politics of abstractions, but of 'the real movements', *i.e. of solutions which abolish the problem itself, on the level of world history*.

However, this chapter has fundamentally questioned Marx's uni-linear understanding of history, and the classical privileging of the industrial proletariat as the subject of history. It has opened the problem of other histories and politics, like those of not fully proletarianised peasants, who hover between capitalist debt and subsistence production, those of the lumpenproletarians surviving through informal economies, criminalised activities and scavenging, and perhaps even of the petty bourgeois mode of entrepreneurship which, as we will see, is under constant threat in Marx's analysis of the centralising tendencies of capitalism.

3.8. 'Crisis' in 19C German Economics

First and foremost the focus is on the extreme severity of crises of overproduction in the early 19th Century, as an effect of the productivity gains of industrialisation. Koselleck mentions the German economist Wilhelm Roscher, writing in 1849, for whom 'financial' or 'commercial crisis' are inappropriate terms, given 'the nature of the disease'. He suggests instead 'production crisis', a crisis of overproduction, during which consumption is stagnant, due to prior over-anticipation of demand which has led to the excessive production of goods for which there not enough are customers, leading to a general glut. The task is described in aetiological terms by Roscher: to study the 'pathology of the disease' and to suggest 'appropriate therapy'.⁹⁹⁹

Already in 1844 Friedrich Engels explained the worsening crises with 'there is so much superfluous productive power that the great mass of the nation has nothing to live on, that the people starve from sheer abundance. For some considerable time England has found herself in this crazy position, in this living absurdity.'¹⁰⁰⁰ Why? Because general

998 Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital,"* 1:300–307.

999 Ibid., 390.

1000 Friedrich Engels, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in *MECW*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 435, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df->

competition pushed firms into a mad race towards productivity gains, which lead to overproduction, unsold commodities, or commodities that if sold would have to be sold below current price, and which then lower the general level of profits. Thus firms expel labour into unemployed starvation *en masse*. Thus the price of wage labour falls, and expensive machinery can operated (or even replaced) by cheaper workers. As the German economist Julius Wolf wrote in 1892: 'Economic crises fulfil a mission ... Because of their invigorating economic effects, one could almost say about crisis what Voltaire said about God, that one would have to invent them if they did not already exist...'.¹⁰⁰¹ Crisis, is thus a central means of regulation under capitalism.

jahrbucher/outlines.htm.

¹⁰⁰¹Quoted by Koselleck, "Crisis," 393. Joseph Schumpeter would later echo this sentiment with his concept of 'creative destruction', even if he refused the usefulness of the concept of crisis to economics.

chapter 4

4.0. Why think totality?

In *The Politics of Time* Peter Osborne lists three possible answers to the question 'why totalize history?' First, the *transcendental* response, which stresses the idea of a unified singular conception of history as a regulative idea implicit in historiography and Enlightenment thought, providing history with an ultimate horizon of intelligibility and meaning. Then, the *immanent*, and classically Marxian response, that history itself is the 'historically emergent product of deep-seated social processes on a global scale'. Thirdly, Osborne presents the answer of a *phenomenological ontology of temporal existence*, according to which history can be conceived as the existential structure of human social in the world.¹⁰⁰² The concept of orientation introduced in chapter 2 has suggested that the Marxian understanding of immanent totalisation must itself be understood as a part of an orientating effort, as a reply to the problem explicitly posed by what Osborne calls the phenomenological approach. But the obverse connection must also be made: the immanent totalisation of history provides a key to understand the historicity of the phenomenological approach, and a measure of its potential untimeliness.

Classically Marxist have privileged dialectics as a method capable theorising the systemic whole of capital, while recognizing that this method itself serves an orientating purpose. Thus Lukács writes that the dialectical conception of totality [*Totalitätsbetrachtung*] is necessary for understanding and reproducing in thought the '[c]oncrete totality [which] is ... the category that governs reality' – we cannot understand 'history as a unified process' without dialectics.¹⁰⁰³ Chris Arthur, recently, has argued that dialectical reason is needed to comprehend the interiority of fully

¹⁰⁰²Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 30.

¹⁰⁰³'Die konkrete Totalität ist also die eigentliche Wirklichkeitskategorie'. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 10. 12. See also appendix 0.0.

developed capitalism. Like Lukács' Arthur's perspective is always that of the structure of a teleology striving for its full expression. In both cases the possibility of revolution is located within this self-reproducing dialectical totality, as the actual (Lukács¹⁰⁰⁴) or potential (Arthur¹⁰⁰⁵) capacity of the proletariat to overcome its contradiction with capital through a negation of capital itself. For Lukács and Arthur, the resource to think the making of history is not drawn from a Kantian subjective principle, but from within the logic of the whole. This is possible because the whole is thought of as contradictory, non-coinciding with itself, and a revolution is made possible through the positing of a *tendency towards an exacerbation of these contradictions* (as we saw in chapter 3). In other words, the 'revolutionary dialectic', as Lukács calls this materialist dialectic,¹⁰⁰⁶ is predicated not just upon the totality, the internal articulation and interdependence of its parts, and its structural contradictions, but on the notion of the 'real tendencies of social evolution' expressed in the class consciousness of the proletariat, pressing within the whole towards the intensification of these internal contradictions to the point of open antagonism.¹⁰⁰⁷ If the condition of possibility of the making of history is the gap between subject and the historical process, the condition of a fundamental change in history is given by an analysis of the tendency of the historical process itself, i.e. by a certain teleological figure.

4.1. Dialectical and historical materialism

To return to Hegel's philosophy of nature in order to throw light on Marx's conception of history is of course to court controversy. Even to hold onto a notion of the use of dialectics in history is today, with a correct though unproductive and limiting caution, considered a dangerous flirt with historical teleology. I do indeed propose that we apply the categories of natural philosophy to the philosophy of history. Dialectics as

1004Lukács, *Lenin*, 11.

1005Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 244–5.

1006Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 2.

1007Ibid., 10. A important theme in the Chinese philosophical discussion preceding the cultural revolution is the critique of the Stalinist and early Maoist doctrine that communist societies are characterised by non-antagonistic contradiction. Against Mao's idea in *On Contradiction* that the relation between the proletariat and the peasantry is non-antagonistic and solvable through the mechanisation of collectivisation of agriculture, Shan Hong, for instance, saw the occasional external fights between the classes as signs that this supposedly non-antagonistic contradiction could 'take on an antagonistic form in the period of its final resolution'. Hong Shan [山虹], "An Attempt to Discuss 'Antagonism' and 'Antagonistic Contradictions,'" *Philosophical Research [哲学研究]* 2 (1957): 128–132.

formulated in Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* was once the cornerstone of a 'Marxist world outlook' (*Weltanschauung*), based on the 'two sciences of Marxism', which purported to grasp the laws of both nature and history.¹⁰⁰⁸ Thus Boguslavsky's *ACB of Dialectical Materialism*, following Stalin's brief text on the matter¹⁰⁰⁹, defined dialectical materialism as 'the science of more general laws governing the development of nature, society and thought'. Historical materialism, in this definition, is a sub-set of dialectical materialism, 'a philosophical science concerned with the specific laws of social development as distinct from the universal laws of being'.¹⁰¹⁰ Both these standard Soviet definitions of the two classical 'Marxist sciences' have been rejected over and again. Already Lukács, before his years of loyalty to the Soviet leadership, had refused that dialectics can be applied to nature, and asserted that it is a method limited 'to the realms of history and society'.¹⁰¹¹ The main reason given by Lukács is that dialectics is a method for dealing with the interaction of subject and object, theory and practice, and the historical determination of concepts in thought by changes in the reality underlying them, whereas science is strictly objective, theoretical and ahistorical in its epistemology. Lukács' dialectic will thus be able to historicize science, but not do what science does: study the eternal laws of nature in its objectivity.¹⁰¹² Furthermore, it has recently been argued by the proponents of the so-called 'Systematic Dialectics'-approach¹⁰¹³ that Marx and Hegel's dialectics are in the main 'concerned with the articulation of categories designed to conceptualise an existent concrete whole' rather than a 'historical dialectic'.¹⁰¹⁴ The former is concerned with the structures of a whole in its 'synchronic', or rather synchronizing, organisation. The temporality of the systematic

1008'It is, therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as of thought itself. Friedrich Engels, "Dialectics of Nature," in *MECW*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 356.

1009Josef Stalin, "2. Dialectical and Historical Materialism," in *History of The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* (New York: International Publishers, 1939).

1010Boguslavsky's *ABC of Dialectical Materialism*, quoted by Elliott, *Althusser - The Detour of Theory*, 87.

Althusser: historical materialism: science fo social formations. Dialectical materialism: science of theoretical practice.

1011Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 24.

1012Ibid., 10.

1013Alternative names given to this set of new – i.e. post 1989 – dialectical reinterpretations of Marx, include 'the New Dialectic' and 'New Hegelian Marxism'. These draw a great deal on the dominant Marx's interpretation in the 1970s, the so-called Neue Marx Lektüre. See Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 1. Roberto Fineschi, "Dialectic of the Commodity and Its Exposition: The German Debate in the 70s: a Personal Survey," in *Re-reading Marx - New Perspectives After the Critical Edition*, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi (New York: Macmillan, 2009). Other contemporary authors writing in this tradition count Moishe Postone, Patrick Murrey and Geert Reuten.

1014Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 4.

dialectic is that of the stretched present of the interiority of a process, while the historical (or historicist) dialectic is the retrospective ordering of diverse historical data according to a dialectical schema. Chris Arthur's arguments against Engels' understanding of *Capital* as a historical work, the idea that its first part deals with a stage of simple commodity production, is here a case in point which we shall return to in chapter 6.¹⁰¹⁵ The Marxisms which today take Marx's Hegelian moments as productive rather than idealisms in need of purging, do so by refusing the application of dialectical thought to history and nature, i.e. by distancing themselves from *Diamat* and the grand philosophy of history of classical historical materialism. So what is dialectics, and how can we understand it as more than an aid of thought? Let me provide a list of three definitions of the Marxian dialectic, which all refuse to reduce it to a mere heuristic instrument, i.e. which ascribe to dialectical logics a certain *actuality* (i.e. both 'rational' and 'real', i.e. *intelligible, ordered and effective*).

Engels' 'laws of the dialectic'.¹⁰¹⁶

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. change of quantity into quality and <i>vice versa</i> . | Hegel's logic of <i>being</i> |
| 2. interpenetration of opposites. | Hegel's logic of <i>essence</i> |
| 3. the law of the negation of the negation | The <i>whole system</i> |

Lukács' 'crucial determinants of dialectics'.¹⁰¹⁷

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 4. interaction of subject and object | (social ontology) |
| 5. unity of theory and practice | (method) |
| 6. determination of thought determined by history | (epistemology) |

Arthur's 'characteristics of systematic dialectics':¹⁰¹⁸

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 7. the reflexivity of subject and object | - epistemology |
| 8. existent totalities | - ontology |
| 9. the interconnected categories of these totalities | - method |

1015 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, chapter 2.

1016 Engels, "Dialectics of Nature", chapter 2.

1017 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 24.

1018 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 5.

We here see the range of applicability of dialectics gradually reduced. While for Engels the general laws of the dialectic apply to nature, history and thought, Lukács does not refuse the dialectic in the study of nature, per se, but insists that it cannot do justice to scientific practice, or account for the social determination of the latter.¹⁰¹⁹ Arthur, finally, limits the use of the dialectic to capitalism in its systematic nature: it is not *actual* in history nor nature, but only in the history of capitalism as a developed system.¹⁰²⁰ Implicit in most of these points is the positing of a contradiction which does not entail *logical or ontological* exclusivity, opposition, but some form of unity, in other words contradictions which are 'dialectical' rather than ruled by the law of non-contradiction. The two terms of each of these contradictions are not identical, they mutually negate each other, yet each is defined in its negative relation to the other. Some are *mutually interdependent or inter-penetrating* (2, 4, 5, 7), and others are *mediated, part of the same whole* (3, 6, 8, 9). But as the example of the transition of quality into quantity (1) shows, they are not symmetrical.¹⁰²¹

Both these characteristics are negated by the Epicurean notion of atoms as pre-individual multiplicities. Atoms merely compose, their relations remain exterior, do not determine or redetermine the atoms in their essence. Each atom is what it is; compositions give rise to qualities, existences and appearances, but they do not change or abolish the intensity or swerve of the atom. This is a world without mediation, without interiority, without wholes, without dialectical contradictions. While Marx considers atoms *insufficient and too abstract* for the purpose of explaining manifolds organised 'ideally' i.e. as organisms (chapter 2), he takes the *practical energy of such 'abstraction'* as the starting point for his political affirmation of *generic potentiality*. So what are we to do with this apparent contradiction in Marx, or, from the point of view of the atom, this singular swerve away from its organisation into an organism? Are we faced with a choice between giving up the dialectical mapping and critique of

1019 Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2002). In all fairness to Engels, it must be mentioned that his project is not to apply dialectics directly in the scientific study of nature, but rather to develop a systematic encyclopedic ordering of the results of science, for the sake of creating an overview sensitive to the 'internal logic of each individual area of [empirical] investigation'. *Anti-Düring* (1877), quoted by Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, 54.

1020 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, chapter 4.

1021 While a thing has both a quantity and quality these can be indifferent to one another: Change in the quality of something (i.e. the temperature of water) does not measurably change its quantity or vice-versa (i.e. the addition of water to a puddle does not make it a pond until a certain point is reached). However, at a certain point – the boiling point or the point where the sun can no longer evaporate the water – there is a shift by which the new quantity causes shift in the former quality or the new quantity entails a qualitative change. Water has become steam, the puddle a pond.

systematic complexes or giving up the affirmation of multiplicity against any form of unity and subsumption? It would seem that we must either accept the exteriority of nature and give up dialectics, or dialecticize nature with history, and reject the exteriority of nature. The debate about the relation between the exteriority of atoms, or forces in nature, and interiority of dialectical wholes, was long ago posed by Eugen Düring's in terms of the critique of dialectical contradiction, from the point of view of real opposition.¹⁰²²

This is not merely a matter of the correct method of science, or the metaphysics of nature, but a question of the construction of problems. Any problem is a relation or a complex of relations; to construct a problem as a contradiction is to read this relation as an essential relation, or to focus a relational complex around one central problematic relation. Here the parts cannot be severed without changing their essence, i.e. without losing their existence. Contradiction always presupposes the existence of a whole, characterised by mediation; in other words it positions the problematic relation squarely within its solution, a solution which is, however, unstable or dynamic given that the contradiction persists. To construct a problematic relation as an opposition means to posit the positivity of each element, and to understand their relation as inessential: in short the parts do not need one another to stay what they are; even if they influence one another in all manner of ways, the parts are perfectly capable of reproducing themselves outside the relation. Any solution of an opposition does not consider a *whole* or mediation, but rather equilibrium, contract, agreement. Where the mode of struggle of contradictions is mediated through interdependence (as class struggle or the master-slave dialectic), the struggle of oppositions is unmediated and relentless (that of class war, open revolutionary struggle, or Carl Schmitt's enmity).

For Chris Arthur, amongst others following the idea that capital is objectively dialectical, this is not a problem: Marxism becomes a critical, negative theory of objective falsity.¹⁰²³ The truth which provides a measure for this critique is the affirmation that social labour is what produces the totality. But the question of nature

1022Düring had written: 'The first and most important principle of the basic logical properties of being refers to the *exclusion of contradiction*. Contradiction is a category which can only appertain to a combination of thoughts, but not to reality. There are no contradictions in things, or, to put it another way, contradiction accepted as reality is itself the apex of absurdity... The antagonism of forces measured against each other and moving in opposite directions is in fact the basic form of all actions in the life of the world and its creatures. But this opposition of the directions taken by the forces of elements and individuals does not in the slightest degree coincide with the idea of absurd contradictions'. Quoted in Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1947) Part I, chapter XII.

1023Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 165.

and natural science still remains unresolved, and its relation to the study of history and capital remains problematic.

The result of the purging of idea of the dialectics of nature in Lukács, Colletti, and Arthur, is that it reproduces the separation between nature and history central to the division of labour between historical materialism and dialectical materialism, and either leaves the latter sphere to a very classical objectivist notion of science, science as the ahistorical and non-social description of nature, or engages in a humanist or historicist rejection of the realist attempts by natural science to bracket everything human or historical in the study of nature. Lukács more usefully argues that '[w]hen the ideal of scientific knowledge is applied to nature it simply furthers the progress of science',¹⁰²⁴ while maintaining that:

Nature is a societal category. That is to say, whatever is held to be natural at any given stage of social development, however this nature is related to man and whatever form his involvement with it takes, i.e. nature's form, its content, its range and its objectivity are all socially conditioned.¹⁰²⁵

The former argument for the the ideal of scientific knowledge orientates science to its object, nature, while the latter approach inscribes this ideal in history.

4.2. The non-dialectics of nature

Let us look at two critiques aiming to purge Marxism of the idea of a dialectics of nature. In his influential 1975 article in the *New Left Review*, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', Lucio Colletti framed this question as a deep aporia of the relation between Marxism and science. Where for Colletti science is based on the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, Marxism, as we have seen, seems fundamentally based on the notion of *dialectical contradiction*. Unlike logical contradictions this *real, material* contradiction entails an unity where the opposite terms co-exist even in their contradiction: they are different conflicting or incompatible moments of the same actuality, the contradiction is *essential*. Colletti quotes Kant's 1763 article *The Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Quantities into Philosophy*:

¹⁰²⁴Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 10.

¹⁰²⁵*Ibid.*, 234.

In a real opposition [...] one of the opposed determinations can never be the contradictory contrary of the other [...], since in such a case the contrast would be of a logical character.... In every real opposition the predicates both have to be positive.... In this way the things of which one is considered as the negative of the other are both, considered in themselves, positive.¹⁰²⁶

Following Kant Colletti insists that there can be no contradictions in reality; what is classically taken as examples of real contradictions in Marxism following Engels *Dialectic of Nature* (+ and -, differential and integral, action and reaction, positive and negative electricity, combination and dissociation of atoms¹⁰²⁷) are really 'examples of non-contradictory contrariety'.¹⁰²⁸ In these cases, there is no need for mediation, the question is the analysis of the attraction, repulsion or equilibrium of positives.¹⁰²⁹ Science, based on mathematics and the logical principle of non-contradiction is applicable to nature precisely because it is discrete, exterior to itself in time and space: no two entities can occupy the same space and time. Thus, Colletti writes,

what 'dialectical materialists' describe as *contradictions* in nature are, in fact, *contraries*, oppositions that are *ohne Widerspruch*; and [...] therefore Marxism can certainly on speaking of conflicts and of *objective oppositions*, without thereby being forced to declare war on the principle of (non-)contradiction and so break with science.¹⁰³⁰

However, Colletti goes on to show that the notion of dialectical contradiction is absolutely central and indispensable to Marx's theory of capitalism and its crises.¹⁰³¹

1026Kant quoted by Lucio Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," *New Left Review* I, no. 93 (October 1975): 7.

1027Colletti takes this list from Lenin, but shows how it is also active in Mao (p.10). Lenin speaks of dialectical contradiction, in the following terms: 'The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their "unity,"—although the difference between the terms identity and unity is not particularly important here. In a certain sense both are correct) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their "*self-movement*," in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites. The two basic (or two possible? Or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, *and* development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation).' V. I. Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works Volume 38: Philosophical Notebooks*, 1st ed. (Lawrence & Wishart, 1961).

1028Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," 10.

1029As an aside, we can note that the ontology of market exchange has a similar logical distribution: individual market actors, represented by the price tags of their commodities, attract or repel one another, resulting in brief encounters, which overall create an equilibrium of supply and demand.

1030Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," 14.

1031He does so in a loyal and enlightening reading of passages of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus-Value* to which I will return in chapter 7.

Against *Diamat* capitalism is not contradictory 'because it is real and any reality is contradictory', but it is contradictory because it is an *upside-down*, inverted reality, following Marx's critique of the Hegelian dialectic. This is exactly the line the line taken by the systematic dialectics approach: 'the very fact that capital is homologous with the [Hegelian] Idea is a reason for criticising it as an inverted reality in which self-moving abstractions have the upper hand over human beings'.¹⁰³² For Colletti the fact that Marx's theory of capital cannot do without the notion of dialectical contradiction and the idea that science is itself based on the very exclusion of the possibility of such contradiction, means that Marxism cannot be a science, but something else: at worst religion, perhaps philosophy, at best social science in search for its 'true foundation'.¹⁰³³

In *Capital* Marx has a very clear reference to a dialectical contradiction in *nature*:

We saw in a former chapter that the exchange of commodities implies contradictory and mutually exclusive conditions. The further development of the commodity does not abolish these contradictions, but rather provides the form within which they have room to move. This is, in general, the way in which real contradictions are resolved. For instance, it is a contradiction to depict one body as constantly falling towards another and at the same time constantly flying away from it. The ellipse is a form of motion within which this contradiction is both realized and resolved.¹⁰³⁴

In a recent article Thomas Weston has recently done much to illuminate Marx's use of this analogy.¹⁰³⁵ To properly investigate the concept of dialectical contradiction in the study of nature it would be necessary to discuss not only the difference between Kant's and Hegel's theory of attraction and repulsion, but also the theorisation in both of the differential calculus, a central use of which is the calculation of orbital paths. The idea of classical mechanics, which Kant supports, is that there are two forces in the moving object: attraction and repulsion, or rather, the tangential vector and the inward acceleration. This is for Hegel a contradiction; in his interpretation Kant makes this mistake of hypostacising these two forces, when there is in fact only one *actual* movement, that of the ellipsis. But, Hegel knows, this positing of two forces is a useful

1032Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 8, see also 165..

1033Similarly Alfred Schmidt, drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, against Engels: 'If matter is presented as being, within itself, dialectically structured, it ceases to be matter in the sense required by the exact sciences'. Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, 59.

1034Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 198.

1035Thomas Weston, "Marx on the Dialectics of Elliptical Motion," *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 4 (January 1, 2012): 3–38.

manoeuvre, allows the differential calculus: dx/dy . Thus the tangential velocity and the inward acceleration of heavenly body can be calculated as functions of one another (in approximation towards 0). However, for Hegel, the truth of this contradiction is the movement itself; we are thus dealing with a contradiction which is not strictly speaking real, unless one ontologises mathematics – a manoeuvre which Hegel is very hostile to.¹⁰³⁶

4.3. Natural, intrinsic ends in Kant and Hegel

Kant speaks of 'natural ends' in relation to the *intrinsic* purposefulness of a natural object.

The parts of the thing combine of themselves into the unity of a whole by being reciprocally cause and effect of their form'. Here we are dealing with the idea of a whole which *reciprocally* determines the parts and the form *not* in a way which allows us to judge it as a cause, but in a way which grounds the cognition of it as a systematic unity, a composition of a manifold, a 'self-organized being'.¹⁰³⁷

The difference from Kant being that for Hegel the 'intrinsic' teleologies of nature are not just useful postulates, but ontologically real.¹⁰³⁸

To see purpose as inherent within natural objects, is to grasp nature in its simple determinateness. e.g. the seed of a plant, which contains the real potential of everything pertaining to the tree, and which as purposeful activity is therefore orientated solely towards self-preservation. Aristotle had already noticed this notion of purpose in nature. and he called the activity the nature of a thing. This is the true teleological view [as opposed to the externality Kantian perspective], for it regards nature in its proper animation as free. and is therefore the highest view of nature.¹⁰³⁹

1036 See Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1969, 174–84, and 342–43.

1037 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 201, §63.

1038 Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel Freedom, Truth and History*, 162.

1039 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature I*, 196, §245.

4.4. Alienated thought knowing itself

To understand the non-affirmative character of the writings in systematic dialectics, one would have to understand why thought is presented in purely negative terms. For the systematic dialectic abstraction in thought is the effect of the alienating real abstractions of capital or religion. Since all abstraction is seen to be alienating, separating and subsumptive, no affirmation is possible in thought, only negation, produced through immanent critique. The idea is that within our abstract mental labour our self-knowledge and critiques can only be knowledge of our alienation. In philosophy, the suggestion seems to be, we can only get as far as what Marx in his critique of Hegel called 'the *essence* of philosophy – the *alienation of man who knows himself*, or *alienated [entäußerte] science thinking itself*'.¹⁰⁴⁰ What we can hope to grasp within what we (with a view to keep alive a spectre of another practice of philosophy) can call *alienated* philosophy - beyond the questions, the concepts, and the ideas per se (i.e. beyond our specialisation and expertise) - is this process of their becoming, as activity, and not merely as activity, but as *social activity*. The immediate task of philosophy – in the service of history establishing the truth of this world – is to 'unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked'.¹⁰⁴¹

For Marx, however, this essentially critical project was not sufficient. Under the division of labour all labours including philosophy are not immediately social, they exist in relative separation. They produce and are produced in estrangement and alienation, which no speculative synthesis can abolish. The abolition of philosophy does not go through critique, but through a construction: '[y]ou cannot transcend [*aufheben*] philosophy without realising [*verwirklichen*] it'.¹⁰⁴² Marx was adamant that criticism is not enough; material force must be overthrown with material force, that of weapons or of the masses gripped by theory: 'Philosophy cannot realise itself without the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realisation of philosophy'.¹⁰⁴³ The promise of philosophy is here nothing but the promise contained in the process of social labour, namely the overcoming of

1040Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," 386, Translation amended.

1041 Marx, "Critique of Hegel. Introduction," 250.

1042Ibid. Note that the German verb *verwirklichen*, just as the equivalent noun *Wirklichkeit* ('reality') comes from the verb *Wirken* which simultaneously means 'to work', 'to be active', 'to effect', whereas in English 'reality' (from Latin *res*, 'thing', 'fact', 'matter') is a stable state of being or matter.

1043Ibid., 257.

alienation, and the realisation of communism, through as ‘the *positive* supersession of *private property as human self-estrangement*, and hence the true appropriation of the *human* essence through and for humankind’.¹⁰⁴⁴ As estrangement is a function of social labour as a whole, emancipation must be thought as a total overcoming.

However, it soon became obvious to Marx himself that philosophy itself considered as a specialised activity could not be the driving force or igniting spark of any real communist movement, but merely a moment within such a movement. In other words, the alienation of philosophy consists first of all in its social form (its institutions, pedagogies, public dissemination, etc.) rather than its content. No amount of humanist, materialist, communist watchwords can guarantee more than an imaginary overcoming of alienation, unless part of a practice, a movement. Apart from communist movements (in the precise sense Marx and Engels gave it as the real movement abolishing the present – alienated – state of things) these words remain mere semblances or placeholders of radicality, and most valuably and less feebly, symbolic representations of the real antagonisms of society. If the content of radical philosophy ‘unmasks’ self-estrangement, as abstract form and activity it performs and produces what it unmasks.

To the question why there is still Marxist philosophy after Marx, Adorno provides the following answer: ‘[p]hilosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed’.¹⁰⁴⁵ In many ways the philosophical moment of post-modernism (arising as a collective mood of disillusioned radical *soixante-huitard* intellectuals) seemed to follow Adorno’s injunction: ‘Having broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself’.¹⁰⁴⁶ However, if the deconstruction of philosophy, and the demonstrations of its contingency and the groundlessness of its ‘play’ undid some of philosophy’s internal determinations (including its status as science) it did not undo the social determination of philosophy as an alienated *activity*.¹⁰⁴⁷ Philosophy is only overcome when it is actualised, the negation of philosophy perpetuates it. No longer living, not yet dead, critical philosophy haunts us. The point, further, is that philosophy cannot be overcome, by giving up philosophising – except by individuals who might move into the sociology of knowledge, political economy, gardening or sex work. Is it not exactly

1044Marx, “1844 Manuscripts,” 348

1045Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3.

1046Ibid.

1047But perhaps the success of the project of dethronement, or rather the utility and appropriability of the narrative and argumentative ammunition it provided for project of the devolution of philosophy departments, reinforced this project, spurred it along and blunted the resistance to it.

what is at stake in William James suggestion that the best way to deal with Hegel, since one cannot beat him, is simply to ignore him? And in Foucault's question: 'We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.'¹⁰⁴⁸ Here, if we want to avoid fetishising Hegel or his system, the proper materialist question is: *what are the (persistent) social conditions - beyond the traditionalism of philosophical education (itself not a convincing answer) - for the constant reappearance of Hegel, not simply at the end of the flight, but in the very flight itself?* The short answer, if we might attempt one, is capitalism. If philosophy can no longer hold claim to be at one with reality, nor to be at the point of its realization it haunts us not only because in its being abolished without being realized its promise persists, but because its social conditions insists. This conditions, once more, can only be abolished in practice, part of which is affirmative, organising thought.

4.5. On the method of Capital

If, however, we read the theoretical construction of the concept of the mode of production in *The German Ideology* and *A Contribution* as the hypothesis, that bourgeois society functions as a systematic totality, we have a sketch for a research programme rather than interesting speculation or valuable cognitive mapping. If we assume a systematic totality as a hypothesis the starting point of our inquiry cannot be the system itself, but must be a moment immanent to the system. As such the moment with which we begin is abstracted from its postulated context, which must be 'reconstructable' in practice from this point, if the assumption of the system is correct. Thus we must rise from the abstract to the concrete (the system in its concrete reality), from one system-determined part to the system which is then reached as a complex concentration of many determinations.¹⁰⁴⁹

In *Capital* the premise that the investigation must begin with the categories of political economy itself is preserved from *Grundrisse* and *A Contribution*. Thus *Capital* is subtitled 'A Critique of Political Economy', and as such it is a *critique* in the Kantian sense, namely an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of something given, namely classical political economy. But where Marx presupposes economics as a discipline, he

¹⁰⁴⁸Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2002), 235.

¹⁰⁴⁹It is thus not a sequence of more and more complex models (as in neoclassical economics, econometrics), but a progressive development of the *same object*, capitalism. Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 18.

does not take for granted the reality of its object, that is, bourgeois economy as a systematic whole. In this sceptical attitude the method of abstraction comes to its correct application, not as the construction of a unity through the abstraction of the similar from the different (Feuerbach), or as a thought-synthesis bracketing a social whole, but as an abstraction of the ‘elementary cell’ from its organism in order to establish the logico-systematic relations of the assumed social ‘organism’ itself.¹⁰⁵⁰ Thus the starting point, the commodity, is double: It is a category of bourgeois economics *and* a really existing entity, namely an object exchanged for another.

The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an “immense collection of commodities”; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity.¹⁰⁵¹

However, we cannot thereby take the mode of production to be given and the commodity to be a mere appearance. Put polemically we need to reverse the terms: the commodity is what is given, and the mode of production remains merely the hypothetical system in which the commodity is a part. Indeed, this whole can *only* be reached through the laborious construction of the system starting with the microscopic procedure of investigating its presumed elementary cell.

What we will be looking at in our critical exposition is the analysis and systems-construction starting with the object as such. The method involved can be described as the move from a thought-synthesis (the hypothetical mode of production) over an analytic abstraction (the elementary form, the commodity) to a systematic construction (the analysis of the form of value). In so far as this construction is correct we have moved from a thought-synthesis to a real synthesis. Our main instrument has been what Marx calls ‘the power of abstraction’.¹⁰⁵² Thus we are no longer dealing with the always-already of a social totality, but with a systematic whole which can be developed from one part. This leaves aspects of the social to be left uncounted for, in an empirically determinate ‘relative autonomy’ *vis-à-vis* a whole with an internal logic based on necessities. This is the reason that Marx, in the Preface to the first edition of *Capital*, can say that the object of study is not the degree of development of ‘the social antagonisms that spring from the natural laws of capitalist production’, but rather is

¹⁰⁵⁰Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 90.

¹⁰⁵¹Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁵²Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 90.

‘these laws themselves, of these tendencies winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity.’¹⁰⁵³

A very emphatic note of point must be made here: because *Capital* focuses on analysing the logic of capital *from the perspective of capital* the openness of the problem of proletarian reproduction and of class antagonism is glossed over. That Marx's abstracts from a very urgent and open problem in order to study the organic of capital, is of course clear to him:

Labour capacity appears ... as absolute poverty .. it is itself merely the possibility of labour, available and confined within the living body of the worker, a possibility which is, however, utterly separated from all the objective conditions of its realisation, ... Since actual labour is the appropriation of nature for the satisfaction of human needs, the activity through which the metabolism between man and nature is mediated, to denude labour capacity of the means of labour, the objective conditions for the appropriation of nature through labour, is to denude it, also, of the means of life ... life is therefore absolute poverty as such, ... has his needs in actuality, whereas the activity of satisfying them is only possessed by him as a nonobjective capacity (a possibility) confined within his own subjectivity. As such, conceptually speaking, he is a PAUPER, he is the personification and repository of this capacity which exists for itself, in isolation from its objectivity.¹⁰⁵⁴

1053Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 91.

1054Marx, *MECW* 30, 30:40–41.

chapter 5

5.0. On simple commodity production

The classical argument that Marx was proposing an abstract analysis of historical simple commodity production is found in Engels' classical logico-historical reading of *Capital*. According to Engels the logical categories of the presentation, represent, in idealised form, the actual process of history. Engels' famously read the first chapters of *Capital* as chapters describing 'simple commodity production', a non-capitalist market production out of which developed, eventually, the capitalist market. This interpretation has been thoroughly criticised by the combined efforts of the proponents of the 'New' or 'Systematic Dialectic'.¹⁰⁵⁵ Thus Chris Arthur has shown that this concept is foreign to Marx, who '*never used the term ... in his life*' – and that *Capital* does not deal with a historical sequence of more and more complex social formations, but with the development of the *same object*, capitalism, from its most abstract concept (the commodity) to the more concrete, complex articulation of concepts in Volume III.¹⁰⁵⁶ Indeed, the commodity as the general form of appearance of wealth of a society, is only possible, as Arthur points out, with the *generalisation* of commodity circulation, which in turn depends on generalised commodity production.¹⁰⁵⁷ Ironically Ernest Mandel, whom Arthur strongly criticizes for having an Engelian position, makes exactly the point that only capitalism is characterised by generalised commodity production and the law of value. He does so precisely to defend the focus on the *emergence* of capitalism from commodity exchange.¹⁰⁵⁸ However, this apparent disagreement is perhaps not a necessary theoretical disagreement, as much a divergence of theoretical interests: while Mandel is attempting to describe the historical emergence of capitalism, Arthur is

1055 Fred Moseley, ed., *Marx's Method in Capital: A Re-Examination* (Prometheus Books, 1993), 1. See also Jim Kinkaid's 'The New Dialectic' in Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis, eds., *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Haymarket Books, 2009), 385–6.

1056 Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 18–19.

1057 *Ibid.*, 45.

1058 Mandel, "Introduction," 14–15.

interested in the reading of chapter 1 of Marx's *Capital*. In making this argument with compelling evidence, he is raising an important point about the *qualitative* difference introduced by the emergence of the capitalist mode of production.

However, Arthur's polemical headline 'Dialectical Development versus Linear Logic' fails to recognize the question of emergence as a legitimate one, and pre-empts the whole discussion by posing it in terms of logic and philology. He thus misses that the question of emergence, while informed by capital logic, is not a question of logic, but of complex historical time: 'a whole series of social and political developments influences this birth process of modern capitalism, hastening it, slowing it down, or combining it with trends going in different directions'.¹⁰⁵⁹ Further, as Ian Hunt points out in his critique of Arthur's book, 'the growth of not-yet-capitalist market relations could have played a part in the rise of capitalism from the dissolution of feudalism'.¹⁰⁶⁰ To understand the process of emergence creates an orientation within totalisation rather than totality.

5.1. The categories of Capital are systematic, not historical

The danger, to be precise, of the projection of *systematic* concepts onto pre-capitalist contexts is the loss of conceptual specificity. To avoid this the concepts developed in the critique of the capitalist mode of production would have to be re-developed in the new systematic context of non-capital modes of production in the way *Capital* does for the capitalist mode of production. Marx does not begin *Capital* with the system/totality of the capitalist mode of production, but with the *appearance* of such a system (the commodity); he then *develops* the system *systematically*, starting with its defining, dominant practices, commodity *production* and *exchange*. However, economic historians and historical sociologists often seem to simply presuppose the systematicity of non-capitalist modes of production, or, in other terms, to apply the concept of totality or system *ahistorically and immediately*, hypostitising it, or taking it as a regulative ideal for the ordering of historical data. An example is Perry Anderson's writing about 'general crisis' of the economic 'system' in Medieval Europe, in terms of 'structural

¹⁰⁵⁹Ibid., 15

¹⁰⁶⁰Ian Hunt, "The Economic Cell-Form," *Historical Materialism* 13, no. 2 (2005): Jacques Bidet puts this non-identity of market and capitalism in stronger, if theoretical rather than historical term. Jacques Bidet, "The Dialectician's Interpretation of Capital," *Historical Materialism* 13, no. 2 (2005): 129.

contradictions', 'monetary crisis'. One great difference, from the point of view of reproduction, between such a crisis and modern capitalist crises is that trade – especially long distance trade – and money was only marginal to the daily reproduction of the vast majority of the populations of the Occidental peninsula of Eurasia.¹⁰⁶¹ As Jairus Banaji notes:

Unless 'relations of production' are constructed and defined to have the sort of reach and conceptual power that can 'integrate' all the fundamental phenomena or movements that social and economic historians deal with as their staple (conquests, demography, monetary expansion, historical ruptures like the great transition from T'ang to Sung, crises within regimes such as the state of Russia at the death of Ivan the Terrible in 1585, major ecological changes, etc.), Marxist historians who work on anything other than capitalism will simply continue to pay lip service to historical materialism, as Anderson does in *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* in some striking demonstrations of bad theory. By 'bad theory' I mean the substitution of purely theoretical explanations for historical research and/or recourse to a theory that is itself simply a string of abstractions.¹⁰⁶²

5.2. On the unevenness of the emergence of capitalism

Indeed, Marx notes, this experiment in capitalist manufacture was reversible as Italy's commercial supremacy was annihilated by the development of the world market in the late 15th Century. 'The urban workers were driven *en masse* into the countryside, and gave a previously unheard-of impulse to small-scale cultivation, carried on in the form of market gardening'.¹⁰⁶³ The unevenness of this process might be read as an important corrective to the unilinear comment on the destructive power of trade, made 20 years earlier in the *Manifesto*: 'The bourgeoisie ... draws all ... nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls.... It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves'.¹⁰⁶⁴

1061Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to feudalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1978), 199–209.

1062Banaji, *Theory as History*, 7–8.

1063Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 900.

1064Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 112.

5.3. Slavery and surplus-value

The reproduction of the slave – even his or her life time – becomes a business decision of the slave-owner, which under the capitalist system means an extreme intensification of slave labour to keep up with the demands of the capitalist mode of production on the world market.

Hence the Negro labour in the southern states of the American Union preserved a moderately patriarchal character as long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labour, became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself.¹⁰⁶⁵

5.4. The role of national debt in primitive accumulation

In a passage of particular contemporary relevance Marx writes:

The only part of so-called national wealth that actually enters into the possession of a modern nation is – the national debt'. 'The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation. As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it endows unproductive money with the power of creation and thus turns it into capital, without forcing it to expose itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury. The state's creditors actually give nothing away, for the sum lent is transformed into public bonds, easily negotiable, which go on functioning in their hands just as so much hard cash would. But furthermore, and quite apart from the class of idle rentiers thus created, the improvised wealth of the financiers who play the role of middlemen between the government and the nation, and the tax-farmers, merchants and private manufacturers, for whom a good part of every national loan performs the service of a capital fallen from

¹⁰⁶⁵Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 345.

heaven, apart from all these people, the national debt has given rise to joint-stock companies, to dealings in negotiable effects of all kinds, and to speculation : in a word, it has given rise to stock-exchange gambling and the modern bankocracy.¹⁰⁶⁶

5.5. Some notes on history and the time of revolution

The working assumption of economics reproduce an anthropology or a myth of origins and betray a certain desire, and forgetting, an eagerness to legitimate. However, the question remains in what sense Marx's own conception is historical, and what desires his historical narrative betray and might produce. The textbook understanding is that Marx knows that bourgeois society has a past, that its categories are not eternal, and also that the methodological bracketing of history misses that history is not only the past, but the future, a future that is bound to be not merely quantitatively but qualitatively different: capitalism did not always and will not always exist. The valences of such narratives are well known, and might variously produce a longing for the pre-capitalist commons, a celebration of bourgeois society for its overcoming of feudalism, or a notion of a future in which the powers held back by capitalism are finally set free¹⁰⁶⁷, or a future which is really *no future* but rather a break with capitalism's constant projection of futurity as growth of the ever-selfsame.¹⁰⁶⁸ Beyond nostalgia, progressivism, catastrophism, utopia and hope, this chapter will ask the question of the historicity of capitalism from the point of view of a strategic orientation in relation to the problems of our and Marx's time. Perhaps the point is not to discuss the temporality of the subjective orientation to transition, but to consider the struggles and compositions that can be made possible in a given conjuncture in relation to capital's problems, and then to see in what specific sense their emergent temporality would be *untimely*.

Marx's engagement with history as actuality is divided between the synchronic engagement with the temporalisations of the present, the time of the mode of production, first of all, on the one hand, and the diachronic analysis of *transitions* between modes of production, on the other. Furthermore (apart from the *logical time* of the transitions outlined in the chapter on 'The Historical Tendency' in *Capital* - see

1066Ibid., 919.

1067See the recent Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, “# Accelerate - Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,” 2013.

1068Berardi, *After the Future*.

chapter 4, above), there might be a third time in Marx, that of revolution. Both present and transition it does not merely oscillate between the two but expresses an organised practical energy, which is perhaps not best described as *against* or *with* the history - as we know history is a constantly attempted synchronisation of contradicting times (both a general direction and against itself). Revolutionary time might be characterised as *with* or *against the times* (the time of the proletariat against the globalising time of capital, the time of the proletariat *with* the time of capital as it goes into crisis). However, my thesis is that there is no revolution without what we could call *untimeliness, an organised practical energy which is its own time* – perhaps within the movement that negates or affirms the unfolding time of the historical process. The problematic of this chapter is not to discover the right form of historical projection, or the facts about the genesis of capitalism, but of understanding the pre-history of the present in terms of the inauguration of a certain problem we are still living, and to understand this as much as it opens for a conceptualisation of the *untimeliness* of revolutionary time.

5.6. The factors blocking capitalist development

Capitals already existed in larger towns in Italy and Flanders before the capitalist mode of production developed. However, they were 'prevented' by their environment from growing and creating the conditions for their own expansion. Certain conditions blocked the generalisation of capitalist production and circulation. For instance, there was no centralised state capable of enforcing labour and commercial contracts.¹⁰⁶⁹ Marx also notes the following: '

The rules of the guilds ... deliberately hindered the transformation of the single master into a capitalist, by placing very strict limits on the number of apprentices and journeymen he could employ. ... The guilds zealously repelled every encroachment by merchants' capital A merchant could buy every kind of commodity, but he could not buy labour as a commodity.¹⁰⁷⁰

Jameson notes the similarity of this logic to Pierre Clastres' work on the defences against state-formation in pre-state societies.¹⁰⁷¹

1069Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 902, 935.

1070Ibid., 479.

1071Jameson, *Representing Capital*, 82.

5.7. The conjunctural, strategic approach

I have characterised the historical politics of the systematic dialectics approach in the previous chapter. To illustrate the strategic and conjunctural approach by picking a rather strict expression of it – Althusser's writings on Machiavelli could be another – we read this passage from Mario Tronti:

To wish to systematise everything within the rational order of a programmed development is the short path to being left behind. One does not control time; one uses it. ... change, the rapidity of change is not only in the social structures but also, and even more so, in the social subjects. It is not only the terrain of the political struggle that changes, but we ourselves, the bearers of political action.¹⁰⁷²

¹⁰⁷²Mario Tronti, *Il Tempo Della Politica*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1980), 50–51. - I would like to thank Matteo Mandarini for bringing this passage to my attention.

chapter 6

6.0. Marx and the work-ethic

In the *Grundrisse* Marx writes:

The Times of November 1857 contains an utterly delightful cry of outrage on the part of a West-Indian plantation owner. This advocate analyses with great moral indignation—as a plea for the re-introduction of Negro slavery—how the *Quashees*¹⁰⁷³ (the free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and, alongside this 'use value', regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good; how they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations, but rather observe the planters' impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure, and even exploit their acquired Christianity as an embellishment for this mood of malicious glee and indolence. They have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage labourers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital, because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of *direct* forced labour, slavery, or *indirect* forced labour, wage labour. Wealth confronts direct forced labour not as capital, but rather as *relation of domination* [*Herrschaftsverhältnis*]; thus, the relation of domination is the only thing which is reproduced on this basis, for which wealth itself has value only as gratification, not as wealth itself, and which can therefore never create *general industriousness*. (We shall return to this relation of slavery and wage labour.)

Marx discussion must be referred back to Thomas Carlyle, whose text on the matter of

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Thomas Carlyle, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* XL, no. February (1849): 534–5.

the 'quashees' show the very close connection between the protestant work-ethic and racism:

And now observe, my friends, it was not Black Quashee, or those he represents, that made those West India islands what they are, or can, by any hypothesis, be considered to have the right of growing pumpkins there. ... If Quashee will not honestly aid in bringing out those sugars, cinnamons, and nobler products of the West India islands, for the benefit of all mankind, then, I say, neither will the powers permit Quashee to continue growing pumpkins there for his own lazy benefit, but will sheer him out, by and by, like a lazy gourd overshadowing rich ground -- him, and all that partake with him -- perhaps in a very terrible manner. ... The gods are long-suffering; but the law, from the beginning, was, He that will not work shall perish from the earth -- and the patience of the gods has limits!

E.P. Thompson's, on the other hand, provides a nice corrective to this narrative, and one that will still have resonance for anyone familiar with regions only marginally subsumed by capitalist production:

If the theorists of growth wish us to say so, then we may agree that the older popular culture was in many ways otiose, intellectually vacant, devoid of quickening, and plain bloody poor. Without time-discipline we could not have the insistent energies of industrial man; and whether this discipline comes in the forms of Methodism, or of Stalinism, or of nationalism, it will come to the developing world. What needs to be said, is not that one way of life is better than the other, but that this is a place of the most far-reaching conflict; that the historical record is not a simple one of neutral and inevitable technological change, but is also one of exploitation and of resistance to exploitation; and that values stand to be lost as well as gained.¹⁰⁷⁴

My familiarity with such regions comes from lifelong friendships in Ifakara, a rural town in central Tanzania, in which is presently undergoing processes of primitive accumulation, trade expansion and dawning agricultural capitalism. The challenge is here to avoid inscribing the struggle between capitalism and other modes of reproduction in terms of a historically linear progression. See appendix 7.5. on resistances to proletarianisation.

¹⁰⁷⁴Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 93–4.

6.1. Poor whites, slaves and revolution

The example of the “poor whites” is not randomly chosen among surplus-populations under the capitalist mode of production, but by virtue of the fact that they, like the Roman proletarians, were in direct local 'competition' with slave labour. And European proletarians would have likely become wage labourers sooner had mass scale utilisation of slave-labour in the colonies not made mass migration of European labour superfluous.¹⁰⁷⁵ Slavery thus, in some sense, retarded the development of wage-labour, while also limiting the power of workers-organisations to negotiate wages. As Northern trade unions were painfully aware during the American Civil War the fight against slavery was a fight for labour in general. However, as W.E.B. Du Bois argues in *Black Reconstruction*, the revolutionary importance of the abolition of slavery was not just, as many American socialists believed, that it created the conditions for a revolution by the working class. Rather, the civil war itself was immediately revolutionary. While Northern labour could not seize the war as a chance for revolution, the rebellion and desertation of slaves and poor whites turned the civil war into a revolutionary struggle for liberation.¹⁰⁷⁶

6.2. The commons and utopia

Writing about More's *Utopia* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I have attempted the following characterisation of this moment:

In the simultaneous politicisation and enclosure of the commons arises a defiant poetry of defeat, which becomes more than that: The more it becomes a defence of something irretrievably lost, the more the hierarchical character of the lost communities is forgotten. ...the lost continued to exist in its absence, the loss itself became a common possession, a common desire. ... Thus we can say that communism constitutes itself around a loss, or a lack. For this reason communism as a no-where (*outopia*) is from its beginnings never purely messianic, but also an idea shaped like a memory or a mourning. The first properly communist movements arose in the meeting between the struggle for

¹⁰⁷⁵Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 105.

¹⁰⁷⁶Du Bois quoted in Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism - The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 235.

the commons and the literary *utopia* (*eutopia*), in exactly the moment where the real loss became irredeemably lost, became lack, became a progressive demand, became desire. In this moment, where the turning back of history became impossible, or reversely, where history became thought as progressing, communism became modern.¹⁰⁷⁷

At this moment, however, communism also increasingly becomes stuck in the extreme con-temporaneity of the capital-relation.

6.3. The crippling of the proletarian body

'The uniformity of his [the worker's] stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind, and makes him regard with abhorrence the irregular, uncertain, and adventurous life of a soldier. It corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employment than that to which he has been bred. His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expence of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it.¹⁰⁷⁸

About the same problem, Marx writes that the

crippling of body and mind is inseparable even from the division of labour in society as a whole. ... [T]his social separation of branches of labour attacks the individual at the very roots of his life, it is the first system to provide the materials and the impetus for industrial pathology.¹⁰⁷⁹

For a new development of the concept of proletarianisation focussed on the loss of savoir faire and savoir vivre, which, however, forgets dispossession, see Bernard Stiegler's *For a new Critique of Political Economy*.¹⁰⁸⁰

1077Bue Rübner Hansen, "Spøgelse Uden Krop," *Trappe Tusind 2* (April 2009): 9.

1078Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 178 Book V, .

1079Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 484.

1080For a New Critique of Political Economy (Polity Press, 2010). Bue Rübner Hansen and Manuela Zechner, "Review of Stiegler's *For a New Critique of Political Economy*," *Journal of Labour History* Forthcoming 2014).

6.4. The soul of capital

Marx's, as we have seen in the previous chapter, often likens the capitalist mode of (re)production to an organism. But as Hegel defined a living organism, it needs a 'soul'. And so does Marx, a moment which, according to David McNally 'has received remarkably little attention in the critical literature'.¹⁰⁸¹ It is of course tempting to reduce this to a serious if ironically phrased indictment of capital for its demonic mystifications, as is the tendency of McNally's exposition: 'As in religion, so in capitalist society, the material world is subordinated to non-material powers, bodies subordinated to spirits, the body of value colonised by the soul of value'.¹⁰⁸²

However, while we certainly find these valances in Marx's argument, there is also a rational content to Marx's argument, which will help us to speak of souls not in terms of *mystifications*, but as structural determinants of reproductive system-processes ('living organisms' broadly speaking). Life, in Hegel, is a very precise moment designating the articulation of chemical component into a living process: 'life is a perenniating chemical process'.¹⁰⁸³ Chemical processes – in Marx's terms labour and money are also chemical, i.e. combining and separating – do not of their own accord give rise to life, such relations can only be elements in an organism, which is characterised by the mutual implication of the reproduction of the elements and the whole.

Reproduction is the initiation of the whole, the immediate unity-with-self in which the whole has at the same time entered into relationship. The animal organism is essentially reproductive, reproduction constitutes its actuality.¹⁰⁸⁴

Logically, the reproduction of the conditions of capital is present only with the second circuit¹⁰⁸⁵; chemism does not necessarily lead to organism, it does so only in the contingent event of it looping back on itself. The elements of an organism are replaced over time through its relations to its outside, while the process and form of the whole stays the same. The structure of this self-relation 'or articulation of into members and expansion' is the *soul*: 'Each member has the entire soul within it, and is only independent through its being connected with the whole'.¹⁰⁸⁶ The soul is the self-relation, or self-feeling of a living whole, in its structure and expansion. As Houlgate

1081 McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 125.

1082 *Ibid.*, 129

1083 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature II*, 219.

1084 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 110, §353.

1085 Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital,"* 1:266.

1086 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature III*, 13, §337.

notes, the soul 'is not some thing separate from the body, nor is it inserted into the body from the outside', but the 'immateriality of nature', it is relational, recursive and structural rather than material.¹⁰⁸⁷

In Part Eight of *Capital* the notion of a capitalist *soul* appears at the exact point at which expropriated peasants have become wage-labourers, mere 'material elements of variable capital':

Suppose, for example, that one part of the Westphalian peasantry, who, at the time of Frederick II, all span flax, are forcibly expropriated and driven from the soil; and suppose that the other part, who remain behind, are turned into the day-labourers of large-scale farmers. At the same time, large establishments for flax-spinning and weaving arise, and in these the men who have been 'set free' now work for wages. The flax looks exactly as it did before. *Not a fibre of it is changed, but a new social soul has entered into its body.*¹⁰⁸⁸

The chemical element stays the same, but it is now organised as an element in the process of capital. Likewise the labourers producing it. Where the labourers had previously worked the land and spun flax for their own reproduction, their labour mediating themselves with the land, the sustenance of their own bodies (including their souls) is now predicated on helping the soul of this new mode of production wander, soul-crushing as it may be:

While productive labour is changing the means of production into constituent elements of a new product, their value undergoes a metempsychosis [*Seelenwanderung*]. It deserts the consumed body to occupy the newly created one. behind the back of the actual labour in progress But this transmigration [*Seelenwanderung*] takes place, as it were, behind the back of the actual labour in progress.¹⁰⁸⁹

By producing new value, the labourer is also part of reproducing or *transferring* the old value embodied in the means of production; the worker is part of reproducing the articulation and expansion of the organism, to stave off crises, keep themselves and the elements of capital invested with its soul. So what is this capitalist soul? Against Wakefield, Marx insists that it is not a thing, but a relation, or rather the movement of

1087Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History*, 168.
1088Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 909. My emphasis.
1089Ibid., 314.

value through many different relations:

We know that the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker.¹⁰⁹⁰

The 'capitalist soul' of the means of production has nothing to do with their material substance, it refers to the mode of organisation and expansion of the whole, which Marx can speak of as 'dominance' because the members (the workers) are irreducible to their function; exploitation, the extraction of surplus-value is the expansive moment. When Marx famously let's the fetishistic commodities 'speak through the mouth of the economists' in the English translation, he is indeed referring to the soul of the commodities (*der Warensseele*), suggesting that the economists are spiritual mediums. These mediums do not distort the message, but perpetuate the fetishism: value is the soul of commodities, enacted through their 'intercourse as commodities', i.e. through the form of their exchange. This, however, is not merely an empty form hiding the true content of the world of commodities, i.e. real labour, but an real, effective form, the value-form proper to a society of generalized exchange. Thus, in the chapter on the fetish-character of the commodity, Marx writes that when the social relations between producers do not appear directly as social relations, 'but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things', they 'appear *as what they are*'.¹⁰⁹¹ In chapter 1 of *Capital* is fetishism described is the real relation between things, which mediates and at the same time hides the relationship between producers. A *relation* hides a *relationship*. In the example of flax, in chapter 30 it is the material *sameness* of the commodity that hides the character, the soul of the productive process itself. An *apparent identity* hides a change of *production of that identity*. Where the differential relation used to be producer/land now the relation is that of labour/capital. The "same" product is the product not just of two different combinations but a moment in two different processes of reproduction. The telos of the former is the reproduction of the life of the Westphalian peasants, and perhaps of the rulers who extort them, while the telos of the second is capitalist profits. Hereby exploitation also changes from a part of the product or extra labour extorted violently from the peasants process of reproduction, whose consumption is only reproductive of domination not of the

¹⁰⁹⁰Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 933.

¹⁰⁹¹Ibid., 166.

producers, where in the second exploitation is directly a part of the reproductive process of both the worker and of capital. Likewise the capitalist merely becomes an embodiment of the soul of capital:

As a capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one sole driving force [*Lebenstrieb*, life drive], the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour. Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more; the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist.¹⁰⁹²

The soul of capital is embodied in the capitalist; the expansive drive of this soul is for valorisation. This soul is the reproductive bond, that which keeps the body from decomposing into its constituent parts. But what is value, from the perspective of the class relation? Value is the mediating soul, the soul that inhabits capital and labour, wandering through the production and circulation process. The one soul of capital (as mediation of labour and capital) is value. Labour and capital constantly reengages with one another because they, in their different ways, cannot reproduce themselves otherwise. Their relation is essential to their beings, yet contradictory. It is a unity because of mutual interdependence of the moments, and a contradiction because a power-relation, whereby one force dominates the other.

6.5. Mediations stabilise the contradictory responses to problems

Mediations stabilise the contradictory responses to the problem, keep them from becoming explosive, yet they perpetuate them at the very same time. The perpetuation of the contradictions means old mediations are continually called forth to solve the problem, but always do so insufficiently. Thus new, additional mediations are continually called for. To take two of the most general examples: the state mediates and perpetuates class struggle, class struggle makes the mediation of the state necessary. Money mediates buyer and seller, keeps at bay the market-fragmenting difficulties of

¹⁰⁹²Ibid., 342.

barter, the acts of buying and selling constantly call for the mediation of money.

6.6. On theories of real subsumption

In recent years, the concept of real subsumption has played an important role in periodising contemporary capitalism as the time in which capitalist domination and exploitation is extended to all spheres of life, to the social production of language, affects, and desires.¹⁰⁹³ These theorisations can be interpreted as attempts to come to terms with the crisis of the Symmetry Thesis, the idea that working-class autonomy would grow through its official organisations, mirroring the organisation of capital. In his book *The Micropolitics of Capital*, Jason Read argues that real subsumption today means that the production of subjectivity is not merely supplementary to capitalist production, but the centre of this production itself. In other terms, that capital is no longer subsuming singular bodies and social commons such as language to labour-time and the wage, but instead it attempts to directly appropriate singularity and the commons.¹⁰⁹⁴ In the same period, Hardt and Negri theorised the real subsumption of the whole social *bios*, particularly communicative, affective and symbolic labour. 'In the biopolitical sphere', they claim, 'life is made to work for production and production is made to work for life.'¹⁰⁹⁵ In the face of the total subsumption of living labour, Hardt and Negri discovered the total resistance of life in the *multitude*, while Jason Read somewhat more carefully noted that 'it is not possible to produce an antagonistic logic of real subsumption', to draw a clear line of antagonism.¹⁰⁹⁶ For Negri, the total subsumption of life coincides with the absolute clarity of antagonism. Today '[c]apital has conquered and enveloped the entire life-world, its hegemony is global ... there is no longer any "outside" in this context ... and ... struggle is now totally "inside"'.¹⁰⁹⁷

In either case, real subsumption is used in order to produce a periodisation of capitalism, which poses the question of the difference of today with respect to yesterday. As a concept of a definite change in the mode of organisation of capitalism, real subsumption seems to avoid the typical dangers of periodisation, particularly the imposition of a schema external to the matter, or one based on superficial experiential

1093 We can trace this tendency back to the 1960s at least, to Tronti's "social factory" thesis and Guy Debord's *Society of the spectacle*.

1094 Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, 150–51.

1095 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 32.

1096 Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, 151.

1097 Antonio Negri, "Communism: Some Thoughts on the Concept and Practice," in *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010), 156.

changes.¹⁰⁹⁸ However, while *Empire* and *The Micropolitics of Capital* were written in the early millennium, at the highpoint of capitalist triumphalism and of leftist exaltations of the productive power of capital, the recent crisis has made it clear that the existence of surplus-populations and other proletarians not subsumed by the capitalist labour process is not just a Third World relic of the past destined to be erased by the teleology of capital. The necessity of the capital-labour relation never abolishes the contingency of their encounter: in the next chapters we will see this when capital produces populations absolutely redundant to its needs, and when lumpenproletarians refuse wage-labour. Capital is dependent on this contingency in order to discipline proletarians through competition and other means measured out by the state (workfare, benefit sanctions, etc.). We will argue that the freedom of proletarians does not lie in the freedom of labour, but only in their organisation in such a way that would abolish this contingency in favour of forms of free association.

The critique of real subsumption is indispensable insofar as it theorises the conditions under which proletarians come to see the requirements of the mode of production as self-evident laws. Yet it is *insufficient* insofar as its approach to capitalism is limited to the critique of actuality. The limitation of most such critiques is that they focus on capitalism's most advanced forms of integration and organisation, its most recent and most shiny solutions to the problems of the class antagonism and reproduction. In other words, these problems are only understood in the light of its 'solutions' (by which one should not read resolutions or dissolutions), and not truly as problems.¹⁰⁹⁹ As any periodisation, the discourse on real abstractions totalises the present, actuality. It does so by theorising capital's latest, most sophisticated modes of closure. Even such theories proceed to introduce discourses of a new revolutionary subject or a “new” possibility of communism, etc., the hyperbolic yet vague optimism of these attempts make them appear like compensatory gestures.

1098For a critique of the use of the concept of real subsumption in periodisation see Endnotes, “A History of Subsumption.”

1099On mediations, contradictions and problems, see appendix 6.5.

chapter 7

7.0. Jameson and spatial exhaustion

Fredric Jameson ends his chapter on primitive accumulation in his book *Representing Capital*, with the enumeration of two alternative visions of a post-capitalist future. On the one hand a future liberating the forces of capitalism, a socialism more 'modern than capitalism and more productive'. The affirmation of such futurism and excitement, he asserts, 'is the fundamental task of any left "discursive struggle" today'.¹¹⁰⁰ On the other hand he enlists the anarchist vision of an almost pre-capitalist future, on the model of the people growing the land freely, which he describes as a 'mesmerising image of liberation' of independent farmers at the American frontier of old.¹¹⁰¹ Such an image, he insists, can only result from some sense of utter dissolution of the social order, and work on the level of the global totality.¹¹⁰²

However, Jameson's binary is perhaps a false one. For one thing it hides that between the non-capitalist reproduction at the frontier and the socialist *Aufhebung* of the centralising, modernising and socialising tendencies of capitalism lies the question of the needs of surplus-populations, that cannot be satisfied under capitalism. When Jameson asserts that it is 'difficult to imagine any further enlargement of the system', while the 'entire world is suddenly sewn into a total system from which no one can secede',¹¹⁰³ he misses how the question of capital's secession from a part of the proletariat poses the issue of their reproduction *outside* the capital-relation capital in all its immediacy, yet under conditions of capitalist domination. And if all the globe is commodified this outside is inside, and will immediately be antagonistic to capital.

¹¹⁰⁰Jameson, *Representing Capital*, 90.

¹¹⁰¹Jameson has previously argued that the inexistence of such spatial frontier is exactly what gives purchase to Fukuyama's thesis of the *End of History*. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 2009), 90–92.

¹¹⁰²Ibid., 91.

¹¹⁰³Ibid., 90–1.

7.1. End of the welfare state exception?

We might say that the debates about *precarity* mark a return to the problem that appeared to have been solved when the dream of 'full employment' seemed realistic. In other terms, far from being a product of recent capitalist restructuring the condition of *precarity* (insecure employment, the passing between un-, under- and overemployment) is capitalism's *modus operandi*. That a certain euro-centrism or belief in progress (two sides of the same coin we might say), has turned the 30 to 50 years in which this tendency was suspended for a relatively small part of the global proletarian population into the *norm*, must be noted. Indeed the majority of the most advanced 'Western Marxist' of the 20th century turn this anomaly into the norm, helped along by focus on the dominant *nexus* on the West and Japan, and a certain belief that the South would eventually catch up – *de te fabula narratur* - shared by many leaders of the liberation struggles there. This anomaly must, of course, be explained in terms of successful labour struggles, helped along by the threat from the socialist block and revolutionary movements. However, if this was a matter of conditions in which productivity increases did not impinge on capital accumulation, the question to be answered is *why they didn't*, and whether this was a regional exception.¹¹⁰⁴ In any case, the belief in a benevolent capitalist dynamic which has been shattered in the Global North, should also entail a recognition that this dynamic had its less benevolent effects and conditions elsewhere.

While the current tendencies to pauperisation and precarisation certainly have their proximate cause in the weakness of proletarian organisation, this weakness in turn must be explained by reference to broader economic tendencies which began undermining proletarian organisation at the highpoint of its militancy in the early to mid 1970s, and made possible the neoliberal offensive against organised labour in the 1980s. While we cannot account for the current debates over the character of the long-downturn since the late 1970s, we resist the political reading of the past decades, which stress the reversibility of the process and the agency of neoliberal policy makers.¹¹⁰⁵

1104Answers as to why, which are affirmative of the second question, would count: the fresh ground for accumulation after the destruction of value and labour in the Second World War, the cheap raw materials brought in from the colonies, the availability of outlets for excess commodities as new markets opened up, etc.

1105Cf. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Our reference points are here Robert Brenner, "What Is Good for Goldman Sachs Is Good for America - the Origins of the Current Crisis," April 18, 2009, David McNally, "From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown," *Historical Materialism* 17 (June

7.2. On peasant communication and organising

Marx and Engels have often been taken to carry a real grudge against the peasantry, an idea which is particularly based on the phrase the 'idiocy [*Idiotismus*] of rural life', in the *Communist Manifesto*. However, as Hal Draper remarks the idea that "idiocy" equals stupidity is based on a mistranslation. 'In the nineteenth century German still retained the original Greek meaning of forms based on the word *idiotes*: a private person, withdrawn from public (communal) concerns, *apolitical* in the original sense of isolation from the wider community'.¹¹⁰⁶ The backwardness of the peasantry has nothing to do with a rejection of rural life, but with the fact that they – in the absence of means of communication and transportation – cannot easily participate in organised social life and its struggles, except by proxy, exemplified by the long representation of the French peasantry by the Bonaparte family.

The solution Marx gives in the *18th Brumaire* to the political problem of the peasantry, is not to enlighten the peasants as to their *true* interests, but the creation of channels of communication and spaces of community formation, which which the peasantry could start to articulate its own interests. An example of a movement which successfully achieved this in the mid 19th century is the Danish Folk High School and Co-operative Movement (*Folkehøjskole- og Andelsbevægelse*), even if this was developed through the organic participation of clergy; their leading ideologist was N.S.F. Grundtvig, a liberal and nationalist priest. In the 20th century Maoists and Liberation Theologists succeeded with more revolutionary attempts.

7.3. Class formation through radical solutions

Why insist on the construction of new solutions to the problems of live? In *The German Ideology* class is not seen as a sociological category or a determinate relation to capital; rather it is a separated and isolated life, that becomes exploited by being organised by capital and which is dominated also when not exploited. Marx himself writes that to compose a class around a radical problem, a radical solution is needed, 'the abolition of

2009): 35–83. A '45 year decline in companies' profitability' is also noted in a report by the accountancy firm Deloitte *Challenging Times and Opportunities: Unemployment, Volatility, and Worker Passion in an Era of Constant Change*, Shift Index (Deloitte, 2011).

¹¹⁰⁶Draper quoted in "Notes from the Editors," *Monthly Review* 55, no. 5 (October 2003). Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 112.

private property and of labour'. However, this is not merely a matter for the class of becoming conscious of its class being, with the help of theory. Private property and labour are simply to names of the misfortune of proletarians: being separated from the former, they need to engage in the latter. Communism is not simply non-capital. Rather, it is a matter of a new mode of combination between the 'isolated individuals, who live in relationships daily reproducing this isolation', whereby they form a 'real community' in which they 'obtain their freedom in and through their association'.¹¹⁰⁷

Remember how in the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* the task is the disorganisation of a heterogeneous mass, and then to pass through combination, crystallisation, and the essentially political self-organisation of the mass against the state. In the *German Ideology*, the pivotal condition of reproduction and the 'primordial' repression of reproductive labour is added for the first time. The isolated individuals are thus to be understood as reproductive units, primarily the families.¹¹⁰⁸ The question of dis- and reorganisation is here not a matter of a subjective or political distance or withdrawal from the state, but also a problem of increasing the capacity to refuse being organised by capital, i.e. to find ways to reproduce oneself beyond capital. In revolutionary terms, the question is

...how is it possible for the proletariat, acting as a class in contradiction with capital, within the capitalist mode of production, to abolish itself as a class and thereby produce communism? [Or]... how is it possible for the proletariat to reproduce itself without reproducing itself as a class? That is: to reproduce itself without reproducing the conditions through which it both reproduces and is reproduced by capital?¹¹⁰⁹

This is not a mere matter of immiseration until the final revolutionary leap, but of what Silvia Federici calls 'self-reproducing movements'.¹¹¹⁰ The common problem is not *lived*

1107Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 1969, 63 and 66 respectively.

1108'That the abolition of individual economy is inseparable from the abolition of the family is self-evident'. Ibid., 64.

1109Nathan Brown, "The Proletariat," *Trans-Scripts* 3 (2013): 71.

1110'We conceptualize this as a movement that would not continuously surge and collapse, surge and collapse but would actually have a continuity through all its transformations. This continuity would be precisely the ability to also place the needs of people and the relationship of people at the center of the organizing. This is also what you are referring to by affectivity as a sharing of space, the sharing of reproductivity, like the preparing of food, the conversations in the nights or the sleeping together under the tents, of making a sign together, of bringing together this creativity as being an extremely important aspect of this movement. For many people it has been really a transformative experience inseparable from the specific demands...' Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and Christian Marazzi, "Debt, Affect and Self-Reproducing Movements," *Eipcp Journal* (May 25, 2012).

as common until it is constructed as such, as a problem that can be solved collectively. We can thus paraphrase Marx's classical historico-philosophical remark from *A Contribution*, bringing into a practical register:

Human beings set themselves only such tasks as they are able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.¹¹¹¹

This common problem of the proletariat is not just the existence of capital – the relation of enmity – but problem of proletarian reproduction. Thus, revolutionary practice is not defined by antagonism only, but necessarily also involves experiments with self-organised self-reproduction. Without this it is hard to imagine a movement that abolishes mutual competition and separation more generally. Without this we have only common enmity and abstract theoretical figures of revolutionary reversal. But communism is not a historically invariable possibility. On the one hand, this means that different ages make possible different forms of communism theoretically possible, and others impossible or unsustainable.¹¹¹² On the other hand, the question of revolutionary practice is not one of theoretical conditions of possibility, but rather of the practical conditions of construction.

7.4. The question of violence revisited

If proletarian withdrawal becomes too much of a problem for capital and the state, the brute violence of the police or the subtle co-optive violence of the law and money will be activated, to try to crush or put proletarians to work. However, within the bounds of the current text and a reading of Marx, we cannot analyse the question of violence and proletarian self-reproduction at any great length. What we can do is briefly outline some of the stakes in the discussion, and what seems to need consideration. First, non-violent deconstituent violence. Second, self-defence of self-reproduction, and self-reproduction as self-defence. Third, the question of order.

In her 1970 text 'Let's Spit on Hegel', Carla Lonzi insists on overcoming the antagonistic model of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, which posits a violent unification

¹¹¹¹Compare with Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," 263.

¹¹¹²Primitive communism under the capitalist mode of production is marginally possible, but unsustainable. Global communism in precapitalist times is impossible.

of the side of the slave. What Mao called the 'contradiction with in the people' is repressively subordinated to the contradiction with the enemy.

*Women now affirm that the proletariat [in the hegemonic definition of the communist parties of the period] is revolutionary vis-à-vis capitalism, but reformist vis-à-vis the patriarchal system.*¹¹¹³

Against the patriarchal difference-obliterating model of enmity, she points to the actuality of strategies of withdrawal, which break out of the military analogy of opposing armies: 'the woman who rejects the family, and the young man who rejects war'.¹¹¹⁴ The suggestion here is that proletarian struggle against the enemy must be subordinated to the construction of proletarian solutions. However, overcoming the relation with the capitalist master is obviously not achieved through only through withdrawal.

The gains of quiet encroachments and other strategies of proletarian reproduction must be defended by the state's and private security firms re-imposition of proletarian separation. Self-reproduction can become a question of self-defence, but also an offensive weapon, and as such a threat to the state. Think of the violent repression of the Black Panthers' survival programs.¹¹¹⁵ The question to the survival strategies of surplus-population could be framed: survival pending revolution or pending employment? Huey P. Newton's assessment in his doctoral dissertation is helpful in mapping out the question, but also in measuring a historical and theoretical distance, and the need to undertake different experiments under different circumstances:

While the FBI rationalized that it took these neutralizing steps against the Black Panther Party in order to curb its violent propensities, the truth is that what the bureau felt most threatening were survival programs providing free breakfasts to school children and other constructive services. No single feature of the Panthers made them so feared or disliked by the government; many organizations possessed either a revolutionary ideology, community service, or a willingness to engage in legal struggle to achieve their goals. It was the combination of all of these features, pitched to a group that had been

1113Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996), 282.

1114Ibid., 281.

1115JoNina M. Abron, "'Serving the People': The Survival Programs of the Black Panther Party," in *Black Panther Party Reconsidered: Reflections and Scholarship*, ed. Charles Earl Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 177–192.

historically and systematically excluded from full participation in democratic capitalist America, that made the Party different, and dangerously so.¹¹¹⁶

It seems clear that the traction of the Black Panther Party has to do with its ability to organise concrete solutions to the problems of the surplus-populations and lumpenproletarians in the North American ghettos: community patrolling of the police, free health clinics, liberation schools, free legal aid, etc.¹¹¹⁷

However, the Panthers were finally repressed, and what they had spoken of as the colonial occupation of their neighbourhoods was re-established by the police. Bonaparte, also, managed to unite the bourgeoisie under his rule, as the leader of the army. They united under his force, not because he could bring order as such, but because he could make sure that no radical solutions were invented which would threaten the bourgeois mode of exploiting the proletariat.¹¹¹⁸ The bourgeoisie wanted reproduction of the class relation, at any cost, even at its own submission to the *Gewalt* of the Bonapartist state:

Thus by now stigmatizing as "socialistic" what it had previously extolled as "liberal," the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule; that to restore tranquillity in the country its bourgeois parliament must, first of all, be given its quietus; that to preserve its social power intact its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion, and order only on condition that their class be condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity....¹¹¹⁹

The liberals, write Marx, will accept both ordered disorder and dictatorship to avoid losing their privilege.

1116 Huey P. Newton, *War Against The Panthers: A Study Of Repression In America* - Doctoral Dissertation (Santa Cruz, CA: UC Santa Cruz, 1980),

1117 For a list of 65 of their community programmes see "Black Panther Community Programs 1966-1982," The Black Panther Party Research Project (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 2013). What do we do today with the fact that the Panthers did not draw a clear distinction between the pedagogics of the breakfast programmes and the politics of community self-reproduction on the one hand, and the idea of revolutionary 'consciousness' on the other? For instance, Bobby Seale writes: 'A revolutionary program is one set forth by revolutionaries, by those who want to change the existing system to a better system. A reform program is set up by the existing exploitative system as an appeasing handout to fool the people and keep them quiet ... The revolutionary struggle becomes bloody when the pig power structure attacks organizations and groups of people who go forward with these programs'. Seale, *Seize the Time*, 141.

1118 Marx, "18th Brumaire," 484.

1119 *Ibid.*, 436.

after the coup d'état the French bourgeoisie cried out: Only the Chief of the Society of December 10 [Bonaparte] can still save bourgeois society! Only theft can still save property; only perjury, religion; bastardy, the family; disorder, order!¹¹²⁰

What is crucial to note here is that the relation between revolution and counter-revolution is not one between order and disorder, but between different forms of order and disorder. To establish a new mode of social organisation requires disorganisation of what the opposing side has organised, and organisation of what is disorganised on one's side. The real danger of fascism seems to occur under in crises where the revolutionary forces cannot solve the problem of organisation of what has been disorganised, but where the problem of disorganisation calls out for a solution. Thus, in Marx's reading, in the crisis of 1848-52 the father figure of Louis Bonaparte could step in to bring order with force from outside, because no social force managed to organise the contingencies of the situation.

7.5. The proletariat and the resistance to proletarianisation

As shown by Rediker and Linebaugh, the labour of primitive accumulation was carried out by proletarians. Yet, as they also stress, many proletarians ran away to to set up their own commons in the new world, or to live among Native Americans and marooned slaves. In producing capital, the working class produces the weapons and the cheap commodities, the colonists and soldiers of expropriation. This poses the difficult question of the relation between the proletariat and those that are resisting proletarianisation. It poses the the task of thinking the problem of capital not from the point of view of the problem of the proletariat, but from the point of view the problem of subsistence producers, nomads and hunters.¹¹²¹ In a similar argument to the one quoted from Jameson in chapter 7, Žižek recently said, 'this is the ABC of being a communist. You have to go to the end, through capitalist modernisation. There is no way back'.¹¹²² Clearly the choice between an impossible return to the past and a

¹¹²⁰Ibid., 484.

¹¹²¹A significant, if decreasing population of the worlds population are still peasants. To see in this decrease merely the end of the past, and not struggles against proletarianisation and for a different future, is positively genocidal. Samir Amin, "World Poverty, Pauperization, & Capital Accumulation," *Monthly Review* no. October (2003).

¹¹²²Slavoj Žižek, "Freedom in the Clouds" (presented at the Communism, A New Beginning, Cooper Union, New York: Verso, 2011), 8mins, 00sec.

wonderful modernised present and future is a false choice, even if it is understandable that contemporary tendencies to capitalist decadence makes it tempting to reaffirm modernity against the bourgeoisie. Even bracketing the ecological costs of modernisation, the question is if it is even *possible* to continue technological modernisation without colonial and neo-colonial looting and access to oil *ad libitum*. However, the point here is not to get into a discussion of modernism, or counter-modernities, but to ask simply the question of revolutionary practice: in what ways is it possible to combine potentialities for communism against capitalist dominance? This is the question Marx grappled with in his letter to Vera Zasulich.

in Russia, thanks to a unique combination of circumstances, the rural commune, still established on a nationwide scale, may gradually detach itself from its primitive features and develop directly as an element of collective production on a nationwide scale. It is precisely thanks to its contemporaneity with capitalist production that it may appropriate the latter's positive acquisitions without experiencing all its frightful misfortunes.¹¹²³

From the point of view of an orientation toward the possibility of communism, the decisive point is that the peasants of the rural commune can compose with the communist goals of the proletariat. And indeed, in terms of non-proletarian ways of life, there is an important sense in which these populations might hold some of the answer to how to live non-capitalistically, using their land in common, yet working it as singular individuals. The challenge is here to avoid inscribing the struggle between capitalism and other modes of reproduction in terms of a historically linear progression. Further, the forms of indirect capitalist exploitation, which happen through the ultimate connection of most petty market producers with the world and the increasing role of debt in the form of micro-credit in rural communities, must not be thought of as 'underdeveloped', but in their contradictory integration with the current world system. As Massimiliano Tomba writes:

Assuming ... the reciprocal co-penetration between absolute and relative surplus-value ... the distinction between "advanced" and "backward" capitalism loses a part of its significance' thus 'we must consider the possibilities of liberation resulting from different temporalities of different social forms.¹¹²⁴

¹¹²³First draft of Marx's "Letter To Vera Zasulich," 349.

¹¹²⁴Massimiliano Tomba, "Accumulation and Time: Marx's Historiography from the Grundrisse to Capital," *Capital & Class* 37, no. 3 (October 1, 2013): 367–68.

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