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AN ART HIDDEN IN THE FOREST OF THE EARTH:

LABOR BETWEEN ECONOMY AND CULTURE

by

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

for Robert Dombroski

In fertility time grew.
Pablo Neruda

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. Labor between economy and culture means labor as the univocal and common concept of the social – a concept capable of being included in the synthetic mode of praxis. In other words, labor is here seen as the substance of praxis, and it defines both the economy and culture, hopefully no longer seen as two separate and juxtaposed spheres. Rather, economy and culture (base, or structure, and superstructure, to use categories of a vulgar Marxist paradigm) are united in this synthesis and thus constitute a totality, a total social fact.

Labor can be grasped as a univocal concept only insofar as its ontological nature is understood and becomes thematic. When this happens, labor still shows its presence in production as production (what we shall sometimes refer to as mere production), but it also goes beyond it. Indeed, a new understanding of production becomes necessary, one that does not limit production to the sphere of political economy; one that does not, at the same time, distinguish between economic production and artistic production without trying first to explain what is common in them. This dissertation is an attempt to provide such a new conception: a concept of production based on an adequate understanding of the concept of labor: production without productivism, labor without capital – a production that spans the range of human activity (action) from economy to culture: a poetic praxis, a practical poiesis.

2. The present work is then a conceptualization of praxis thus understood, praxis as the expression of a labor (living labor) freed from the constraints of political economy and productivism: labor as an ontological category – a category of social and political ontology. My intention is not giving a full account of labor theories, producing a history of labor, revisiting the literature on the question of the relationship between structure and superstructure. It is not even understanding, through a reading of labor literature, whether labor itself is a disappearing reality or not (though I will deal with this question at some point). I actually start from the assumption that *there is* labor and try to grasp the *there is* of labor at the level of ontology. Indeed, that there is labor seems to be a self-evident truth, and labor itself the most common concept of all social expressions. The point is then understanding the directionality and use of this labor. It seems also clear that the use of labor is not entirely dissimilar from the use of freedom. This latter concept, too, has a self-evident reality, yet the problems with it lie in the use we make of it. And really, labor is freedom. The same way in which freedom is often turned into its opposite: captivity, slavery, and so on, labor (living labor) is determined and defined through institutional paradigms that reduce its creative power to nothing. And living labor becomes dead labor, or labor which has no other choice than choose its own 'voluntary' annihilation. Living labor becomes productive labor.

3. This is not a dissertation in the usual sense of the word, but rather an ontology of praxis and living labor, a poetic ontology, as we shall see, whose main objective is disentangling living labor from the deadly web of productive labor.

The present work is really a stand against productivity and productivism, as it seeks to formulate a conception of praxis, perhaps a *new science* of the human being, capable of confronting the crisis that, at all levels of the social, threatens to destroy humanity, annihilate reason, freedom, and hope. This crisis is brought about and constantly heightened by the aberrant way in which we look at production – not as a form of human, sensuous, creative power, not as an activity for the improvement of social welfare and the quality of everyday life, but rather as a mere means for incrementing profit with all that this entails: deepening the system of exploitation and uneven distribution of wealth, increasing the suffering of an ever greater number of people, cementing the awful institution to which recently the appropriate name of Global Apartheid has been given – the division of the world into North and South. This happens with all the indifference toward poverty, toward the often tragic heroism people have to endure for reasons of mere survival – this, in a world that could guarantee a decent life to everybody. But, let us not deceive ourselves (or be deceived), a change will not occur if this indifference (an expression of that social idiocy I will speak about below) is not destroyed, replaced by a concept of difference as care, dignity, and freedom. And the material conditions for this movement lie in the destruction of the culture of productivity and productivism, in the passing away of the capitalist mode of production as a whole; for between capital and the difference we are describing there is an absolute contradiction, an irreducible antagonism.[1]

[1] For the concept of antagonism, and irreducible antagonism, see in the bibliography the works by Antonio Negri (*passim*).

4. The idea of writing a discourse on labor began for me when, in the fall of 1996, I took a graduate seminar on Marx with Stanley Aronowitz. I had read Marx on my own before that time; the *Communist Manifesto* was one of the first important books I had read as a teenager and, soon after that, I had read the *Manuscripts* (without understanding much) and tried to read volume one of *Capital*. Then, in the next years, especially those of my activity as a cultural worker and poet, with the Union of Left Writers in San Francisco, I read, at various times, the most important works by Marx and Engels, and I wrote about labor using the medium of poetry. But I had never written anything on Marx before the fall of 1996. For that seminar, I wrote a paper on the *Grundrisse*, which constitutes the bulk of chapter 3 of this dissertation. It was then that I started working on the difference between living labor and productive labor, trying to understand whether solving the ambiguity in the relationship between these concepts would not open new ground and liberate living labor from the tyranny of all productivist logic. In this sense, the distinction I constantly call attention to between living labor and productive labor constitutes the main theme of this dissertation. I asked this question again in a paper I delivered at the 4th International Conference of Rethinking Marxism, at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. This paper is also included in chapter 3. But it was only as I was working on chapter 4 that a possible solution to the question became apparent; and the solution is that productive labor is the institutional form of living labor under the specificity of capitalist production.

5. However, more important than the solution, which may be more or less correct and convincing, or perhaps not correct or convincing at all, is the question itself. In order to formulate the question, I had to postulate, at the ontological level, the neutrality of living labor with respect to productive and unproductive labor alike. I did this by forging over the years, with the philosophy of John Duns Scotus as a background model, the concept of *neither-productive-nor-unproductive* labor, i.e., labor before its division into what is and what is not productive, even before its division into useful and abstract labor. I took this neutral living labor to be to social ontology what Duns Scotus's concept of being is to pure ontology – a transcendental, but also the most common, simple, and univocal concept. Each mode of production, which institutionalizes labor in this or that way, would correspond to Duns Scotus's concept of *thisness* (*haecceitas*) thus constituting the concrete occurrence, the contraction, of the neutral concept in the specificity and singularity of a *this*. I thought this was also helpful in reading Marx's powerful concept of *essential difference* as presented in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*.

Let me also mention here that the neutral concept of labor (neither-productive-nor-unproductive labor) is not an abstraction, but an ontological reality; it is *creative labor*, which is always present in production, regardless of the *mode* of production. This labor is the same as time. However, a mode of production, understood as something much broader than political economy could ever consider – a "general illumination", in Marx's expression – is capable of reducing this creativity to nothing, as it happens with the capitalist mode of production.

Then, following Marx's *critique* of political economy, our task is to stress that capital is a transitory concept and reality, but labor is not. Creative labor is then also the free labor (and free time) of the future.

6. But the neutrality of the concept of labor also owes its conceptualization to another metaphysical (as well as political and historical) configuration, which I call the *logic of neither/nor*. This logic, which is here applied to labor, can also be applied to many other realities and concepts. Basically, what it does is maintain open a space and time for resistance and rebellion – space and time of refusal and suspension of all institutional forms, of the merely given. This is a logic that opposes the superficial, silly configuration of the both/and logic; again, it is a logic that, in the face of the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of accepting the demands of an either/or, goes back into itself, back into the dark center of a double negation in search of the *arche* of a willed destiny of freedom. It is, in other words, the only way in which modernity can recuperate the healthy sense of an alternative, regain the ground of choice and creativity. Here, the logic of neither/nor, indispensable for the conceptualization of labor as neither-productive-nor-unproductive, provides the subjective conditions for a return of labor to itself. When labor is not institutionally doubly negated, but rather subjectively and deliberately (voluntarily) so, then it is able to look at the categories of its captivity as the fugitive looks at the chains he is leaving behind. There is in this willed double negation, or neither/nor attitude, the supreme affirmation of a heroic passage. It is the passage from necessity to freedom, from the opacity of nature to

the splendor of a rational praxis (a poetic praxis). But it is a passage that must be conceived and worked out in the solitude of the earth's forest.

7. I have already mentioned one of the two major figures that have influenced this work, namely John Duns Scotus. The univocal concept of being, which constitutes the kernel of his metaphysics, a pure ontology, becomes living labor in the construction of our social ontology. The neutrality and diffusion of being are the neutrality and diffusion of labor. The concept of *thisness* is also used as the historical contraction of what otherwise remains transhistorical. However, this transhistoricality must be understood not as a realm outside history, but rather as history itself, as what in history sustains and makes possible the coming to be and passing away of stages, ages, eras, and modes. But Duns Scotus's influence on my work does not end here, for I also borrow three other fundamental concepts from him: contingency, possibility, and the rational will. The concepts of contingency and the rational will find special application in chapter 5, where a similarity between Duns Scotus's and Gramsci's conceptions of the will is pointed out. The concept of possibility is employed at various stages of this work, but it becomes thematic in section 9 of chapter 4 on Bookchin and the reality of utopia. This concept, which proceeds directly from the concept of contingency as well as from the rejection of what-is, of the merely given, and thus from the affirmation of the logic of neither/nor, opens the realm of the *could*, what-could-be, which would otherwise remain closed to both speculation and praxis. This modality of the *could*, also used to counter the onto-theological *ought* in the

section on Lukács, is of course essentially related to both contingency and the rational, or concrete, will. It relates to the concept of contingency insofar as this latter displaces the merely given –a displacement which occurs at the ontological level of its formation—leaving to causality nothing but the task of working out the details of an ontic residue. In this sense, what might otherwise be constructed as a metaphysical category (i.e., necessary, eternal, immutable) is revealed in the light of a contingently caused *this*, caused in the freedom of the *could*. Within this structure of freedom and contingency, which has the configuration of an open disjunction (or...or...or...or...), there remain the ever-germinating seeds of an alternative, of a plurality of alternatives, of radical change, subversion, and actual freedom. Duns Scotus gives a concrete image of this when, adapting a figure from Avicenna, he says: "...those who deny that some being is contingent should be exposed to torments until they concede that it is possible for them not to be tormented" (1987, 9). He also says that "something can be changed, for something is possible ('possible' being defined as contrary to 'necessary')" (44).

8. The other major influence on the formation of the philosophical framework I am using is Giambattista Vico. More than specific concepts, however, it is a general philosophical outlook, a tendency, that I borrow from him. At this point, I should say that even the expression *the forest of the earth*, part of the title of this work, comes from Vico, as a way of acknowledging the importance of his thought in the development and framing of my work. Vico is one of those audacious thinkers who shun the dull formality of the merely rational (often an unreasonable

rational), notwithstanding the security one would find in it, and welcome the work of the imagination and poetic thinking. It is precisely the sense of his poetic metaphysics that pervades my work. With Vico, before Marx, *poiesis* and *praxis* are identified. This means that poetic metaphysics is also practical metaphysics, and this synthetic modality is essentially related to the concepts of doing (praxis) and making (poiesis) – the basis of all social ontology. In fact, Vico's identification of the *verum* with the *factum* is much more than a simple argument against Cartesian epistemology: it is a new ontology of the social being, the making of *this world of nations*. The concepts of possibility and change are here also present, perhaps often only implied, for the world we make we can also subvert and transform. It is in the attempt to formulate this new ontology of social being, this *new science* of human sensuous activity –a science of the everyday life—that the work of Vico becomes fundamental. In fact, I say 'science', but this word must be understood in Vico's sense: a knowledge which comes from the imagination and the body, which is grounded in poetry, and led by *inventio*. Thus, this is not science in the usual sense of the word. Rather, it must be understood as the very concept of the sensuous that, as we shall see, both Nietzsche and Marx emphasize.

9. *Division of the work*. This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I (chapters 2 and 3) deals with works by Marx and is called "Aspects of the Critique of Political Economy." Part II (chapters 4-6) is called "Toward an Ontology of Liberation." It deals with problems and dangers in radical ontology as well as the

alternatives it may offer. As I have noted, but it is here worth repeating, the main subject of the dissertation is, on one level, clarifying the distinction between productive labor and living labor. However, once this distinction becomes clear, the dissertation focuses on the alternatives presented by living labor itself. These two levels, analytic and synthetic, destructive and constructive, do however keep their interplay to the end of the work.

I have already touched on the content of some of the chapters, but it may also be advisable to give a summary of the work by going more systematically through each chapter.

Chapter 2 is a close reading of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. This reading does not rely on the vast literature on this work (Marcuse's reading of the *Manuscripts*, for instance, is not discussed here but in chapter 4); rather, it is an attempt to grasp the substance of Marx's arguments on their own terms as well as on the basis of the philosophy which constitutes the framing of my work and which I have outlined above. In this chapter, I look at the distinction between the proletariat and the worker – a distinction not always to be found in Marx, but present in the *Manuscripts* and important for me especially when I come to discuss Bookchin's concept of 'workerness' (chapter 4). Here I also introduce the logic of neither/nor, which I will use throughout my work. The other main concepts I discuss here are genuine communism, philosophy, totality, and,

above all, the importance of the senses. It is here that Marx attributes to the senses the task of theorizing praxis itself.

In chapter 3, I focus on aspects of the *Grundrisse*. Here, too, there is a close reading of the text, of selected passages, to be sure. This chapter, the first I wrote, lays the ground for all the others, for it is here that my guiding question as to the difference between living labor and productive (or unproductive) labor is first formulated. Of course, philosophically speaking, one can very well understand it as the difference between genus and species, for, as we shall see, the truth of the matter is that if all productive labor is living labor, not all living labor is productive labor – and this not at all simply because living labor can also be unproductive. In fact, the forms of productive and unproductive labor are both categories of capital and political economy. However, living labor is, in itself, neither-productive-nor-unproductive, and it often manifests itself as such. Yet, the effects of the real subsumption of all labor under capital are such that all our apprehension of logical and ontological categories is distorted by them. Thus, we let it pass that living labor must be either productive or unproductive, and by doing so we commit not only a logical and ontological mistake, but we also enter the zone of a great political danger, namely that of falling into the trap set up precisely by capital and political economy. We start thinking that there is nothing outside this model of subsumption; yet, this is not Parmenides's nothing, and I hope we will be able to understand why. In full positivity, capital builds the solidity of its own being, a being of dead labor, a dead plenitude; *it denies*

nothing. Yet, the point is to show that this nothing is something after all: a living labor that returns to itself, withdraws into itself only to shape, in its hidden forest, the necessary instruments for its liberation.

Chapter 4 is really the central chapter of the dissertation; it is included in Part II, but it has in reality the character of a transitional chapter. Here I deal with what it means to radicalize the ontology of labor and, though the question of the critique of political economy remains present, a passage is made toward the thematic formulation of an ontology of liberation (or perhaps many ontologies). Here, questions of philosophy, history, and anthropology are examined with the intention of clearing the way for a discourse on, and practice of, labor really able to leave political economy behind. Whether the attempt is successful I do not know. After looking critically at aspects of the work of some philosophers and social theorists (Postone, Marcuse, Lukács, and Baudrillard), I find in the work of Michel Foucault a possible solution to my guiding question, and the solution is that productive labor is living labor institutionalized. As I have noted, this solution may seem too simple, perhaps even simplistic; or it may even be something everybody already knew. Indeed, I do not want to present this as some sort of discovery. Yet, I think that the guiding question I pose is serious enough to demand a clear formulation. Nor do I really think that the suggested solution is a platitude. Of course, problems remain, for institutions are not only capitalist in character. Yet, it is here, precisely, that a fair understanding of the relationship between structure and superstructure becomes helpful – here, where one sees

clearly that they are not moments or spheres to be separated and then again conjoined by mere juxtaposition. To the contrary, they constitute an organic unity, and perhaps it becomes superfluous at this point to distinguish between them. Thus, when labor is institutionalized under capital, that is, according to the specificity of capitalist production, it is –one could argue—institutionally institutionalized. What regulates and over-regulates labor is what regulates and over-regulates life, all social being; it is no longer an economic question, nor of course merely a moral or political question: the culture of labor begins. It is this form of labor that one wishes to abolish, not labor in general. The last section of this chapter, on Bookchin and the reality of utopia, seeks to draw important consequences from these premises.

In chapter 5, the question of understanding the relationship between base and superstructure is considered again. With Gramsci, the superstructure is the rational will. The unity of the economy and culture, not their juxtaposition, is affirmed. Starting from a critique of productivism, this chapter tries to explore the possibilities left to a labor which has withdrawn into its neutrality. In other words, once labor is shown as neither-productive-nor-unproductive, the question arises as to what this actual form could be, what contraction into what *this*, what *essential difference*, what mode could replace that of capitalist production and its obsession with productivity. And the answer, already offered by Marx, is that this labor is *creative*. Creative labor makes a different, organic totality, the secular and earthly plenitude which Gramsci calls 'absolute historicism'. But I need to point out that,

more than a study on Gramsci, this chapter is an appropriation of Gramsci, of some of his main themes. It is important because it gives us the possibility, not of writing a defense of Marxism, but rather of gathering from the concept of praxis, from the philosophy of praxis, a renewed sense of reason, history, and totality. If it is true that "reason also is choice" (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, 108), the choice of reason must lead toward the overcoming of false and dangerous ideological assumptions. The point is not defending any given doctrine; the point is rather understanding what any future philosophy might be – a philosophy which is not a vain repetition of old themes, nor one that searches the new for the mere sake of novelty, but one in which what is valuable in the old and the new constitutes the synthetic ground of a true alternative. It is in this sense that we have to understand Gramsci's claim to the autonomy, independence, and totality of the philosophy of praxis. This totality is certainly not the imposition of a Marxist skeleton on the joys and sorrows of everyday life.

In chapter 6, I deal with creative labor at last. I look critically at the way in which Heidegger handles the question of production; in particular, I criticize his distinction between mere production and artistic production, between production and fine art. The esthetic dimension of labor, which takes into consideration Nietzsche's and Marx's emphasis on the sensuous, can only be appreciated by giving esthetics a fundamental, ontological task, not the task of complementing the rest of human activities. This is what Lewis Mumford does. To be sure, Heidegger recognizes the fundamental, ontological character of art and creation.

The problem with his view is that he sees that as divorced from everyday life; the category of creativeness will never reach into the commonality of all making and doing. This is so because he does not consider at all the division of labor, which however remains hidden within his discourse. Mumford, on the other hand, is able to challenge this division and understand the potentially creative character of all human activity. It is this view that I find germane to my own. Indeed, Mumford underlines the importance of regaining the missing link between art and technics, the human person. His alternative goes in the direction of a renewed humanism – another abused concept, yet one of which we are absolutely in need.

10. In writing this dissertation, my intention was not that of producing a comprehensive work on the discourse on labor. If that had been the case, I should have taken into consideration a much wider literature than I actually have. There are many authors whom I have simply left out of the scope of my work, and this not at all because their contribution to the discourse on labor is insignificant. Rather, the reason for this lies in the fact that taking all the literature on labor into consideration would have multiplied the interpretations complicating my work to a point that it would have become unmanageable; it would have taken away the flexibility I needed to trace my own discourse; it would have required a completely different conception of my work. In any case, I would have dealt with the same questions and probably come close to the same answers. Nonetheless, it would be good to mention at least one of the authors who could, perhaps should, have been included. I mean to mention André Gorz, who, in *Farewell to the*

Working Class (1982) for instance, deals with questions relevant to my own discourse. There are moments in which Gorz's analysis and interpretation come very close to Bookchin's critique of workerness as well as to his concept of an un-class (non-class). I now mention Gorz because he is one of those authors who speak about the abolition of work, and at this point I want to clarify the source of a possible ambiguity in my own work in this respect. In fact, when I say that capital, not labor, must be abolished, I am not obviously in disagreement with those authors who, like Gorz, speak of the necessity of abolishing wage labor, for wage labor is productive labor, labor *for* and *of* capital: it is already capital. Rather, I disagree with those theorists, such as Baudrillard (chapter 4, *infra*), who speak of the abolition of labor *tout court*, of the concept of labor, who attack not capital, but labor itself. It is important to stress this here because the controversial question of the abolition of labor (or work) is another of those questions resting on a fundamental ambiguity. This dissertation also tries to disambiguate that. Thus, abolished must be the whole paradigm of productive and unproductive labor, the capitalist paradigm of the institutional forms of labor. However, beyond those forms, we have to be able to think the ontological character of labor and see whether it is possible to build a practical/poetic ontology in which labor, far from being abolished, but rather completely transfigured, becomes the motor and substance of a renewed conception of life.

Chapter 2 - Problems of the Relationship between Philosophy and Political Economy: Karl Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*

Already in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)*, Marx distinguishes between ontology and political economy. The concept of labor undergoes a critique insofar as it is understood as a category of political economy, and this critique is worked out from the point of view of ontology. Whether a category of ontology or of political economy, labor is time. Thus it is with the concept of time that we have to deal. Yet, if all labor is time, the opposite does not hold true; that is, all time is not labor. Furthermore, as far as political economy is concerned, the time which is not labor (at least, not *economic, productive labor*) is not worth dwelling upon. For political economy, the essence of the worker lies in his or her labor time; the rest of the time is not of its concern. Thus political economy defines the *proletarian* as a *worker*, and only looks at him in that respect. Herein lies the origin of estrangement and alienation, the proletarian's loss of his humanity.

2.1 The time of the proletarian

Marx says: "It goes without saying that political economy regards the *proletarian*, i.e. he who lives without capital and ground rent from labour alone, and from one-sided, abstract labour at that, as nothing more than a *worker*. It can therefore advance the thesis that, like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work. *It does not consider him, during the time when he is not working, as a human being.* It leaves

this to criminal law, doctors, religion, statistical tables, politics and the beadle" (Marx, 1975, 288; last emphasis added).

There are different moments to highlight in this important passage, to which I will often refer. First of all, we find here a definition of the *proletarian as a worker* which defies any productivist logic, and thus any attempt to reduce Marx's theory of revolution to a past theory able to relate only to a given phase of the capitalist mode of production, that is, the phase in which the proletarian can be clearly identified with the factory worker. Here Marx defines the proletarian as "he who lives without capital and ground rent from labour alone." This category is much broader than that of the industrial worker. This labor is, Marx stresses, "one-sided and abstract". Today, the one-sided and abstract dimension of labor has become even more dominant than in the mid-19th century, and the proletarian, far from disappearing, shows his presence everywhere. Political economy's narrow understanding of labor allows the transformation of whoever has no capital or ground rent into a worker or a potential worker. This is also the origin of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. And in fact, for political economy, whether labor is productive or unproductive depends only on the need capital has for it. The only labor that counts is, of course, productive labor. Unproductive labor can also be performed by the proletarian, but this is a proletarian who does not succeed in becoming a worker. As Marx says, "In political economy *labour* appears only in the form of *wage-earning activity*" (289). This means, in the form of money; but of a specific form of its appearance: money which is immediately capital. And this again means, money as the form of appearance

of exchange value.

The second moment of the above-quoted passage has to do with the reproduction of the worker's labor-power: "It [i.e., political economy] can therefore advance the thesis that, like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work." Thus, as far as capital and its science (political economy) are concerned, the time of the proletarian is only his labor time, that is, the actual time at the point of production plus the time for the reproduction of his labor-power. The distinction between structure (or base) and superstructure can also be detected here. Labor time is structural time. The time which remains is superstructural time. This is "the time when [the worker] is not working". This time, political economy leaves to criminal law, doctors, religion, etc. This is the time of everyday life, the time in which he or she who has no capital or ground rent (i.e., the proletarian) is not engaged in any productive or reproductive activity. Supposedly, it is *free* time; however, things are not so simple, for this freedom is now subjected to the superstructural sphere: the organization of the state as an instrument of capital. It is an empty time, during which anything can happen, and therefore it must be highly controlled and regulated. The time in which the worker does not work, but is again a "human being", is also the time in which the negation of the organic dimension of labor as free and creative activity becomes apparent. It is the time of either reflection or transgression. In either case, the tiredness and the sense of estrangement show forth. For the worker to go back now to the organicity of labor, that is, a labor which is not a wage-earning activity, means to cross back the territory of the totality of capital, i.e., capital in its structural

and superstructural forms, the factory and the state, the economy and culture. It seems to me that to this *beyond* are closer those who are less impeded by the totality of capital, that is, by the ensemble of its base and ideology (or culture). Even though in the time of total subsumption everybody, whether employed or not employed, productive or unproductive, is affected by the rules of capital, yet there remains (there must remain) a space for rebellion and revolt.

This space cannot be found at the point of production, but rather "during the time when [the worker] is not working" or even when the proletarian is not successful in becoming a worker. In fact, the economic form of labor reproduces itself *ad infinitum* and is unable, by simply remaining what it is, to spur a project of freedom. Marx says: "Labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a *commodity* and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general" (324). There could be no clearer statement against the logic of productivism. Indeed, in Marx we find a critique, not an upholding, of this logic. Here it becomes clear that it is not the economic power of production that will change things, but a subtraction from that power –in itself a power. The origin of alienation lies precisely in this form of labor: economic, estranged (or external) labor. The return of labor to itself, to its organic and creative nature, the return from political economy to ontology, can only be accomplished by and through the ruin of the system of estrangement and alienation. For this ruin to obtain, capitalist production, economic production must end. This is the production of labor as its double, its negation, and as an alien power. It produces for the worker a "*loss of reality*" (*ibid.*). It is only by

subtracting themselves from this logic that workers will be able to effect a change, and that means, by stopping being workers. Through the power of subtraction, the workers lose the loss itself and may, at the same time, recuperate the sense of reality. We saw in fact that the production of commodities is also the production of labor and of the workers as a commodity. Marx adds that "the more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the domination of his product, of capital" (*ibid.*). The truth of domination is then production itself. Domination cannot cease unless production also ceases.

2.2 The logic of neither/nor and the means of life

This domination presents two fundamental moments and articulates itself according to them. They are both moments of negation, whose result is a double negation; the same double negation which, in *Capital*, Marx identifies as the "double freedom" of the workers. This double negation can be understood as a logic of *neither/nor*, which essentially defines the condition of workers under capitalism, as well as of any other marginal group. Marx says: "The more the worker *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, through his labour, the more he deprives himself of the *means of life* in two respects: firstly, the sensuous external world becomes less and less an object belonging to his labour, a *means of life* of his labour; and secondly, it becomes less and less a *means of life* in the immediate sense, a means for the physical subsistence of the worker" (325). A paradoxical situation, or rather a trap: "The culmination of this slavery is that it is only as a *worker* that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject*

and only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker" (*ibid.*). Under the subsumption of all labor under capital, it becomes more and more difficult for the proletarian (i.e., he or she who has neither capital nor ground rent) to make a living. Work becomes a necessity –and a necessity posited by capital. This double condition of negation is seen in the first volume of *Capital* as the "process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers" (1977, 874). Workers are then free "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" (*ibid.*). In order to find a *means of life*, they have to become workers; but they can become workers only because they can dispose of labor as a *means of life*.

The twofold meaning of the expression "means of life" is related to the two senses of the concept of labor: organic (or creative) and estranged (or external) labor. The latter is forced labor, labor as a wage-earning activity, and productive labor. The former is not unproductive labor, or better unproductive labor is not the opposite of productive labor; rather, this labor that we call *organic* is labor in its totality as against the totality of capital;[1] it is labor which returns to itself, a labor that we also call

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[1] I draw the concept of *organic* labor from Marx's definition of nature as "man's *inorganic body*" (1975, 328). Marx says: "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" (*ibid.*). It is this dialogue that I call *organic*. And he continues: "To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature" (*ibid.*). Even though I cannot develop this argument here, I would like to note the importance that this passage has from an

neither-productive-nor-unproductive. It is not merely opposed to external labor; it is, rather, in a Spinozian way, different from it.

Labor is a *means* whether we consider it as a category of ontology or of political economy. It is a means because it is a mediation; it is a dialogue between one part of nature (man) and nature itself (man's inorganic body). However, this mediation can have a universal character or not. When it has a universal character, man appears, says Marx, as a *species-being*, that is, "a being which treats the species as its own essential being" (1975, 329). Differently from the animals, which "produce only for their own immediate needs or those of their young; [and thus] one-sidedly, ... man produces universally" (*ibid.*). This universality has the form of freedom, for "man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need" (*ibid.*). Moreover, "man is capable of producing according to the standards of every species ...; ... [and] in accordance with the laws of beauty" (*ibid.*). No doubt there is anthropocentrism in this concept of universality, yet there is also a lot of truth in it. Or rather, the truth is that the concept of anthropocentrism is in itself a very limited and overdetermined concept; that, in other words, the ability and power of human beings is not to be considered according to the concept of its centrality, but, to use a Nietzschean concept, of its perspectival position in the order of things.[2] For Marx, it is in the nature of man to treat the species "as its own essential being or itself as a species-being" (*ibid.*). It is also in his nature to produce *in freedom from* physical

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environmentalist point of view.

[2]"Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live" (Nietzsche, 1968, #493).

needs and thus reproduce, as culture, the whole of nature (*ibid.*). This is, in fact, the origin of culture. Of course, Marx's argument is *essentialist* and linked to the philosophy of the Enlightenment. However, in the passage we are reading it is hard to find a justification of the domination of man over nature; rather, we find an indictment of it, and this precisely when the universal character of the concept of labor is lost, being transformed into a merely particular, or particularistic, and individual means of life. Again, the universal character of labor is such that, through it, man appears as a creator: "nature appears as *his* work and his reality" (*ibid.*). Estranged labor, on the other hand, takes nature away and transforms its product into an alien power. Estranged labor "reduces spontaneous and free activity to a means, [and] it makes man's species-life a means of his physical existence" (*ibid.*).

When it is considered in its universality, labor is a univocal concept. The concept of labor, in its universality, has in Marx a function similar to that which, in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus, pertains to the univocal concept of being, that is, to the most common concept. In fact, labor is being; its mediating activity has the form of the synthetic moment which in Scotus' ontological syllogism unites two otherwise unrelated extremes.[3]

It is in this sense that we can call this labor *organic*, for it mediates between and unites, *instrumentally*, what otherwise would be left in the separateness of its immediacy. Yet, true immediacy belongs, precisely, to labor itself, to its ontological power of affirmation. Without this power, immediacy would be a scattered inorganic

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[3]Cf. John Duns Scotus (1987, 20).

presence, and it would never become *life* and a *world*. Thus the instrumentality of organic labor has nothing to do with the external concept of instrumentality, typical of estranged labor and geared toward the domination of nature. The immediacy of labor is not the immediacy of the human will, for the human will, with its rational and reflective determinations, distinguishes itself from this immediacy: "The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It is not distinct from that activity; it *is* that activity. Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges" (Marx, 1975, 328).[4] Thus labor is labor, and instrumentality is one of its fundamental aspects. Then, it depends on the conscious effort of the human will to direct this instrumentality toward its fundamental and original organicity, or to let it open to external forms of estrangement and alienation.

2.3 Labor as nothing

Even in its estranged form, however, labor does not lose its fundamental creative power, but this creation has now the character of narrow economic production, that is, production for the sake of profit. This means that ontology still precedes and grounds political economy, or that political economy is an episode in the history of the

[4] I will go back to the rational will in the section on Gramsci.

social, practical ontology of labor. The class struggle itself, which, as is made clear at the outset of the *Manifesto*, well precedes the capitalist mode of production, takes on, under capital, a particular and extreme configuration, for the antagonism between labor and capital becomes irreducible. This irreducibility is the direct consequence of the estrangement and alienation to which capital reduces the natural and organic *appropriation* of the fruit of labor. Private property is the form and substance of this reduction: "*Private property* is therefore the product, result and necessary consequence of *alienated labour*, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself" (Marx, 1975, 331-332). What the workers lose in the labor process is not merely an economic advantage. As Marx says, they lose reality itself. And to lose reality means to lose ontological status and grounding. These are the accomplishments of political economy. Yet what labor produces is not without ontological qualities, for labor, however estranged, remains a fundamental creative power. This is why Marx asks the question: "If the product of labour is alien to me and confronts me as an alien power, to whom does it belong?" (1975, 330).

Labor and the product of labor belong, says Marx, to "*man* himself", but this *man* is an "*alien* being" for the worker who, during the whole process of production, has lost his humanity. If the alien being is *man*, the worker is its negation, *non-man*. Labor and the product of labor belong to "*a man other than the worker*" (*ibid.*). The word "other" here establishes an otherness brought to the point of irreducible antagonism. Other than the worker is man himself, for the worker has lost his humanity, or he has transferred it, directly with his labor, to this *other*. It is precisely

by and through the appropriation under a regime of estrangement and alienation that this *other*, this *alien* being, acquires the ontological status of *being-man* as such. The ontological power is labor itself; those who can appropriate this labor and the product of this labor enjoy the status of being; those who cannot do that, fall into the status of non-being. When capital is everything, labor is nothing. At this level, which is ontological and not merely economic, the class struggle becomes a struggle between life and death, between being and nothing. The negation of the humanity of the worker is inherent in the concept of the worker himself. To re-appropriate his humanity, the worker has to stop being a worker; work, production, has to stop. The concept of a direct producer is what Marx envisages as the overcoming of the concept of the worker. The direct producer re-appropriates the full ontology of organic labor. He or she is a creator, and not at all a producer in the narrow economic sense. His *property* is *organic*, and not "private". Organic property is not sanctioned by the laws of the State; it is, in fact, not sanctioned at all. Rather, organic property is nothing but the truth which is made manifest in the working together of nature and of that part of nature which the human being itself is. It is not at all the form of "man" upon nature. Rather, it is the form to which nature itself agrees, and which the human being, who is a part of nature, shapes and upholds.

This continuous shaping up of the form of organic property is the "*practical*, human-sensuous activity" called for by Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach (421-422). In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx shows that private property is not the cause, but the consequence, of alienated labor (332). Indeed, labor is *activity*,

whereas private property is a *situation*, a state. What we find here is the dialectic between living and dead labor, of which more will be said later.[5] Marx says that what from the point of view of the worker, of living labor, is activity, is, from the point of view of the non-worker, of dead labor, a situation. Both activity and situation are estranged and alienated. Furthermore, what is real and practical for the worker, is theoretical for the non-worker (334). Private property is a *theoretical situation*, that is, a formal, external and legal state. From the point of view of the worker it is simply the alienation of that real, practical and sensuous activity which, left to its immediacy, would constitute organic property. In reality, property itself is the product of labor; its private or organic character depends solely on whether this labor is alienated or itself organic.

2.4 Labor as the essence of man

The ontological nature of the antagonism between labor and capital is further developed by Marx in the second manuscript. He says: "The worker is the subjective manifestation of the fact that capital is man completely lost to himself, just as capital is the objective manifestation of the fact that labour is man lost to himself" (334-335). At first sight, man appears as the middle term and the univocal concept common to the two extremes: capital and labor. In reality, the common concept is labor itself, for it is the only concept which is included in all three terms: labor, capital and man. Furthermore, as we have seen, the fact that man is completely lost to himself is a

[5]See the section on the *Grundrisse* below.

consequence of the alienated nature of labor, and it is also the origin of private property. Finally, we also have to keep in mind that "man" is nothing but labor, if labor is understood ontologically, and not economically, as human sensuous activity. Thus, the concept of labor is to practical ontology what the concept of being is to pure ontology: the most common and univocal concept. Even in the dead world of capital, we find nothing but labor, albeit labor in its estranged form. In the above quotation, Marx distinguishes between the subjective and the objective manifestations of this loss of humanity, of this estrangement. But of course here subjective does not mean relative to a particular point of view, for the point of view of the worker is universal. Subjective does not mean non-objective, for man *is* an objective being, and, in reality, a "non-objective being is a *non-being*" (390). We have seen that capital reduces the worker to a non-being; however, this is not why the worker and labor have the character of subjectivity. Instead, "subjective" and "objective" are here used by Marx in a different sense. "Subjective" means "living"; "objective" means "dead". The former is an activity; the latter a situation, as we have seen.[6] Thus, living labor does not lose the character of the objective being, defined later, in the section on Hegel, as "a natural being and as a living natural being" (389) that is active and suffering at the same time. What I am saying is that living labor, understood ontologically and thus, fundamentally, as organic labor, is not simply one aspect of a compound nature, or else human beings would be, at one and the same time, and

[6]The subjective has, in this case, preeminence over the objective. In the third manuscript Marx says: "The *subjective essence* of private property, *private property* as activity for itself, as *subject*, as *person*, is *labour*" (341).

necessarily so, both labor and the negation of labor, i.e. capital. But this cannot be the case. Rather, in its non-estranged form labor is the essence of man in its totality, and this is an action and a passion.[7] But of course this is not the concept of labor understood by political economy.

Political economy obscures the real nature of the ontology of labor by making *appear* the alien character of the relationship between labor and capital "as something *real*" (335). The power of creation no longer resides in labor *as* labor, that is, in its immediate and universal form, but only in labor as subsumed under capital, in productive labor: "The worker produces capital and capital produces him, which means that he produces himself" (335). But the worker is not all labor: "Political economy ... does not recognize the unoccupied worker, the working man insofar as he is outside this work relationship" (*ibid.*). The totality of actions and passions, of drives and limitations, which we will consider more closely below, is reduced by political economy to a single dimension: "...as far as political economy is concerned, the requirements of the worker can be narrowed down to one: *the need to support him while he is working* and prevent the *race of workers* from dying out" (335). The distinction between the worker and the working man, the unoccupied worker, is fundamental here. It is the same as the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, that is, both terms of the distinction fall within the categories of political economy. In fact, the unoccupied worker, who –though unemployed– usually performs some kind of labor anyhow, receives his/her identity through and by those

[7] I will return to this point below.

categories. The working person, that is, the proletarian who is not a worker, does not, by virtue of that fact alone, perform organic labor. He or she is still within the "general illumination" of capital and of estranged labor. The categories of 'worker' and 'jobless working person' are two determinations of the same reality; they belong to the same logic, just as productive and unproductive labor do. The totality of organic labor, which is in itself neither-productive-nor-unproductive, but something *different*, has nothing to do with having or not having a job. For Marx, this totality is *genuine*, that is, not "crude", *communism*. In communism, the ontology of labor regains its unhindered powers.

2.5 Genuine communism

In the third manuscript, Marx gives a definition of communism, of genuine communism. As it is well known, this is a rare fact in Marx's writing, but it is important to dwell on it also because it tells us that speaking about what communism is, is no mere exercise in "futurology", but a sense of ontological clarity.[8] First of all, Marx calls communism a *positive supersession* and a *restoration*. He says: "*Communism* is the *positive* supersession of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and hence the true *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a *social*, i.e. human, being..." (348). Both labor and property are seen in their organic character. Property

[8]I will go back to this in the section on the *what-is* and *what-could-be*, *The Reality of Utopia*.

is nothing but the consequence of appropriation, the direct result of labor. The *positive* character of this supersession is in line with the concept of ontological affirmations of which Marx speaks later in the text (375) and with his critique of Hegel's dialectic at the end of the *Manuscripts*. One of the most important moments of this critique has to do precisely with Hegel's concept of negation (the negation of the negation), which Hegel presents as the absolute positive and to which Marx counterposes Feuerbach's concept of *the positive in itself* (381). Thus, supersession and restoration have the positive character of affirmation, and this affirmation is the sensuous, practical activity of the natural, objective being which man himself is. It is obvious that what brings about communism so conceived cannot be a change in the economic sphere. Of course, the sphere is rather that of politics. But the question remains: politics of what sort? It is the politics based on the antagonism which, as we have seen, has itself ontological foundations. It is therefore in the sphere of political, practical, ontology that this change takes place. In its organic character, that is, in its non-estranged form and in its agreement with nature, human sensuous activity defines not only political and social ontology, but ontology *tout court*. This is the meaning of Marx's definition of genuine communism as the identity of humanism and naturalism: "This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism" (*ibid.*). We will appreciate better later, in the second part of our work, how this synthetic moment goes well beyond the critique of political economy into the construction of an ontology of liberation. In this ontology, when labor appears *positively* as the medium term between economy and culture, it

will in reality serve as the univocal concept of the identity established here by Marx. The *oikos* of economy will then be what Marx calls "man's inorganic body", nature; and economy will in fact be ecology at this point. Culture, on the other hand, is the shaping, the care, the *cultivation* of the *oikos*.[9] We have already seen that in this careful shaping there is no imposition of external forms, that is, forms that are not in agreement with the nature of the *oikos* itself. This, it seems to us, is the organicity of communism, and, in the last analysis, the identity of economy and culture.

But Marx's definition of communism continues: "it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution" (348). This definition, to which we will often come back, posits the question of communism absolutely beyond the narrow limits of political economy, into the realm of philosophy in general, of metaphysics and ontology more precisely, and of ethics. There is a strong utopian strand in Marx's thought at this point, and this not because the *Manuscripts* are part of his "early writings"; rather, I believe that this is so because it is in the nature of the

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[9]On this sense of "culture", within the Marxist tradition, see for instance Bukharin (150).

concept of communism to be *utopian*, not perhaps in the literal sense of the word, but in a sense similar to the one described by Marcuse who, in the introduction to *An Essay on Liberation*, speaking of contemporary societies, says: "what is denounced as 'utopian' is no longer that which has 'no place' and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies" (Marcuse, 1969, 3-4). It is then a *real* utopia. In Marx, more than in Marcuse, the universal dimension of this utopia becomes evident. Of course, Marx's is the language of a 19th century philosopher coming from the Hegelian tradition, and of a man who argues against utopianism, so his definition of communism seems more a-historical than one would expect; or rather it is historical in the Hegelian sense of history as the spirit of the world. Thus he continues: "The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism – the birth of its empirical existence – and, for its thinking consciousness, the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming*" (*ibid.*). To this, he counterposes the crude understanding of communism: "whereas the other communism, which is not yet fully developed, seeks in isolated forms opposed to private property a historical proof for itself, a proof drawn from what already exists..." (*ib.*). This "other" communism is utopianism proper: "from what already exists" it seeks to advance what does not yet exist. Genuine communism, on the other hand, posits its own potentiality in the concept of history itself, in the *phenomenology* and in the *logic* of a spirit turned sensuous and practical. It posits its own potentiality, from which the actuality of the act will come, in the realm of a practical ontology. Political

economy is certainly what hinders this movement, but this movement itself –the movement of history– is broader than the episode constructed and told by political economy.

Let us go back to genuine communism as the resolution of a conflict. All the pairs of the conflictual relationships considered here by Marx come down to the opposition between object and subject. This opposition is no longer popular today, for, it is true, when considered in itself, that is, without its resolution, it describes a heterogeneity more present in the analytic forms of discourse than in reality itself. But the resolution is the synthesis, life itself, the organic manner in which what seems scattered and separate comes together in its actuality. To be sure, Marx does not leave the opposition to itself, nor does he solve it in a purely dialectical, but mechanical, manner. This means that what pertains to communism is not the concept of the synthesis, for that pertains to all manifestations of the concrete; rather, what pertains to communism is a peculiar mode of the synthesis. For instance, *private property* is one of the modes in which the synthesis occurs, but not, of course, the only one. In the system of private property, the synthesis that makes up the concrete, directly unifies the commodity form to the legal subject and the legal superstructure in general.[10] Private property is the expression of the way in which the ontological modality of appropriation becomes estranged and constitutes, while being in turn legitimized by, a system of law. In communism, the concrete is still the "concentration

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[10]This is Pashukanis's argument in *Law and Marxism*, of which more will be said below.

of many determinations" and a "unity of the diverse" (Marx, 1973, 101), for, as Marx says, this belongs to the very concept of the concrete. Thus, the resolution of the conflict does not bring about a grey and dull sameness. Instead, it allows for the possibility of a non-conflictual actualization of difference. Here, both the process which creates the commodity form and that which creates the legal form (indeed, two aspects of the same process) return to themselves and create difference *as* difference.

2.6 Communism and philosophy

To be sure, in the *Manuscripts* it is not clear whether this conflict is brought about by capitalism alone, whether it belongs essentially to human nature, or whether the two are combined in the sense that an original *metaphysical* conflict is brought by capitalism to its utmost degree. However, given Marx's concept of human nature (as becoming and always in the making), it is safe to exclude what could at times seem to give room to a traditionally metaphysical understanding of his thought. Instead, there is metaphysics, but it is of a different, non-traditional, kind; it is rather in line with Vico's *poetic metaphysics*, which emphasizes precisely the sensuous, human and practical activity, the concept of *making* as the measure of human nature and of the social world. With a metaphysics of this kind, the possibility of change and of resolution of a conflict is left to the human will –but of a concrete will. The concept of the will, central to the German Idealist tradition from which Marx himself starts and later criticizes and rejects, is also a common concept in the movement of thought that goes from Vico to Gramsci, and, before Vico, it is a central concept in the philosophy

of the Medieval Duns Scotus. As we will see later, in Gramsci the will –the rational and concrete will– is precisely the movement of self-affirmation; it is, Gramsci will say, the superstructure, thus what escapes the immediately narrow domain of political economy.

We have many problems here. On the one hand we are saying that Marx's concept of communism is based on the will. This is necessary, if one wants to avoid the mechanical, deterministic, understanding of dialectic and history, that is, the idea that one historical stage necessarily follows the other –necessarily, and not in accordance with the idea of freedom. On the other hand, we have to stress Marx's aversion to the idea of the will, especially of the free will. This aversion is particularly clear in *The German Ideology*, where Marx attacks the German idealist conception of the will. Yet, if the will –and, as we shall see later, the rationai, concrete will– is understood as subjectivity and the motor of sensuous activity, of action– then, this is not what Marx is attacking. He is against the concept of an arbitrary will; but not only that: he is against a whole philosophical method. This is what he means when, in *The German Ideology*, he says: "In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven" (1947, 47). This is a metaphorical manner of speaking, but its meaning is very clear: we start from the concrete, the sensuous, not from the abstract or even speculative moment. Marx and Engels make this very clear: "we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their

real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process" (*ibid.*). This passage, together with the famous statement that follows in the same text a few lines below: "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (*ibid.*), strongly supports and justifies, at least at first sight, the structure/superstructure distinction central to a large part of Marxist theory. Yet, one wonders if this method is, besides the necessity of contrasting German Idealism at this point, the one really chosen by Marx. In fact, it seems almost the opposite of the method he describes in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* (of which I will say more below), where the concrete is, in thought, not the point of departure, but the point of arrival; and the point of departure is, precisely, the abstract. The will, therefore, i.e., imagination, conception, but also thoughtful action, the concrete will, cannot be dismissed as a speculative or abstract moment of a philosophy that has lost contact with reality; on the contrary, it is reality itself.

Given the problematic nature of the argument, it is probably good to say immediately what we have in mind: The creation of communism is a philosophical endeavor, and communism itself a philosophical state. In fact, it is only philosophy that can bring about that *totality* of which Marx speaks. What else could be the solution of the riddle of history and the consciousness that communism itself (the communist subject) would have of being the solution? By 'philosophical endeavor' and 'philosophical state' we do not mean, of course, to refer to what only pertains to the mind nor to a caste of professional philosophers, for we are here speaking of philosophy as philosophy of praxis. Yet, this truth is no less important, for otherwise

nothing is easier than to conceive of communism as a mere alteration of the mode of production in the strictly economist sense. Let us reproduce once again Marx's thought: "The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism –the birth of its empirical existence– and, for its thinking consciousness, the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming*" (1975, 348). It is easy, at this point, to split again this *organic* and *total* movement into the opposition and the conflict of a subject and an object, of existence and being, of freedom and necessity, and so on. Indeed, this has been the unhappy history of the socialist movement so far. The attempt to build socialism (if not communism) in the Soviet Union is the history of the missed resolution of these conflicts. As if communism could be built under the pressure of compulsory laws that only have behind them that concept of the will criticized by Marx. This can be done in the spirit of the transition to communism, a concept now criticized by many. However, from the point of view of the construction of genuine communism, it is untenable. The communist subject posits itself beyond the legal superstructure as well as beyond the economic base; it posits itself in the immediacy of non-ideological, non-fetishistic, human and social relations.

2.7 E.B. Pashukanis

Certainly, under capital and for political economy, the conflict is presented as a logical continuum that does not require a resolution, but must be accepted for what it is, as a metaphysical given. In this sense, it is admirable the way in which Pashukanis draws a

parallel discourse between political economy and the law, the concept of value and the will, the subject and the commodity. In *Law and Marxism*, Pashukanis says: "After he has become slavishly dependent on economic relations, which arise behind his back in the shape of the law of value, the economically active subject –now a legal subject– acquires, in compensation as it were, a rare gift: a will, juridically constituted, which makes him absolutely free and equal to other owners of commodities like himself" (1978, 114). This (juridical) will is an ideological construct, and so are all the categories of the legal superstructure, of the subjective sphere. Yet, Pashukanis says, an ideological construct is not nothing, it is not an unreal, *merely* psychological, *merely* subjective, and thus illusory thing; rather, it represents the way in which a given society understands and interprets the material relations taking place within it. In fact, the categories of political economy are not different: "The categories commodity, value and exchange value are indubitably ideological constructs, distorted, mystified mental images (as Marx puts it), by means of which the society based on the exchange of commodities conceives of the labour relations between individual producers" (73). Thus, ideological is not merely what pertains to the superstructure. Rather, ideological is the totality of social determinations that presents the conflict as a logical continuum and as a metaphysical reality. As Pashukanis says in the Preface to the second Russian edition of his book, "the principle of legal subjectivity and the model it implies –which appears to bourgeois jurisprudence as the *a priori* model of the human will– follows with absolute inevitability from the conditions of the economy based on the commodity and on money" (42). And further,

"there is an indissoluble internal connection between the categories of the economy based on the commodity and on money, and the legal form itself" (*ibid.*). The juridical will is an ideological construct just as the commodity is. Yet, behind its ideological nature, all determinations are based on material relations. Pashukanis says, speaking of the categories of political economy: "The ideological nature of these forms is proven by the fact that, no sooner do we come to other forms of production than the categories of the commodity, value and so on cease to have any validity whatsoever" (73).

2.8 Social ontology

Departing now from Pashukanis, who is interested in the question as to whether the law can be conceived of as social relation, just as capital is, we can draw from what precedes some consequences for our own discourse, that is, our reading of Marx's definition of communism. Communism is certainly a different form of production, different from capitalism, and under communism the categories of political economy: commodity, value, etc., cease, as Pashukanis says, to have any validity. They are no longer ideological constructs because the social relations that create them are eliminated, or because social relations are now *regulated* in a radically different way.[11] Yet, the product of labor is still something: "a thing which," says Marx at the outset of Volume I of *Capital*, "through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind"

[11]The legal character of social relations is not a metaphysical given just as the economic character of labor is not. Pashukanis say: "...under certain conditions the *regulation* of social relations assumes a *legal character*" (79).

(1977, 125). If this is true of the categories of political economy, that is, if it is true that they cease to have any validity, not because of an ideological change, of a change in their ideological nature, but because the social relations that give them that nature are eliminated, the same must be true of the categories of the superstructure. The change occurs, respectively, not at the level of political economy or the law. Rather, it occurs at the more fundamental level of social ontology; it is in the constitution of their being that the determinations that make up the concrete undergo a substantial change. Yet, at this point, the point of the resolution of the conflict and of the creation of communism, there is no longer a political economy here and a legal structure there, no longer a logical continuum masking a practical conflict; this is the meaning of the supersession of private property, which, to exist, requires precisely that split and that opposition. Human activity, organic labor, is now the totality of those determinations that, estranged under capital, create a new and total social being, whether this is a man or a woman, an object for everyday life, or a work of art.

The ability to resolve this conflict is itself the measure of society. Communism is for Marx the only *society* worth of this name, notwithstanding the fact that it belongs to the essence of man to be a social being. The question then does not have to do with whether there is a society or not, but it has to do with its modality. This means that society is not an abstraction, nor is it the negation of the individual: "The individual *is* the *social being*" (Marx, 1975, 350). Marx says: "*Society* is therefore the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature" (349-350). It is

difficult today to dwell on these thoughts, particularly when one's intention is not to criticize and ridicule them, but to endorse them as pointers for an alternative. After the so-called fall of the communist ideology, to do this means to be part of a laughable minority. For the vast majority, the word 'communism' has the meaning given to it by people like Bastiat, whose ideology has come back today in the dominant and malignant form of neo-liberalism. In this sense, communism, far from being a "perfected unity", is *plunder*.[12] For Bastiat, "*Exchange*, like *property*, is a natural right" (1964, 197), and the exercise of this natural right is the essence of freedom (210). Today, neo-liberalism is showing to what degree of perfection free exchange and free trade are able to bring society. However, the issue is very complicated and, even though it will not be the focus of our work, we will have to say something about it as we proceed. I believe that what particularly complicates the issue is the fact that the historical experiments based on the philosophy of communism have done very little (and at times nothing) to break and do away with the logic of productivism which also, and specifically, defines capital. For this reason, the "unity in essence of man with nature", that is, the total and organic conception of life, has more and more given way to fragmentation and estrangement. The concept of, and the desire for, totality continues to live in holistic ways of thinking and practices of a religious nature. What Marx calls "the return of man from religion, the family, the state, etc., to his *human*, i.e. *social* existence" (1975, 349), that is, the construction of that *secular and earthly plenitude* that we will describe in the section on Gramsci, is seen,

[12]See F. Bastiat, (1964, 204).

paradoxically, as a dehumanization of the human being, as an infringement on the liberty of the individual. Thus, men and women return instead *to* religion, the family, and the state, in search of an identity –as it is happening now in the republics of the former Soviet Union and elsewhere– able only to foment chauvinistic divisions and ideologies.

If one looks, for instance, at the European twentieth century in the light of Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*, one realizes that what was missed (and is being missed even now) is not something that lies within the sphere of economics and political economy, but within the sphere of philosophy and culture. The rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union and the economy of growth in post-war Western Europe show very well that economically (*and* technologically) speaking 'man' has the ability to reach and pass the limit. This indeed does not appear to be a problem. This reaching and passing of the limit has brought about the welfare state that is now being dismantled. Seen traditionally as the outcome of revolutionary political and social struggles, and thus as an approximation to the society of the future, the welfare state is today also understood in terms of specific economic and political interests of the dominant classes, and that means, of the way in which political economy itself has been able to turn class tension and antagonism to its own advantage. At the same time, the *integral* and *total* way in which man could, according to Marx (and later, Gramsci), re-appropriate his essence, has become something of a rhetorical figure for the great majority of people. Marx says: "Man appropriates his integral essence in an integral way, as a total man" (351). But what is a 'total man'? Of course, for Marx,

this totality is given, first and foremost, by the "unity in essence of man with nature", thus by society itself. The total man is the man who has overcome the social stupidity and one-sidedness that ties him to mere possession: "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when we directly possess, eat, drink, wear, inhabit it, etc., in short, when we *use* it" (351).

Marx's prescient attack against the society of consumption –an attack later elaborated, but in an elitist way, by other Marxists, notably the Frankfurt School– does not intend to describe the society of the future as a society of scarcity and misery; in other words, communism is not a system that promises "bread and onion" to everybody, as is often thought by those who partake in the social idiocy of the dominant ideology.[13] However, what here seems problematic is Marx's use of the word '*use*'; in fact, everybody knows of the positive meaning of 'use value' as opposed to 'exchange value'. In general, we think of alienation and estrangement not when and because we use something, but when and because this something is raised to a level which is not, precisely, that of immediate and direct use, the level of abstraction and exchange. Thus, the fact that Marx speaks negatively of the concept of 'use' here is explained by his attempt to redefine this concept, at the philosophical, ontological, level. It is precisely *in use* that the analytic gap between subject and object disappears and *praxis* arises as the synthetic involvement of the two terms. But

[13] I am referring here to a televised speech given a few years ago by Silvio Berlusconi, at the time of his first electoral victory.

this *use* can go into different directions; it can become *ab-use*, as is often the case under the logic of productivism of our societies, or it can become what Marx calls "*human* use". It is in this latter sense of 'use' that the organicity of the relationship between humans and nature is recuperated. In this sense, 'use' is the same as 'labor'. If it is true that consumption is part of production, and production of consumption,[14] then the redefinition of the concept of use redefines the way in which we conceive of the process of production as a whole. Under attack is the concept of thoughtless use, not of use as such. Human use does not start, within the whole cycle of production, at the end of the moment of production proper, nor does labor end when consumption begins. This is why I said that labor and use are in reality the same. Marx provides a very deep understanding of this question –and one that proves fertile for today's ecological concerns– when he grounds the possibility of the future society, not on a thoughtless transformation of the object of utility: nature, but on the simultaneous transformation of nature *and* of the human subject. The human subject changes subjectively and objectively. It is "*all* the physical and intellectual senses" (Marx, 1975, 342), estranged under the system of private property and within the modality of "*having*", that are radically transformed.[15] Marx says: "The supersession of private

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[14]And this becomes very clear in the *Grundrisse*.

[15]There is a strong visionary element in these pages of Marx, that returns, however, everywhere in his writings, even in those in which the supposedly scientific element seems stronger. I am not saying this as a critique, for a general problem with Marxism is, as Murray Bookchin has remarked, not that it is too visionary, but that it is not visionary enough (Bookchin, 1971, 177). In Marx, this visionary element comes from the revolutionary passion that led him to the study of political economy and not, certainly, from political economy itself. Mario Tronti

property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become *human*, subjectively as well as objectively" (352). Here Marx appears as a visionary and, in the positive sense of the word, utopian writer; as a writer of the possible, of what-could-be.

2.9 The emancipation of the senses

To say that the senses are emancipated can be a very obscure thought, and even more obscure can be what follows: "The *senses* have therefore become *theoreticians* in their immediate praxis" (352). Obscure or very speculative and deep, or both. It is, in reality, another way of asserting the resolution of the conflict. Marx prepares the ground for the above statement by saying: "The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object, made by man for man" (*ibid.*). Unless one wants to believe that Marx is simply playing with philosophical concepts and terminology –a play to be later abandoned for a "more serious" and "more scientific" discussion of economic questions– one has to take very seriously this emphasis on the senses, the apparently paradoxical nature of their *theoretical* ability, and the definition of praxis. Of course, the emphasis on the sensuous is related to the sensationalism and materialism of the Enlightenment, and it is analogous to Nietzsche's emphasis on the sensuous, as we shall see in chapter 6. With the Enlightenment, the senses become the

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also points this out: "Marx does not start from 'the critique of political economy', even when understood as critique of capitalism. He gets to it and goes through it, starting off from an attempt at a theory of revolution" (Tronti, 1977, 186).

place of the primal synthesis, yet these are not the blind senses, but the senses already endowed with certain rational powers. From them, all experience and all knowledge follow. Thus, in the *Traité des sensations*, Condillac says: "...la sensation enveloppe toutes les facultés de l'âme" (1984, 58). And he concludes his work: "...toutes nos connoissances[16] viennent des sens, et particulièrement du toucher, parce que c'est lui qui instruit les autres" (265). The senses, and particularly touching (thus handling, using, manipulating), inform each other and, ultimately, they also inform judgement. Certainly, the first synthesis of the senses is, like Marx's concept of the concrete, enmeshed in confusion; hence, analysis and abstraction become necessary. Yet it is the senses themselves that open up the space for thought. The senses, Marx says, become "*theoreticians* in their immediate praxis": it is not a simple doing, nor is it a simple recording of sensations; rather, it is the identity of theory and praxis which is based on this understanding of the senses. The act is not the pure act of those philosophies that continue the tradition of German Idealism; it is rather the act that knows itself as *this* act, that is itself its own theory. With Nietzsche, the sensuous is what remains after the destruction of metaphysics and the demise of the supersensuous as a true world of ideas. The sensuous is *this* world, and this world is the will to power that "impose[s] upon becoming the character of being" (Nietzsche, 1968, #617). By following the senses, with their "subtlety, plenitude, and power" (#820), the world and life become art, a work of art, or work as art. The doer and the doing go back into the deed (#675), that is, to bring together Nietzsche and Marx, to "their immediate praxis". In

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[16] Condillac's spelling for the word 'connaissance'.

this praxis, also from a Nietzschean point of view, knowledge is not external and merely superimposed to the act. It is rather in the act itself.

It seems obvious that at this point Marx is not simply dealing with the theory of communism; or rather he understands communism as the condition for the overcoming of the separation between thought and being. This does not mean that thought and being become one and the same thing. Rather, they are distinct, and yet united in essence. As Marx says: "It is true that thought and being are *distinct*, but at the same time they are in *unity* with one another" (1975, 351). Here one cannot avoid thinking of Parmenides's exposition of this problem. In fact, Marx is here re-stating Parmenides's position. Parmenides, "the father of materialism" according to Burnet (1957, 182), says in his philosophical poem: "...for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be" (in Burnet, 1957, 173); and again: "The thing that can be thought and that for the sake of which the thought exists is the same" (176). [17]

Is then communism –the solution of the riddle of history– also the solution of the riddle of philosophy, that is of the question of the relationship between thinking and being? I think that the answer is positive, which means that communism is not simply a way in which society can be organized at the level, first and foremost, of its economy. Communism implies much more than that: the radical transformation of the

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[17]According to John Burnet, even the philosophy of Demokritos, subject of Marx's doctoral dissertation, depends on Parmenides's thought: "What appears later as the elements of Empedokles, the so-called 'homoeomeries' of Anaxogoras and the atoms of Leukippos and Demokritos, is just the Parmenidean 'being'." And he continues: "Parmenides is not, as some have said, the 'father of idealism'; on the contrary, all materialism depends on his view of reality" (1957, 182).

social subject, and Marx is often explicit and emphatic about this. As he says in another of the "Early Writings": "To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself."[18] This may sound apocalyptic and, after what some have interpreted as the rise and fall of radicalism, no longer tenable.

However, if we go beyond the ideological and philosophical confusion of the present, we may be able to look at this question with some freshness of thought and perhaps realize that the world needs this radicality much more than it needs the philosophically weak and yet violent inertia of what has usurped the name of democracy. It may very well be that the world needs to recuperate a lost totality, find the solution of a riddle, the resolution of a conflict, the unity in distinction of thinking and being. Probably, one of Marx's most interesting and deepest contributions is, precisely, the emphasis on the senses, on the radical transformation of the social subject –and this is also what, as Murray Bookchin often repeats, the Marxist tradition has in general completely overlooked.[19]

Of course, there have been exceptions, notably, Che Guevara's concept of the "new man", as well as others; but in general the question of the subject has been seen as not scientific and even not revolutionary (not proletarian) enough. The subject, the subjectivity of the subject, has often been seen as the element holding back the

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[18]This is in "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction" (Marx, 1975, 251).

[19]Bookchin calls attention to a passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where Marx denounces the inability of revolutionaries to actually "revolutioniz[e] themselves and things" and says how a social revolution must "draw its poetry ... from the future" (Bookchin, 1971, 174).

revolutionary process, as the petit-bourgeois, liberal moment usually lagging behind the ripeness of the objective struggle. Thus, in communist parties around the world, subjectivity was to be castigated as deviant, and no effort was made to understand, at the level of philosophy as well as of everyday life, its meaning.[20] The communist movement, in the so-called communist or socialist countries and elsewhere, became the opposite of what it intended to be. Of course, if this has been the general tendency, it does not mean that it has been the only one. I have mentioned one notable exception, but there are others as well. In general, an emphasis on subjectivity can be found in the readers of the *Grundrisse*. Antonio Negri, for example, in an interesting reply to Norberto Bobbio's "Is There a Marxist Doctrine of the State?"–as well as in virtually all of his work– gives to subjectivity an explosive content. In the reply to Bobbio, he says: "The 'how' and the 'who' of the revolutionary process are the same" (in Bobbio, 1987, 131), which means that the subject and the process are the same.[21] However, the question remains open as to *how* is the *who* of the revolutionary process – a question which finds elements of an answer in the pages of Marx we are presently reading and later, as we shall see, in the work of Gramsci. In fact, the subject itself is absolute openness, looking for a modality of absolute and essential difference. This subject is the *proletarian* as defined by Marx at the outset of the *Manuscripts*, not the worker *as* a worker.[22] This means that the subject cannot revolutionize itself (its

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[20]I draw these reflections, in part, from my personal experience.

[21]This is also the main theme of *Il potere costituente. Saggio sulle alternative del moderno* (Negri, 1992).

[22]This truth has been individuated and explored by Murray Bookchin

'how') by continuing to produce capital; rather, it revolutionizes itself by withdrawing from that modality of production. Within the logic of production (or, more precisely, productivism), the proletarian who is a worker is completely enslaved. Free at the beginning –actually, depositary of a 'double freedom'– the worker, insofar as he or she is a worker, loses any genuine revolutionary agency. This agency becomes the prerogative of self-designated and self-styled 'revolutionaries' who, very often (but not, of course, in all cases), have a very narrow understanding of the concept of revolution and social change.[23]

(1971), a writer in the anarchist (or anarcho-communist) tradition, more than by writers in the Marxist tradition itself. We will go back to Bookchin's critique of Marxism below.

[23]If I am here speaking of Lenin's concept of the professional revolutionary, I do not mean to include Lenin himself (or other famous or unknown genuine revolutionaries) in this category. What I am saying is that the bureaucratization of the formation of the revolutionary subject goes hand in hand with the emphasis on production and productivism, with the concept that the proletarian is, first and foremost, a worker. The history of the Russian Revolution, for example, has shown how it is the party, the professional revolutionaries, that lags behind, not the objective movement per se, but the subjective desire for social change that defines the revolutionary subject (whether this latter is a factory worker or not) –a desire that, to be sure, is based on and is in agreement with objective reality, and which is, furthermore, an integral part of that objective reality. But it is at the level of this subjective desire that there lies the possibility of subversion and radical action. After all, with the *Theses of April 4*, "Lenin shifted the whole question to the subjective plane" (Trotsky, 1959, 232). It is interesting that at that time, narrates Trotsky, Lenin was considered an anarchist, "a bad Marxist", by its enemies –a view accepted even by the British ambassador to Russia (237).

2.10 Totality and the total man

Thus, with the definition of genuine communism Marx offers his concept of the *total man*. As we have seen, this is the man who "appropriates his integral essence in an integral way" (Marx, 1975, 351). Today, because of the ideological and philosophical confusion, all talk of totality (and of essence) is immediately mistaken for a form of totalitarian thinking.[24] But in fact, as we shall see later,[25] this totality is nothing but the plenitude of being –a redefinition of the old Parmenidean concept as it entered into, and actually grounded, the materialist tradition. Yet, what is it exactly that we mean when we speak of 'plenitude of being'? Of course, in the most original sense (that is, according to Parmenides), we mean that being is and nothing is not. For Parmenides, "everything is full of what is" (in Burnet, 1957, 175). This fullness, or plenitude, is not the absolute and abstract positive which, in Hegel's dialectic, follows, and is synonymous with, the negation of the negation, that is, the concept from which Hegel starts and to which he returns. It is rather, in Marx's evaluation of Feuerbach's achievement, "the positive which is based upon itself and positively grounded in itself" (Marx, 1975, 381). In Parmenides, this is the concept of the same: "It is the same, and it rests in the self-same place, abiding in itself" (in Burnet, 1957, 175). This concept of the positive, which, to put it in an extremely schematic way, goes from Parmenides to Duns Scotus to Spinoza and beyond, constitutes the only alternative to the either/or

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[24]It is useful to be reminded that "the term 'totalitarianism' [was] originally invented as a description or self-description of Italian Fascism" (Hobsbawm, 1994, 112).

[25]We shall come back to the concept of totality in the section on Gramsci.

of essentialism and relativism, as well as to the logic of fragmentation criticized by philosophers such as Marx and later celebrated in postmodern thought. The totality (or plenitude) which follows from, and is included in, this concept is not such that it denies difference and singularity. To the contrary, it makes them possible, for each manifestation of being is then total and fully positive. Excluded is not one part of being, but exclusion itself. Thus, a radical transformation of the world is not a reshuffling of the balance of power, nor is it an inversion of the modalities of inclusion and exclusion. Rather, it is a liberation of the fully positive into everything to which it could belong. The idea of the dissolution of power is simply this: not an impossible elimination of power in all its forms, but precisely its dis-solution, its dispersion, and its equal presence everywhere. If the "totalistic imagination" has been, as Martin Jay says, a feature of the revolutionary intellectuals (Jay, 1984, 13), this cannot be ascribed to their desire for the elimination of difference –as it is usually understood when 'total' (or 'totalistic') and 'totalitarian' are conflated into the same meaning. To the contrary, the desire which sustains this imagination tends toward the constitution of a totality full of totalities, a plenitude full of plenitudes, a world full of worlds.[26]

In Marx, this totality announces itself in many ways. But the most fundamental aspect of it lies in its anthropological dimension. In this sense, Marx is neither an essentialist in the traditional, metaphysical sense of the word (that is, a metaphysics that posits essence as preceding existence), nor is he using this idea of totality with a

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[26]This is one of the most recent expression of the revolutionary desire: obviously, I mean the Zapatista slogan "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos."

nostalgic, romantic look back at the past. Furthermore, his critique of the loss of totality does not rest on moral, or moralistic, ground. In a way that sounds somewhat Nietzschean, Marx says: "The idea of *one* basis for life and another for *science* is from the very outset a lie" (1975, 355). This has to do with science in general, but also with that particular social science that goes under the name of political economy. The question is not whether a science is right or wrong, but how this science (this knowing) relates to life. From this we can see to which extent Marx remains linked to the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially the idea of *progress*. From the correct interpretation of this admittedly problematic concept also follows an interpretation of the concept and reality of technology.[27] For Marx it is clear that, first and foremost, this world is man-made. In this respect, Marx follows the general direction of thought set by Vico (himself a figure of the Enlightenment – a wonderful figure, though half-forgotten), and he calls attention to Vico's ideas in the first volume of *Capital*. But the world is made through industry, through technology, and in this making the true nature of man comes to the fore –the true nature, that is, *making* itself. Marx says: "Nature as it comes into being in human history –in the act of creation of human society– is the *true* nature of man; hence nature as it comes into being through industry, though in an *estranged* form, is true *anthropological* nature" (355).

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[27] For a critique of the concept of progress, see the section on Mumford in chapter

2.11 The truth of history

Let us stop for a moment and consider this modifying phrase: "though in an *estranged* form". What Marx is saying here is that there is nothing false or mistaken in history. A Hegelian position, and Marx is here criticizing Hegel. What appears to be false, for it de-humanizes human nature, is still part of the true nature of the human being. This is the meaning of Marx's essentialism: estranged labor is not labor as such, yet through it the latter is also expended and comes to fruition. This is why, fundamentally, that is, ontologically prior than economically, capital belongs to labor, private property to the sensuous and universal modality of appropriation; rather than the other way around. Yet, at the same time, estrangement destroys organic totality. The latter, as we have seen, still remains as a sort of hidden, and thus restorable, base; however, its actuality is taken away. As Marx says: "It is inherent in the very nature of estrangement that each sphere imposes upon me a different and contrary standard: one standard for morality, one for political economy, and so on" (362). We are at the origin of the structure/superstructure distinction which had, at one point, become a dogma of a certain brand of Marxism. In reality, the delimitation of spheres is itself a product of estrangement. Once the organic totality is recuperated, even the economic activity of human beings –what constitutes the base– is part of their general sensuous activity. This, as we have seen, does not mean that economic concerns will cease; rather, the

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concept of economy itself is completely modified.

The fact that true human nature becomes historical even under a regime of estrangement can be certainly looked at as a metaphysical truth, but such that it proves the solidity of the ontology of labor. This is indeed the central point in Marx's work, both in the *Manuscripts* and subsequently, that is, the centrality and essential nature of labor. In the *Manuscripts* he says: "To say that the *division of labour* and *exchange* are based on *private property* is simply to say that *labour* is the essence of private property - an assertion that the political economist is incapable of proving and which we intend to prove for him" (374). All of Marx's subsequent work can be seen as an attempt to prove this, and it constitutes precisely his *critique* of political economy. His later emphasis on the industrial working class, which contradicts his definition of the proletarian at the time of the *Manuscripts* and which has created so many problems in the way his thought is to be interpreted and applied, may simply be due to the fact that when he was writing (but the situation has changed in the course of the Twentieth Century)[28] industrial labor (especially heavy industry) was in its rise and its antagonism to capital was at its sharpest and least reducible form. But after the Great Depression, during which capitalism threatened to collapse, and after its salvaging through the Keynesian doctrine of state intervention, the condition and destiny of the industrial working class (particularly in so-called western societies) completely changed. Yet, what has not changed is the fundamental truth enunciated by Marx that labor is the essence of private property (under a regime of private

[28]Cf., for instance, Hobsbawm (1994).

property) and of the constituted social world in general; that it is, in other words, the ontological power that makes and sustains this "world of nations". Labor can be displaced, deterritorialized and reterritorialized (to use the expression of Deleuze and Guattari), and this is what is happening nowadays under the regime of global capital (a regime which, to be sure, is an historical development of a tendency that pertains to the logic of capital itself). But this displacement, this new international division of labor, does not change the basic truths defining capital and its opposite: labor. The maquiladoras of the US/Mexican border, to make a relevant example, do not say that labor is over, and the transformation of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo into a Riviera Maya still has labor (and estranged labor at that) as its essence and truth. It can also be noted that, in Mexico, the development of Quintana Roo (besides the economic and social disparity present within it) is symmetrical to the exclusion and poverty of the state of Chiapas. *Antagonism itself has not disappeared; it too has been displaced.*

Certainly, private property and estrangement are not exclusive features of the regime of capital. With the coming of agriculture, during the passage to the neolithic (or rather, what Mumford calls the"Paleolithic-Neolithic Union"),[29] the forms –more or less idealized– of primitive communal production and wealth see the beginning of the end. Or in any case, to take a literary example from the classics, they end with the last age of humanity, the age of hard iron, and its *amor sceleratus habendi* (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I). What is peculiar to capital, therefore, is not that labor is

[29]Cf. Mumford (1961, 21 and 25-28).

estranged and exploited; peculiar are rather the forms of this estrangement and exploitation. Above all, the fact that the proletarian enters "freely" in the act of exchange whereby he or she becomes a worker, and hence the reduction of labor power itself to a commodity. This is an important observation because it says that organic labor, and thus communism, do not lie at the level of history (as past history), but at the level of ontology, of poetry and the imagination: at the level of the possible. In fact, communism is, precisely, a utopia. Of course, this is not Marx's explicit thought, for he was absolutely against the utopian idea of communism. Yet, as we have seen, he was not against (rather, he was for) the *poetry from the future* only able to bring about the radical change of communism: not a "real existing socialism", but a form of social organization that could not be looked for in a golden age that preceded, and not immediately, the age of hard iron.

Thus, true anthropological nature manifests itself through industry, through technology, and *in* history. It *is* history; it makes history. But what is anthropological, and thus historical, is not itself the ground. It is rather what stands above the ground and makes it anthropologically and historically meaningful. Yet the possibility of this standing (thus, its essential moment), the making of the world, lies at the ontological level. Herein lies the radicality of Marx's thought; in its desire not merely to substitute one stage of history with another, one mode of production with another, but to subvert the universal conditions of human existence.

2.12 Ontology, money, and the limits of production

The section on money, in the *Manuscripts*, begins precisely with this idea, accepted at this point almost as axiomatic, namely, with the idea of the ontological foundations of anthropology and history. It is actually interesting that the section on money starts with a reiteration and a summing-up of the ontological statement Marx has been making, now rendered explicit. Marx now posits as a condition the fact that "man's *feelings*, passions, etc., are not merely anthropological characteristics in the narrower sense, but are truly *ontological* affirmations of his essence (nature), and [...] they only really affirm themselves in so far as their *object* exists *sensuously* for them" (1975, 375). On the basis of this condition, Marx draws the concepts of difference (i.e., the fact that there are different modes of affirmation), of praxis (as the involvement of the object in the sensuous activity of a subject), and of the universality of history. History, "the science of man", is "itself a product of the self-formation of man through practical activity" (375). Here, "through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property [...] the ontological essence of human passion come[s] into being, both in its totality and in its humanity" (*ibid.*). Of course, Marx is not defending the modern concept of private property. In fact, he qualifies this private property as "freed from estrangement": "The meaning of private property, freed from its estrangement, is the *existence* of *essential objects* for man, both as objects of enjoyment and of activity" (*ibid.*).

Marx is saying this to show how the ontological power of labor –in the broad sense of sensuous, practical activity– is expressed, under a regime of estrangement, in

the form of money. On the basis of the universality (and univocity) of this power – which has the form of property as appropriation– money is then "regarded as an omnipotent being" (*ibid.*). This is similar to the way in which, in Nietzsche's account of the genealogy of truth, one perspectival truth becomes the only, absolute, divine truth (whose eminent form of expression is here not money, but god). In this sense, money takes on a real ontological power, for it is essentially appropriation and thus labor. Labor itself, in its estranged form, has to rely on a negated organicity. This organicity, even if it does not manifest itself as such, is still there, and thus it can be restored. Under the regime of capital, money becomes the universal mediation, or, as Marx says, "the *pimp* between need and object, between life and man's means of life" (*ibid.*). Money expresses all modalities of ontological affirmation as one; yet all ontological affirmations do not have –if understood as to what belongs essentially to their concept– an economic foundation and meaning.

The critique of money, and of the form of value expressed by and through money, is the center of Marx's critique of political economy, in the *Manuscripts* and later in the *Grundrisse*. It is true that Marx (and Engels) accepted the concept of production as developed by the classical political economists and thus opened the way for a Marxist version of the logic of productivism. They did this on the basis of the idea of progress and of the optimism inherent in their concept of history. Yet it is also true that in the cessation of estranged labor and the coming of communal production they saw a way out of this logic – through the concept of the development of the full, total individual. This concept entails the overcoming of the division of labor and thus

a completely different idea of production. It is difficult to find unambiguous justifications for the logic of productivism in the work of Marx. It is, I believe, impossible to think that Marx would have seen the forced industrialization of the USSR under Stalin as a correct way to proceed on the road to Socialism and Communism. The fact that he saw the possibility of revolution in the industrialized countries of his time unequivocally says that for him the task of industrialization, and the regime of the factory, pertained to the concept of capitalism, not of socialism or communism. To the concept of communism pertains the liberation of time, not its framing in the factory system.

It is the concept of communism itself that, as we have seen, cannot be reduced to economic categories. Its essential meaning transcends those categories; yet, the discourse on communism starts from within a modern market society and on the basis of a long history of the idea that nature can be dominated by human beings (and thus – as part of nature– some human beings by others). Marx absolutely denounces the idea of the free market, but, as far as domination goes, he only criticizes the fact that some human beings dominate others (and particularly through the market system), not the idea –to which Francis Bacon gave a modern form– of the human domination of nature. Thus, from an ecological point of view Marx can be, and has been, criticized in turn. Nor is our task that of providing an absolute defense of Marx's philosophy and, especially, of Marxism. Yet, when one accuses Marx of considering labor as the only creator of value, in disregard of nature –as the ecologist historian Clive Ponting does– one forgets that in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* it is precisely the

opposite view that Marx holds (cf. Ponting, 1991, 157). Moreover, the idea that labor is *not* the only creator of value, stated explicitly in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, has its roots in the *Manuscripts*. Here Marx, speaking of the externalization [*Entäusserung*] of the human corporeal power, says that the establishing [*Setzen*] of this subjective power is itself objective: "In the act of establishing it [i.e., man as an objective being; bg] does not descend from its 'pure activity' to the *creation* of *objects*; on the contrary, its *objective* product simply confirms its *objective* activity as the activity of an objective, natural being" (389). Yet Ponting is correct in pointing out the Eurocentric (he does not use this word) and anthropocentric nature of Marxism, which belongs to a metaphysics of domination rooted in Greek and Roman thought. This metaphysics invests and is strengthened by Judaism and Christianity where, with the notable exceptions of Maimonides and Francis of Assisi who deny the centrality of man and his primacy over other beings (Ponting, 145-146), the concept of human domination over nature takes on the form of a right and passes as such into modern science and modernity. Ponting also reminds us that in the Taoist and Buddhist traditions, as well as in the traditions of pre-Columbian America, things stand differently, so much so that some economists (E.F. Schumacher in *Small is Beautiful*) have opposed the Eurocentric tradition with a "Buddhist Economics" (Ponting, 152-153 and 159).

These are very serious problems, which I cannot treat exhaustively here. I will only say that they can be narrowed down to one: that of the quest for an alternative. This is, after all, Marx's main concern, but with the celebrated "fall of communism"

and end of the possibility of revolution, the question of the alternative becomes not simpler, but more complex. It is clear that the possibility of revolution has not ended; certainly, its axis has moved, and most of the revolutions of this last century have had very little in common with the Marxist orthodoxy. Yet, central remains the question of labor, often conceived again in solely economic, and thus self-defeating, terms.

Chapter 3 - Labor as Time: *The Grundrisse*

Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time

-Karl Marx

3.1 The concept of productive labor

In studying the question of productive labor and of its relation to unproductive labor, we have to keep in mind that, for Marx, it is precisely because labor, in and for itself, is *neither productive nor unproductive*, but *creative*, that it becomes productive or unproductive under capital. Yet, in dealing with this question, we find some analytical difficulties, which may (and in fact do) create some confusion. To avoid this confusion, it is then fundamental to distinguish clearly between two levels of discourse and two categories. The two categories are productive labor and living labor, or, as we will see, the subjective power of labor; the former pertains to the discourse of political economy, the latter is an ontological category. The point is that, under capital, productive labor is only that which produces capital. However, the subjective power of labor is a productive power only insofar as the word 'productive' is taken in its broadest and most original sense, as *poiesis* (see below; also cf. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 711).

Of course, since Marx is analyzing the specificity of the capitalist mode of production, there are times when these two categories appear as identical. This is so because the concept of capital cannot be grasped outside the form of value, and productive labor is, precisely, the value form of labor. It is in the exchange process that

the use value of labor abandons its creative freedom and is ready to become productive.[1] Thus, when in the *Grundrisse* Marx speaks of the development of the concept of capital, he warns that he cannot start with labor, but with value, "precisely, with exchange value," even though labor remains the presupposition of the process as a whole (259). He says that capital, "the communal substance of all commodities" (271) is "objectified labour" (272), which can only be countered by non-objectified labor. This non-objectified labor is labor as subjectivity, the living subject, the worker; yet, it is not labor as such, unrelated to capital: it is labor already employed by capital, as the subjectivity capital needs. Marx concludes: "The only *use value*, therefore, which can form the opposite pole to capital is *labour* (*to be exact, value-creating, productive labor*)" (272). Here productive labor and living labor appear as identical. However, they are not, and do not need to be. A few pages below, Marx says: "Labour, such as it exists *for itself* in the worker in opposition to capital, that is, labour in its *immediate being*, separated from capital, is *not productive*"(308). However, this does not mean that it is *unproductive*. Not to be productive, or to be *not productive*, is to be *neither-productive-nor-unproductive*; it is the form of labor before its descent into the realm of production and circulation, before its division into and by the categories of capital. That the concept of capital should not be developed from labor, but from value, does not take away the ontological priority of labor over capital. In other words, labor is a common element of all production, and it has the form of time; capital is an essential difference, whose destruction or passing away entails the liberation of time, the return of labor to its

[1]"It has a use value for the worker himself only in so far as it is *exchange value*, not in so far as it produces values. It has exchange value for capital only in so far as it is use value" (307).

immediacy.

In *Marx Beyond Marx*, Antonio Negri calls Marx's definition of productive labor a "*heavily reductive definition*" (64). However, he goes on to say that it is not "impossible to free Marx, in this case, from the weight of historical conditions, which lead him, in order to exalt workers' labor, to restrict in such a miserable way the conception of productive labor" (65). Negri also says that, in its literal formulation –productive labor is "that which produces capital" (*Grundrisse*, 304)– Marx's definition has the merit of insisting on "the workers' opposition as a political opposition, on the political irreducibility of the force of workers and of proletarian revolution" (64-65). He thus looks at the question of productive labor from the fundamental viewpoint of antagonism –of difference that becomes antagonism (Negri, 52)– [2] and from that point of view, which is the point of view of the worker, productive labor appears in its other aspect, as the workers' use value (Negri, 65). Productive labor is, yes, that which produces its opposite, surplus value, capital. But it is also, first and foremost, itself (that is, living labor) as a use value. However, this does not solve the problem, for unproductive labor, which does not produce capital, is also a use value.

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[2]For Marx's own treatment of this, see his analysis of the double aspect of the commodity in the *Grundrisse*. He says: "...this double, *differentiated* existence must develop into a *difference*, and the difference into *antithesis* and *contradiction*" (147).

It is in the exchange process that the difference which living labor is (the difference which living labor is *in its immediacy*) develops into the form of antagonism. Negri very clearly says that antagonism "consists in the fact that capital must reduce to an exchange value that which for the worker is a use value" (67-68). This use value is subjective labor, subjective power, *potenza*. Against the reduction of productive labor, but determined by it, subjective labor, defined by Negri as a "general abstraction" (70), turns into a "general power (potenza)" and a "radical opposition" (70). Indeed, in the face of the power of capital, and under the real subsumption of all labor, the radical opposition, the subversion of capital, cannot come from unproductive labor. Yet, it cannot come from productive labor either; at least, not from productive labor *as* productive labor, that is, as we have seen, as the labor that produces capital, for the radical opposition –to be political– must be that which stops producing capital, which brings capitalist production to ruin. The abstraction from productive labor must also be an abstraction from unproductive labor, for this latter too receives its definition (in this case the definition of a negativity) not in virtue of its quality, of what it itself is, but rather because of its exclusion from exchange. Yet, this exclusion does not change its nature; it does not cease to be a use value, to be labor and fire. The abstraction, and this is the concept I would like to present here, must take the form of a double negation, a *neither...nor* of resistance and refusal, a negation of the logic of *either...or*, but also of the logic of *both...and*, an exaltation of the broken dialectic which is immediately the absolute affirmation of a radical difference: of a new "essential difference," to use a wonderful expression of Marx's, which displaces, and does away with, the logic of capital.

Neither-productive-nor-unproductive labor is labor that returns to itself as to its immediacy. It is difference that, yes, becomes antagonism, but only to return to itself as difference and be able (that is, have the power as *potenza*) to be what it is and what it wants to be. Antagonism itself is nothing but difference that returns to itself, to its freedom and power, after a dreadful journey into the realm of alienation and death. It is a subjective power because it rejects the objectivity and objectification inscribed in the capitalist organization of work. The destruction of the form of exchange –the form whereby labor becomes either productive or unproductive– is the destruction of productive *and* unproductive labor alike. The *neither...nor* configuration of the irreducibly oppositional struggle that labor wages against capital simply says that this labor is *all* labor, the absolute power of labor, a positive power. It is not labor as productive labor, but labor that withdraws from the narrow categories of productivity and unproductivity alike. The *neither...nor* configuration says that this labor rejects capital's categories and presents itself in its other aspect, the aspect which (ontologically speaking) most essentially and fundamentally defines it: it presents itself as a use value. As such, labor is *neither productive nor unproductive*. As I have noted, Marx calls it "*not productive*" (308), which is not –I repeat– the same as saying *unproductive*. It is *creative* labor, whereas productive labor is merely *created*, or posited, by capital. After all, the *neither...nor* configuration is already inscribed in the condition of the workers who, in their "double freedom" –as Marx calls it– "neither form part of the means of production themselves..., nor do they own the means of production" (*Capital*, I, 874). In our own days, in the age of globalization, this double freedom, or double negation, becomes deeper and broader, for it now constitutes the tragic structure of the South of the world,

the South of every North. But the *neither...nor* of antagonistic struggle is only apparently a negative construct. In reality, it is the utmost of positivity and affirmation: it rejects what presents itself as absolute because it wants the absolute; it rejects the possibility of a settlement because it wants the impossible; it again rejects the false choice between a no longer viable *either...or* and a *both...and* of weak and complacent acceptance of the order of things because it wants to affirm its own difference, notwithstanding the objective demonstrations of a non-ground.

How can we otherwise understand the use value *for the worker* of living labor if not outside the categories of productivity and unproductivity? And how can living labor find itself if it doesn't tear itself away from the logic that either enslaves or annihilates it? And yet, once it has torn itself away from it, what space and time does it find, under real subsumption, to initiate and accomplish its affirmation? If the first two questions are rhetorical, the third is not. It is, in fact, a practical question. Practical means ethical, and *ethos* is the place where difference is able to develop *as difference*, the time in which time itself is able to live up to its destiny of freedom. Thus, the answer to the third question is that there still exist a time and place for revolution, and that the concept of revolution must be seen as the univocal ground where living labor, in its difference, runs; as the subterrenean fire that links the most abstract to the most concrete. The time of difference, which under capital marks only the passage from M to M', is here the time in which difference goes back to its plenitude.

What otherwise is this use value? Certainly not my craftsmanship. Nor is it a generalized possibility of autarkic production. As Negri says: "Here use value is nothing other than the radicality of the labor opposition,..., the source of all human possibility."

And he continues: "Capital sucks this force through surplus value" (70).

Labor remains creative even when its creativeness is taken away, changed into mere productiveness, constrained into an alienated form. As Negri says: "...the tendency of profit to expand goes hand in hand with a living labor directly exploited but creative nonetheless" (91). This is so because the creative aspect of labor (its ontological dimension) precedes its productive aspect. Labor cannot be productive without being creative. Yet, it can be creative and not be productive. This means that there can be labor without capital, but that there cannot be capital without labor (that is, without the expenditure of some kind of useful labor).

For Negri, the concept of productive labor must be completely displaced in order to let labor as use value appear and in order to enter into a definition of the revolutionary class. The revolutionary class is the class for which labor must return to its immediacy and freedom. It is the class which intends to bring about the abolition of work. Negri says: "Work which is liberated is liberation from work. The creativity of communist work has no relation with the capitalist organization of labor. Living labor –by liberating itself, by reconquering *its own use value*, against exchange value– opens a universe of needs of which work can become a part only eventually. And in this case, it is a question of work as essential, collective, nonmystified, communist work: instead of work as capitalist construction" (165).

3.2 Productive labor and the productive power of labor

So far, we have seen what productive labor is: a category of political economy and of capital. In this sense, productive labor does not produce use values, but surplus value and

capital. Of course, in order to produce surplus value, it also has to produce exchange values and thus use values for others, for consumption. But the production of use values is not productive labor's (and capital's) main goal. The substance of productive labor is all contained in the formula M-M' –a formula which points to a time of difference, the time in which difference itself is forced into a position of antagonism. What actually comes back to itself is labor in its antagonistic awareness. There is here a moment very similar to that described by Hegel when he speaks of self-consciousness in the "Lordship and Bondage" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here Hegel says: "...as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness" (117). The same with the independence and autonomy of living labor in its aspect as a use value. In this use value, that is, in the living labor which precedes and determines exchange, there lies the ontological power of labor itself, its creativeness (or creativity) and freedom.

We have also seen that Negri criticizes Marx's definition of productive labor, and rightly so. The sections on productive labor are probably the most ambiguous in Marx's work, and, given the importance of this concept, it is important to be aware of this fact. In fact, Marx, in the *Grundrisse* for example, often shifts his discourse from living labor to productive labor (which is a form of living labor, yet not the only one), giving the impression, at times, that they are the same thing. Of course, they are not. But this confusion may generate a greater confusion when one leaves Marx's texts. This confusion is then used to legitimize that logic of productivism which is one of the main causes of the failure of revolutionary theory and practice.

Even in Mario Tronti's non-productivist analysis of productive labor the

confusion remains. In *Operai e capitale* (Workers and Capital), Tronti says: "...one and the same productive force can truly be counted twice: at one time as a force that *produces* capital, and at another time as a force which *refuses* to produce it; at one time *inside* capital, and at another time *against* capital" (180; my translation). However, the truth is that the force *against* capital is not a productive force in the sense in which the force *inside* capital is. The former is not the double of the latter. I believe that many people, perhaps without giving enough thought to it, accept the logic of *either...or* established by capital; they therefore feel that if this force is not considered as productive, it must be unproductive. And of course an unproductive force could not even dream of rising against capital (even though this too is only true up to a certain point). In order to think outside this logic and get a glimpse of a new horizon, we have to look at this force as *neither-productive-nor-unproductive*. In this sense, it is an already radically different, subversive, force. The abstraction from these two categories of capitalist production reveals the univocal ground of labor as it is for itself, and for the worker. Even so-called unproductive labor is then understood as unproductive only for capital. In reality, it becomes evident that it often relates to essential social needs.

In Marx, the question of productive labor is only seen in relation to the critique of political economy, that is, of capital. Marx does not expand into the new, radically different, ontology of communal production; an ontology which liberates time as its own substance (see, for instance, 172 and 708; also cf. Negri, 33) by overcoming, not of course the common element of production, but the essential difference of productive labor. He is, of course, more interested in the analysis of productive labor than in a description of what labor can do once it is liberated from the subsumptive power of

capital. There remain, however, in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere, important indications of what production and the relations of production could be like when labor is able to return to itself.

I will give a few examples. In the "Chapter on Money," Marx says: "On the basis of communal production, the determination of time remains, of course, essential. The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental" (172). And toward the end of the book, in the last notebook of the *Grundrisse* (Notebook VII), he says that, in communal production, "[t]he measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time" (708). This disposable, or free, time, explains Marx a few pages below, is the "time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power" (711). Adopting an expression Negri has used in a book on Giacomo Leopardi, we could call this time *ethical time* (Negri, 1987). But here we also recognize Negri's concept of *potenza*, the subjective power as a productive power of living labor. We see that Marx distinguishes, though a distinction blurred by analytical difficulties which he does not resolve, between *productive labor* as a category of capital and only of capital, and the *productive power of labor* as that which is enhanced by liberated time. The free disposition of this power remains productive, in the original, etymological, sense of the word, only insofar as its production turns into action, liberating action. Here productive means creative, a poetic and practical activity. It is an instance of that *poiêsis* which, as Giorgio Agamben points out in *The Man Without Content*, comes from the Greek verb *poiein*, which means "to pro-duce" in the sense of bringing into being. In Marx, this sense of *poiêsis* coincides

with that of *praxis*, or human production, which comes from the Greek verb *prattein*, "to do" in the sense of acting (Agamben, 68). This identity of *poiêsis* and *praxis* in Marx is called a "revolutionary thesis" by Étienne Balibar (*The Philosophy of Marx*, 41). Indeed, speaking of *The German Ideology*, Balibar says that "...Marx removed one of philosophy's most ancient taboos: the radical distinction between *praxis* and *poiêsis*" (40). The identity is kept throughout the *Grundrisse*, and this is why it becomes more difficult to understand Marx's reductive definition of productive labor. It is because this concept has nothing to do with the constant passing over of *praxis* into *poiêsis* and of *poiêsis* into *praxis* with which Balibar characterizes Marx's revolutionary thesis. Rather, productive labor, posited as doubly free (but in actual fact doubly negated), is nothing other than necessary labor which does not pass over into the freedom of praxis but falls into the abyss of its own negation. It becomes, in fact, surplus labor. It reproduces itself, but only to produce and valorize capital. Productive labor is then nothing but the form which the productive, subjective, power of labor is compelled to take as soon as it enters into an exchange relation with capital. It is the value form of labor, or the form in which the productive power of labor is known in political economy. As Marx says at the end of the *Grundrisse*, "Use value falls within the realm of political economy as soon as it becomes modified by the modern relations of production, or as it, in turn, intervenes to modify them" (881). This is, of course, particularly true of the use value which labor is. The end of productive labor is the liberation of the productive power of labor as time.

3.3 The end of labor

If the concept of productive labor is not clearly defined, then it is difficult and dangerous to speak about the end of labor, the abolition of work, or even the refusal of work. The liberation of labor is, yes, labor liberated from itself, but this holds only insofar as it is understood that this "itself" of labor is posited by capital as necessary and surplus labor. However, under capital, labor is posited as necessary only insofar as it gives way to surplus labor. Indeed capital's real intention is not that of positing necessary labor, but surplus labor. As Negri says, "*...the relation between surplus labor and necessary labor is...the relation between the two classes*" (97). Moreover, Marx says: "Labour may be necessary without being productive" (533). It is evident that capital would not be interested in positing this necessary labor, for only labor which becomes productive is useful and necessary to capital. Here we also see that unproductive labor may be (as often is) necessary.

We must then clearly distinguish between productive labor (a category of political economy) and the productive power of labor as free time (a category of ontology). The former is what must be rejected as another name for the workers' alienation, the death of their subjective and collective power. Productive labor is precisely what produces surplus value and profit, and reproduces the workers' use value only insofar as it can become an exchange value again, the "alienated presupposition" (Negri, 52) of the new cycle of production. Productive labor is then the substance of exploitation, for only insofar as it is productive will labor yield its living power to the objectifying power of capital. The latter category, however, the productive power of labor, is living labor itself, which is the form of time, and whose revolt against capital implies its ability to posit itself as necessary not

as a step toward its transformation into surplus labor, but as the ground of its own activity and freedom. In this sense, as Balibar suggests, the necessity of *poiêsis* becomes the freedom of *praxis*. The end of productive labor is not, of course, the end of production. It is, however, the end of production as an end in itself: the end of the anarchy of production. Production becomes then a means to the possibility of free action, the objective ground of subjectivity. The expansion of capital (capital's and productive labor's only end) gives way to the true concept of development (which is based on the freedom of praxis).[3]

Once this distinction is clearly made, it is evident that the ontological critique of productive labor does not tend toward a destruction of the concept of labor as such; rather, it clears the ground for the return of the subject of labor to itself, to its *ethos* and its immediacy, and to its identity with the object (cf. *Grundrisse*, 85). Revolutionary is then not the abolition of labor as such, but the abolition of surplus labor and of necessary labor as a necessity posited by capital. This covers the spectrum of what productive labor is. We are left with *this* labor, precisely, with the *thisness* of labor, the *thisness* of time and production. Destroyed is the value form of labor. The labor that remains is not a curse. Nowhere is Marx clearer about this than when he makes fun of Adam Smith for whom, Marx says, labor is precisely this, a curse. But for Marx, and this precisely because for him production is not synonymous with capitalist production, labor is "in itself a liberating activity" (611). The curse is not labor, but the subsumption of labor under capital. Claiming the superfluous while maintaining intact the structure of capital,

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[3]For the incompatibility of these two concepts ('expansion' and 'development'), see Samir Amin (1997, 14).

is not and cannot be revolutionary. Or D'Annunzio would be a better revolutionary theorist than Marx. Instead, labor remains. And this labor that remains –these hands, this brain– is praxis: the action of freedom, the self-realization of the subject, its coming back to a destiny of difference. Speaking of Smith, Marx says: "Certainly, labour obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it. But Smith has no inkling whatever that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity – and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits – hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labor" (611).

3.4 The thisness of time and production

The *Grundrisse* is a work about time, and it is so in a fundamental sense. This means that time is the most fundamental category of the *Grundrisse*. Again, it means that time is the *subject* of Marx's critique of political economy – subject in the double sense of subject-matter (or object) and of ground (or foundation). This becomes evident as soon as one opens the *Grundrisse*: "The object before us, to begin with, *material production*" (Marx, 1973, 83). This is how *Notebook M* starts. But *material production* is time, both as objectified and as subjective labor. The *tense* of this time which is immediately labor is alternatively the perfect or present tense: "The difference between previous, objectified labour and living, present labour here [i.e., in the accumulation of capital] appears as a merely formal difference between the different tenses of labour, at one time in the perfect

and at another in the present" (465-466; brackets added). Material production is, then, time both as *having been produced* and as *producing*, as *having become* and as *becoming*. The difference between these two modalities is the difference between the substantial form of capital and living labor, between the capitalist and the worker. It is a difference which presents itself immediately as antagonism and opposition. It is, in fact, the structural constitution of the class struggle.

But Marx also says: "Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself" (173). This means, again, that time is the irreducible subject of political economy as a science as well as of the critique of political economy. But time as being is also the subject of metaphysics. And if time itself, as Kant says, does not change while everything else changes in time,[4]–if, in other words, time remains (in substance) identical with itself– yet, at the same time and in a certain respect, it changes, for *this* time is different from *that* time, and there is no time over and beyond each *this* of its individuation. This means that each moment contracts all time within itself, and that the present –as Benjamin stressed– is always in transition.[5] In terms of what Marx says in the *Grundrisse*, this means that, even though each mode of production is precisely only *a* mode, the individuating modality is not simply an external addition. If all time is contracted in *this* moment and all production in *this* mode of production, the modality itself, far from being extrinsic and general, is essential and singular.

The problem of production is then the problem of time, for production is time. Now, it is as absurd to speak of *time in general* as it is to speak of *production in general*.

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[4]Cf. Kant (1929, for instance B225).

[5]Benjamin (1969, 262).

"Whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development – production by social individuals" (Marx, 1973, 85). The *principium individuationis* is here stated in all its meaningfulness. There is no production beyond the *this* of production. "Production is always a *particular* branch of production...or it is a *totality*" (86). Whether it is considered in its particularity or in its totality, production is a concrete whole, and this is what *material production* stands for: a sort of Aristotelian composite of matter (material) and form (production). Of course, "production in general" can be used as a "rational abstraction," for –as Marx says– "it really brings out and fixes the *common element* [of all production] and thus saves us repetition" (85; brackets and emphasis added). But that it saves us repetition does not mean that production in general or general production is actually found as either a concrete or abstract reality. As an abstraction, it is only rational, i.e., purely formal and empty. It is not the *determinate abstraction* (cf. Negri, 1991a, 47) Marx will speak about when he deals with abstract labor or with the question of method. In fact, in these latter two cases –of which more will be said later– the abstraction is still historically determined and it fully and exclusively belongs to the capitalist mode of production. But this is not the case with production in general or general production, where it is not yet a question of "the relationship between scientific presentation [*Darstellung*] and the real movement" (Marx, 1973, 86). Indeed, the aim of those economists who start with general production (with "the *general preconditions* of all production") is in actuality "to present production...as distinct from distribution etc., as encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, at which opportunity *bourgeois* relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded"

(87). An eminently political aim.

It is very important not to confuse the empty, merely formal and rational abstraction, which may nonetheless have a certain usefulness in discourse and method, with the determinate abstraction which has a massive socio-ontological status of its own. In other words, it is important not to confuse the empty formula of the thing with the thing's actual structure and power, the level of predication with that of reality.

3.5 The concept of essential difference

All of the above does not cancel the truth that "all epochs of production have certain *common traits, common characteristics* [*Bestimmungen*]" (85; brackets and emphasis added). This commonality is certainly very important. However, even more important are the different determinations, the *essential difference*, without which a mode of production would not be *this* mode. Indeed, the word "mode" in the expression "mode of production" is fundamental. If one spoke about production in general, one would be speaking about a *what* without knowing *which what* it was, without knowing the *how* of the *what*. But that would amount to speaking about something very indefinite and vague. Furthermore, the *how* that constitutes a *what* as *this what* is not an accidental one. Rather, it is essential. Yet, by being essential, it is not eternal, immutable, and common. It is essential, and yet it is a difference. It is, in fact, an *essential difference*: "...the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity –which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature– their *essential difference* is not forgotten" (85; emphasis

added).

The importance of distinguishing between the *essential difference* and the *common element* of production cannot be stressed enough. In fact, by confusing the two, bourgeois political economy is able to prove, *logically*, that capital is a necessary and common element of production. The syllogism of political economy is as follows: Since no production is possible without an instrument of production or past labor and since capital is also an instrument of production and past labor, then capital is "a general, eternal relation of nature" (85-86). Of course, Marx adds, "that is, if I leave out just the *specific quality* which *alone* makes 'instrument of production' and 'stored-up labour' into 'capital'" (86; emphasis added).[6] The logic of bourgeois political economy makes capital into a common element of all modes of production because it does not isolate the specific determinations from the common determinations of production. Both kinds of determinations are essential, but they are not essential in the same way. Of course, all epochs have both specific and common determinations, but whereas the latter are always the same, the former are each time different. That the specific determinations are also essential only means that production is not conceivable without *a mode* of production. That they are different means that this mode always changes (and yet *a* mode must be

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[6]Marx returns on this important point in the chapter on Capital: "If, then the specific form of capital is abstracted away, and only the content is emphasized, ..., *then of course nothing is easier than to demonstrate that capital is a necessary condition for all human production*. The proof of this proceeds precisely by abstraction from the specific aspects which make it the moment of a specifically developed *historic* stage of human production. The catch is that if all capital is objectified labour which serves as means for new production, it is not the case that all objectified labour which serves as means for new production is capital" (1973, 258).

there). The capitalist mode of production is not production proper, i.e., production as immediate subjective creation, though the concept of production proper is subsumed within it. Fundamentally, the capitalist mode of production requires the conversion of use value into exchange value, the reduction of the labor capacity to a commodity, and the creation of surplus value. On the other hand, the common element of production is nothing but the "already" of "the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature" (85), namely, living labor. However, in the *already* of this identity, living labor is always useful labor.[7] It is , of course, time, but time as quality not as quantity. With the coming of a commodity economy –and particularly with capital– living labor is split into two different aspects or properties: useful (or concrete) and abstract labor – "different in their very essence" (Marx, 1977, 309). Abstract labor, which at first could seem as the common element, is, in reality, a specific quality of the logic of exchange value.[8] In fact,

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[7]"Labour...as the creator of useful value, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself" (Marx, 1977, 133).

[8]I do not fully understand the real nature of abstract labor. My first persuasion was that abstract labor constituted the most common element of all useful labor. Indeed, this still seems to be correct from a logical and ontological point of view. However, this view would entail the presence of abstract labor before and beyond capital — a view which would be the opposite of what Marx says, for capital would be, again, necessary and eternal. Both Rubin (1972, 131-158) and Lukács (1971, 83-110; but particularly 87-88), among other writers, see abstract labor as pertaining exclusively to capital. In fact, abstract labor is the value-creating or value-increasing property of labor. Yet, precisely because of this, the following can be said: As a creator of value, abstract labor becomes the middle term in the dialectic between human beings and nature. It becomes the vanishing mediation between the object of capital and capital, and it appears as a power of capital. Outside capital, abstract labor would vanish in the return of labor to its immediacy. This does not mean that abstract labor would completely disappear. It only means that, for it to appear, certain historical and social conditions must obtain. Of course, this is another logical difficulty, for the question now becomes: Is then capital always possible? But I leave it at that for now. What I want to say is that, if abstract labor

abstract labor is the creator of value, which is the substance of exchange value and thus of money. However, this does not mean that abstract labor is a pure invention of capital. Rather, it is that aspect of living labor which capital is able to isolate and extract, to reproduce, and be produced by.[9] The implication is not that abstract labor is in complete opposition to useful labor. In fact, there can be no expenditure of the former without expenditure of the latter. Thus, even though capital's only interest is time as quantity, it cannot avoid the quality of time as a plurality of subjective practices.

Remark 1: Dialectic and metaphysics

To speak about time is, in general, to speak about metaphysics or ontology. Now, this can seem strange, for Marx is certainly an anti-metaphysical thinker. Indeed, insofar as Marx's philosophy is based on dialectic, it is an anti-metaphysical philosophy. In fact, dialectical thinking represents one of the ways in which western philosophy has tried to overcome or get rid of metaphysics. Hence, dialectic and metaphysics have often been contrasted as opposite. The opposition between dialectic and metaphysics can be reduced to the opposition –within Presocratic philosophy– between Heraclitus and Parmenides. Supposedly, the former says that everything constantly changes, everything is in flux; the

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is –in Harvey's apt expression– "a *distillation*...out of a seemingly infinite variety of concrete labour activities" (Harvey, 1989, 15; emphasis added), then it must somehow be there from the beginning. The point is that, under non-commodity production (production of use values) –and this would restore the correct historical perspective– there is simply no separation between the two aspects or properties of labor in question. The common element is then living labor before its division into useful and abstract labor. Consequently, the *essential difference* of capital is not simply abstract labor, but the separation of living labor into its two properties and the negation of its immediacy.

[9]Capital reproduces abstract labor insofar as it "produces the worker as a wage-worker" (Marx, 1977, 716).

latter that nothing ever changes, that everything remains the same. The former presents a philosophy of becoming; the latter a philosophy of permanence. However, this view is not necessarily correct. Both Hegel and Heidegger have shown the fundamental agreement between the philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides. Moreover, reality itself shows –as soon as one thinks a little about it– that becoming and permanence cannot be in a position of mutual exclusion, but rather that the one cannot be without the other. The correct view would then be that things change and yet do not change. In other words, they change in certain respects and do not change in others.[10]

3.6 Rosdolsky and Negri

The question of dialectic raises the question of the relation of Marx to Hegel, as well as the question of the relation of the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*. According to Negri (1991a), these questions are resolved by denying anything which is more than a terminological and conceptual resemblance between Hegel and Marx and by establishing the *Grundrisse* as autonomous from *Capital*. For Negri, the *Grundrisse* is not a rough draft to be used for philological purposes, but a *political text* in its own right. Indeed, the *Grundrisse* is for him superior to *Capital*, for the *openness* of the former makes possible what the *objectified categories* of the latter impede: the action by revolutionary subjectivity (8-

[10]That permanence and becoming cannot exclude one another was already explained by Aristotle: "It is also evident that neither those who say that all things are at rest speak truly, nor those who say that all things are in motion . For if all things are at rest, whatever is true will always be true and whatever is false will always be false, yet there appears to be a change; ...And if all things are in motion , nothing will be true, and so everything will be false; but this [is]... impossible" (1979, 1012b 23-28).

9).[11] At the end of his book, Negri denies the dialectic, "that eternal formula of Judeo-Christian thought, that circumlocution for saying –in the Western world– rationality" (189).

Rosdolsky, on the other hand and before Negri, sees what he constantly calls the *Rough Draft* as "a massive reference to Hegel, in particular to his *Logic*" (1977, xiii) and considers superficial the view that Marx's relation to Hegel is only terminological and external. Furthermore, as the title of his book explicitly says, the *Grundrisse* is for Rosdolsky a preparation to *Capital*. However, he warns that one "should not...exaggerate the similarity of the two works" (51). And pointing to the transformation of money into capital as an important moment of this similarity, he concludes: "Both are the product of Marx's dialectical method...*The difference lies only in the method of presentation*" (189-190; emphasis added).

It is evident that the views of Rosdolsky and Negri are diametrically opposed, yet their opposition does not require that readers of the *Grundrisse* or of Marx in general take sides with either one or the other. As Rosdolsky's reference to Schumpeter shows,[12] his interpretation tends toward an appraisal of the dialectic against a background which seems to reduce the hermeneutical options to either metaphysics[13] or positive science.

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[11]Even though I agree with Negri's characterization of the *Grundrisse* as an *open work*, I do not see why *Capital* –and this, of course, beyond the use that may have been made of it– would necessarily "block" revolutionary subjective action.

[12]In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter says: "Marx retained his early love during the whole of his lifetime. He enjoyed certain formal analogies which may be found between his and Hegel's argument. He liked to testify to his Hegelianism and to use Hegelian terminology. But this is all. *Nowhere did he betray positive science to metaphysics*" (1950, 9-10; quoted in Rosdolsky, 1977, xii; emphasis mine).

[13]Of course, 'metaphysics' is here used in its vulgar sense. See Remark 2, below.

Rosdolsky's further references, to Lenin and Lukács, make it clear that the question of the dialectic and of its passage from Hegel to Marx –notwithstanding the latter's radical and materialist inversion of it– has to remain central within Marxism, against both vulgar metaphysics and its offspring, positivism. "The publication of the *Grundrisse* means that academic critics of Marx will no longer be able to write without first having studied his method and its relation to Hegel" (Rosdolsky, 1977, xiii).

Negri, however, starts from different theoretical and practical premises. His reading, which stems from the experience of the Autonomy Movement in Italy and is in accordance with the Althusserian and Deleuzian destruction of Hegelianism, is also an attack against the orthodoxy of Marxism and of the traditional communist party. Furthermore, by abandoning the dialectic, Negri is not concerned with the question as to whether Marxism is a metaphysics or a positive science. He has, in fact –at the time of *Marx beyond Marx* and subsequently– a different conception of metaphysics, namely, metaphysics as an antagonistic and alternative political ontology, or constitutive practice, which seems to have little or no use of the categories of traditional dialectic. In this sense, the dialectic also falls within the vulgar metaphysics it tried to combat.

The question of the relation of the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* and of Marx to Hegel becomes a hermeneutical and a political question. Of course, hermeneutics itself is always political, yet it is not so in a dogmatic way. I cannot elaborate on this problem here, but I will try to present a few suggestions. It is, I believe, fair to say that Rosdolsky's view is hermeneutically correct insofar as it considers the dialectic as intrinsic to the real movement *and* to the mode of presentation in the *Grundrisse*. In this sense, it is also fair to say that the *Grundrisse* can illuminate the reading of *Capital*.

However, it is also important to recognize the *openness* of Marx's dialectic against the circularity of the dialectic of Hegel. Thus Hegel goes to pieces when the form of capital proves to be unable to return to itself, when what seemed to be a circle turns out to be a spiral. "Exchange value posited as the unity of commodity and money is *capital*, and this positing itself appears as the circulation of capital. (*Which is, however, a spiral, an expanding curve, not a simple circle*)" (Marx, 1973, 266; emphasis added). But circularity is, for Hegel, the *essential requirement* of dialectical logic: "The essential requirement for the science of logic is...that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first" (Hegel, 1989, 71). Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra to the dwarf who said that "time itself is a circle," Marx is saying to an ideal Hegel (for instance, to Proudhon): "do not make things too easy for yourself!" (Nietzsche, 1954, 270). However, the spiral movement is not a denial of the dialectic; it is rather a denial of the circularity which lies more in the movement of the concept than in the real movement.[14] Indeed, the dialectic still remains as the motor of a movement which breaks free of the circle into a spiral. At this point, the question must be

[14]It is true that, as Negri says, "Marx's score with Hegel was settled long before [at the time of the so-called *Early Writings*]; here [in the *Grundrisse*] it is only a question of going back to him in a critical and scientific manner" (1991a, 3; brackets added). Indeed, the critique of Hegel is not at all an aspect of the *Grundrisse*. Under attack here are the bourgeois political economists and the socialists, first of all Proudhon. It is the latter who appear as Hegelians. Now, if we ask what is the result of the concept of circularity, the answer is *identity*. And it is this concept of identity that Marx wants to smash. Speaking of the problem of production and consumption –within the wider context of the concept of production as a Hegelian totality in which production, distribution, exchange and consumption are only members, "distinctions within a unity" (Marx, 1973, 99)– Marx says: "Thereupon, nothing simpler for a Hegelian than to posit production and consumption as identical. And this has been done not only by socialist belletrists but by prosaic economists themselves, e.g. Say; in the form that when one looks at an entire people, its production is its consumption. Or, indeed, at humanity in the abstract" (93-94).

posed as to why the dialectic is unable to perform the circular movement prescribed by Hegel and why what was supposed to be the end and coincide with the beginning is displaced and thrown into the open.

The answer to the above questions is to be looked for in the concepts and in *the reality* of crisis and catastrophe.[15] The dialectic is broken because reality is broken. The former remains open because openness characterizes the real movement. Thus, politically, Negri's reading of the *Grundrisse* is very convincing even though I do not see the reason for denying the dialectic *tout court*.[16]

Remark 2: Vulgar metaphysics and poetic metaphysics

In the history of philosophy, it is possible to distinguish between a metaphysics of transcendence –but not of the transcendental– and a metaphysics of immanence. The former can also be called *vulgar* metaphysics. Its main tenet is the principle of "the ontotheological One" (Alliez, 1996, 200). The latter is a *poetic* (or *poietic*) metaphysics whose presupposition and result are ethical, practical and whose inner motor is political to the core. Marx's metaphysics of time is of the latter type, and it is, as Negri says, a "cursed" metaphysics (Negri, 1992, 151). It is a cursed metaphysics because it is a materialist one, and because it carries within its womb the tools for a radical transformation of the world.

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[15]See Negri (1991a, 9 and 85-104)

[16]Notwithstanding Negri's denial of the dialectic in all its forms, he still retains – both in *Marx beyond Marx* and in his later writings– a dialectic of antagonism as the motor of his concept of a constitutive ontology.

Critical metaphysics, which starts with Kant, still falls within a vulgar type of metaphysics, even though, by denying access to the thing-in-itself, it keeps reason from deluding itself. But to criticize vulgar –in Kant's case: dogmatic– metaphysics without building a metaphysics of immanence is tantamount to remaining caught within it. This is also the case with Heidegger, the school of deconstruction, and analytic philosophy in general. It is not the case with Nietzsche and Marx.

It is true that today one cannot overlook Heidegger's fundamental contribution to the question of time. Yet, as Negri says, one does not need to compare Marx to Heidegger in order to understand the former's concept of time. In fact, "Marx has a metaphysics of time as, indeed, more radical than Heidegger's" (Negri, 1992, 41). With Marx, "...temporality can be rooted in man's productive capacity, in the ontology of his becoming – an open temporality, absolutely constitutive, which does not reveal Being but produces beings" (*ibid.*). The difference between "revealing" and "producing" is fundamental. The Heideggerian modality of revealing (and this is also true of the later Heidegger on language and technology) still retains something of the *beyond* typical of vulgar metaphysics.[17] For Marx, on the other hand, the metaphysics of time does not reveal anything. If there is a hidden subject, it affirms itself in and through production. If there is a subterrenean fire, it breaks itself open through its incessant labor. Negri continues: "...Marx liberates what Heidegger ties up; Marx lights up with praxis what Heidegger brings back to the mystical. The Heideggerian time is the form of Being, it is

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[17]See, for instance, the lectures on *The Nature of Language* in *On the Way to Language*. For Heidegger, the time of *poiesis*, the poetic experience, "points to something thought-provoking and memorable with which thinking has been charged from the beginning, even though in a veiled manner" (Heidegger, 1971, 87).

the indistinction of an absolute ground; the Marxian time is production of being, it is still a form, but the form of an absolute procedure. The Marxian temporality is the key through which a subject which is formally predisposed to the adequation with an absolute procedure becomes materially able to enter such a process, to define itself as constituent power" (42).[18] The substance of this constituent power is time. Marx's metaphysics of time is the open dialectic of living labor "set free" by the inability of capital to reconstitute its own identity.

Identical is only that concept which, without being a *one*, is contracted into an infinite series of possible differences. In the history of western metaphysics, this concept has been established by John Duns Scotus in an objective fashion. This means that the concept is not an empty abstraction but a real, objective being. The self-identity of this concept, namely, its neutral immediacy, which is also absolute difference, allows for its univocal expansion and inclusion into everything that is.[19] This concept can be given different names: being, time, power (as *potentia*, i.e., not as *constituted* but as *constituent* power).[20] It is the principle of that which can be and not be, which is and is not. In Marxian terms, moving from pure ontology to political ontology, this concept is living labor. It is then the principle which demystifies the view of bourgeois philosophy and political economy according to which the laws governing the capitalist mode of production are immutable and eternal. In fact, the capitalist mode of production is *this* repetition of an ongoing process, which is the process of becoming itself. It is *this*

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[18]The translation of passages from Negri (1992) is mine.

[19]See Duns Scotus (1987) and Deleuze (1994).

[20]See Negri (1991b) and (1992).

essential difference that, as long as it is, totalizes itself and works toward the subsumption of everything else under itself. But precisely by so doing, precisely by this act of subsuming and totalizing, of turning itself into a *positive whole*, of leaving *nothing* outside itself, it reaches its concept and vanishes and withers away. *The concept of the end, so much talked about in these recent years, is nothing but the coming to completion of an essential difference*. It is true that this essential difference (the capitalist mode of production) is such that it has subsumed everything under itself and has left (actually: created) *nothing* outside. Yet it would be useful to ask, in a Heideggerian fashion: is this nothing really nothing or is it something after all? The answer is that the nothing which lies outside the positive whole in which our essential difference has transformed itself is time as the constituent power of being, time which either becomes completely subsumed under capital and constitutes the substance of the latter's valorization or exceeds the capacity of capital and is seen by the latter as waste time.[21] If it is nothing, that is only because capital has no use for it. Capital has in fact already become, it has accomplished –through the appropriation without exchange of one part of its own negation: surplus labor– its M-M' movement, it has tried to rejoin itself a step ahead of itself. Yet this nothing –which is capital's own creation– is caught within the spiral movement of capital as the force that breaks the circle open into a spiral, for, in its constant drive to go beyond itself, to expand and yet desperately try to maintain a stable identity, capital steps into the very nothing it needs to use or disregard (cf. Negri, 1991a, 91 and 100; and Marx, 1973,

[21]This latter case is explained by the law of the tendency of the profit rate to decline (cf. Negri, 1991a, 100).

462).[22] Yet capital cannot avoid stepping outside itself, for this movement belongs to its concept. The nothing outside capital, the *not-capital* is *labor*, *living labor*, regardless of whether it is *productive* (i.e., actually employed by capital for its own valorization) or not. I will return to this point below.

3.7 The problem of method

In "The Method of Political Economy," Marx deals with the relationship between the method of presentation and the real movement. He says that "the method of raising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being" (1973, 101).

One will not be able to think the concrete as concrete if one does not grasp its elemental structure. And one cannot grasp the latter on the basis of *Vorstellung*, representation. In thought, the concrete comes at the end of a process of analysis and synthesis, though in reality it comes at the beginning. In the process of thinking, the concrete appears "as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation [*Anschauung*] and conception" (101). If thought stops at the level of concretion, it will only reach a confused representation of reality and an abstraction; the latter, however, will not be a meaningful, determinate abstraction, but an empty one.

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[22]This is the question of the tendencies of capital. "It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. 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" (Marx, 1973, 399).

Of course, Marx's abstraction is not the empty abstraction of the logician, but it is a *determinate abstraction*, i.e, "the abstraction which seeks the real in the concrete" (Negri, 1991a, 48).[23] It is the internal structure of the concrete divided into its constitutive elements: division of labor, money, value, commodity, etc. Ascending from these abstractions to the concrete makes it possible for the latter to be reconstituted in thought as it really is: a "concentration of many determinations," a "unity of the diverse" (Marx, 1973, 101), without having the obscurity and confusion of representational, pictorial thinking. As Marx himself says, making the example of labor, "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" (105). Which means that these abstractions are not timeless, but always rooted in time and in history.

The method that goes from the abstract to the concrete is the one which takes into consideration the common element of production and the specificity of each mode of production. The common element is not something determined *a priori*, on the basis of thinking alone: "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" (104). However, the most important determination is not the common element –with which, however, one needs to start– but the specificity of production: "In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose

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[23]On the other hand, Negri adds, "*the concrete...seeks in abstraction its determination*" (48: Negri's emphasis), and this constitutes the process of tendency.

relations thus assign rank and influence to the others" (106-107). Marx continues with a poetic metaphor full of philosophical significance: "It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and *modifies their particularity*. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it" (107). Then, in a way that brings to mind the unpublished chapter of *Capital* on the formal and real subsumption, Marx says: "Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society" (*Ibid.*).[24] The concept of capital is not, as it was for political economy, an abstraction of commonality and a general relation of nature, but it is the most fundamental of the categories "which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society" (108). At this level of analysis –as well as in reality– another fundamental category –one without which capital would not be capital– is wage labor. The end of this process of analysis, which brings to the reconstitution of the concrete in its totality and specificity, is the world market and the crisis of capital. The concept of crisis, however, is one that runs throughout the whole development of capital, and it becomes the concept of the class struggle or –as far as capital is concerned– of the history of bourgeois society. It is the concept of time itself, for, under capital, time is the time of crisis.

[24]On the question of subsumption, see the important unpublished sixth chapter of *Capital* (Marx, 1977, 1019-1038).

3.8 Money

The time of capital is the time of crisis. It is the difference between M and M'. This difference is a constitutive and thus a positive one. It is in fact the process of realization of capital and the condition of its development.[25] But that which constitutes it, living labor, is the negation of that which is constituted by it, capital. Living labor constitutes itself as its own negation: "It posits itself objectively, but it posits this, its objectivity, as its own not-being or as the being of its not-being – of capital" (Marx, 1973, 454).

The time of difference is that which changes becoming into a having become.[26]

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[25]"Marx's theory of crisis and its counteracting tendencies is the core of his critique of capitalist production. Contrary to the commonsense view that crisis may then sound the death-knell of capitalism, Marx held that crises were the condition of capitalist development" (Aronowitz, 1981, 184).

[26]The dialectic between becoming and having become is also treated by Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, in the section on the accumulation of capital (459-471). In this section, capital emerges into existence as the truth of being, namely, as the essence it has become (I am, of course, using Hegelian terminology). From this moment on, "it creates its own presuppositions, i.e. the possession of the real conditions of new values *without exchange*," which appear "*not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence*" (460; Marx's emphasis). Insofar as capital is establishing its ground, we are still within the Hegelian circle (cf. Book II of *The Science of Logic*, "The Doctrine of Essence"). Yet the spiral movement of productive capital does not cancel the dialectic between becoming and having become. Here becoming appears as living, abstract labor which changes capital from a thing to a process. "Labour is the yeast thrown into it, which starts it fermenting" (298). In this process, labor is not only consumed but also objectified, i.e., from *becoming* it itself changes to *a having become*. Labor, as subjectivity, acts upon an object and modifies it. In so doing, "as a modification of the object, it modifies its own form and changes *from activity to being*" (300; emphasis added). In *Capital*, I, Marx says the same: "Labour has become bound up in its object: labour has been objectified, the object has been worked on. What on the side of the worker appeared in the form of unrest [*Unruhe*] now appears, on the side of the product, in the form of Being [*Sein*], as a fixed, immobile characteristic" (287; see also 296). The product is the coincidence and the neutral result of three moments: the material, the instrument, and labor. The whole process is one of *productive consumption*, indeed it is "consumption of consumption itself" (Marx, 1973, 301). The "*form-giving* activity consumes the object and consumes itself, but it consumes the given form of the object only in order to posit it in a new objective form, and it consumes itself only in its subjective form as activity" (301).

The latter moment is not simply the end of the process, but it is also the beginning of a new process. It is a repetition, but one which –in the process of realization– occurs in a time of difference. Money is the subject of this time: a subject which does not have a reality of its own. In fact, money is only the form of value, whose reality, or substance, is labor time which "exists only subjectively, only in the form of activity" (171). In this sense, labor, as the time of expenditure of its power, is the real subject. Yet, under capital, living labor is expended only if alienated by the worker to the capitalist in an act of *free* exchange whose vanishing mediation is money.[27] Living labor is then wage labor. This means that money, in one of its various functions, appears as the link between the subjectivity of becoming, of living labor, and its objectification into a having become. But money is only the form of appearance of exchange value. Thus, the *Grundrisse*, in its aspect of being a huge pamphlet against Darimon and the Proudhonians, has as its main objective the necessity of abolishing not simply money but exchange value, i.e., the specificity of the capitalist mode of production: "...it is impossible to abolish money itself as long as exchange value remains the social form of product" (145).

Yet the having become of becoming is not fully capital if and until money has changed into more money. In fact, the dialectic between becoming and having become is not proper of capital, but it belongs to the *already* of the identity of human beings and nature (85). This is why the concept of subsumption becomes fundamental. If money becomes the form of being[28] and being is time, money's transition to capital is

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[27]Money is either identical with itself (M-M), or it is the form of a time of difference (M-M').

[28] "The philosophical significance of money is that it represents within the practical world the most certain image and the clearest embodiment of the formula of all

accomplished by subsuming the whole being of the worker –through the appropriation without exchange of a portion of the labor time and the reduction of the other portion to a "consumption fund" (594) for the satisfaction of needs. However, even though the opposition between labor and capital becomes explicit only in a developed form of production (namely, with the production of surplus value), it is already, though latently, contained in the "simple forms of exchange value and of money" (248), that is to say, in the commodity form.

3.9 The form of the thing

In section one of "The Chapter on Capital" of the *Grundrisse* –"The Production Process of Capital"– Marx goes from the phenomenology of the concept of capital to the production of surplus value and profit. It is not my intention to deal systematically with the whole section. Rather, I will try to underline passages of it which are important to the understanding of the concepts of labor and time.

Let me start with the concept of capital. The first thing I want to say is that capital is labor *and yet* it is not labor. It is not labor, for labor is the not-capital: "the real *not-capital* is *labour*" (274). What is meant here by labor is *living labor*, labor as subjectivity, activity, as the "form-giving fire" (361), which economically and philosophically constitutes a much more general, universal and fundamental category than capital. Capital, in fact, only pertains to the capitalist mode of production, but it pertains to it in an essential way, as its *essential difference* or specificity. Living labor, on

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being, according to which things receive their meaning through each other, and have their being determined by their mutual relations" (Simmel, 1990, 128-129).

the other hand, pertains to production as such; it is a *common element* of production. I am not talking here of productive or valorizing labor, which is the form in which labor is subsumed under capital, but of living labor as –I repeat– the fire which gives form to all beings that come out of the relationship between humans and nature or humans and technology.

This living labor is, perhaps at times only as possibility, the horizon of capital. Even though capital tries –out of a necessity inherent in its concept– to subsume all labor under itself, living labor always and potentially exceeds the capacity of capital, and this is why a revolution is possible. The necessity inherent in the concept of capital is that which leads capital to employ and not employ as much living labor as it can; it is, in other words, the fundamental contradiction of capital which manifests itself in a special way in the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to decline.[29]

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[29]This law is a function of the relation between constant and variable capital. Constant and variable capital are, from the point of view of the valorization process, what means of production and labor-power are from the point of view of the labor process, that is, respectively, the objective and subjective factors of capital (Marx, 1977, 317). According to this law, the greater the mass of objectified labor (i.e. constant capital) set in motion by living labor, the less is the surplus-value which capital is able to appropriate. In other words, the gradual growth of constant capital in relation to variable capital –a direct result of the valorization process– makes the appropriation of surplus-value progressively smaller, for less labor is able to produce a greater quantity of commodities. In volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx says that this law is "just another expression for the progressive development of the social productivity of labour" (1981, 318), and he explains it as follows: "Since the mass of living labour applied continuously declines in relation to the mass of objectified labour that it sets in motion, i.e. the productively consumed means of production, the part of this living labour that is unpaid and objectified in surplus-value must also stand in an ever-decreasing ratio between the mass of surplus-value and the total capital applied in fact constitutes the rate of profit, which must therefore steadily fall" (319).

It is also true that, however, capital is labor. But as such, it is only accumulated, objectified, dead labor. In this sense, capital is understood as a thing, not as a relation or process (258), and in so doing, the most important aspect of capital is lost. To say that capital is accumulated labor –Marx argues against Adam Smith– is to refer to "the simple material of capital, without regard to the formal character without which it is not capital" (257). Marx's argument here repeats what he has already said in the introduction when he was speaking of the difference between the element common to all production and the essential difference of each mode of production (85-86).[30] Since capital is an essential difference and not a common element, it cannot be understood simply as labor. However, this is not only true from the point of view of the most general abstraction, namely, the point of view which abstracts what is common out of the concrete and thus points to what in the concrete is essentially different. As I have noted, capital is not labor because labor is the not-capital The labor which is objectified as capital (in the means of production, for instance) needs to be *resurrected from the dead* by living labor (364). Furthermore, capital cannot be a thing because what characterizes it –insofar as it is the representative of money as the general form of wealth– is "the constant drive to go beyond its quantitative limit" (270; see also 334). However, as I have already noted, this drive also constitutes the source of capital's main contradiction, one which leads it into crises.

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[30]See section 1, above.

What this tells us is that capital is nothing but time (not time in general, not time *as time*, but a specific modality of time) striving continuously to go beyond itself. It is the time of production as the time of exploitation, the time of total subsumption; it is the urge to make value out of value, surplus value and profit.

It is because capital is not labor, or not labor *as labor*, that Marx says: "To develop the concept of capital it is necessary to begin not with labour but with value, and precisely, with exchange value in an already developed movement of circulation" (259). In fact, labor as such, not productive or valorizing labor, is, in the last analysis, –i.e., notwithstanding the fact that labor is always socially determined– a relation of nature. As Marx says in *Capital*, "[l]abour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (I, 283). But capital, on the other hand, is an exclusively social category. To go back to the *Grundrisse*, Marx adds: "It is just as impossible to make the transition directly from labour to capital as it is to go from the different human races directly to the banker, or from nature to the steam engine" (259).

Thus the beginning is made with value, exchange value. But what is value? Exchange value, "the substance of money" (221), is nothing but a given amount of labor time contained in a commodity. The substance of value is labor, but the form of appearance of this substance is exchange value and money. However, from the point of view of the genesis of capital, money is to be considered as the medium of circulation and at the same time, and in addition to that, as what suspends itself from circulation. In

this sense, money *is and is not* in circulation, and this constitutes its transition to capital.[31] The full form of capital –as productive capital– is M-M'. However, the form of circulation M-C-C-M (which presupposes the simple form C-M-M-C) is the first appearance of capital, precisely, of commercial capital. "As soon as money is posited as an exchange value which not only becomes independent of circulation, but which also maintains itself through it, then it is no longer money,...but is *capital*" (259).[32]

As we have seen, capital is *not a thing* but a *process*. This is so because money as capital is not a thing but a process. Even though the concept of capital cannot be developed from labor, it is labor which remains the substance of things and which also gives form to things. Even the transition from thing to process is something accomplished by labor. In fact, when money returns to itself from circulation and becomes capital (a return which can be seen as a broken identity), labor also returns to itself. "But the nature of the return is this, that the labour objectified in the exchange value posits living labor as a means of reproducing it, whereas, originally, exchange value appeared merely as a

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[31]Money is the *first concept* of capital and the *first form* in which it appears. Capital starts from money which *is and is not* in circulation (253). Like all other commodities, money has the ability to step outside circulation. But differently from all other commodities, which by stepping out of circulation are consumed and destroyed, money acquires thereby an independent existence as "the non-substantial general form of wealth" (254).

[32]This contradiction is also present in the exchange process between the capitalist and the worker. In *Capital* Marx says: "Capital cannot therefore arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation" (I, 268). And: "This whole course of events, the transformation of money into capital, both takes place and does not take place in the sphere of circulation. It takes place in circulation because it is conditioned by the purchase of the labour-power in the market; it does not take place in circulation because what happens there is only an introduction to the valorization process, which is entirely confined to the sphere of production" (I, 302).

product of labour" (263). What is here clearly indicated is the passage from value to surplus value, for living labor will be necessary and surplus labor. The return is a violent attempt at attaining an impossible identity, and it is in reality not a return, for M *has become* M'. But what is M-M'? In the words of Éric Alliez: "It is the convulsive movement of what does not come back to itself, the specter of what does not come back into itself, thereby breaking the natural motion of need that had bodied forth in the notion of reciprocity that led to exchange, and from exchange to the polis – thereby drawing the entire astrologies of the Same into an abyss of dissimilarity" (Alliez, 1996, 2). M-M' is this abyss. It is not time as time, but the specific modality of a time which is unable to return to itself. The question is here that of the separation between use value and exchange value and of the fetishism that comes with it. The impossibility of the return is not the positive one due to consumption, for in this case a return of sort would still obtain. Rather, it is the totally negative lack of return which, as Marx says, "becomes *madness*" (269) –a madness which, however, constitutes the inner logic of capital.

3.10 The labor of fire

If capital is not labor, or if it is (and this only from the point of view of substance) only objectified labor, then what is labor? Labor as the *not-capital* is fundamentally two things. It is living labor and productive labor. I believe it is very important to distinguish between these concepts, for productive labor is always living labor, but living labor is not necessarily productive labor.

As Marx says in the already cited unpublished sixth chapter of *Capital*, "when we speak of *productive labour* we mean *socially determined* labour" (1977, 1043). However,

I think this (of productive labor) remains the most problematic question in Marx's critique of political economy. Marx equates living labor with productive labor. Of course, he does so because he looks at these categories from the point of view of capital in order to correct some mistakes of socialist writers, and, most importantly, because he wants to attack the uncritical view of some bourgeois political economists who say that all labor is productive (see, for instance, Marx, 1973, 272-273). However, he himself creates some confusion because, at times, one gets the impression that there is no living labor over and beyond productive labor, whereas this is so only under capital; and this impression is dangerous because it is easily convertible into a dogma. For this reason, it is important to repeat a fundamental point, namely that labor, in and for itself, is not productive (or better *neither productive nor unproductive*), but *creative* and that it only becomes productive or unproductive under capital.[33] In other words, it is important to keep in mind that the category of productivity itself is a category of capital. Capital itself is "productive" (325); in its ability to go beyond its own limit, it is a revolutionary agent: "its production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited" (410). Yet, Marx says: "The universality towards which it irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain stage of its development, allow it to be recognized as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency, and hence will drive towards its own suspension" (*ibid.*). The end of productive and unproductive labor is the beginning of real creative labor, of real freedom; it is the lighting of a communal fire, and

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[33]Under capital, "living labour itself appears as *alien vis-à-vis* living labour capacity, whose labour it is, whose own life's expression it is, for it has been surrendered to capital in exchange for objectified labour, for the product of labour itself" (Marx, 1973, 462).

not the self-conceited absorption in a solipsistic desire.

But productive labor is not creative labor; rather, it is *created* labor, that is, posited by capital as necessary and surplus labor. Productive labor is value-preserving and value-increasing labor, and it is opposed to unproductive labor, which is however also living labor. Marx introduces the concept of productive labor as he analyzes the relation of capital to labor. Starting from the idea that the opposite of capital cannot be one particular commodity, for the substance of capital itself is the communal substance of all commodities, i.e., objectified labor, Marx says that the opposite of capital is then "labour which is still objectifying itself, *labour* as subjectivity" (272). The difference between objectified and subjective labor is also expressed by Marx as the difference between labor which is *present in space* and labor which is *present in time*. "If it is to be present in time, alive, then it can be present only as the *living subject*, in which it exists as capacity, as possibility; hence as *worker*" (272). Of course, this is living labor, which is also said to be productive insofar as it is used by capital for its expansion or valorization. But it seems to me that the difference between productive and unproductive labor cannot be made on the basis of the description of labor as subjectivity or as presence in time. Thus, productive labor is only that labor which produces surplus value, i.e., unpaid labor; it is a form of living labor, but not the only one.

It is then important to see living labor as a category, not of political economy or capital, but of ontology. In fact, living labor is the "creative power" which, however, under capital, "comes to confront the worker as an *alien power*" (307). It is the subjectivity of which the worker *divests* himself. But living labor –and this needs to be stressed again– is not only and not necessarily productive labor. The two coincide only

when, as the result of the exchange between capital and labor, labor is transformed into capital (308). Marx also says: "The specific relationship between *objectified* and *living* labour that converts the former into capital also turns the latter into productive labour" (1977, 1043). Living labor is then called *productive* because it is in the production process that this transformation occurs. But labor becomes *productive* –in capital's sense of the word– only because, fundamentally, it *can* produce –in the common sense of the word. In other words, labor is not an ontological, creative power because it is *productive*; rather, it becomes *productive* –and this is the only reason capital wants it– because it is an ontological, creative power. Without labor, capital would be nothing. But the opposite does not hold true. Without capital, labor would not be productive, and yet it would not be nothing, either. Then, what would it be?

For a logic (that of capital) which posits labor as either productive or unproductive, it seems that if it is not productive it must be unproductive. This is, at first sight, a logic of either/or which works quite well as far as the rhetoric of capital is concerned. However, at a closer examination, it reveals itself to be a logic of *both/and* generated by the contradictions of capital itself: "Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist" (Marx, 1973, 401). But the positing and not-positing of necessary labor has nothing positive in it, for its positing is exploitation and its not-positing is annihilation. It is the *double freedom* which characterizes the worker's existence (see Marx, 1977, 272 and 874). Hence,

contrary to those writers who tend to resolve difficulties by means of this logic,[34] *both/and* is not an alternative. In reality, the *both/and* modality enjoyed by the few is the condition for the *neither/nor* modality of a growing majority; *both/and* is a paradise whose presupposition and result is the tragedy of a *neither/nor*. *Chiapas* is an example of this. The possibility of a change does not reside in the acceptance of the *both/and* mentality but in the creation, out of a double negation, of a new radicality, one in which the having become of becoming is resurrected again to return to the immediacy of its subject. The logic which breaks that of capital is a logic of *neither/nor*, a logic of double negation, or, again, a logic of double resistance and absolute affirmation.[35] Through this logic, labor returns to itself, not posited by capital as valorizing labor, but posited by itself as *neither productive nor unproductive labor*: as living labor or form-giving fire. Productive labor, in fact, in its double aspect of value-preserving and value-creating labor, only makes sense within the logic of exchange value and money. In its first aspect, productive labor reproduces use value. As a form of living labor, it still gives form to things. But in its second aspect –that for which alone it is productive– it only creates exchange value, and the only thing to which it gives form is capital.

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[34] For an example in philosophy, see Bernstein (1992, particularly 309-314).

[35] It is, in Negri's words, the power of *self-valorization* (Negri, 1991a). However, Negri does not characterize it as a *neither/nor* logic.

3.11 The abolition of productive labor

The abolition of productive labor is not simply the abolition of its second aspect, surplus labor. Even its first aspect, necessary labor, would cease to have to be conceived of in the way established by the logic of exchange value. In the same way in which Nietzsche's abolition of the true world of ideas is also the abolition of this world as a world of appearances and thus the abolition of vulgar metaphysics as a whole, Marx's theory of revolution implies the abolition not only of valorizing labor but also of the necessity of necessary labor *as a necessity posited by capital.* It is, in other words, the abolition of the concept of productive labor as a whole and of its counterpart, unproductive labor. It is also the abolition of the concept of waste labor. Neither-productive-nor-unproductive labor is labor which returns to itself as to its "*immediate being*" (1973, 308).[36] It is however important to note that labor in its immediate being is not the *in itself* but the *for itself* of labor. The fact that under capital labor is not able to return to its immediacy is due to its being posited by capital as the essential moment in the mediation through which alone capital relates to its object. This object is, in the last analysis, the form of capital itself as more money and profit. It is the *for itself* of capital in search of independence, power, and identity. Yet the power of capital is labor, which however becomes a power *for* capital only by ceasing to be a power for itself. In this sense labor too becomes the object of capital but only, of course, as labor alienated from the worker

[36] "*This transformation* [of labor into capital] is *posited* only in the *production process* itself. Thus, the question whether capital is productive or not is absurd. Labour itself is *productive only* if absorbed into capital, where capital forms the basis of production, and where the capitalist is therefore in command of production." And: "Labour, such as it exists for itself in the worker in opposition to capital, that is, labour in its *immediate being*, separated from capital, is not productive" (308).

and confronting him as an alien power, indeed, as the power of capital itself.

The ability of capital to posit the necessity of labor as necessary labor, so that this positing is at the same time the positing of surplus labor, rests on its ability to create – through the circularity of production and consumption– a relentless system of need. Need is, in fact, "subsumable"[37] and subsumed under capital. It is the vanishing mediation between production and consumption, that which posits both and is, in turn, posited by both. Living labor which returns to itself as to its *immediate being* is the exit from a system of need.[38] In fact, the immediacy of labor is its freedom – not its *double freedom*, that is, the freedom of the modern workers who "neither form part of the means of production themselves..., nor do they own the means of production" (Marx, 1977, 874) – but that which rests on the univocal disposition of its being. It is the freedom that destroys the *both/and* logic of capital to affirm itself as a new, absolute and radical essential difference.

As the negation of capital, this new essential difference is the abolition of money and exchange-value. It is not the abolition of labor, but the triumph of living, creative labor over a system of alienation and death. Labor that returns to its immediacy is labor that escapes the abyss and madness of capital. No longer divided into useful and abstract labor, no longer a vanishing mediation in the M-M' process, this labor becomes the subject (i.e., the ground and agent) of a new determination of the concrete. It is in this sense that the *Grundrisse* is, as Negri says, a political work, for it presents a theory of

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[37]"The apogee of critical science resides in specifying the non-subsumable" (Aronowitz, 1981, 249), namely, the *principle of hope* or desire against need. "The counterlogic is...to define desire as that which goes beyond need and is unrecuperable by the prevailing structure" (*Ibid.*).

[38]What is meant here is, of course, capital-commanded need.

radical subversion and revolution. As we have seen in the section on method in particular, there is, in the *Grundrisse*, a destruction of the petty logic of bourgeois political economy whereby capital is surreptitiously presented as an eternal element of production and relation of nature; but there is also a constructive dimension in it. This latter has to do with a new experience of time and labor –a time whose perfect tense is no longer the presupposition for the mortification of its becoming, but rather the ground from which becoming itself can attain the full recognition and status of being; and a labor which, freed from the law of value, is able to recuperate its self-identity and produce difference as difference, that is, not the difference which is measured by the universal equivalent form (the form of money), not, in other words, the quantitative difference that results in the price of the thing. It is rather the difference of each individuating expenditure of useful, creative labor: the moment which contracts all fire within itself, all being and all power. In this sense, labor, in its self-identity and in its capacity to run throughout whatever is socially and culturally constituted, without however losing track of itself, is difference that creates difference. This labor comes into a direct, organic contact with the world, whose power it is. It destroys the old forms of time, the lines of history able only to cherish a dream and a destiny of death, to establish itself as the living, immediate form of freedom.

Chapter 4 - The Problem of Radicalizing the Ontology of Labor

We have dealt with some fundamental issues related to the question of labor by looking primarily at texts by Karl Marx. These texts, along with others, started the complicated history of Marxist theory and historical materialism. Here we cannot deal with all the complex questions arising from that history, questions that for the most part, and notwithstanding the global establishment's celebration of the collapse of Marxist philosophy, remain still open today. As we have said in the introduction, it is not our intention to present here a defense of Marxist theory, that is, to defend it dogmatically and at all costs. Nor is it our intention to establish 'what is living and what is dead' in Marx. Rather, what we intend to do is try to establish the philosophical and everyday validity of the concept of labor in a world that has, under certain aspects, radically changed since the time of Marx's writings, but that has, at the same time, maintained unaltered some of its fundamental determinations. In other words, we are still within the essential difference determined by capital, and labor is still what capital is not, and thus its most immediate and formidable antagonist. We would then like to question the concept of labor in the whole spectrum of the social, that is, from political economy to culture. In this section, among other things, we will see examples of a vast literature that would simply get rid of the concept of labor on the basis of the changes the world has gone through in the last century and a half, on the basis of alleged mistakes Marx committed in drawing his theory from traditional political economy (this particularly has to do with the labor theory of value), and also on the basis of new categories of analysis and interpretation, such as those of *emergence* (Baudrillard) and *invention* (Méda, in chapter 5, below). According to these interpretations, labor emerged or was invented at

one point in history (the eighteenth century), and it is a solely western concept. Yet, even if one leaves aside political economy, philosophy, and their relationship, common sense alone would suggest that this is an awkward way to proceed.

Often, it is writers who work from within the Marxist tradition who, ultimately, find faults with the concept of labor. I believe that this happens because they do not distinguish between living (creative) labor and productive labor (or labor productive of capital). As I have already noted and will repeat below, it is true that there is ambiguity in this respect in the work of Marx himself. But that ambiguity should not mislead us, for, as I have also tried to show, there remain in Marx's texts clear passages pointing to an understanding of the social sphere where labor is radically transformed, yet not extinct. Again, the truth that labor (in a radically different form) remains should not be based on the assumption that Marx said so; rather, Marx said so because he could not have said otherwise, and this should hold for anybody who wants to do some critical and solid thinking, whether he calls himself a Marxist or not.

I understand that the order of this chapter may be a little puzzling. First of all, I should say that the chapter itself is really divided into two parts: sections 4.1-4.5 and then the remaining ones. It is the order of the first part which may be found objectionable. Why do I start with Postone's relatively recent work, then go to Marcuse's and Lukács' related ontologies (notwithstanding their distance in time), and back, with Baudrillard, to a position not entirely dissimilar from that of Postone? I have to say that I don't have an entirely satisfying answer to this question, and the order of this first part of the chapter could have been different. My intention was to begin by describing a position (Postone's) which might give a general sense of the problems one faces in radicalizing the ontology

of labor if the radicalizing process ends with the evaporation of the concept of labor itself. If in Postone's critique this move can be discerned, in Baudrillard's it is emphatically posited. Yet, I wanted to break the description of this negative moment by presenting two other views (Marcuse's and Lukács) in which the radicalizing process, notwithstanding the problematic nature which undeniably always inheres in it, also yields some important positive results. I thought that this order would place Baudrillard's more extreme position (which is here taken as an example of a vast literature of this kind) in a more distinct perspective. The second part of the chapter (sections 4.6-4.9) continues the positive critique already seen in the sections on Marcuse and Lukács. However, now we also find a possible answer to our fundamental question in the two sections on Foucault and the beginning of a programmatic formulation of a radical ontology in the sections on Bookchin and utopia.

4.1 Postone and the critique of labor in capitalism

The truth is that often the critique of productivism becomes an outright critique of labor; the critique of capitalist production, a critique of production as such. In reality, what this does is shift the focus of the critique. I think that an example in point is Moishe Postone's relatively recent book, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. Here, one gets the impression that Postone wants to get rid of the concept of labor altogether. Starting from a critique of a perhaps oversimplified category that he calls 'traditional Marxism,' he says that, contrary to that tradition, which analyzes and criticizes capitalist production from the standpoint of labor, his own wants to be a critique of labor in capitalism (1996, 16). Whereas traditional Marxism has a transhistorical concept of labor, Postone wants to look

at labor historically, as Marx had done. However, this leaves him with a onesided understanding of the concept of labor; and indeed, with a reductive concept of history. Or at least, it is not clear why the history of labor should be the history of labor in capitalism. Contrary to what Postone says, I would not call transhistorical the idea that labor is present in all modes of production (as the substance and most common concept of all modes); and this includes of course the communal mode of production of the future. I actually think that this is Marx's idea and that it makes a lot of sense, both logically and historically. Of course, I completely agree with Postone's view that Marx's critique of political economy entails a radically different and new concept of production itself (27). I also agree with his critique of productivism. Yet, the critique of productivism, of production in the capitalist sense, does not imply a critique of labor in all its forms. Nor, I repeat, is it correct to say that by clinging to the concept of labor over and beyond capital one falls into a transhistorical understanding of it. Or rather, one has first to define in what sense one wishes to use the concept of transhistoricality: if by this concept one means to refer to a metaphysical level that transcends all history, then this is not what I am talking about; however, if by transhistoricality one means to refer to the immanent ground of history, regardless of the difference among ages, stages, eras and modes of production, then nothing is wrong with it. In other words, it depends on the meaning one attaches to the prefix 'trans'. In the first case, 'trans' means 'beyond', but in the second case it means 'through, across'.

For Postone, "[a]t the core of all forms of traditional Marxism is a transhistorical conception of labor" (7). But he maintains that "[f]ar from considering labor to be the principle of social constitution and the source of wealth in *all* societies, Marx's theory

proposes that what uniquely characterizes capitalism is precisely that its basic social relations are constituted by labor and, hence, ultimately are of a fundamentally different sort than those that characterize noncapitalist societies" (6). But this is patently false. First of all Marx does consider labor to be a general principle of social constitution. When this constitution takes the form of capital, labor is productive in that very specific, capitalist sense. Of course, the basic social relations of capitalism are constituted by labor; yet, this is an essentially different sort of labor from that which constitutes, say, the social relations of feudalism. What is different is the *which*, not the *what*; in other words, the difference does not lie in whether there is production (and hence labor) or not, but in the *mode* of this production.

We do not have to go further into Postone's argument to realize his fundamental (and elementary) mistake. Basically, this mistake lies in his reductive understanding of labor. What, if not labor, would characterize the social relations of noncapitalist societies? Certainly, not a labor subsumed under capital, only productive of capital. Yet, it is still a form of labor that brings about the necessary and non-necessary wealth of all social formations. Unless we think of work as opposed to labor (as in Arendt's confusing distinction),[1] of leisure, or play. But these concepts do not solve any of the real questions faced by world societies; questions of scarcity, survival, and the search for a decent life. Certainly, labor can be playful rather than draining, free and creative rather than compulsory and dull (and it is really in the synthesis of these opposites, namely, what in labor is necessary and what is free and creative, that one finds an alternative); yet, it would still be a form of labor.

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[1]Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

The above argument is in direct opposition to Postone's, and I believe that Postone has overlooked the difference between the common elements of production and the essential difference of each mode underlined by Marx in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*. Thus, for Postone the mistake of 'traditional Marxism' in general is to believe that "a transhistorical, ontological content takes on various historical forms in various societies" (61). For him, "labor is indeed socially constituting and determining, according to Marx, but *only* in capitalism" (62). The alternative he presents to the traditional critique is what he calls a "social critique of the specific character of labor in capitalism" (67). This critique is "a theory of the determinate structuring and structured forms of social practice that constitute modern society itself" (67). As I will show when I deal with the institutionalization of labor in the sections on Foucault (cf. sections 4.6, 4.7, below) the forms that constitute modern society belong to the logic of capital in a specific way. Yet, other forms obtain in other societies that arise from and are in accordance with other modes of production. To limit the social critique of "structuring and structured forms," really of institutional modes and techniques, to capital alone amounts to an erasure of history outside the paradigm of capital.

Postone is not very clear as to the real nature of the forms of social practice constituting his critique. He speaks of "an abstract, impersonal, structural form of domination underlying the historical dynamic of capitalism" (68). However, it is not clear why a theory of social constitution needs to isolate an historical period, a mode of production, not for the sake of analytical clarity in one's study method, but rather as the synthetic moment, the result, of one's research; a fact which gives the impression that there is perhaps no question of social constitution over and beyond that period or mode.

Moreover, positing the question of the abstract in such a fashion, that is, again, not analytically and methodically, but synthetically, runs into serious philosophical and political problems. In fact, the forms of social domination are no longer understood in terms of *class* domination and other concrete phenomena, but according to "abstract, impersonal and structural" modalities the nature of which remains rather nebulous. Yet, if one reads Marx's subtle exposition of the problem of method in the passage from the abstract to the concrete (1973, 101), one realizes that a critique which loses sight of the concrete is not tenable.

It is not my intention to deal with all the other arguments in Postone's study, but it may be good to note that, notwithstanding his critique of Habermas, Postone ultimately remains within the same Habermasian paradigm.[2] He criticizes Habermas's misinterpretation of Marx on the same grounds for which he criticizes all theories constituting what he reductively calls "traditional Marxism." For instance, he says: "Habermas ... hypostatizes transhistorically the alienated character of labor in capitalism as an attribute of labor per se" (1996, 238). He also criticizes his theory of intersubjectivity, and that is, the reinterpretation of the dialectic of labor according to a paradigm of interaction, or rather the unduly emphasis given on interaction over labor. Again, he presents his own alternative as a superseding critique of both the traditional dialectic of labor and of Habermas's new paradigm. Speaking of his own reading of Marx's theory he says: "In such an approach, the possibility of emancipation is grounded neither in the progress of 'labor' nor in any evolutionary development of linguistically mediated communication; rather, it is grounded in the contradictory character of the

[2] I owe this observation to Stanley Aronowitz (Personal Communication).

structuring social forms of capitalist society in their historical development" (260).

In reality, by emphasizing the role of these structuring social forms, Postone does nothing but thematize Habermas's concept of *organization*, which, as Aronowitz says in his critique of Habermas, is seen by the latter as "Marxism's missing link between infrastructure and superstructure" (1981, 61). He continues: "Organizational forms are the key linkage between *communicative* action (interaction) and *instrumental*, or productive action" (*ibid.*). For Aronowitz, "Habermas wishes to establish a world of harmonious relations, and not on the ground of a transformation of power relations" (62). Though Postone formally underlines the "contradictory character" of the forms of social constitution, a fact which seems to re-inscribe within society the antagonisms Habermas dispenses with, his removal of the forces of social domination from the concrete reality of class antagonism and production is the same as Habermas's. In fact, as Aronowitz says, Habermas "regards the sphere of production to be free of internal antagonisms" (*ibid.*). If, as Aronowitz says, "we must reject [Habermas's] attempt to substitute moral and cognitive learning for class struggle" (63), a substitution facilitated by the structural link of organization, the same holds true of Postone's replacing the class struggle with some vague forms of social domination.

4.2 Marcuse and the ontology of passion

In *The Foundation of Historical Materialism* of 1932, Marcuse gives a new interpretation of Marx's thought based on the then just recovered and published *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Notwithstanding some problems I will point out

during my discussion, Marcuse's reading shows a fundamental path in the ontological understanding of labor, one which I will follow in the present work.

Marcuse says that in the *Manuscripts* "we are dealing with a philosophical critique of political economy and its philosophical foundation as a theory of revolution" (Marcuse, 1972, 3). Thus, Marcuse's interpretation is twofold, and it is in this respect that I have some problems with it. In fact, if we completely subscribe to the idea that Marx's *Manuscripts*, as well as his subsequent work, represent "a philosophical critique of political economy," we cannot accept the idea that such a critique also becomes "a critical *foundation* of political economy" itself (5), that, in other words, it becomes the "philosophical foundation as a theory of revolution" (3). I believe that there is some confusion in Marcuse's reading at this point. He says: "Within this critique the idea of political economy is completely transformed: it becomes the science of the necessary conditions for the communist revolution" (5). It is difficult to agree with this direction of thought, which, however, does not constitute the central moment of Marcuse's seminal study and can be simply pointed out as the source of some possible confusion or as an initial weakness in his argument. Once again, Marcuse is correct when he says that "the revolutionary critique of political economy itself has a philosophical foundation, just as, conversely, the philosophy underlying it already contains revolutionary praxis" (4-5). So, his twofold approach is fully justified at this level. However, in order for this to be true, there is no need to retain a concept of political economy, not even in its most radical form. In other words, political economy and revolutionary praxis do not have to be equated or seen as complementary to one another, especially when the philosophical foundation of the concept of labor and the *critique* of political economy are revealed and

properly understood.

Yet, the merits of Marcuse's reading of the *Manuscripts* are in no way diminished by the confusion I have pointed out. First of all, Marcuse says that "all the familiar categories of the subsequent critique of political economy are already found together in this work" (3), a thing which has now become evident to all readers of the *Manuscripts*. However, Marcuse's claim is even stronger, for he says: "But in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* the original meaning of the basic categories is clearer than ever before, and it could become necessary to revise the current interpretation of the later and more elaborate critique in the light of its origins" (*ibid.*). Herein lies the historical and political importance of Marcuse's original reading of the *Manuscripts*, in this call for a revision of the interpretations of Marx's thought and in this implicit attack (soon to be explicated) against the letter of Marxist orthodoxy.

Marcuse's main finding is the fact that labor is not merely a category of political economy, but that it has a philosophical foundation, or rather it is the philosophical foundation of society and its science. This is equal to our claim that labor is an ontological category. Marcuse says: "But if we look more closely at the description of alienated labour we make a remarkable discovery: what is here described is not merely an economic matter. It is the alienation of man, the devaluation of life, the perversion and loss of human reality" (7-8). By saying this, Marcuse is able to move his discourse more securely onto the plane of ontology, as we shall see.

To be sure, Marcuse does not see, at this point, the difference between 'proletarian' and 'worker' that I have underlined in my reading of the *Manuscripts* (see chapter 2, above). He says that Marx is speaking of 'man as man,' which is true, but it is

not the whole truth. In fact, Marx also speaks of man as 'non-man' – a concept that was fundamental to our ability to formulate the modality of neither/nor as a modality of double negation which founds any project of liberation. The distinction between 'proletarian' and 'worker' I have highlighted in Marx is seen by Marcuse as a distinction between 'man' and 'worker.' He says: "It is thus a matter of man as man (and not just as worker, economic subject and the like), and of a process not only in economic history but in the history of man and his reality" (8). However, as we have seen, Marx's categories of double negation and non-humanness invest both the worker and the proletarian alike, namely the proletarian whether he is employed or not. Under capital, full humanity is reserved for the man who confronts the worker as his *other*, and it is this that Marx calls *man himself* (see section 2.3, above). In a sense, we could say that there is in Marcuse a greater optimism than in Marx in this respect.

Marcuse's great move lies in his ability to isolate the concept of labor constituted as a "simple economic fact" and show that this is indeed a disguised form of a more fundamental and universal category. Speaking of Marx's dispute with Hegel around the idea of the essence of man and its realization, Marcuse says that "a simple economic fact appears as the perversion of the human essence and the loss of human reality" (8). To say that it "appears" as a perversion does not mean to say that it is false and illusory. It is, in Hegel's sense, the appearing of something essential. This is why I say, using a language perhaps dearer to Nietzsche, that it is a *disguised* form. What appears as the perversion of the human essence *becomes* that perversion, or rather the human essence is actually so perverted; the loss of human reality becomes the neither/nor of man, a tragic transition into non-humanness. Yet, this simple economic fact, which conceals a more fundamental

ontological fact –the fact of freedom, in the expression of Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy, 1993)– can also in turn become the motor of a renewed revolutionary praxis. Marcuse says: "*It is only as this foundation* that an economic fact is capable of becoming the real basis of a revolution which will genuinely transform the essence of man and his world" (8). Here, the truth that this disguised form of the essence of man is a *real* appearance becomes evident. If the essence of man must be (genuinely) *transformed*, it is because an essence does not remain beyond the categories of capital and untouched by them. On the one hand, we have to understand that Marcuse is here criticizing the idea that a revolution can be accomplished only in economic terms; on the other, we have to realize that we are here very close to the theory of real subsumtpion, according to which nothing remains outside political economy and capital. Yet, what does it mean to say that an economic fact becomes the real basis of a revolution *only as this foundation*? Or rather, what is a *foundation*?

If it is an ultimate foundation that Marcuse is talking about here, then it would be –as Heidegger explains very well– an ungrounded ground and have its *raison d'être* in itself. However, an economic fact cannot be a foundation of this kind, unless it totalizes itself by invading and usurping the other aspects of the totality of life and thus appear as a total fact in its own right. As we shall see, this is precisely the way in which capital manages to present itself as a totality. Yet, the foundation Marcuse is talking about is only a disguised form of a more fundamental ground, a passion which, for Marx, grounds history and anthropology. Hence Marcuse's transformation of the essence of man and his world does not point toward the necessity of keeping an economic fact *as this foundation*, but rather toward exploding it in order to regain access to the ungrounded ground, to the

ultimate foundation where the negation of the essence of man is in turn negated in such a way as to become the supreme and univocal affirmation of his being. In this sense, the ultimate foundation is ontological, not economic in character.

Marcuse is very clear about this, especially when he deals with Marx's important distinction, in the *Manuscripts*, between crude and genuine communism (see chapter 2, *supra*). Here he says that, in rejecting the form of crude communism as a viable alternative, Marx had already raised those "objections to the absolute economism of Marxist theory, which have been raised time and again right up to the present day" (9). Marcuse correctly notes that for Marx crude communism is "merely the simple 'negation' of capitalism and as such exists on the same level as capitalism – but it is precisely that level that Marx wants to abolish" (*ibid.*). This is the level we have been talking about, that for which a simple economic fact appears as a total social fact. Of course, we are not saying –and in this we are in line with Marx and Marcuse– that the economic fact loses all importance after its appearance as a totality is exploded, but rather that it takes its proper place as a factor within the totality of life.

Once labor is understood as a philosophical (ontological) rather than economic category, man's objectifying activity (14) becomes *universal*. This is now the ultimate foundation, the ungrounded ground of man's real essence. And this universality –this real essence– is the same as freedom (17). Here we find another important moment in Marcuse's reading of the *Manuscripts*: his redefinition, or better his translation, of Marx's difficult (perhaps today even infelicitous, though excusable when he was writing) concept of species being. Marcuse says: "The definition of man as a 'species being' has done a lot of damage in Marx-scholarship" (15). However, when one tries to understand

the "real origins of Marx's concept of 'species'" (*ibid.*), one really gets to the concept of universality. Thus, 'species' being is the same as universal being (16) and thus free being – free in his capacity to go beyond the merely given. Yet, Marcuse's reinterpretation of the concept of species being as universal being does not make Marx less vulnerable to subsequent critics of his thought, for the concept of universality will also come under attack in the 'anti-humanist' movements of thought of the 60's and 70's. However, Marcuse's reinterpretation remains very important, for it frees Marx's thought from some terminological problems. It is in this universality (a concept, to be sure, present in Marx's own writings) that the concept of freedom underlying Marx's critique can be adequately understood. Here, the ontology of labor is radicalized; it becomes an ontology of passion (20), and it is through it that "human *universality* is realized" (23).

Speaking of the "ontological concept of passion" in Marx, Marcuse quotes from the *Manuscripts*: "Passion is the essential force of man energetically bent on its object" (20; Marx, 1975, 390, with a slightly different translation). This passion is then at the same time also an action, and fundamentally so. It is here that Marx says that man is an objective and sensuous being: "To be sensuous is to *suffer*" (390), and it is in this *suffering* that passion shows itself as the ultimate ontological ground. Yet, as action, it is essentially a free and universal activity, a freedom and a universality often in actual practice denied by the totalizing power of a simple economic fact. In fact, as Marcuse says, under capital "[l]abour is not 'free activity' or the universal and free self-realization of man, but his enslavement and loss of reality" (26). The true negation of this modality, what Marx calls *genuine communism*, is the only way by and through which man can regain his status as "an organic, living being" (45). This organicity lies in a newly-found

form of totality, that is, when all aspects of life (up to the most sophisticated expressions of it) are generated by the fundamental ontology of passion which gives human beings back to their sensuality. In this sense, as Marcuse also underlines and Marx explicitly recognizes, the ontology of passion is the self-affirmation of a thoroughly positive modality of being with which Feuerbach counters Hegel's negations. Of course, Marx accepts Hegel's emphasis on labor, the fact –says Marcuse– that "Hegel grasped labour as man's essence in the act of proving itself" (47); yet, he criticizes and rejects its abstract, speculative dimension. In other words, notwithstanding Hegel's mistake – according to Marx– in replacing human sensuous activity (i.e., a praxis that arises out of the union of passion and action) with the Mind or Spirit, "despite the 'spiritualization' of history in the *Phenomenology*, the actual leading concept through which the history of man is explicated is transforming 'activity'" (47).

To conclude, in his reading of the *Manuscripts*, Marcuse still retains the concept (soon to become a cursed concept in western thinking) of labor as the essence of man. This does not trouble us in the least. What is important is that Marcuse, notwithstanding some uncertainties at the outset of his essay, is able to uncover the ontological ground of labor as passion and human sensuous activity beneath its appearance as a simple economic fact. He is able to describe Marx's principle according to which the genuine transformation of society entails the return of labor to itself as to its immediacy. If there is a *fact* here, it is not subsumable under the categories of political economy and capital, though it is from those categories that the return begins. Yet, that is a false beginning. The true beginning, which properly speaking never begins, is the fact of labor as a univocal, universal, and explosive practice, and this is the same as the fact of freedom.

4.3 Lukács' social ontology

The concept of the organic, which Marcuse also stresses following Marx, becomes central in Lukács' social ontology. With Lukács, the concept of the organic comes about through the *distancing* operated by man. But it is this same *distancing* that dialectically creates man as man. In volume 3 of *The Ontology of Social Being: Labour*, Lukács calls this distancing the "freeing of man from his environment" (1980, 26). The basis of this distancing or separation is labor, and it is through the distancing that labor passes from a rudimentary to a sophisticated form and becomes the "model of all social practice" (46), that is, of *praxis*.

Lukács defends a very unpopular theory: the subject/object dualism. He says that this dualism is necessary, yet "deliberately made." This seems like a paradox, but in reality it is a move toward the synthetic mode of practical activity wishing to escape the reductions of both determinism and voluntarism. He says: "This deliberately made separation between subject and object is a necessary product of the labour process, and at the same time the basis of the specifically human mode of existence" (24). In reality, the subject/object distinction is not the only unpopular concept Lukács is recuperating from the tradition. In fact, his entire argument rests on the concept of teleology that for him is inherent in the concept of labor ontologically understood. So he does not speak of a general and generic teleology, but, with Marx, of a teleology of labor which is "ontologically established as a real moment of material actuality" (8). Here we see that by teleology Lukács means nothing but the concept of becoming, a rational becoming. Teleology is then the motor of the dialectical movement through which a "new

objectivity" arises (3). It is good to understand this teleology in terms of a rational becoming because present within it are the moments of reflection and consciousness: "If the subject, separated from the object world as it is in consciousness, were unable to consider this object world and reproduce it in its inherent being, the positing of goals that underlies even the most primitive labour could not come about at all" (24). Yet, the most important moment is not consciousness, which to some degree is also present in the life of animals. Rather, the most important moment is what tears man away (or frees him) from the biological sphere (within which the animals remain): this is the *distancing*, which is not an act of consciousness (or at least not of consciousness alone), but it is rather already human praxis itself.

Instead of a dualism, we find a synthesis; instead of a paradox, a dialectical moment. Lukács is careful enough to say that, although they remain within the realm of the biological, animals also "stand in a certain relationship to their environment" (24). Yet, what distinguishes man's separation from his environment and creates the subject/object relationship denied to animals is the *universality* inherent in the specificity of what Marx understood as a species-being. We have seen, with Marcuse, that this latter concept must be understood in terms of universality if one is to avoid dangerous misunderstandings. Yet, it remains a specific (or even singular) universality, that is, it characterizes human activity alone. Obviously, this does not solve the problems presented in this respect by those philosophies that challenge man's primacy and centrality in the order of things, from "pessimism" to forms of environmentalism. Marx, Lukács, and even Marcuse remain within what is known as 'anthropocentrism.' Yet, the question, which we shall address again and more fully later, is whether anthropocentrism is really the right

concept to be used in this respect. It may be that no philosophy will ever be able to escape the fact that human beings philosophize; no radical view can indeed deny that human praxis is characterized by the principle of universality (of which Marx very clearly spoke), and that, through this principle, it continuously goes beyond its limit. Whether this going beyond has the form of care or destruction is a different question. It is here that what is rational in the human will –'rational' in the sense of Duns Scotus, Milton, and Gramsci– acquires fundamental importance.

To go back to Lukács, we have seen that there is really no dualism and no paradox. What he presents is the "complex of social being" (49), grounded in labor, constituted by and through labor and, at the same time, departing from it (59). Lukács says: "labour is the underlying and hence the simplest and most elementary form of those complexes whose dynamic interaction is what constitutes the specificity of social practice" (*ibid.*). Labor is then a univocal concept. Lukács never fully addressed these departures from labor, which were to constitute the subject-matter of the never written *Ethics*. But it is clear that they were to be dealt with according to a method different from the strictly dialectical one (of the identity of identity and non-identity) which provided the first structural differentiation as a distancing of man from his environment. These more complex forms were to become the object of what we can call a 'genealogical' method of study. The passage from a dialectical to a genealogical method is adumbrated in the following passage that I will read in two parts: "The identity of identity and non-identity in its structural form ... is reducible ... to the way that labor itself materially realizes the radically new relationship of metabolism with nature..." (59). This means that it is through a dialectical process that the distancing (the new metabolism) takes place

and a subject/object relationship arises. Then Lukács continues: "...whereas the overwhelming majority of other more complicated forms of social practice already have this metabolism with nature, the basis of man's reproduction in society, as their insuperable precondition" (*ibid.*). And this means that the distancing (and thus the new metabolism with nature) constitutes the structural basis for the development of culture. As I have noted, this seems to be a move from a purely dialectical to a genealogical method.

Hints of what the ethical problem is can be found in the pages where Lukács discusses the question of the 'ought' – a central question of modern German philosophy, of German Idealism in particular. This is a question that, one way or the other, always brings in a certain determinism. In relation to labor and the philosophy of the future, the 'ought' modality should be criticized, rejected and replaced by the modality of the *could*.[3]

Lukács speaks of the 'ought' in relation to Kant and Hegel. For him, the "genesis of the 'ought' in the teleological nature of labor" (72) has to do with the first, dialectical passage that radicalizes the opposition between man and nature by creating a new metabolism and a distancing. He says: "The ontological nature of the 'ought' in labor is certainly oriented to the working subject, and determines not only his behaviour in labor, but also his behaviour towards himself as the subject of the labour process" (72). This is a process that leads to the foundation of a work ethic. For Lukács, however, this process is "the ontological foundation for the metabolism between man and nature" (*ibid.*). In other words, labor becomes the ontological vector of man's "self-control" (73); the 'ought' of

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[3]See the section on *Bookchin and the reality of utopia* below.

labor becomes "the growing command of [man's] insight over his own spontaneous biological inclinations, habits, etc...." (*ibid.*) – a profound idea of freedom that owes a lot to Kant and post-Kantian German thought.[4]

To give to this process ontological and objective foundations in terms of the 'ought' modality does not mean to reduce the fundamental character of human freedom (with its ability of thinking and willing and of choosing itself as freedom) to a static, biologically determined behavior, which would only have a tragic note appended to it. Looked at from the modality of the 'ought', that is, from the more sophisticated and complex forms of its history and genealogy, the first dialectical move of a distancing seems to command the entire history of human labor. Thus even the most sophisticated and complex forms of this history would be determined by it and little room would be left for human agency and freedom. Those new forms would then be determined by the new metabolism which, on the basis of man's separation from nature, would now create, not the possibility of genuine freedom, but only the conditions of tragedy, to which all history must submit. The objectivity posited by the process of the 'ought' is a "regulative principle" (73). Yet, notwithstanding the conceptual limitations of the 'ought' and the urgency we experience to replace it with the openness of the 'could', where determinism is completely eliminated without falling into the error of denying all determinations, its regulative function is not external. Just as we saw in the case of teleology, here too there is a potentiality whose actualization depends on the dynamic interaction of those complexes made up by labor and constituting the specificity of social practice (59).

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[4]For instance, in Fichte's idea of freedom there is a moment in which the authority that the self exercises over itself supersedes the givenness of natural freedom.

To be sure, Lukács tries to avoid determinism by saying explicitly that the teleological positing of the 'ought' does not entail the idea of the past determining the present in an unqualified way, but rather it entails the idea of the future directing the present in a determined way. Thus, he calls the 'ought' relations "acts in which it is not the past in its spontaneous causality that determines the present, but in which the teleologically posited future task is the determining principle of practice directed towards it" (74). In other words, this is what in phenomenology is known as the 'pro-ject'. Yet, the question remains as to whether the problem of determinism is really avoided. I think that the answer is negative. The 'ought' is not simply teleological; it is also always theological: it belongs to that onto-theology that characterizes western metaphysics. As I have noted and will fully show later, it is only through the 'could' modality that a genuine sense of freedom can be regained.

It is possible that by means of the 'ought' of labor Lukács seeks to overcome the structure/superstructure distinction within Marxism and formulate a unifying ontological principle. He emphasizes in fact the relationship between the "natural foundation of human existence" –which for the "new materialism founded by Marx" is "insurpassable" (74)– and the more complex form of social categories arising in the development of history. For him, the 'ought' in labor is grounded in labor's first shaping the metabolism of nature and society. He says: "This relationship is the foundation of both the rise of the 'ought' in general, from the human and social type of need satisfaction, and of its specificity, its special quality and its being-determining limits, which are called into existence and determined by this 'ought' as the form and expression of real relations"

(*ibid.*). It is easy to see how the "rise of the 'ought' in general," with its undeniable character of necessity, corresponds to the base (or structure), whereas the specific "form and expression of real relations" correspond to the superstructure of what can be referred to as a 'vulgar' Marxist paradigm. The 'ought' is then what unifies them. Yet, while the 'ought' may be responsible for the basic system of needs –but there, too, responsible could be any other principle or modality– it is difficult to see what would bring it into operation within a more specific and sophisticated system of social relations. If the problem is making sure that these relations are understood as real and as having a material foundation, the 'ought' still remains problematic, for it essentially and necessarily reduces these phenomena (the social relations) to their material foundation by re-inscribing the determinism one had sought to avoid. If this interpretation is correct, we can also say that by trying to avoid a generic (and in actual fact unavoidable) causality (one for which freedom and contingency operate at the ontological level, while at the empirical level events are in a relation of cause and effect), one falls into a necessary, or structural, form of causality, where it seems that this relation of cause and effect goes back to the ontological, "noumenal", level, pre-ordaining everything that must unfold. In other words, the open modality of the 'could' (according to which causality remains open to an infinite series of disjunctions: or...or...or...or...) states a generic causality principle whereby whatever eventually obtains simply denies all other events that could have obtained as well. This rule is characterized by openness, and it avoids strict determinism without impairing the view that, within the contingent, there is still an open relation of cause and effect. To deny this would be to solve the question by suppressing it, which is often what is done. Yet, in order to understand this logic we only have to think of what

Duns Scotus says: that events are not contingent, but that they are "caused contingently." When, on the other hand, the difficulty is solved through the modality of the 'ought', one enters the realm of strict and necessary (structural) causality, represented by the formula 'if A, then B'. In this case, 'B' obtains because it *must* obtain; in the ethical sphere, one says that it obtains because it 'ought' to. And yet, Lukács is aware of this. He says that "the 'ought' in the labor process already contains possibilities of the most diverse kind, both objective and subjective. Which of these become social realities, and how, depends on the concrete development of society and the time, and as we also know, the concrete determinations of this development can only be understood after the event" (74-75). In reality, by clinging to the concept of the 'ought' this is a plain impossibility. As I will show later, it is only through the 'could' that Lukács' correct understanding of this important point becomes actual and valid.

We see the consequences of this for the Marxist question of base and superstructure. With the 'ought' of labor, which solves the question of the metabolism between nature and society, it is not simply the base (that is, the new metabolism) that comes about in such and such a way, but also what follows and 'ought' to follow from it. Nor does this way of looking at the problem account for why, at different historical stages, this metabolism acquires new modalities and functions. For it is easy to see, for instance, that the distancing of 'primitive' societies is completely different from the distancing produced by (and at the same time producing) technology, even though the principle may be one and the same. What could then this 'ought' in labor be, that works unevenly on the basis of a first selfsame distancing? How does the 'ought' (the German *Sollen*) compare, for instance, to the *hau* of the Maori, the spirit of the thing? Here, what

moves labor and its 'legal superstructure' comes from the forest and to the forest wishes to return. This spirit is productive power itself, and the structural moment constitutes and pervades the whole (Mauss, 1990, 10-13). Notwithstanding the character of obligation which is here present too, the onto-theological, transcendental dimension typical of the 'ought' is completely missing, for the spirit of the thing is absolute immanence.

This criticism of Lukács should not obscure the importance of his discourse on the ontology of labor. The criticism of the concept of the 'ought' goes beyond Lukács himself, and we have seen that he actually tries to solve the inherent contradictions only to make them more evident. Thus, this criticism does not have to do with the importance that Lukács gives to the fundamental role of labor in human history. This becomes particularly true when Lukács deals with the concept of freedom, which is, however, weakened by his treatment of the 'ought', as we have seen. In relation to freedom, Lukács says: "How fundamental labour is for the humanization of man is also shown in the fact that its ontological constitution forms the genetic point of departure for yet another question of life that has deeply affected men over the entire course of their history, the question of freedom" (112). However, here too Lukács reproduces the hidden determinism we have seen in relation to the 'ought'. This determinism is inherent in the dualistic method he has chosen, which we have interpreted as divided into a dialectical and a genealogical part. He says that, in considering the question of freedom, "we must apply the same method as before. That is, point out the original structure that forms the point of departure for the later forms, and their insurpassable foundation, while simultaneously bringing to view those qualitative distinctions that appear in the course of

the later development, spontaneously and unavoidably, and which necessarily modify decisively, even in important respects, the original structure of the phenomenon" (112-113). I have quoted the whole passage because here the method employed in the whole study is stated in its most explicit and clear way. Again, it is not clear how this method would really account for the variety of historical and social phenomena. The "insurpassable foundation," i.e., the selfsame distancing, constitutes the basis for a series of realities that appear "spontaneously and unavoidably." But there is no hint as to why these realities can be so different as to develop into different cultures and civilizations. Looked at from this point of view, the modification of the original structure is also a problem. It is true that Lukács has already made clear how it is the teleological positing of the future that conditions any present human activity and thus the development of history; yet, on the basis of the 'ought,' the question remains as to what makes people posit *this* future rather than *that*; in other words, the relationship between the 'ought' and the freedom of this positing remains a non-relationship, an irreducible gap.

In a sentence that has a Heideggerian flavor, Lukács says: "The particular difficulty for a general methodological investigation of freedom lies precisely in the fact that it belongs to the most manifold, many-sided and scintillating phenomena of social development" (113). Again, Lukács directs the reader to his never written *Ethics*. However, the question of freedom, as it relates to labor, is a central question throughout the book. We have already seen how the first distancing is in itself an act of freedom: it is a project of freedom and it makes, at the same time, this project possible. At that point, dialectics proper is abandoned for an ontological genesis, a genealogy, as we have seen. Lukács' main concern is to distinguish his approach from that of idealism as well as from

any systematic, logical and epistemological attempt to build a theory of freedom. In a very straightforward manner, he says that freedom "consists in a concrete decision between different concrete possibilities" (114). And this is freedom "as a moment of reality" (*ibid.*). We have seen that, while the formulation of the question is correct, it runs into problems when reality is understood in terms of the 'ought.' In addition to this, freedom is also "ultimately a desire to alter reality" (114). Of course, this desire must maintain itself within the real, and reality itself "must be preserved as the goal of change" (*ibid.*). So, it is in this sense that the teleological method becomes fundamental as the subterrenean link, the substance, of the time of change. The element of determination that remains at this point is a necessary one. We have shown this when speaking of the 'could' modality. Lukács emphasizes it, and we are in complete agreement, even though we have criticized his directional 'ought.' He says: "As a determination of men living and acting in society, freedom is never completely free from determination" (115). Lukács sees this in a very concrete manner. He says that this determination is at work in everyday life in the actual labor process, and then he gives the example of chess where, he says, "situations can arise, brought on in part by one's own moves, in which the only move possible is that to which one is compelled" (*ibid.*). Yet, notwithstanding the importance of the element of determination, freedom –and this is so particularly in labor (where a certain compulsion must always be present)– is always the possibility of alternatives and of re-directing the course of events by the rational will (an expression we will find later in Gramsci). Lukács says: "In a first approximation, we can say that freedom is that act of consciousness which has as its result a new being posited by itself" (114). It is this conception of freedom (a great conception indeed) that I am relating to Gramsci's concept of the

rational (or concrete) will.

As we have seen, Lukács' ontology of labor –of a labor that creates only use-values– presents the radicality required by a fundamental social phenomenon aspiring to the character of totality, and it is in this sense that it is, properly speaking, an ontology. There is very little here that could be of any interest for the narrow approach of political economy. Labor is immediately understood as what tears itself away from the opacity of nature thereby starting the development of history, the constitution of cultures: an act of freedom. An interesting move, even though sometimes one wonders if it is not more of a Spenglerian than of a Marxist type.[5] The determination of freedom, or freedom in determination, is posited through the teleological self-positing of labor. Here, however, the modality of the 'ought' points to an ethics that risks abandoning the plane of history and immanence.

4.4 Baudrillard and the critique of everything

The critique of teleology and economism, with an implicit critique of the 'ought,' has been carried out by many writers, though not always successfully. All the writers we have met so far in this chapter reject economism, but not all of them are against teleology. The two concepts are not, in fact, necessarily related. In Lukács, teleology has more or less the same function that projectuality has in phenomenology, and it is not a concept to be criticized or rejected. Rather, what is more problematic is the idea of the 'ought' whereby teleology reinscribes itself in the order of onto-theology. However, when the concept of

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[5]Cf. Spengler. See also Lukács' discussion of the question of time and space in *History and Class Consciousness*.

labor is looked at from a point of view that intends to be absolutely radical (whether it really becomes radical is something that remains to be seen), then the critique necessarily involves the three aspects of economism, teleology and the 'ought.' This is the case with the critique presented by Baudrillard in the book *The Mirror of Production*. The book begins with an attack (dramatically conceived and presented) against productivism. To be sure, the attack is not against productivism in general, but against the place it occupies in the revolutionary left: "A specter haunts the revolutionary imagination: the phantom of production" (1975, 17). He calls this a "romanticism of productivity" (*ibid.*). It is really an attack against Marxism, that is, against the critique of political economy and of the capitalist mode of production. But Baudrillard says: "The critical theory of the *mode* of production does not touch the *principle* of production" (*ibid.*). As everyone readily understands, the mode of production defines its 'how'; it is perhaps more difficult to see what the *principle* of production is. The principle of production is simply this: that *there is* production.

We will see how Baudrillard actually gets entangled in a series of logical and historical difficulties (not to say absurdities) that, however, do not seem to disturb him in the least. This happens because, by wanting to get rid of the "principle" of production, he really advocates the end of production as such, that is, all forms of production, the fact *that there is* production: an untenable proposition. He arrives at the concept, so fashionable today, of the "end"; not only the end of political economy, but of everything else. For him, to maintain the principle of production (and *a* mode as well) means to remain caught within political economy. In this sense, capitalism is no longer the problem; production is. However, it would be good to distinguish between production in

capitalism, with its principle (where 'principle' in this case means 'rule' or 'requirement') of productivity and growth, that is, productivism, and the necessary production without which life itself would not be sustainable.

In order to understand this distinction, it is good to leave Baudrillard for a moment and look at an example of the way in which capitalism understands production as productivity and growth. We will see that this conception has nothing to do with the concept of production related to *poiesis* – that general making which naturally exceeds the concept of production under capital. One example will suffice. In a huge volume entitled *Handbook for Productivity Measurement and Improvement* (1993), we find a variety of methods whereby productivity can be, precisely, measured and improved; methods that are all based on Taylor's first formulations. Interestingly, the end of this improvement, the end of productivity itself, is happiness. In the last article of the *Handbook*, "Happiness Is Personal Productivity Growth,"[6] John W. Kendrick, an emeritus professor of Economics at The George Washington University, writes: "Indeed, it is perhaps not too much to claim that happiness emerges as a by-product of personal productivity growth in its deepest meaning" (10, 10.13). How this "deepest" meaning differs from one that is not as deep the professor does not say. For us, however, it is not difficult to see how this phrase helps the ideological passage from economics proper to 'ethics'. We see here the whole ideological structure of capital's self-justification. First of all, we have to realize that capital is not interested in production per se (or not simply and primarily in that), but in productivity, and that this interest in productivity is really capital's interest in profit. We then realize that the principle of production under capital is

[6]This article first appeared in *Challenge* magazine, May-June 1987.

something other than production itself. Yet, this productivity (and productivity growth) is understood and presented almost as a feature of the Renaissance: the ideal of the fully developed individual, the justification of the individual over and beyond individualism, that is, his ontological and ethical justification. Is this the "deepest meaning" of personal productivity growth hinted at by Kendrick? I think it is.

In another article of the same *Handbook*, in which the profound ignorance of present-day apologists of capital becomes apparent, we find another reference to the Renaissance: this time to Machiavelli, to whom the title is given of "patron saint of Information Technology." Leonard Bergstrom, vice-president of Real Decisions Corporation, with a BA from Yale University, concludes an article on the efficiency of information technology with a passage from the above-mentioned patron saint of Information Technology who, according to Bergstrom, wrote in *The Prince and Discourses* (as if they were a single book) about the difficulty and danger of initiating a new order of things.[7] Bergstrom says that this "describes the constant task on an IT executive." He then concludes with an ode to competition, which is of dubious Machiavellian flavor: "A business orientation is absolutely essential in today's world of rapid technological change and uncertain economic conditions. To run Information Technology as a business [and it is here that, for Bergstrom, Machiavelli becomes important], you must continually measure and monitor your performance against that of peers and outsourcing alternatives" (5, 12, 18-19).

To go back to Baudrillard, we see the simplicity, and perhaps even the bad faith, of those who, on the left, attack production indiscriminately. For Baudrillard it is not

[7]It is actually in *The Prince*, chapter 21.

production as the production of capital that must stop, that is, the obsession with productivity and growth. No, for him the question of production is the question of western metaphysics: "...in order to find a realm beyond economic value (which is in fact the only revolutionary perspective), then the *mirror of production* in which all Western metaphysics is reflected, must be broken" (1975, 47). This is Baudrillard's main thesis. But we have seen that capital has already gone beyond economic value and that it has there found nothing less than happiness. For capital, the problem of metaphysics mirrored in political economy is already resolved by the fact that exchange value becomes the fundamental, perhaps the only real, use value. There is no double anymore; the mirror is reality, and even happiness is nothing but a by-product of the incessant activity to improve productivity. What does western metaphysics have to do with this?

But let us follow Baudrillard's argument more carefully. For him, the critique of the (capitalist) mode of production only deals with the *content* of production, not with its *form*. By leaving the form and principle of production untouched, critical theory lets the language of productivity enter, "[t]hrough a strange contagion," the revolutionary discourse (17). Yet, Baudrillard does not see that, in reality, not only *a* form, but even *a* content of production must remain. In other words, the critique of the *capitalist* mode of production cannot become a critique of all modes, and this not for ideological reasons, but because production is an essential aspect of human life. Even the distinction between content and form of production made by Baudrillard looks suspicious. In reality, a mode of production is always a unity of content and form: it is a *what* modified by a *which*. The critique of the capitalist mode criticizes both content and form of that mode. Yet, it would be unreasonable to think that no mode of production and no production at all could

remain.

But, indeed, Baudrillard is not only arguing against the economic concept of labor; he is against labor as an ontological concept as well. He distinguishes between *form of representation* and *form of production*, which he calls the "two great unanalyzed forms of the imaginary of political economy" (20). Apparently, these two forms limited Marx's own analysis of production. Baudrillard says: "The discourse of production and the dicourse of representation are the mirror by which the system of political economy comes to be reflected in the imaginary and reproduced there as the determinant instance" (20). I do not want to deny the relative importance of the dimension of representation and of the imaginary, yet everything does not happen there. There may be mirrors: but determinant is indeed what they reflect.

On this basis, Baudrillard argues for a critique of everything: "In order to achieve a radical critique of political economy...[a]ll the fundamental concepts of Marxist analysis must be questioned, starting from its own requirement of a radical critique and transcendence of political economy" (21). This is a strange, circular argument: in order to achieve a radical critique of political economy one must question the necessity of this same critique! When Baudrillard points to the confusion, within critical theory, between the liberation of productive forces and the liberation of man, he shows himself to be an acritical reader of Marx. By that I mean to say that, if it is true that there is in Marx's own writings a source of confusion in relation to the concept of production, readers of Marx should eventually grasp the distinction he draws between the capitalist concept of productive labor and the ontological nature of the productive power of labor. What would otherwise be the liberation of man that Baudrillard counterposes to the liberation of

productive forces if not the subjective appropriation of this productive (*poietic*) power? Otherwise, the phrase "liberation of man" is an empty formula, or rather, it is the dissolution of man's most essential features and an attack against all humanism – probably the latter is the case with Baudrillard. This is indeed the meaning of Baudrillard's next passage, which is in parentheses in the text: "Why must man's vocation always be to distinguish himself from animals? Humanism is an *idée fixe* which also comes from political economy – but we will leave that for now" (22). In reality, Baudrillard does not explain why this is so. And this makes one wonder what it is exactly that he means by political economy. In a sense, Baudrillard breaks the boundaries between political economy and ontology too early, or rather he never sets them. Hence he is able to inflate his critique of everything up to the point that nothing is left that is recognizably human. Toward the end of the book, the concept of universality and the concept of the concept will also come under his critique, but it is never clear what alternative he wishes to present.

The concept of labor, here as later in Méda (see below), is understood as a creation of political economy: "...the system of political economy does not produce only the individual as labor power that is sold and exchanged: it produces the very conception of labor power as the fundamental human potential" (31). But here Baudrillard is speaking of one and the same thing. In fact, under capital the fundamental human potential is labor power to be sold and exchanged: labor power becomes a commodity. Yet, who can deny that the power of labor, the capacity to work, the possibility to act in such a way as to transform the environment and oneself, precede the subsumption of labor under capital? Baudrillard's view is based on at least two important mistaken

assumptions. The first is his complete rejection of use value (which played such an important role in Lukács' ontology, as we have seen). For Baudrillard, "Far from designating a realm beyond political economy, use value is only the horizon of exchange value" (23). Here analysis becomes mere metaphor, a mistake Baudrillard has earlier reproached Marx for. Besides that, it is difficult to agree with this statement. Use value, regardless of the role it also plays under capital (where even exchange value is a use value of some sort), is related to that metabolism between man and nature that both Marx and Lukács describe. Use value is the reason and the result of labor in its most concrete yet most generic sense, that is, it comes out of concrete labor, yet it does not belong exclusively to any specific mode of production, because it is common to all.

The second mistaken assumption is that in primitive societies there is no production. This means: no use value, no labor or labor power. It is interesting that, in his critique of everything, Baudrillard accepts the term and concept of "primitive societies" and does not challenge the use of the word 'primitive'. We will go back to this later. For now, I just wanted to note that, in developing a discourse on labor, as an irreducible category of political economy, Baudrillard is compelled to eliminate from the range of possible meanings of this concept all human activity which has developed according to a separate mode. Yet, it would be far more realistic to say that labor and production are necessary aspects of human activity in general, and that what characterizes political economy is rather the fact that this labor is alienated and this production conceived only in terms of endlessly growing productivity and profit. Instead, Baudrillard (but he is only an example of a more widespread way of thinking) shows that he is interested in manipulating the categories of critical theory rather than understand and explain them.

Thus, for him "Marxism assists the cunning of capital. It convinces men that they are alienated by the sale of their labor power, thus censoring the much more radical hypothesis that they might be alienated as labor power, as the 'inalienable' power of creating value by their labor" (31; italics removed). The emphasis should here be on "creating value," for this is the idea that needs explanation. Baudrillard forgets that it is precisely a sold and bought labor power that creates value, for 'value', as Marx says, means 'exchange value', and this is created only by the withholding of part of the worker's remuneration, so that real value is surplus value. Otherwise, the transformation of matter during the labor process does not by itself create value in this sense. Unless Baudrillard means that the principle of alienation lies in the making of use value, in the passage of *poiesis* from a subject to an object, in the new, arising synthesis. Yet, if this is the case, the only 'radical' alternative would be to stop all doing and all making, not merely production in the capitalist sense. Even though Baudrillard draws a line between Marx and Marxist theory, his argument still presents many problems. For him, under attack must be the "productive potential of every man in every society" (31), not the direction this potential takes under direct or indirect compulsion, the use to which it is put. Under attack is, in other words, anthropology, for, in the productive power of man, Baudrillard sees a fundamental anthropological postulate. This is not altogether wrong, but one should also remember that this anthropology rests on a more fundamental ontology, as we have seen when discussing Marx's *Manuscripts*.

In reality, Baudrillard criticizes Marx's *ontological* understanding of labor. But when he himself speaks of the "objectification of nature" (34), he is very imprecise. He should rather speak of the 'subjectivization of nature' and the 'objectification of human

activity'. It is in this sense, as we have seen, that for Marx humanism and naturalism become one and the same thing (*Manuscripts*, 348). On the other hand, Baudrillard's phrase: "objectification of nature," means nothing, and it is the result of his inability to understand the synthetic moment at work in Marx's dialectic. Finally, for Baudrillard the whole issue becomes one of symbolic exchange. He says: "The real rupture is not between 'abstract' labor and 'concrete' labor, but between symbolic exchange and work (production, economics)" (45). It is in this *mirror of production* that, accordingly, human suffering and misery must be sought. In this mirror, "in which all Western metaphysics is reflected" (47), the universality of the concept separates man from his nature, and it is here that alienation occurs. Concepts –the concept of history being one of the most important in this respect– are universalized and become transhistorical: "As soon as they are constituted as universal they cease to be analytical and the religion of meaning begins" (48). But Baudrillard does not say why a universal concept cannot be analytical. Instead, he continues by giving a de-ontologized, linguistically and psychologically flattened, version of the concept. Accordingly, concepts "set themselves up as expressing an 'objective reality'. They become signs: signifiers of a 'real' signified" (*ibid.*). Yet, Baudrillard does not realize that concepts do not express reality, but they maintain their own reality and their own objectivity. It is not that they *become* 'signs', rather they constitute the ontology of the form, and as such they are a fundamental part of the structure of reality. Even when taken in the Saussurian sense, as a part of a sign, they bridge the space between constitution, interpretation, and expression, but they are never, properly speaking, expression. Yet, they are usually so understood by a contemporary French school of thought that works on the basis of a misappropriation of the Saussurian

concept of the sign.[8]

On the basis of this misconception, Baudrillard assigns to the concept-sign –rather than to the constitutive social practice of power and control of which the concept is, of course, a part– the responsibility for a reading, an interpretation, of history that prepares the ground for a system of "repressive simulations." He is here dealing with the question of historical and anthropological interpretation through universal concepts. This is an important issue, though I think that the right argument to be made is precisely the opposite of Baudrillard's argument. In fact, the problem does not lie in the fact that universal concepts are used in the attempt to get an understanding of non-Western cultures and peoples, but, generally speaking, the problem lies in the way in which universal concepts are constructed –as peculiarly Western forms for the enhancement of hegemonic practices of assimilation or exclusion. In other words, it is not by saying that the Maori *also* produce that one imposes on them a set of external categories, but by dismissing their mode of production as non-efficient, non-modern or unproductive one understands the Western, capitalist concept of production as universal. Instead of saying that there is production and production, Baudrillard eliminates the problem altogether:

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[8]For Saussure, a sign is a "two-fold psychological entity" in which a concept (signified) and a sound-image (signifier) are inextricably united (Saussure, 1986, 66). In Baudrillard's critique, as well as in that of many other French writers, concepts can be so 'deconstructed' because the two sides of the sign are conflated into the second side only (the signifier), which becomes 'floating', and it must report to an external signified: Baudrillard's 'objective reality.' Yet, the relationship between this objective reality and its sign, that is, the relationship between the concept and its expression, is more complex than that. Expressed is the concept, not the thing. It is the concept that is signified through and by the signifier. To say that the concept is a signifier means to have a very poor and flat vision of the world, to lose sight of its complexity. In fact, by functioning as a signified, the concept shows to be a structural moment of that objective reality to which Baudrillard refers.

"There is *neither a mode of production nor production in primitive societies*" (49). As I have already noted, in this critique of everything only the concept of the 'primitive' seems to be in no need of being questioned. Since at this point Baudrillard is also speaking about psychoanalysis, he continues: "There is *no dialectic* and no *unconscious* in primitive societies. The concepts analyze only our own societies, which are ruled by political economy" (*ibid.*). Baudrillard's own alternative is to stop exporting Marxism, psychoanalysis and bourgeois ideology and rather "bring all the force and questioning of primitive societies to bear on Marxism and psychoanalysis" (50). However, who will do that? Baudrillard says "we". Yet, since we are not 'primitive', how are we going to even get close to this "force" and this "questioning"? This is much more presumptuous and Eurocentric than the sober claim of Marxism to universality. What Baudrillard suggests is that we appropriate the 'primitive' societies' paradigm and then use it as a category of our understanding.

Let us limit our reading to the concepts of production and mode of production. For Baudrillard, in a way not entirely different from Postone in this respect, "Marx made a radical critique of political economy, but still in the form of political economy" (50). To this completed but insufficient critique, Baudrillard wishes to substitute a vague "critique of the political economy of the sign" (51). Symbolic exchange is what remains after the completion of the critique of political economy. Recall that use value is not what lies beyond exchange value, but it is rather exchange value's horizon. The beyond is, as we shall soon see, a romantic interpretation of the forms of exchange in so-called primitive societies.

First of all, Baudrillard gets rid of labor, a concept whose "emergence" is traced

back to the 18th century (53). Then, he eliminates the concept of totality: "Everything that speaks in terms of totality (and/or 'alienation') under the sign of a Nature or a recovered essence speaks in terms of repression and separation" (55-56). But again, he does not explain why this is so. Totality seems to bear the same relation to his critique as universality. Yet, there is also a positive understanding of the concept of totality, which comes precisely from anthropology and from issues that Baudrillard also deals with; but he does not see it. I mean to refer to Marcel Mauss' concept of the *total fact*, which describes so-called primitive societies by a universalizing method, precisely.

Baudrillard may be right in criticizing the thoughtless, mechanical application of Marxist categories to 'primitive' societies (he makes the case of Godelier), but that does not mean that these societies have no concept and practice of production. Their production does not take place according to the capitalist mode, of course, yet to say that they have no production and no concept of labor is to push theory to the point of the absurd. In order to understand this, there is no better place than Mauss' essay *The Gift*. Baudrillard does refer to Mauss' ideas, without mentioning him: "The exchange-gift, to be exact, operates not according to the evaluation or equivalence of exchanged goods but according to the antagonistic reciprocity of persons" (75). This, however, does not take away the importance of a theory of production and the existence of a life economy in those societies.

According to Marcel Mauss, the exchange-gift occurs on the basis of an obligation, and it is the reason and form of this obligation that he sets out to study in *The Gift*. Yet, this is so closely related to a theory and practice of production that one of the most important terms described by Mauss denotes the most fundamental moment, the

raison d'être, of production itself: consumption. I am here speaking of the word *potlatch*, which means 'to feed, to consume' (Mauss, 1990, 6). This is not the place to deal extensively with Mauss' great study. I will only say two things. One is that the reason for exchange is not identical with the reason for production proper. By that I mean to say that exchange can be understood from within the system in which it inscribes itself: the system of laws. In this sense, we have to recall the brief discussion of Pashukanis' ideas in order to understand how the ideological meaning of these forms relates to, and is regulated by, the material conditions of life that it regulates in turn. The gift is the universal ground bridging the gap between the base and the superstructure, to use Marxist terminology and concepts. It is not simply the thing exchanged. Rather, this thing is nothing but the empirical, phenomenal form of a totality of social relations that include, of course, the productive power of labor. The second thing I want to say has to do precisely with this productive power. In the section of his book entitled "The force of things," Mauss says that arguably "in the things exchanged during the potlatch, a power is present that forces gifts to be passed around, to be given, and returned" (43). Here the legal and ethical category of obligation shows its essential constitution and determination. Even though it is mixed with religious and magical moments, this power is productive power, and it is possessed by the thing exchanged (44). Among the Maori, this power or force is called *hau*, the spirit of the thing, which is there "in cases where the law, particularly the obligation to reciprocate, may fail to be observed" (10). Thus, "in Maori law, the legal tie, a tie occurring through things, is one between souls, because the thing itself possesses a soul, is of the soul" (12). Notwithstanding the difference between the Maori and Western orders of things, one can still see how universal concepts play a role

in both. In fact, what makes a culture different from another is the answers it gives to questions that confront humanity in a common way. These *structural* questions are in the order of universality, not because they are abstract, but because they are concretely common; and even the basic answers, for example the principle of alienation (in the ontological, not in the economic sense), must be similar. This is how the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate (the obligation to reciprocate above all) comes about: "because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul" (12). But of course this is not the economic alienation typical of capital. It is rather what occurs in the first dialectical relationship between man and nature (recall Lukács): an unavoidable universal. Yet, as we have seen, this is the central moment of Baudrillard's critique of everything.

4.5 The limits of the critique of production

Contrary to what Baudrillard says, Marxism and psychoanalysis (and even 'bourgeois ideologies') are tools for understanding, not only Western, but also non-Western societies. Marxism in particular is informed and sustained by an aspiration to universal emancipation –emancipation from the servitude of labor and from the forms of social domination that come with it, regardless of any given mode of production. To romanticize 'primitive' societies is rather reactionary and backward. At the same time, there is bad faith in rejecting all Western accomplishments only on the basis of their provenance. Rather, when one goes a little deeper into the question, one realizes that nothing is indeed purely Western and that the category itself is flawed. To say, particularly, that labor is a product of 18th century Europe, and thus of Western

metaphysics, without specifying that one is speaking of productive labor in the capitalist sense, is inadmissible. To oppose this model (and regime) of labor with an imprecise idea of life (economy and culture) in 'primitive' societies makes one wonder what happens to the rest of history and of the world. The great civilizations of the past are certainly not all Western, nor are they 'primitive' in any possible meaning of the term. The past construction of cities and other immense and splendid structures in most regions of the world does not support the thesis that labor (when left unqualified) emerged or was invented at one point only in history. Tenochtitlán or Benin City, which left the first European invaders in breathless admiration, is not conceivable without conceiving also an organized and developed system of labor. That this labor is a universal, that it is hidden in the forest of the earth, only says that it provides the univocal ground for all social and cultural formations. The city itself, as Lewis Mumford says, is "a product of the earth" (1938, 3), an "earth form" (316). The substance of this form, which also comes from the earth, is, at least in part, labor itself. The difference between cultures is a function of the dialectical relationship of geography and history, and its unit and measure is, with Mumford again, the region. I am not attempting here to give a clumsy answer to complex questions. What I intend to do is throw some light on the fact that denying the existence and usefulness of universal concepts and realities only brings us to an absolute theory of cultural relativism contradicted by, not only historiography, not only history and anthropology, but also experience and common sense. The opposite of this absolute cultural relativism is not, of course, a static essentialism; it is rather the awareness that the human condition (with its concepts and practices) is not an invention, but that *inventio* (i.e., labor) is the way in and through which different habitats are shaped and

constituted in response, precisely, to those structural and universal questions defining the human condition itself.

Thus, radicalizing the ontology of labor means neither reducing all forms of social life, of human activity, to a restricted concept of labor that in one way or the other always supports the logic of productivity and productivism nor refusing to give labor the universality which all common sense inquiry is able to discern and prove. Instead of denouncing the concept of labor as an inherently capitalist or productivist concept, a radical ontology of labor –an ontology of liberation– should focus on the way in which labor is institutionalized. There, in the institutionalization of labor, in labor as an institution, one finds the character and meaning, the sign, of a society. In other words, it is the 'how' rather than the 'what' of labor that needs to be understood and, possibly, dismantled. It is in this sense that Marx focuses on the *mode* of production and actually considers with annoyance the concept of production in general. Yet, this does not mean that he denies that there is production in general, if by that one means that all modes of production are precisely essential modifications of one and the same activity and concept. Certainly, by being *essential* modifications, essential differences, they must be considered as the only synchronic manifestation of that generality, as the only presentification of that universal; to dwell on the generality and the universal as such would, at this point, only obfuscate the real issue: that of understanding the *thisness* of labor. The issue is here subtle and delicate. For instance, today we do not deny the global dimension of capitalist production: on the one hand, we do not justify it by recurring to the idea that production has always existed and that therefore the real issue is production in general; on the other, we do not merely say that production means production in the

age of globalization. They are two different things. Properly speaking, production in general does not exist; yet, even overcoming the capitalist specificity of globalization would be impossible if other forms of production did not announce themselves and shine here and there in the interstices or at the horizon of this given form. Instead, what we say is that the production of capital must stop so that a new paradigm of production may take shape. But to launch an indiscriminate assault on all forms of production, on production as such, on its reality and concept, on labor, is the same as deciding to delete the problem rather than try to find a solution to it.

The concept of institution is the key to solving the question of the distinction between living labor and productive labor. As I have repeatedly said, productive labor is also living labor, but not all living labor is productive in the capitalist sense of the word, and in the sense in which Marx also uses the concept. Productive labor is living labor institutionalized and, as we shall see, normalized. In this sense, what constitutes a problem is not the fact that we do some work, but the obligation to work. The factory is the typical example of this obligation under the capitalist/industrial regime. Yet, the obligation itself constitutes a modality that goes beyond the factory, or rather, as some authors have said, the model of the factory becomes, at one point in history, the general model valid for society as a whole.

4.6 Foucault and the concept of the institution

In order to understand the concept of the institution as the clarifying moment of the distinction (or the confusion) between living labor and productive labor, we have to turn to the work of Michel Foucault. Both in *Madness and Civilization* and in *Discipline and*

Punish, Foucault addresses the question of labor, and of productive labor, from the point of view of a constitutive, positive ontology of the institutional world. Here, the procedures and structures of rationalization later applied by Taylorism to the labor process in the narrow and most technical sense, show their historical roots of blood and terror. In their historicity, these procedures and structures give productive labor (as productive of capital) a rather sinister dimension. The concept of work ethic, used to justify at some level the idea of productive labor and to produce the immoral status of unproductive labor by the same stroke, reveals here the disfigured traits of its inner constitution.

Of course, it would be preposterous to say that labor is a new concept and reality, new with modernity, that before modernity there was no labor or even no obligation to work. One needs only to think, even in a very schematic way, about the condition of the medieval serf, of the ancient slave. Think about the great constructions of antiquity in the civilizations that flourished before the advent of capital in different areas of the world. One realizes that their accomplishments could not have been achieved without labor, and compulsory labor at that. So, what was new with modernity might have been a certain institutionalization of the obligation to work, and this happened for a variety of reasons. If it belonged to the concept of a serf to do manorial labor, of a slave to perform slave labor, with the coming of modernity a paradoxical concept of freedom –that Marx called "double freedom"– is created by new relations of production which will then flourish during the industrial revolution. The relationship between the urban and rural areas takes on a new form, conditioned in particular by the economic, social and political disenfranchisement that brings about brigandage in the countryside and at the doors of

cities and vagabondage within the city itself. These manifestations of social life that defy any acceptable concept of labor, that cannot be subsumed under any mode of production, are in fact among those forms which political economy will soon classify as unproductive. And so they are indeed, for, if anything, they are disruptive of the nascent capitalist economy, its social organization, and its ideals of productivity and productive labor. It is this latter concept of labor that can be said to have emerged with modernity, not labor in an unqualified sense.

Poverty became one of the main problems of modern, industrial society, perhaps its most conspicuous social pathology,[9] and it was as a remedy to poverty that, as Foucault notes, one resorted to labor: "In the first phase of the industrial world, labor did not seem linked to the problems it was to provoke; it was regarded, on the contrary, as a general solution, an infallible panacea, a remedy to all forms of poverty" (1965, 55). Of course, the serf, the slave, the city artisan was also poor. But he did not have to deal with the ambiguities of a double freedom, which begins in the initial phase of modernity and becomes systemic with the Industrial Revolution. He was part of the means of production, the land, or he belonged to a guild and was the owner of his craft and skills. Modernity arises in a world of crumbling social institutions, labor begins to be set free (and only in this sense can one speak of its emergence), but this was of course a negative, or paradoxical, freedom. The disappearance of the old institutions requires that now labor

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[9]In the pre-modern societies, poverty had certainly a different dimension and meaning. As Hobsbawm says: "For the old traditional system, inefficient and oppressive as it had been, was also a system of considerable social certainty and, at a most miserable level, of some economic security..." (1962, 190-191). When the peasant becomes a 'free', economic subject ('free' in Marx's sense of a "double freedom"), he also loses those fundamental forms of certainty and security.

be institutionalized in a new way, along new and productive lines. For, what is the new form of poverty that goes from vagabondage to banditry and brigandage if not wasted labor and wasted productivity, that is, labor and productivity that do not find ways of implementing themselves as such?

As Braudel says: "Poverty was such in Florence in April, 1650 that it was impossible to hear mass *in pace*, so much was one importuned during the service by wretched people, 'naked and covered with sores,' 'ignudi e pieni di scabbia'" (1995, 2, 735). In the same century, but also before and after that, Naples was "the theater of a perpetual social war, something going far beyond the limits of ordinary crime" (737). The cities of Europe, as we shall see more concretely when we go back to Foucault, tried to defend themselves against poverty. Braudel again says: "In Spain, vagrants cluttered the roads, stopping at every town ... Along the roads to Madrid moved a steady procession of poor travellers, civil servants without posts, captains without companies, humble folk in search of work, trudging behind a donkey with empty saddle bags, all faint with hunger and hoping that someone, in the capital, would settle their fate" (740). Finally, "[i]nto Seville streamed the hungry crowd of emigrants to America, impoverished gentlemen hoping to restore their family fortunes, soldiers seeking adventure, young men of no property hoping to make good, and along with them the dregs of Spanish society, branded thieves, bandits, tramps all hoping to find some lucrative activity overseas..." (*ibid.*). The phenomenon, present all over Europe but also in other areas of the world, was social, economic, and political. Though Braudel is hesitant to call it a class war, it indeed was such, and it constituted the ground and landscape for the emergence of modern institutional labor. Indeed, this war anticipated today's structure, under the globalized

economy, of the international division of labor and of the social movements of resistance to it. Living labor that was not institutionally productive either ended up in the madhouses, in the prisons or on the scaffold, or it organized itself along the lines of banditry and brigandage (or of piracy at sea).[10] The bandits and brigands formed "states in miniature with the great advantage of mobility" (Braudel, 745). They cut across the territorial states upsetting both national and international order. Braudel notes that "these tiny forces irritated established states and in the end wore them down" (*ibid.*). And he emphasizes the social and radical dimension of their activities: "Like the guerrilla forces of modern popular wars, they invariably had the people on their side" (*ibid*).

The modern, institutional concept of labor emerges then from a class war that takes place at different levels of the social sphere: within the city, in the relationship between the city and the countryside within one territorial state, and at the international or transnational level. The opposition to its institutionalization is represented by the antagonistic living labor that remains at the margins of established society and continuously threatens its order. New forms of institutional order will be required, as we shall see, to cope with this problem. However, what is characteristic of this 'unproductive' living labor is its antagonistic relation to established and constituted power. Braudel says: "Banditry was in the first place a revenge upon established states, the defenders of a political and even social order" (745).[11]

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[10]To be accurate, piracy occupies a somewhat different place, for in the colonies –where it particularly grew– it was a sort of national vanguard, bearer of more or less official state power, as any history of the Caribbean region will show.

[11]See also Hobsbawm's classics *Bandits* (Hobsbawm, 2000), particularly the fourth edition with the new chapter "Bandits, States and Power".

Yet the established political and social order was not shy in retaliating against this revenge, but to the method of brute force and sheer cruelty it now added, and gradually developed, sophisticated techniques of control. By shifting the original antagonism from the economic base to the moral level, it was able to have the nascent proletariat carry the burden of its social failure. In this sense, the institutionalization of labor as productive labor, that is, its normalization and moralization, served the purpose perfectly well. As Foucault says: "Labor and poverty were located in a simple opposition, in inverse proportion to each other. As for that power, its special characteristic, of abolishing poverty, labor – according to the classical interpretation – possessed it not so much by its productive capacity as by a certain force of moral enchantment" (1965, 55). Here it is Adam Smith that, among others, Foucault has in mind: labor as a curse – a notion that, as we have seen, was energetically rejected by Marx. Labor was then used as a remedy against all forms of rebellion, or what was interpreted as social deviancy or mere idleness: "Labor in the houses of confinement thus assumed its ethical meaning: since sloth had become the absolute form of rebellion, the idle would be forced to work, in the endless leisure of a labor without utility or profit" (57). However, notwithstanding the emphasis that Foucault puts on the moral, rather than economic, determination of the concept of labor, the link between the two, or the prefiguration of this link in the following centuries, is already evident. Productive labor –even at this pre-industrial stage– acquires a dual nature, and its moral determination seems in fact to be a clumsy justification for its economic use. Thus, if it is true that, as Foucault says, "[t]he prisoner who could and who would work would be released, not so much because he was again useful to society, but because he had again subscribed to the great ethical pact of human

existence" (59-60), it is also true that the substance of this pact lay in the promise not to disrupt productivity and economic growth again. The tenuous line separating the working poor from the idle and mad could suddenly disappear, and clinging to a form of productivity was the only way to ensure oneself against falling outside of the ethical, but really social and economic, pact. Thus, a century later in Britain with the enclosure movement, and then particularly with the Poor Law of 1834, the compulsion toward forms of industrial productivity was determined by making other forms of life (particularly in the countryside) "intolerable".[12]

Foucault describes confinement as an "institutional creation peculiar to the seventeenth century" (1965, 63). Yet, what is here important is that, when the industrial age comes into its own around and after the time of the French Revolution, that institution is used as a model for the new social and economic order. It is in fact a pre-configuration of the factory world – not simply the factory itself, but the slums around it and, after factories were moved away from the countryside to the new urban centers, the industrial city itself. Of course, this is prefigured in Foucault's own description when he says that this new institution "marked a decisive event: the moment when madness was perceived on the social horizon of poverty, of incapacity to work, of inability to integrate with the group; the moment when madness began to rank among the problems of the city" (64). This is another way of stating Marx's concept of the double freedom of the proletariat, but for a period slightly earlier than the one Marx deals with. All the same, the poor are left with the choice to either accept the conditions of the new contract, and by doing so subscribe to perennial poverty, or sink into madness and disappear. One or

[12]Cf. Hobsbawm (1962, 185).

two centuries later, their situation would not be better, but perhaps worse; in any case, the institutional form given to labor at this point in history as either productive or unproductive (either sane or insane) would become a pillar of the new industrial society, and living labor as such (that is, neither-productive-nor-unproductive-labor) would all but disappear.

Here, I take distance from Foucault's analysis and description, for he sees a rupture where there probably is substantial continuity.[13] Thus, for Foucault there is an overturning of categories such that at the end of the eighteenth century the economic dimension of poverty replaces the previous moral one. He says that "freed from the old moral confusions," poverty now becomes "an economic phenomenon" (*ibid.*, 229).[14] And he explains this as follows: "In the mercantilist economy, the Pauper, being neither producer nor consumer, had no place: idle, vagabond, unemployed, he belonged only to confinement, a measure by which he was exiled and as it were abstracted from society. With the nascent industry which needs manpower, he once again plays a part in the body

[13]The thesis of a rupture between a pre-industrial and industrial age in Europe is not completely invalid, but I don't think that underlying structures do not exist that, unmodified, have to do with both ages. This would become even clearer when one considered Europe not in isolation but within the global frame and order. Then, for instance, Eric William's controversial thesis of the structural relation between capitalism and slavery (Williams, 1944) should be considered and evaluated, and one would be able to see the possibility that these continuities exist. But even Braudel's study of the Mediterranean, which we have been looking at here, indicates that the age that immediately preceded the rise of industry was already one in which a prefiguration of future social relations existed. If the phenomenon of poverty in the classical age was different from poverty in the Middle Ages or in antiquity, it is because non-specific capitalist relations are already being delineated.

[14]I would rather say that poverty is always an economic phenomenon with a moral justification. The difference does not lie in whether it is economic or moral, but rather in whether it represents a specific or non-specific dimension of the nascent capitalist system.

of the nation" (230). Not only does he play a part, but he becomes "the basis and the glory of nations" (*ibid.*). Yet this view, which was probably held in France by progressive and enlightened writers, or was rather a rhetorical device more than a factual reality, seems a little too optimistic. The part the poor played in the body of the nation seems to be more realistically explained by a reference to the Enclosure Acts and the Poor Law of 1834 in Britain than by a verbal, thus once again moral, exaltation of their potential. That this served both moral and economic purposes seems to be as true in the eighteenth (and probably in the nineteenth) century as it was in the seventeenth century, though in the latter the lack of the specificity of the new capitalist mode of production gave it a vagueness the former dissolved. What I am saying is that probably the drastic shift from moral to economic ground did not take place in the way described by Foucault, but that the moral and economic aspects of poverty and labor were always combined and made to serve different purposes. Certainly, during the French Revolution and later in Napoleon's army, the poor acquired opportunities they did not have before in France. But this precisely does not alter the thesis that the exaltation of poverty was not a merely economic matter.

However, the question here is not establishing whether Foucault was right or wrong; rather the question is identifying the difference between productive and living labor. As we have seen, the difference lies in the fact that productive labor is institutionalized living labor, and this process of institutionalization is the same as, or a necessary element of, the formation of a specifically capitalist economy. In this sense, it is the Foucauldian concept of the *micro-physics* of power, introduced in the first part of *Discipline and Punish*, which deals with torture in the mid-eighteenth century, that

provides the answer to our question. Here the institutions *produce* a body which is in turn bound to be productive. Foucault presents a 'political economy' of the body (the inverted commas are his own) later described as a "political technology of the body." He says that "it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection...; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (1977, 26). Here the thesis of *Madness and Civilization* and that of *Discipline and Punish* seem to come together: production in the modern sense is indeed a relatively new concept, modified and enhanced by capitalism; yet, subjection is a very ancient concept and certainly fundamental in the classical age of absolutism. The institutions work synthetically in this respect. The micro-physics of power may entail analytic dissection, as Foucault explains later in this study; yet, what it constitutes is the result of a synthetic activity. Foucault says: "What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings [the knowledge later characterized by Foucault in various ways as 'techno-politics,' 'political anatomy of detail,' etc.][15] and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces" (26).

[15]Cf. Foucault (1977, 92 and 139; brackets mine).

This regulated, disciplined body is a unity of production and subjection. Constituted as labor power, it marks the difference between productive (or unproductive) labor and living labor. The latter could be characterized as the agile, flexible, and erotic body which, at least in theory, remains outside the discipline of production and constitutes itself through a logic of neither/nor. That this is a quasi-utopian moment, for bodies are regulated and disciplined as a general rule in one way or the other, does not affect our distinction, which is not formal, but real. To make this a little more concrete, we can think about the difference between the body of the soldier, the prisoner, the factory worker, and that of the bohemian, the hermit, the guerrilla. Insofar as one is able to stay away from the institutions, the unity of production and subjection is negated; the body, subtracted to that unity, becomes free to formulate its own self-discipline.[16] Certainly, in this subtraction (which is the same thing as the logic of neither/nor) there may be, or perhaps there must be, some forms of simulation and dissimulation. Thus, the body of the *capoeira* is another good example of this. In the capoeira fight/dance (an Afro-Brazilian martial art), the subtraction of the body from the micro-physics of power and the constitution of new decentered moments of power/knowledge, are brought about through simulation and dissimulation. Capoeira, a preparation for guerrilla and slave rebellion masked as a dance, is nothing but a disruption of the production process, in which alternative time and space are constituted as if out of nothing, out of what is

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[16] Peter McLaren also calls attention to the importance of the body in his discussion of Che Guevara's revolutionary subjectivity: "For Che, the body became the revolutionary's most severe teacher. But Che's physical strength and agility were not those of the phallo-military mercenary of the ruling class, whose mindless athleticism serves the highest bidder, but rather that of the battle-tough warrior whose steely resolve pushes the body to its limits, yet never divorces it from critical, contextual analysis of the goals ahead" (McLaren, 2000, 79). In other words, the body becomes the unity of theory and practice, the *organicity* of the revolutionary organic intellectual.

available: the voice, the body (perhaps even with arms and hands tied up).[17] In these new and masked forms of time and space, the categories of production (in a slave but already capitalist society) and subjection are dispersed in the apparently only playful prefiguration of a future of freedom.

4.7 The sequestration of time and bodies

The work of Foucault provides us with the conceptual and critical tools for overcoming the confusion between living labor and productive labor. Yet, in and by itself, Foucault's work remains within the general paradigm created by that confusion. This happens because, notwithstanding his powerful critique of the concept of the institutions, Foucault also shares in the prejudice against the concept of labor typical of late twentieth century French thought. Because of this, when he could clarify the confusion on the basis of his own analysis, he re-inscribes it with full force in his own discourse. Of course, he does not commit Baudrillard's mistake of saying that labor only pertains to the concept of capital, but he reduces, once again, labor to productive labor. By doing this, he loses sight of the fact that the result of the rise of specific institutions in the modern, industrial age is not the transformation of a generic human activity into labor, but rather the transformation of labor into productive labor under and according to the specificity of capital. This confusion reappears in Foucault's work when, in the conclusions to the lectures "Truth and Juridical Forms" (1973), with which we will deal here, he criticizes the Hegelian and Marxian idea that man's concrete essence is labor. He says that "labor is absolutely not man's concrete essence or man's existence in its concrete form." And he

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[17]For a description of capoeira, see Bira Almeida (1986).

continues: "In order for men to be brought into labor, tied to labor, an operation is necessary, or a complex series of operations, by which men are effectively —not analytically but synthetically— bound to the production apparatus for which they labor. It takes this operation, or this synthesis effected by a political power, for man's essence to appear as being labor" (Foucault, 2000, 86). What is meant here by labor is productive labor. However, what makes a set of institutions so specifically different from another that human beings can be tied to labor in such different ways as to account for the difference in modes of production and the specificity of historical ages? That human beings are tied to labor is not a novelty of the modern, industrial age; it is not a condition that pertains exclusively, or even only peculiarly, to capital. But the way in which they are tied to it is new.

The question is, then, how the transformation into labor would specifically pertain to the modern world of capital. If it is true that man's essence, his generic making, can be constructed as labor only under a given regime of techno-political measures, then this is true of all modes of production, all ages of history, and all areas of the world. The labor that went into the construction of the pyramids must have been of the same nature. Then the difference seems to be one between spontaneous activity and an activity organized and structured *as* labor. But then we have a zero-sum discourse, and we still have to explain the specificity of labor under capital, that is, its 'productive' nature. Let us keep in mind that for Marx productive labor means capital-producing and valorizing labor. We then understand that it is the ambiguous use of the word 'productive' that creates confusion, for, in a generic sense, 'productive' can also be used to describe labor in a non-capitalist mode of production. Thus, when Foucault speaks of the "production

apparatus," he really refers to a general concept, not one which is historically specific — though that may not be his intention. Notwithstanding Foucault's explicit defense of the adequacy of a non-historical approach in this respect,[18] the fact remains that either labor is coterminous with history (i.e., with the human episode in the universe), and thus we have to explain how it goes through different modes without changing in substance, or it is a modern phenomenon only, in which case the construction of the pyramids, and of all pre-modern history, was not based on labor, which would be an absurd claim to make.

To his credit, Foucault never makes that claim, which –however absurd– has been made, as we have seen. Rather, what happens in Foucault is that the specificity of the capitalist mode of production –perhaps too strongly emphasized at the time of *Madness and Civilization* when the passage from the ethical to the economic understanding of labor was worked out– is shifted into becoming a general paradigm of history. Probably, the reason for this is that Foucault is particularly interested in the compulsory dimension with which labor always seems to present itself. Yet, a generic compulsion is not the same as the obligation to work which becomes systemic, structured and institutional under capital, as well as under other social formations. Thus, the problem of understanding and explaining the specificity of each formation, and finally of capital, is still there. The solution to the problem is that this labor is now *wage labor*, and wage

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[18]A nonchalant Foucault says: "Someone said that man's concrete essence is labor. Actually, this idea was put forward by several people. We find it in Hegel, in the post-Hegelians, and also in Marx, the Marx of a certain period, as Althusser would say. Since I'm interested not in authors but in the function of statements, it makes little difference who said it or exactly when it was said" (2000, 86). Besides the fact that "the Marx of a certain period" is more a product of fiction than reality, a reading of the *Grundrisse*, or even *Capital*, would show the thorough historicity of Marx's understanding of labor.

labor is the result of a "free" exchange on the part of its possessor.[19] Certainly, no one would deny the high degree of compulsion that, to make an historical example, went into the construction of the Taj Mahal. Shah Jahan and his bureaucracy were certainly able to structure the Indian labor force in an absolute way. But precisely because it was absolute, that form of compulsion did not rest on the "free" acceptance of a contract of exchange.[20] More important, whether the labor force was occupied in the construction of buildings and cities or in the traditional textile industry, there was not in seventeenth century India (or in other areas of the world before capital) the concept of productivity which became fundamental with capital. Before capital, notwithstanding its compulsory nature, labor was useful, not productive; at least, not specifically so. Yet, what we see here is precisely the truth that the question of productive labor is a question of political economy; whereas that of living labor is a question of ontology. And we can even liberate Foucault from the responsibility of the confusion, because we see that he is really dealing with a question that goes far beyond the limits of political economy.

There is, in this piece by Foucault, an attempt at redefining the old Marxist question of the relationship between structure and superstructure. At the very end of his lectures, Foucault says: "Power and knowledge are thus deeply rooted – they are not just superimposed on the relations of production but, rather, are very deeply rooted in what constitutes them" (87). I believe that this is true. Here we do not find the usual attempt at

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[19] Of course, one can also sell oneself into slavery. But that would be an exceptional case and not an institutional measure.

[20] Of course, in pre-modern or pre-capitalist societies, labor is either absolutely free (where the only 'compulsion' would be a sense of self-discipline and of social/communal interest) or absolutely un-free, that is, *forced* labor. It is only under capital that the contradiction obtains by and through which labor becomes 'forcedly free', or a *free-forced* labor.

redefining a relation by simply overturning its terms but a move toward a more immanent way of understanding the relation as a whole. It is certainly not a question of which term has priority over the other, but rather a question of grasping their intimate and necessary connection.[21]

In the last lecture of "Truth and Juridical Forms," Foucault starts from the concept of panopticism, which he defined in the previous lecture. Panopticism, or surveillance, is a general modality "peculiar to modern, industrial, capitalist society..." (73). It is a modality of surveillance and control, but also of molding and shaping people's time and bodies, as we shall see.

Foucault gives his audience (and readers) a riddle to solve. He says he will describe the prescribed routine of a French institution of the 1840s: "I'll describe the routine without saying whether it's a factory, a prison, a psychiatric hospital, a convent, a school, or a barracks, and you will guess which institution I have in mind" (73). It turns out that the institution in question is a women's factory. The prescribed routine offers a model of what Foucault here calls "institutional sequestration," really a sequestration of individuals' time and bodies. The sequestration is accomplished through the detailed method of techno-political control also described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In this lecture Foucault also goes over the distinction between two kinds of confinement: one which is geared toward *exclusion*, typical of the classical age; the other is characterized by the modality of *attachment* (or sequestration), and it is typical of the industrial age.[22] He says: "In the age we're concerned with, the aim of all these

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[21] We will see this again in the section on Gramsci below.

[22] Interestingly enough, attachment is what most specifically characterizes the

institutions –factories, schools, psychiatric hospitals, hospitals, prisons– is not to exclude but, rather, to attach individuals" (78). This attachment always seeks to produce or to enhance and guarantee production. We are here at the divide present in Foucault's work, but present in history as well. Here production acquires its specifically capitalist sense, no doubts about that. Yet, is it true that such a drastic change from exclusion to attachment occurs? Isn't exclusion also a relatively modern form of control, typical of capitalist societies? Isn't attachment a modality one finds in all pre-modern history and actually the most fundamental feature of feudal societies? If the answer to these questions is positive, as it certainly is, then the change that occurs with the coming of modern industry has nothing to do with a passage from exclusion to attachment and it is not determined by a change in the modalities of control. Rather, exclusion remains, while a new (that is, non-feudal) form of attachment is worked out and implemented. Indeed, exclusion remains as a specter behind attachment, as we have seen. Moreover, it is not that newly-devised modalities of control bring about a new form of attachment; rather, the possibility of this new form of attachment calls forth those modalities and makes them possible, too, or rather necessary. One could then say that exclusion and attachment complement one another. Indeed, it is easy to see that capital, in particular, needs to both attach and exclude: it attaches some of the total living labor and excludes another part of it, and in so doing it wins over both. Here we go back to one of the central points in the *Grundrisse*. I mean a sentence we have discussed before, where Marx says: "Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not

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feudal social system. I will say more about this below.

exist" (1973, 401). When translated into Foucault's terms, this great statement by Marx says precisely this: in order for labor to become productive and valorize capital, it must be both attached and excluded.

It is true that attachment has production as its only priority and that, conversely, production has a higher regard for attachment than exclusion. But this is so only in appearance. Without the not-positing of necessary labor, there would probably be no positing of it either; that is, without exclusion (or the specter of it) no attachment. Foucault says: "The factory, the school, the prison, or the hospitals have the object of binding the individual to a process of production, training [*formation*], or correction of the producers. It's a matter of guaranteeing production, or the producers, in terms of a particular norm" (2000, 78). But we have to be very careful and understand what is happening here, for this by itself does not exclude exclusion. The watershed described by Foucault is not between all past history and the modern, industrial age; rather, it is a divide between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Then, another interpretation is possible, namely, that with the coming of the industrial age the centuries of 'confusion' and 'anarchy' we have described before, the open centuries of geographic discovery and global trade expansion, the centuries which follow the relatively structured order of the Middle Ages, come to an end. A new order and a new structure prevail. In other words, in terms of control and surveillance, institutional power finds a new, viable and reliable modality, and in a sense, notwithstanding the novelty of the Industrial Revolution, this represents a going back to the 'security' of the Middle Ages – through a new and different modality of attachment, to be sure.[23] Individuals will not be attached to the land

[23] On this point, see the section on Mumford, chapter 6 *infra*.

but to the factory and to the other institutions.[24] Moreover, there is now a 'voluntary' (paradoxically and ironically so) involvement in this new attachment. This may explain why confinement proper appears as no longer necessary. But it is helpful to keep in mind that confinement itself is a relatively modern phenomenon, whose usefulness may diminish or disappear with the industrial age, but whose apogee is found neither in antiquity nor in the Middle Ages (though, what can one say of that self-imposed form of confinement represented by monastic life?). It is in one of the least structured, that is, more open, periods of Western history, the Renaissance and the age of discovery, that confinement, according to Foucault's description and analysis, becomes necessary.

Once this is understood, we can proceed to a reading of the very interesting and powerful concept of sequestration presented by Foucault. First of all, it is important to understand that the aim of sequestration is inclusion and normalization; whereas confinement excludes marginal individuals and reinforces marginality (Foucault, 2000, 79). Even here we see that, however, Foucault's distinction cannot really hold. Think about our own society and how inclusion and exclusion go hand in hand and reinforce each other; think of the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, the city where Foucault gave his lectures. What is important in the institutions of sequestration, but, also holds for those of confinement, is that they take "all or nearly all of individuals' time. They are institutions that, in a certain way, take charge of the whole temporal dimension of individuals' lives" (80).

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[24] "The factory doesn't exclude individuals: it attaches them to a production apparatus" (Foucault, 2000, 78). Yet, the process of competition that brings the proletariat to be hired or not, attached to the factory or not, is a process of inclusion and exclusion.

As we shall see, institutional sequestration is twofold: it is a sequestration of both time and bodies. Through it, time becomes labor time and the body becomes labor power. Again, the concept is very powerful and sound in its generality, yet it is difficult to see how it would apply exclusively to the specificity of capital. In fact, it applies to slavery and serfdom as well, or to those forms that share in both slavery and serfdom, such as the *corvée* system.

Foucault presents four functions or characteristics of institutional sequestration: control of time, control and molding of the body, the micropower which is equal to judicial power (polymorphous and polyvalent), and finally epistemological power, "a power to extract a knowledge from individuals and to extract a knowledge *about* those individuals who are subjected to observation and already controlled by those different powers" (83).

Let us look at the first function of sequestration, which has to do with time. Here Foucault speaks of a distinction between modern and feudal societies. The distinction is the classical and correct one that sees the serf as tied to the land and the industrial worker "free" to move wherever a demand for labor is present. We have already shown that the modern worker enjoys a forced freedom and that he is freely forced to a form of attachment. So, sequestration we have in both societies, but of a different kind. We could add a third, yet different, form of sequestration, that of the slave who is neither absolutely attached to any place like the serf, nor is he "free" to move from place to place, from the countryside to the city, from one industrial town to the other, like the modern worker, but is staying or leaving according to his master's will. Yet the slave is also not confined but attached.

The four functions of institutional sequestration are responsible for the "transformation of time-power and labor-power and their integration in production" (84). In other words, these institutions of sequestration ensure the set of mechanisms responsible for the transformation of "men's time and their bodies, their lives, ... into something that is productive force" (85).

Before we look again at Foucault's conclusions it would be good to say that, yes, it is true that these institutions of sequestration accomplish the passage from living labor to productive labor: they do so, under capitalism, according to the capitalist mode of production, and under feudalism, according to a feudal mode of production. This means that institutional sequestration per se is not responsible for the specificity of the capitalist mode of production, as it is not responsible for the feudal mode of production. Rather, the opposite is the case: each mode of production chooses those techniques of sequestration capable of ensuring its efficiency and continuation. Yet, Foucault's direction of thought and analysis still indicate the way to the solution of our original question, that is, the question as to the difference between living and productive labor. I mean to say that it is still true that productive labor is living labor institutionalized, but it is institutionalized along capitalist lines. In fact, living labor can also be institutionalized along feudal lines, but then it does not become productive in the sense in which Marx uses that word. It is also probably true that these institutional forms are not merely superstructural constructions erected on the economic base but are, as Foucault says in his conclusions, part of the structure. To say that they are part of the structure does not mean to say that they are responsible for the essential difference of any mode of production; rather, it means to say that a mode of production is not limited to the economic sphere, nor simply

and ephemerally to the superstructural sphere, but is rather, as Marx says, "a general illumination" (1973, 107). This, again, does not mean that new institutions bring about a different mode of production; rather, they themselves are made possible and become necessary because a new order of society, not limited to either the economic or cultural spheres but stretching through both, is called into being. This new order is called into being by the dissolution of the old order, and this dissolution is, in turn, occurring because there is a crisis which invests both the relations of production and the institutions of society. What is important in Foucault's analysis is that it shows the intimate link between relations of production and institutions of sequestration, but it does not really show that this link is a characteristic of capital alone. Still, what is important is that this analysis, up to the conclusions at least, emphasizes the fact that living labor and productive labor are two different things, and that productive labor is nothing but living labor institutionalized, the sequestration of the individuals' time and bodies under capital.

Let us go back to the conclusions. Here, as we have seen, Foucault criticizes the Marxist understanding of the concept of labor and, in a sense, he undoes what he has accomplished so far. I say this because, at this point, we lose sight of the distinction between living labor and productive labor. Labor as such becomes again the culprit of society's problems and, consequently, it again appears as pertaining exclusively to the specificity of capital. Foucault says: "I don't think we can simply accept the traditional Marxist analysis, which assumes that, labor being man's concrete essence, the capitalist system is what transforms that labor into profit, into hyperprofit [*sur-profit*] or surplus value" (86). It is not the capitalist manipulation of labor but the very fact that there is labor which now accounts for exploitation and control. Foucault continues: "The fact is,

capitalism penetrates much more deeply into our existence" (*ibid.*). Of course, this is absolutely true, but I do not think it is true in the sense in which Foucault understands it. We have already seen how capitalism is not merely a mode of production, or rather how the expression 'mode of production' is something that goes much beyond the economic sphere and defines the whole spectrum of the social. The fact that capitalism, as Foucault says, "was obliged to elaborate a set of political techniques, techniques of power, by which man was tied to something like labor" (86) does not make labor responsible for it, nor is it a proof that labor is not man's concrete essence. By way of analogy, the fact that feudalism tied man to the land (and to a different kind of labor) does not make the land responsible for the feudal social relations of production. In other words, it is the way in which labor (or the land) is constructed and used, not what it is in itself, that creates the modalities which translate into a mode of production. It is the relation, not the thing, which should be emphasized. Certainly, in the nineteenth century, man could be tied to something like labor (in the industrial sense) because there was something like labor to be tied to; yet, this tie was defined by the set of political techniques, not by labor. Indeed, labor as a concept was also re-defined by them; or rather, labor was being re-constructed by and through a specificity which made those techniques effective and meaningful. It is in those techniques and in a transformed concept of labor that the essential difference of capital must be sought, not in the sudden appearing of something like labor as the ground of attachment. It is interesting that Foucault, who makes it possible to discern and grasp concretely the working and meaning of these techniques of power as specific institutions, should then make the mistake of losing sight of this important intuition and shift the discourse back to the vague vogue of a critique of labor as labor.

To be sure, Foucault does not lose sight of the importance of the relations of power. The problem with his exposition does not lie in this but in the implicit rejection of the positive, and thus revolutionary, dimension of labor. By and through the capitalist institutional sequestration people's bodies and their time do not simply and generically become labor power and labor time: they become so in the specificity of the capitalist mode of production. Labor is not simply what they are tied to, but, fundamentally and essentially, what they are. No longer attached to the land or to the owner, workers are attached to themselves as mere possessors of labor power; in this new attachment we see again the meaning of the word 'proletarian' as used by Marx in the *Manuscripts*: modern industrial workers are attached proletarians. They are attached to their own freedom, and only to it; though, as we have seen, paradoxically and ironically so. The techniques of power elaborated by capital do not create labor as a human necessity, a human reality and competence; rather, they use this necessity, this reality and competence, in order to extract hyperprofit (surplus-value). And hyperprofit is not merely the result of the process of this extraction (or production); it is its pro-jected ground.

Foucault says that what he meant to do was "analyze this infrapower as a condition of possibility of hyperprofit" (87). That the infrapower exists, no one denies. Yet this infrapower (the set of techniques of control) is devised because hyperprofit is the conscious end of production; or else hyperprofit would merely be its epiphenomenal consequence. True, "[t]here is no hyperprofit without an infrapower" (86), yet not all forms of infrapower are geared toward hyperprofit. Foucault is correct when he says that this infrapower makes men into "agents of production, into workers" (*ibid.*). Yet, how would this be possible if labor were not essential in man? However, it seems to me that

the real question is not whether labor is or is not the essence of man. I think that to this question one could easily answer that labor is *one of* the essential moments of a person's life, but of course there is labor and labor. Instead the question is whether the reduction of man's full being to his laboring capacity (and only to it) does not turn the potentially joyful and meaningful moment of labor into his crucifixion. Under capital, this crucifixion has the specific form of productivity; other forms obtain under different modes of production, and this is why Marx can say that a class struggle has underlain all history. Yet, this would not be possible if labor were not an essential moment of human life. And it is this same truth that makes labor coterminous with freedom.

4.8 Concepts and contradictions: the meaning of utopia

Foucault says that "there are two sorts of utopias: proletarian socialist utopias, which have the property of never being realized, and capitalist utopia, which often have the unfortunate tendency to be realized" (2000, 75). I do not think we can take this unusual remark of Foucault as expressing a scientific truth; actually, it is unusual precisely because it polemically and rhetorically alludes to something beyond the economy of the text, and this is not common in Foucault's work, which is, as he says in one occasion, concerned with 'the function of statements" (86) and thus has always (even when it becomes figurative and poetic) the analytic dimension typical of scientific discourse. Yet, there is some truth in that unusual remark. First of all, by "capitalist utopia" Foucault means the factory or any of the other institutions he describes. The factory, the industrial city, are examples of the capitalist utopia, notwithstanding their presence in those

societies that claimed to be against capitalism.[25] Then, the point is understanding the meaning of the word 'utopia'. Insofar as an institution entails and produces that loss of reality of which Marx speaks, it becomes, *ipso facto*, a utopia. Certainly, a utopia of a peculiar kind, to which the name of *dystopia* is more appropriate. Its utopian or dystopian quality is reflected in the alienation experienced by the subject in it. The original place of being is taken away and replaced by a form of non-being (alienated being). The place is transformed to the point that it really becomes a non-place.

The proletarian socialist (or communist) utopia, on the other hand, which for Foucault has the "property of never being realized," is in reality what lies in the realm of possibilities, potentiality, and the *could*. In reality, this utopia is already there, at least conceptually. It is what for Marcuse lacks actuality only because impeded by the opposing forces of constituted power.[26] Obviously, its potential reality is ready to become actual, and this readiness must posit itself at the level of the concept. Yet, let us be very careful and avoid the mistake of considering the level of the concept as the level of the unreal. The concept is rather the most real, and it is in this sense that the modern capitalist dystopia can also be called utopian: an unreal reality, a paradox which lingers and desperately, though up to now efficiently, wants to remain in control; yet, a reality which has lost the logical and ontological (as well as ethical) support of the concept. When one looks at the conceptual structure of capital, one realizes that it is empty, for there is no rationality in it, and this lack of rationality is, with Hegel, also a lack of *real* reality. Today capital justifies itself rhetorically through all the ideologies that seek to

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[25] Or perhaps this presence explains why those societies did not transcend capitalism and its productivist logic. We will go back to this in the section on Gramsci.

[26] See chapter 2 above.

portray it as the defender of freedom. Yet, it is easy to see that by freedom what is meant is free-trade, and free-trade (with its euphemistic 'open doors') is what legitimizes and deepens the system of exploitation and oppression of what could be termed the *international or global South* (i.e., with the new concept and reality of the international division of labor, the working class of the entire globe).[27] When this rhetoric fails, capital resorts to military action, or rather it always manages to maintain ready a mélange of its rhetorical and military instruments. The result is utter hypocrisy, but it works; it has worked very well so far. Yet, deception and might are not (and cannot be) substitutes for the concept. Through them, even the worst of tyrants can remain in power for a relatively long period of time; but sooner or later, his head will fall. Capital has lost the support of the concept because the concept itself aspires to universality and totality, but capital does not. Capital rests, in fact, on the particularistic interests of a partial will. In Marx's classic argument, capital has created the conditions for the possibility of a different world, but this different world cannot be willed by capital for, as one of Dante's devils would have it, "la contradizion che nol consente" ("the law of contradiction won't allow it").[28] This is why all talks about eliminating the world's poverty, whether they are held at some UN summit or at a fortified New York's Walford Astoria, are pathetic and ridiculous. Capital

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[27] What I mean by this is that the division of the world into a North and a South is not a completely adequate description of the global economic and social situation today. With the due differences (often amounting to a question of degrees), we can say that there is also a South in the North, and in perhaps less important ways, a North in the South. The former is constituted by the most exploited sections of the working class in the advanced countries, often, but not always, made of people who were compelled to leave their own original countries in the world's South; that 'exodus' incorrectly celebrated by Hardt and Negri (1194 and 2000) as a positive moment in the most recent developments of history. The latter is constituted by the ruling classes of the South, or rather by all the sections of society that, in important ways, do benefit from the mischievous machinery of free-trade.

[28] *Inferno*, XXVII, 120; Allen Mandelbaum's translation.

cannot seriously and sincerely will the elimination of poverty, for that would be its self-annihilation. The world for which capital has laid the foundations is capital's direct and absolute negation. It then comes as no surprise that capital should employ all its might to check this shifting of the ground. Yet, the passage from one world to the other, from one essential difference to the other, cannot be a matter of necessary and mechanical transition. It must be willed somewhere and by someone. It needs an agent with a rational will,[29] a subject able to call forth from the future the ontological substance which fills the conceptual structure of this difference. This agent, or subject, can be no other than living labor itself. As against the decaying utopias of capital, which rest on an empty concept, or rather on no concept at all, living labor has an immediate and intimate relation to the fullness of the concept – a concept full of being. But this is a living labor which rests outside the categories of capital and capitalist production, either because it has been rejected by them or because it has subtracted itself from them.

Yet the problem is that living labor is apparently totally subsumed under capital. We have seen that one of the effects of this subsumtpion is to divide labor into productive and unproductive modalities, and we have said that both modalities are categories of capital and its producivist logic. Yet, living labor as a concept and as a real reality surpasses capital and actually grounds it.[30] This is why it is extremely dangerous to say that labor is a creation of capital. To say that means to lose sight of the ontological dimension of labor and thus to miss the possibility of transcending the limits that upon

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[29] The expression is to be understood in Gramsci's sense. Cf. chapter 5 below.

[30] To the possible objection that I am placing too much emphasis on the concept rather than on the reality of labor, I answer that I have a specific reason for doing this. In fact, even assuming that there actually is no living labor outside capital, the concept says that there *could* be. This modality of the possible and the future is what interests me here.

labor are set and imposed by capital. Again, it means to accept the logic of capital as a metaphysical reality. Instead, when living labor is considered in its concept, free from the manipulations it undergoes under capital, then it appears in its neutral and pure form, as being *neither-productive-nor-unproductive*, but all-powerful and creative. It then appears as the ontological foundation and motor of social reality as a whole, and, as I have said, this is the only reason why capital wants it.

I hope I may be allowed to illustrate this with an example from my professional experience. Speaking of the fundamental character of freedom in history in one of my classes, I was challenged by a student who said my argument was untenable given the fact that history has also known the system of slavery. Of course, it was easy to answer the objection by saying that people can be enslaved only insofar as they are free. Yet, the question was important because it made me think about something I wasn't aware of: the fact that there are people who even today accept the idea that slaves *were slaves*, rather than *made slaves*, almost as if slavery were their ontological constitution, and that, consequently, freedom was *granted* to them in a real, ontological sense, not merely in a legal sense.[31] This mistake, of not reaching to the roots of an historical reality and concept, is also made in the discourse on labor. Thus we may think that manorial labor, slave labor, and finally productive labor are forms of necessary, rather than contingent, constraints put on labor as labor. But we overlook the fact that such constraints can be applied at all only insofar as *there is* something as labor to apply them to, and that before being constrained in such and such a way, labor must logically and ontologically be free

[31] "Freedom can only be *taken*: this is what the *revolutionary* tradition represents. Yet taking freedom means that freedom *takes* itself, that it has already received itself, from itself. No one begins *to be* free, but freedom *is* the beginning and endlessly remains the beginning" (Jean-Luc Nancy, 1993, 77)

and unconstrained. Or we may be led to think that labor is eventually granted a freedom which is external to its constitution, a freedom that works by degrees and through ameliorations and reforms, in the same way in which slaves 'were granted' their freedom. We then capitulate before the very logic we wish to combat (that of capital in our age) by conceding the most fundamental point: that a relative degree of freedom may be given to labor, but that originally and absolutely labor is not free.[32] Instead, we should bear in mind that, logically and ontologically, the freedom of labor does not succeed, but rather precedes, labor's enslavement and subsumption. To recuperate the conceptual freedom of labor is not to philosophize in vain. Rather, it is to show that the thisness of production, the essential difference, or the historical age under consideration, is not a given of nature but an historical contingency which, as it came to be, can also pass away. To prepare the new essential difference, we have to reach back into the purity and neutrality of the concept of labor. Yet, this reaching back is in reality a reaching forward. It is there that, beyond what merely is, we can get a glimpse of what could be.

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[32] The absurd nature of this logic was, of course, evident to the ever-original and sharp eye of Duns Scotus: "...if something is against the law of nature, it can never become just ... because crimes are not ratified by their longevity, but are rather more to be condemned; now, all forms of servitude other than these two cases [of voluntary indenture and as punishment for criminal activity] are against the law of nature; therefore, no matter how long such a contrary custom has existed, it would not seem just that a master exercise such dominion over such servants" (Duns Scotus,1986, 327). And again, arguing against or correcting Aristotle, he says that no matter the degree to which a man is enslaved, he never loses his fundamental freedom. Thus, Aristotle's "damnable form of servitude, where the slave is like an animal ... does not mean that in his actions he is only led and does not lead on his own, because no matter how much of a slave he might be, he is still a man and so has free will. And on this score, it is clear what great cruelty is involved in first imposing such servitude, for it reduces a man who is his own master and free to act in a manly and virtuous fashion, to the status of a brute animal, unable to choose freely or to act virtuously" (330).

4.9 Bookchin and the reality of utopia

In a polemic essay against Marxist orthodoxy written in 1969,[33] Murray Bookchin repeatedly emphasizes the distinction between what-is and what-could-be. He correctly describes this distinction as a tension, which he also calls the tension between the actual and the possible. By doing so, he is able to overcome the limits imposed on society and on revolutionary theory and practice by political economy and by an often misguided critique of political economy and move the discourse in two equally necessary directions: toward a deeper theoretical understanding of the potentiality of labor and toward a more meaningful, and truly revolutionary, revolutionary praxis.

Bookchin starts with the quest for creating "a movement that looks to the future instead of to the past" (Bookchin, 1971, 174). In support of this, he quotes from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where Marx says: "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future" (*ibid.*).[34] The same, Bookchin holds, can be said of the social revolution of our own times. In the polemic vein of the essay, Bookchin says that "Marxism has ceased to be applicable to our time not because it is too visionary or revolutionary, but because it is not visionary or revolutionary enough" (177). However, he says that "the problem is not to 'abandon' Marxism or to 'annul' it, but to transcend it dialectically" (*ibid.*). Bookchin does not criticize Marx's work and philosophy, but the Marxist tradition and orthodoxy. In particular, he criticizes the thoughtless and mechanical way in which would-be

[33] "Listen, Marxist!" in Bookchin (1971).

[34] Bookchin quotes more at length, but for our purposes this suffices.

revolutionaries apply Marxism to the problems of society. He criticizes the everyday dimension of Marxism, so to speak; the fact that adherents to this philosophy have forgotten that in order to revolutionize society they also have to revolutionize themselves. It is here that the question of labor and production becomes central, for the revolutionary quality of ideas stands or falls according to whether one refuses or accepts to enter into and uplift the logic of capitalist production.

In this sense, Bookchin says: "The worker becomes a *revolutionary* not by becoming more of a worker but by undoing his 'workerness'" (188). We have already seen how Marx draws a distinction between the proletarian and the worker.[35] Now this distinction can be more adequately understood as a distinction between living labor and productive labor. Bookchin's *workerness* is nothing but productivity, which, as we have seen, for the modern apologists of capital is nothing short of happiness. This productivity was earlier described as the result of the institutionalization of living labor. When we spoke about Foucault's work, we saw how one of the most conspicuous examples of this process of institutionalization occurs, precisely, through the institution of the factory, at the point of production. Bookchin is saying something very similar, or rather what he is saying can be understood in terms of the same concept of the institutions. In polemic with Marxist orthodoxy, which privileges the point of production as the strongest link in the process of proletarian unity and organization,[36] Bookchin says: "The factory serves not only to 'discipline,' 'unite,' and 'organize' the workers, but also to do so in a thoroughly bourgeois fashion. In the factory, capitalistic production not only renews the social

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[35] Cf. chapter 2, *supra*.

[36] We will go back to this in the chapter on Gramsci.

relations of capitalism with each working day, as Marx observed, it also renews the psyche, values and ideology of capitalism" (183-184).

Bookchin is here dealing with the difficult question of the transition from a class society to a classless society. He says that it is "vitally important to emphasize that [Marx's] explanation [of this transition] was reasoned out almost entirely by analogy with the transition of feudalism to capitalism – that is, *from one class society to another class society*" (181-182; Bookchin's emphasis). But, Bookchin notes, going from one class society to another class society is not the same as going from a class society to a classless one. This may be true, even though everything here becomes a little foggy and slippery; that is, the problem may be more apparent than real, or rather it may have to be sought somewhere else, perhaps in the concept of transition itself.[37] Yet, Bookchin's point remains important because it makes us think of what may take place during the so-called transition. Obviously, the new bourgeois class did not arise in modernity because it was 'attached' to the feudal institutions. Rather, the opposite is the case. It is precisely because it was detached from those institutions and left to itself that it was able to take initiatives and exploit opportunities that lay at the margins of the feudal world and became gradually more important and central as that world began to crumble. The bourgeoisie was a class of merchants and entrepreneurs. Neither the serfs nor the feudal petty officials became bourgeois with the crumbling of the feudal system. Reasoning this time deliberately by analogy, one could say that the workers *as* workers, attached to

[37] As we will see in the section on Mumford (chapter 6, *infra*), the fact that there really was such a transition may be called into question. Industry and technological innovations do not start with "what is usually called *the* industrial revolution" (Mumford, 1934, 1963, 4). The problem would then be that of choosing between the concept of transition, as a time-space separating two heterogeneous stages, and the concept of (a relatively continuous) transformation.

production, would not cease to be what they are in the case of a hypothetical 'transition' to socialism. This also requires that one re-think, as some authors have done, the adequacy of the concept of transition.

It is in this sense that we can read Bookchin's idea of an *un-class* which prepares itself before the coming of a fatidic transition. I will quote a long passage for its strength and clarity: "The worker begins to become a revolutionary when he undoes his 'workerness,' when he comes to detest his class status here and now, when he begins to shed exactly those features which the Marxists most prize in him – his work ethic, his character-structure derived from industrial discipline, his respect for hierarchy, his obedience to leaders, his consumerism, his vestiges of puritanism. In this sense, the worker becomes a revolutionary to the degree that he sheds his class status and achieves an *un*-class consciousness. He degenerates – and he degenerates magnificently. What he is shedding are precisely those *class* shackles that bind him to *all* systems of domination. He abandons those *class* interests that enslave him to consumerism, suburbia, and a bookkeeping conception of life" (189). In other words, the worker stops believing in productivity, performing productive labor, supporting capitalist production. This is not very un-Marxian if one considers Marx's distinction between the worker and the proletariat we have already seen in discussing the *Manuscripts*, but also Marx's own description of this *un-class* in the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Marx, 1975b). Here Marx describes the *proletariat*, this "class with *radical chains*," as "a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society" and "a class which is the dissolution of all classes" (256). The concept of *un-class* is evidently present in this description. Here the task of the proletariat is not that of strengthening its position

by adjusting to an ideal of 'workerness' and productivity before dissolving all classes. The proletariat is already that dissolution, that "*total loss* of humanity" which, as such, that is, in this negativity, can posit the "*total redemption of humanity*" (*ibid.*). Marx also emphasizes that the modern proletariat is not naturally poor, but *artificially* poor. In this artificiality, there are the reasons of its loss of humanity. By stopping being a worker, the proletariat exits that artificiality, described by both Foucault and Bookchin as institutionalization at all levels of life. He becomes a human being again, perhaps now naturally poor,[38] yet a living labor which refuses to be subsumed, a total being with time and with a body at his disposal. This does not mean that he becomes inactive and idle. Bookchin's 'degeneration' is to be understood in terms of an involution away from institutional constraints and superimposed norms, almost a purification and return to the principles. This *un*-class consciousness describes what we have otherwise called the *condition of neither/nor*, a condition which immediately, that is, naturally, reaches back into the neutrality of living labor and does not remain idle but lays the foundations for a radical essential difference. For Bookchin, such is the condition of the revolutionary who "begins to challenge not only the economic and political premises of hierarchical society, but hierarchy as such. He not only raises the need for social revolution but also tries to *live* in a revolutionary manner to the degree that this is possible in the existing society" (1971, 190). Bookchin gives the example of self-management as the most important expression of this new consciousness. And he continues: "He not only attacks the forms created by the legacy of domination, but also improvises new forms of liberation which take their poetry from the future" (190-191).

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[38] Perhaps poor of a Franciscan poverty, as Antonio Negri has recently said.

I will not go through the historical part of Bookchin's essay. What I have noted is sufficient to understand the tension between the actual and the possible, the what-is and the what-could-be, the reality of utopia. This tension is, first of all, presented by Bookchin as an explanation of social revolutions. Bookchin admits that social revolutions occur "because the 'masses' find the existing society intolerable (as Trotsky argued)" (192). Yet this is only part of the explanation. In fact, social revolutions also occur because of the tension between what-is and what-could-be. In Bookchin's explanation, the terrain is covered from economy to culture, from the structure to the superstructure: the explanation is both socio-economic and philosophical. *The tension between what-is and what-could-be is a tension of the concept.*

In a discussion which followed the publication of "Listen, Marxist!" Bookchin, speaking of the question of the class struggle, reiterates this point: "The class struggle...does not begin and end at the point of production. It may emerge from the poverty of the unemployed and unemployables, many of whom have never done a day's work in industry; it may emerge from a new sense of possibility that slowly pervades society – the tension between 'what is' and 'what could be'..." (227). As he explains later in the text (231), it is when what-is appears in all its irrationality that the new modality of what-could-be becomes more adequate. I would suggest that, at this point, this modality of the future takes on the character of a *rational will* as against the irrationality of the merely given. In fact, an irrational real seems to be a contradiction in terms, it certainly is if one follows Hegel; it is a place which becomes a non-place, a utopia that, as we have seen, is really a dystopia. The rational and real utopia lies

forward, in the future, in the realm of the concept and of the *could*; yet, as we have seen, this is not at all a mere ideality.

In the introduction to the book which also contains the essay we have been discussing, Bookchin goes even further in clarifying the meaning of the tension of utopia and in emphasizing its importance. He says: "The foremost contradiction of capitalism today is the tension between what-is and what-could-be – between the actuality of domination and the potentiality of freedom" (1971, 12). This contradiction is particularly felt, not at the point of production, but when and where workers are not working, in everyday life (not that production isn't a part of it), or even more urgently by those who simply do not work: Bookchin emphasizes the privileged position of young people in this respect. To say that this is the foremost contradiction of capitalism is no exaggeration, and after thirty years from Bookchin's writing this, the statement still holds true. To say that the contradiction is felt less at the point of production means to acknowledge that, at that point, the what-is becomes absolutely triumphant and all-pervading. At the point of production, only a disruption of production can allow one to get a glimpse of the what-could-be, or else one is left with the alternative of daydreaming and with the numbing of the creative sense. When the actuality of domination becomes absolute, the potentiality of freedom is reduced to nothing. Yet, it is important to understand that this is so only in appearance. In reality, freedom can never be completely destroyed, and, in particular, its potentiality always remains, though hidden somewhere, as it were, or withdrawn into its original and irreducible dignity. It is precisely because of this irreducibility, because of this ultimate and ineradicable stronghold, this cave in the forest of the earth, that the contradiction faced by capital becomes absolute – as absolute as its actuality of

domination. Under the regime of real subsumption, when all labor is subsumed under capital, capital appears as a totality. Yet capital has totalized itself only in view of productivity and profit, not in view of the totality and complexity of social life, and thus it is not a totality but a partiality. Even all the subsumed labor is, as we have shown, only the labor which becomes productive or unproductive. Yet, *that-there-is-labor* is not a category subsumable under capital, though capital tries to make it appear so. *That-there-is-labor*, where labor is self-discipline, application, but also enjoyment and play, is precisely the standing there of what-could-be. And what-could-be precisely stands where what-is reaches the limits of its partial being. Beyond what-is there is its negation. The Parmenidean fullness of being as a one is replaced by the atomistic theory that allows for negation and the void. This negation, however, is not nothing but, rather, what-could-be.

To say that capital is a partiality rather than a totality, or rather that it is a totality only in appearance, does not mean to deny its reality and power. Moreover, appearance should be taken in the Hegelian sense and not be confused with illusion. Certainly, totality and omnipresence of capital are not illusory. But they are reflected realities. It should not be forgotten that the essence of capital is labor. It is labor, not capital, which has immediate totality and simple omnipresence, which is, in other words, univocal. Once this is understood, it is easy to see that even the what-is of labor under capital (i.e., productive labor) cannot exhaust labor's potential being. Subsumed under capital, labor leaves its immediacy to enter the sphere of reflection and produce the appearance of capital. Once it subtracts itself from this task and returns to its immediacy, it counts nothing for capital because it has left the sphere of appearance, that is, it has disappeared; yet, it counts a lot for itself. Thus, this disappearing is not annihilation; rather, it is the

beginning of a subterranean process that brings the contradiction between actuality and potentiality, appearance and essence, domination and freedom, to its utmost degree. It is the beginning of the *guerrilla of living labor*.

For Bookchin, this subterranean process has the name of anarchism, or anarco-communism: "a subterranean movement in history which conflicts with all systems of authority" (211). Here, I do not wish to enter into the complex and really dated question of the relationship between anarchism and communism (or Marxism). Nor am I sure that Bookchin sees this subterranean movement in the labor terms I have described it. Indeed, I think that I make use of a wider and more complex concept of labor than Bookchin does, for it seems to me that he tends to describe an attitude or perhaps a disposition in everyday life, but not necessarily an ontological disposition. Yet, Bookchin, differently from others, always maintains the centrality of labor (through the concept of self-management, for instance), nor does he make the mistake of distinguishing between a liberated (creative) labor and leisure time. Thus he says: "A point has now been reached where the 'masses' can begin, almost overnight, to expand drastically the 'realm of freedom' in the Marxian sense – to acquire the leisure time needed to achieve the highest degree of self-management" (216). This point is very important, for the tension must not be between leisure and labor time, labor and play, but rather between what-is and what-could-be, the actuality of domination and the potentiality of freedom. Once the potentiality of freedom is not curtailed, labor and leisure can be one and the same thing, or, as it seems to have been the case among the Arawak of the Caribbean islands, to be equal and integral components of the organicity of the same time.

Chapter 5 - Praxis and the Danger:

The Insurgent Ontology of Antonio Gramsci

...in this imbalance between theory and practice there was an inherent danger.

Antonio Gramsci

In this chapter, I will consider, through Gramsci, some philosophical and political concepts of the Marxist tradition which, because of their linguistic form, are today controversial or unpopular. I will deal particularly with the concepts of orthodoxy, production and totality.

The main purpose of this chapter is to show how, in Gramsci's vision, Marxism, or the philosophy of praxis, is a new and total, but dynamic, conception of the world whose interest cannot be limited to one or the other sphere of the totality of life. Culture itself, which for Gramsci is wider than philosophy, is the totality of forms that go from production to artistic and poetic creation, from manual labor to philosophical activity. At the end of the chapter, I will propose a new interpretation of today's cursed concept of totality: totality as plenitude. It is not a question of finding a new and better word for an old concept. Rather, what I would like to do is contribute to an understanding of this central and profound concept of the philosophy of praxis while avoiding falling into

easy euphemisms as well as into the danger of weakening and neutralizing the power of the philosophy of praxis itself. I will also suggest, in the last section, a new possible interpretation of the concept of the will which Gramsci claims should be put at the basis of philosophy.

5.1 Orthodoxy and productivism

Gramsci's thought has been interpreted in many ways. However, what is common to most interpretations is the emphasis on Gramsci's total or almost total distance from Marxist orthodoxy.[1] By Marxist orthodoxy one generally understands the economist, productivist reduction of the theory of revolution to the doctrines of the Second International and to trends which are supposedly already present in Marx's *Capital* itself. This means, basically, the idea that the economic sphere strictly and necessarily determines the cultural sphere and that the question of economic growth should emphatically remain a central concern of a revolutionary society. Gramsci's opposition to, or distance from, this tendency is apparent not only in the *Prison Notebooks*, but also in his earlier writings. For example, in "The Revolution Against *Capital*," written in 1917, Gramsci states that the main factor in history is human subjectivity, not economic facts (Gramsci, 1990, 34-35). Here Marx's *Capital* is understood as a text which does not break with bourgeois productivism or that, at least, can be used to perpetuate that same productivist logic.[2] For now, I will not discuss the validity of this view about *Capital*, a view which does not find

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[1]See, for instance, Carl Boggs's very good study of this question, *The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism* (1984).

[2]In reality Gramsci says that "if the Bolsheviks reject some of the statements in *Capital*, they do not reject its invigorating, immanent thought" (1990, 34).

in Gramsci its only exponent, but which is instead relatively common. I will only say that, notwithstanding his 1917 article praising the early achievements of the Russian Revolution at the expense of Marxist orthodoxy, Gramsci does not forget, later in prison, to redefine the concept of orthodoxy itself in a way that shows the complexity of his earlier judgment.

In a note of the *Prison Notebooks* to which I will return throughout this chapter, Gramsci says that "orthodoxy" (which he puts, but not consistently, in quotation marks) is not following any given thinker or school of thought within or without the Marxist tradition; it is rather the self-sufficiency, autonomy and totality of the philosophy of praxis (Gramsci, 1971, 462). I think that we find here the kernel of Gramsci's political thought. The philosophy of praxis is a new conception of the world, the possibility of its constitution, and the reality of this possibility. Here Gramsci reveals that he is orthodox and non-orthodox at the same time. He is non-orthodox if by orthodoxy one means the mechanical and merely formal following of an apparently unchangeable paradigm. This paradigm is, notably, the economist and productivist one, but there may be others. Yet he is orthodox if by orthodoxy one means the living, creative Marxism which is the same as the philosophy of praxis and which does not deny human subjectivity and will, but is based on and propelled by them.

Thus Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is not merely one brand of (Western) Marxism, but something more. The fact that it resists being easily classified is not a sign of philosophical or political vagueness, but the proof of its commitment to the idea of totality, for this totality is a complex reality and philosophy must reflect that complexity. The philosophy of praxis attempts to reconstitute Marxism (i.e., the most sophisticated

and powerful theory of social, political and cultural revolution) outside the dichotomies of idealism and materialism, voluntarism and economism, superstructure and base. This "outside", which is philosophical immanence and political clarity, is not an arbitrary third way, a "democratic" alternative to the theory of revolution itself, but the place of synthesis where what is valuable in the philosophies of the past and present (Gramsci's present as well as our own, if Gramsci's project is to be continued) is superseded, in a Hegelian sense, by a future, possible philosophy which posits itself as radically different, and autonomous, from the forms that have kept it from becoming actual. The synthetic, or dialectical, actualization of the philosophy of praxis does not have to wait for a vanguard party to seize State power in order to start its long process of revolution. This is, basically, the criticism Gramsci has of Bordiga, more than of Lenin. The *transition* to communism is not to be left to a future eventuality. Rather, the future is already contained in the present –contained as a process, not as an event.[3]

The philosophy of praxis is synthetic in the sense –among others– that it brings together, under the same *ensemble*, the commonality and specificity (singularity) of thinking, the objective and the subjective. It aspires, not to a seat within a pluralism of voices, but to the univocity of a transfigured totality. This totality announces itself first as difference, then as antagonism and autonomy, and finally –when it actually totalizes itself– as the destruction of the forms and forces which it counters and is countered by. For it belongs to the concept of totality not to have parts outside itself. This is, again, the meaning of true orthodoxy for Gramsci, that is, "the fundamental concept that the philosophy of praxis is 'sufficient unto itself', that it contains in itself all the fundamental

[3] Cf., in this respect, the section on Bookchin above

elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world, a total philosophy and theory of natural science, and not only that but everything that is needed to give life to an integral practical organization of society, that is, to become a total integral civilisation" (Gramsci, 1971, 462).

Of course, today, this manner of speaking is unpopular, and Gramsci is rather used to construct a democratic pluralism which goes under the name of radical democracy; I mean today that the theory of revolution has been discredited and the concept of totality has become identical with that of totalitarianism. The world is consequently divided into 'democratic' and 'totalitarian' systems, and so are philosophies. The words 'democracy' and 'democratic' are used to speak thoughtlessly of countries (notably, the US and Western Europe) whose values and standards are, in practice, far from meeting the concept these words should refer to. What is more, totalitarianism has almost become synonymous with communism. Few are those who distinguish between communism and sovietism. Thus, Marxism, the theory of revolution, if it wants to survive, has to weaken its positions and renounce its ambitious aspirations, renounce revolution precisely, and become palatable to a more liberal (or neo-liberal) and weaker thinking. Gramsci's philosophy of praxis in particular (due perhaps to the fragmented nature of its exposition) is being used to show that difference can come about without upsetting too much the established order of things. The philosophy of praxis is then relegated to the cultural sphere, it becomes the 'philosophy of culture', as if this phrase did not already describe, and necessarily so, all philosophy, all theory and practice. Gramsci's distance from a bureaucratic and dead orthodoxy, rather than be looked at as a measure of his coherence and of his unrelenting revolutionary stance, is considered a bit

conciliatory and less threatening. As if shifting the fulcrum of the struggle from the base to the superstructure (but there is no forgetfulness of the importance of the economic moment in Gramsci), from the State to civil society, from production and circulation to philosophy and education, that is, from economics to politics and history, were a sign of the abandonment of the revolutionary project – a project, to be sure, whose aim is not the simple amelioration of the condition of the oppressed, but the construction of a radically new totality. The opposite is true. Gramsci's concepts (notably, that of hegemony, but others as well) are tools for a radical change of society and the world; they are instruments of freedom. The subjective change that must occur through the work done at the cultural, educational and political level –the level that in Gramsci goes under the name of civil society– is a change in the direction of living labor, which stops being, to use an expression of Mario Tronti's, "a force *inside* capital" and becomes, not only "a force *against* capital" (Tronti, 1966, 80), but also a force for itself, for its own edification.

However, to say that Gramsci's concepts are instruments of freedom does not mean to reduce them to the status of mere tools. When I say this I mean to stress something essential in the philosophy of praxis, and that means not only in praxis, but in the theory of praxis as well. Then we have to reinterpret the concepts of culture and education. In the light of the philosophy of praxis, they are nothing but living labor trying to break free from the forces of domination and subsumption, to organize and build a future philosophy and a future society. For living labor knows that is possible, even though this knowledge is often enmeshed in common sense and backward thinking, such that it is often difficult to see that this possibility is in fact a reality. Already with the factory councils in Turin, Gramsci shows his deep and unusual understanding of the

importance of the subjective side of the struggle.[4] This is probably due to the fact that Gramsci understood what was already present in Marx: the difference between living labor and productive labor. For Gramsci, labor (or work) -and this is to be found in a note on education- is what mediates "the relations between the social and the natural orders" (Gramsci, 1971, 34), it is "man's theoretical and practical activity...[which] provides a basis for the ... development of an historical, dialectical conception of the world, which understands movement and change, which appreciates the sum of effort and sacrifice which the present has cost the past and which the future is costing the present, and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future" (34-35). Gramsci is here speaking of the basis of the primary school. However, we can also understand here Gramsci's idea of living labor as distinguished from the merely economist and productivist view. Labor is not primarily a category of political economy, but a category of ontology, which has its basis in ... education. It should then be clear why education and culture are not mere superstructural attachments to a general theory of society, but fundamental elements of the theory of revolution. They are based on labor, which we will interpret as a univocal social concept, not delimited to the economic sphere. In this sense, we will also try to understand Gramsci in relation to the meaning of the concept of labor in the work of Marx.

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[4]On the Turin movement, cf. Boggs (1984) and, particularly, Cammett (1967).

It is certainly unusual to draw a parallel between Marx's concept of living labor and Gramsci's more cultural and superstructural categories, especially if one refers to the *Grundrisse* which Gramsci had obviously not read.[5] Yet, in order to understand Gramsci's non-productivist view of the philosophy of praxis, it may be important, especially in the light of Gramsci's above-mentioned article on the Russian revolution as a revolution against *Capital*, to see to what extent Marx himself can be said to remain on the terrain of the productivist logic of capital. The question is not one of pure marxiology, but a political one. In other words, it is not a question of establishing a line of continuity between Marx and Gramsci for the sake of reintroducing the negative concept of orthodoxy which, as we have seen, Gramsci rejects. Rather, it is a question of understanding clearly that Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is not a weaker type of Marxism –one which may be more acceptable to postmodernity and postmodernism with their antiessentialist programs. Indeed, Gramsci's philosophy of praxis remains a theory of revolution as well as a description of historical materialism emphasizing the historical, subjective dimension of the concept. It is democratic not because it 'democratizes' (which is often a euphemism for 'weakens' or 'neutralizes') Marxism, but rather because the concept of true democracy belongs, essentially and fundamentally, to the Marxist theory of revolution. But this is a higher form of democracy, that is, to paraphrase Gramsci, democracy as a "total and integral organization of society." It is not the partial democracy which commonly, and vulgarly, describes the world's most advanced countries today. Here one has to recall Lenin who drastically, but pointedly, says: "Democracy for an

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[5] The *Grundrisse* was first published in the original German version in 1953. A previous limited edition in two volumes had appeared in the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1941. Gramsci died in 1937.

insignificant minority, democracy for the rich – that is the democracy of capitalist society" (Lenin, 1976, 106).[6] Then Lenin goes on to speak of the withering away of this kind of democracy, or, as he sees it (and not altogether wrongly) of democracy in general – democracy being an ideological construct used more often in the service of domination than of freedom. For Lenin, true democracy is communism, and there is no doubt that this holds true for Gramsci as well. For the latter, the difference between the illusion of democracy and true democracy becomes evident in the instructional/educational process. He criticizes the modern type of schooling, based on specialization and vocational learning, for being democratic only in appearance and in words: "The multiplication of types of vocational school thus tends to perpetuate traditional social differences; but since, within these differences, it tends to encourage internal diversification, it gives the impression of being democratic in tendency. The labourer can become a skilled worker, for instance, the peasant a surveyor or petty agronomist. *But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this*" (Gramsci, 1971, 40; emphasis added).

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[6] This is certainly a very unpopular position today. Yet, notwithstanding the need one might have for qualifying Lenin's statement, I believe it still holds true; nor is his crude language too crude. It is evident that Western democracies are farcical substitutions of real democracies. The fact that degrees of freedom are more present in the West than in other areas of the world is not enough to justify their usurpation of the concept of democracy. I cannot elaborate on this issue here – an issue that requires serious philosophical consideration and which I plan to investigate in a future work.

Let us go back, after this brief digression, to the concept of living labor and its relation to Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. In the *Grundrisse* (as well as elsewhere), Marx distinguishes between living labor and productive labor, even though he sometimes treats them as identical, creating thereby some confusion, as we have seen. Gramsci, on the other hand, understood that labor –which remains, as we have seen, at the center of society even when the spell of productivism is broken– is not only inside and against capital, but also outside it. It is in its being outside that its subjectivity is recuperated. But let us first look again at the question of living labor in Marx.[7] Indeed, what is often overlooked is that, in Marx, by the phrase 'living labor' two things are meant: one is the labor power which is sold as living, useful labor by the worker to the capitalist and which, once sold, remains living and useful only to the capitalist, not to the worker for whom it has become a mere exchange value; the other is the worker himself, the original owner of this living labor, which he was compelled to regard as an exchange value and to actually exchange for a wage, that is, for the possibility of reproducing it, but again only in order to exchange it one more time. However, the worker is not his labor power. What becomes a commodity is this labor power, not the worker himself. Yet, this labor power is not a commodity like all others, for it carries with it some (a substantial part) of the subjectivity of its original owner, i.e., the capacity to apply itself to an object and transform it. Living labor as the labor power employed by capital, that is, *productive* labor, is, yes, 'living', but on its way to the scaffold. Even though it is a special commodity –that is, neither a Bible nor brandy, but a commodity endowed with subjectivity and power– it is a finite thing nonetheless. The principle of its reproduction

[7]See chapters 2 and 3 above.

does not lie within itself, but in its original owner, in the subject that has alienated it; it does not lie in living labor as labor power, but in living labor as the worker. But the subjectivity of the worker is not confined to his labor power. True, once the worker has parted with his labor power, he remains deprived of something vital: what is objectified during production is his own subjective power (which is, to be sure, an objective entity), which he has to reproduce only in order to exchange and objectify again. Hence, alienation. Marx explains all this very well. However, what is usually overlooked is that the subjective power of labor employed by capital as labor power (productive labor) does not exhaust the subjectivity of the worker. The worker, and this is something Marx stresses, remains *free* – paradoxically and tragically free, but free nonetheless. It is in this freedom –a *double freedom* for Marx (1977, 272 and 874), or rather a double negation which I have called the condition of *neither...nor*– that the worker is able to organize: in this freedom, not at the instant of production. It is here that production gives way to action, and productivism is transformed into activism. The worker has sold one part of his subjective power. This power has become productive labor (productive of capital, that is). Now the worker is free, so to speak, to do whatever he wants. True, capital is not only a mode of production in the strict economic sense, but "a general illumination, which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity" (Marx, 1973, 107). Under capital, all time is the time of capital. Yet, what capital does not need, notably, the excessive subjectivity of the worker, remains outside capital as capital's own negation and as the worker's possibility of transcendence and freedom. This is a positive freedom, unlike the double freedom of *neither...nor* which excludes the worker both from being part of the means of production and from owning them. The *neither...nor* of double

exclusion is transformed into a *neither...nor* of resistance and refusal, of antagonism and autonomy toward the construction of a positive, but radically different, totality.

It is at this juncture that the philosophy of praxis must be located, where productiveness ends and the possibility of creativeness and action begins. This means: not at the point of production, but in its interstices. This is the place of synthesis, of education and living culture. The reduction operated by the market of the worker to labor power and of living labor to productive labor –a reduction whereby subjective time is congealed into the object, transformed into value and surplus-value– cannot easily take away from the worker all of his subjectivity. Of course, it will try to do so through the various techniques of control and of rationalization of the labor process. Gramsci is very much aware of this, as it appears from his observations on Americanism and Fordism. There, he speaks of Taylor as having the purpose of "developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect" (Gramsci, 1971, 302). And he adds: "But these things, in reality, are not original or novel: they represent simply the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself" (*ibid.*).

With the emphasis on living labor as individual and collective subjectivity exceeding the capacity of capital, another observation can be made. Even under real subsumption, that is, under the regime of relative surplus-value which completely and

repeatedly revolutionizes the mode of production,[8] capital cannot become a totality, for it always needs its negation, labor, outside it, which it posits and does not posit at the same time (Marx, 1973, 401). Indeed, particularly under real subsumption, when necessary labor is greatly reduced, capital cannot avoid creating a mass of superfluous labor, which is still living, yet cannot become productive. This labor remains at the margins of the spiral movement of capital, as a witness to the partiality of the latter. The concept of totality, on the other hand, can only be understood in terms of the difference between the capitalist and the communal mode of production. The former needs to dominate what it includes and excludes at the same time; this is why labor is nothing but a factor of production under capital. The latter, on the other hand, is labor that returns to itself, to its immediacy and difference. This difference is a totality. And this totality is positive freedom. Totalitarianism, instead, a mere partiality, is the underlying ideology of capitalism, for it is the imposition, on the whole *ensemble* of social relations, of a partial will: the abstract and irrational will of capital. It is then not a surprise that the former socialist countries were, as the ideologues of the 'democratic' West are fond of repeating, totalitarian. They were operating within a higher order of the logic of capitalism and productivism. However, if living labor accepts to get rid of its aspiration to the totality, as some writers who fear the "essentialism of the totality" suggest,[9] then it will also have to accept the continuous domination of capital and be content with remaining what capital is not, whether at capital's center or periphery. Accepting this is what in traditional Marxist

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[8]See the unpublished sixth chapter of *Capital* (Marx, 1977, 1019-1038; particularly, p.1035).

[9]Cf. Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 192).

terms goes under the name of reformism. It means rejecting the theory of revolution *tout court*, and not, euphemistically, advancing toward a new model of "democratic revolution". The power of living labor, its hegemony, cannot be partial. For Laclau and Mouffe, for example, with Gramsci the concept of hegemony changes from a principle of representation to one of articulation (1985, 65) and makes thus possible, indeed "entails the idea of *democratic pluralism*" (71). However, what seems to be overlooked is that this hegemony is counter-hegemonic. Thus, it remains to be seen if this democratic pluralism also includes the forms which must be destroyed by a politics of antagonism which is not merely discursive and liminal as the one contemplated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 122-127). As for Gramsci, with his renewed[10] concept of orthodoxy, "[a] theory is 'revolutionary' precisely to the extent that it is an element of conscious separation and distinction into two camps and is a peak inaccessible to the enemy camp." And he continues: "To maintain that the philosophy of praxis is not a completely autonomous and independent structure of thought in antagonism to all traditional philosophies and religions, means in reality that one has not severed one's links with the old world, if indeed one has not actually capitulated" (1971, 462).

5.2 Production and creative production

In the preceding section, I have tried to show that the distance of the philosophy of praxis from productivism, together with its self-sufficiency, autonomy and totality, clears the ground for a theory of revolution that is not limited to the cultural sphere, nor to the

[10]This is Gramsci's own word.

economy, but covers the whole spectrum of social organization and activity.[11] The generic time of this revolution is the present, and its specific time is to be seen in those moments in which living labor is not absorbed in the valorization of capital, but is left free to its condition of double negation. In these moments, in which productiveness gives way to creativeness, living labor becomes living culture and begins to "exercise its own hegemony over traditional culture" (462). Living labor away from the site of production is not productive. In this sense, it is able to form a bloc with the living labor that, by not being productive, is considered unproductive.[12] However, productive labor and unproductive labor are merely categories of capital. Outside capital, productive labor and unproductive labor are living labor which, in itself, is *neither productive nor unproductive*. It is rather creative. The creativeness of this living labor has nothing to do with the production of commodities and surplus-value. Creative living labor is rather the creator of society, culture and history. This means that, outside the production of capital, there is a lot to be done,[13] and it can and will be done by a living labor which is either

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[11]As I will say below, the theory of revolution is based on the concept of labor not as a category of political economy, but of ontology. One should here look at the early years of revolutionary Cuba and at the writings of Ernesto Che Guevara whose thought shares great similarities with Gramsci's. In "Socialism and Man in Cuba" (1965), Che Guevara says: "Man begins to become free from thinking of the annoying fact that one needs to work to satisfy one's animal needs. Individuals start to see themselves reflected in their work and to understand their full stature as human beings through the object created, through the work accomplished. Work no longer entails surrendering a part of one's being in the form of labor power sold, which no longer belongs to the individual , but represents an emanation of themselves, a contribution to the common life in which one is reflected, the fulfillment of one's social duty" (Guevara, 1997, 205-206).

[12]For Marx labor which is not productive is not the same as unproductive labor. It is rather labor before its division into the categories of political economy and capital (Marx, 1973, 308).

[13]On this point, see Aronowitz and Di Fazio (1994, 351-354). They say: "If there is

excluded from exchange or is able to withdraw, totally or partially, from it and organize. It is in fact obvious that a change cannot be effected by simply continuing to produce and valorize capital. Of course, the regime of creative labor does not entail the end of production *tout court*, but the end of production as an end in itself, of capitalist production, that is, of productivism.

In Gramsci's notebook dealing with questions of literary criticism, we find a very interesting note in this respect. There Gramsci posits the difference between creative, poetic labor or activity and practical, instrumental activity. He says that there are periods in which all or most of the subjective power of labor is, in a society, directed toward productivism only. But he asks the question as to what happens to the excessive subjectivity of the worker, that is, the creative, poetic activity which would be lost in productivism and instrumentality. At first sight, it seems that, in such a society, the very nature of the practical field would change, acquiring a poetic and epic spirit. In reality, Gramsci says, it is evident that the subjective power of labor is here merely channeled through and into bureaucratic and repressive forces which neutralize its creative and poetic dimension. Only the living labor which remains outside this logic will be able to create a living culture. I quote the whole passage for its importance:

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work to be done, everyone should do some of it." For instance, "Everyone would assume the responsibilities of producing and maintaining public goods, so no able citizen would be freed of the obligation of work" (353).

> It should be pointed out that in certain periods of history, the greatest creative minds of a nation can be absorbed in practical work. During such periods all of the best human energies are, in a certain sense, concentrated in work at the base and one cannot yet talk about superstructures. [It seems that] a whole sociological theory has been constructed on this basis in America, to justify the absence in the United States of a flourishing of artistic and humanistic culture. This theory, if it is to have at least a semblance of justification, must be able to point to an extensive creative activity in the practical field, even if the following question remains unanswered: if this 'creative-poetic' activity exists and is vital, stirring up all of man's vital forces, energies, will and enthusiasms, how is it that it does not stir up literary energy and create an epic? If this does not occur, one can legitimately suspect that only 'bureaucratic' energies are involved, not universally expansive forces but brutal and repressive ones. Is it possible to believe that the slaves who were whipped into building the pyramids saw their work in a lyrical light? What needs to be pointed out is that the forces which direct this huge practical undertaking are not only repressive with respect to instrumental work (which is understandable), but are universally repressive. This is typical and explains why in America for example, a certain literary energy can be observed in those who reject the organization of a practical activity which is passed off as 'epic' in its own right (Gramsci, 1985, 114).

From the passage quoted above it should be clear that creative production does not necessarily exclude instrumental production. The question is, to put it mildly, one of emphasis. We see that Gramsci even finds "understandable" a certain "repression" in

instrumental labor. This thought is also expressed in the section on "Americanism and Fordism" where Gramsci argues against Trotsky's idea of the militarization of work; yet he finds the latter's preoccupation with the principle of coercion adequate (Gramsci, 1971, 301). But in the above passage, notwithstanding the reference to slave labor, Gramsci is speaking of the specifically capitalist mode of production, that is, of capitalism in its phase of real subsumption. At this stage, when even the sexual instinct is controlled and regulated (Gramsci, 1971, 297), the repressive forces become universal and the possibility of autonomous creativity becomes antagonistic and marginal.

Another observation to be made is that under the regime of productivism, the poetic and practical dimensions of human activity –distinguished in Western culture since Greek philosophy and perhaps theoretically reunited, before Marx's critique of political economy, only in the work of Vico– reach a stage of full and complete separation. It must be noted that Gramsci's quest for a literature or creative work that accompanies the practical achievements of humankind does not go in the direction of German Romanticism and its aspiration to poetry and the work of art as an elitist substitute for mere production. Rather, for Gramsci the question is to reunite what has been separated in the politics of world history. In other words, it is not in the division of production and creation, that is, in the division of labor, that the answer must be looked for, but in the overcoming of this division. The work of art can very well be, from the producers' point of view, a work of mere, instrumental production, as the Pyramids attest. However, the point is moving toward a conception of labor that brings together production and creation. Indeed, the critique of productivism does not entail a critique of production as such; no more than the critique of individualism entails a critique of the individual or

individuality.[14] The unity of production and creation is the unity of structure and superstructure: a configuration of the historical bloc. In the logic of productivism, the superstructure (i.e., human will and subjectivity) is completely absorbed and lost in the structure, politics and culture are reduced to the economic sphere, creation disappears in mere production. However, the overcoming of productivism does not entail the disappearing of the structure, the economy, or production as such. In reality, if it is true that the economic base determines in important ways what is not merely economic, it is also true that an economic structure is not a metaphysical given but a mechanism which is willed by the subject for specific reasons and to specific ends. The economic structure is itself constructed by a superstructure understood, with Gramsci, as will and subjectivity. In this sense, an alternative form of production still fulfills some structural functions in society but does not reduce society to those functions, nor does it turn production into productivism.

When production is conceived "in relation to the interests of the class which is as yet still subaltern", then a "split" (*scissione*) and a "new synthesis" occur that make subjective "that which is given 'objectively'" (Gramsci, 1971, 202). Productivism ends, and production becomes creative production. Gramsci defines the objective element of production as "the junction between the requirements of technical development and the interest of the ruling class" (*ibid.*). This is what the individual worker, powerless as an individual, thinks of objective production. However, the collective worker can, for Gramsci, change this objectivity to subjectivity. It is difficult to see here a residue of

[14]On the question of the individual and individuality, cf. Gramsci (1971, 360).

productivist orthodoxy in Gramsci.[15] Rather, one should see here Gramsci's attempt to clarify the ambiguity inherent in the concept of production. This ambiguity has to do with the fact that the word 'production' is used to speak of production in general, as a necessary condition for human life, and of production under the capitalist mode: capitalist and specifically capitalist production. In the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx distinguishes clearly between the "common elements" of all production and the "essential differences" that qualify any given mode (Marx, 1973, 85). Capitalism is, of course, not the only way in which production has occurred, even though –and this is Marx's main point in his critique– for bourgeois political economy the essential, historical difference

[15]See Boggs (1984, 278-279). This is indeed my only criticism of Boggs' otherwise very good study. After speaking of Gramsci's "downplaying of economics" as "a conscious effort to escape, on the conceptual level, the seemingly relentless logic of capital," Boggs says: "Yet Gramsci remained uncritically wedded to certain orthodox productivist assumptions. He fully accepted the Enlightenment faith in progress through industrialization, and shared the view of both Kautsky and Lenin that the transition to socialism would require a developed scientific and technological infrastructure inherited from the bourgeoisie" (278). I am not saying that Gramsci did not believe this was necessary, but I wonder whether it could be otherwise. The problem does not lie in using the inherited infrastructure or not, but in the modality of this use. When used by "the class which is as yet still subaltern," this infrastructure ceases to be a means of domination and exploitation and becomes one of the necessary elements for the construction of a new society. The point is to see whether Gramsci also thought of inheriting and using, in the construction of communism, the capitalist relations of production, but this does not seem to be the case. The "split" and the "new synthesis" mentioned by Gramsci answer this question sufficiently well. As I have said in a previous note, I find Gramsci's thought rather close to Che Guevara's in this respect. For Che Guevara too the point is not ending production as such, but eliminating "the old categories, including the market, money, and, therefore, the lever of material interest" (1987, 184). Yet work, even with its "coercive aspects" (207), would continue. But these 'coercive' aspects would be the result of a new self-discipline, not of an external process of regimentation. They would be part of the self-education and self-transformation of the revolutionary subject described by Peter McLaren in his study of Che Guevara's and Paulo Freire's revolutionary pedagogy (McLaren, 2000). This self-transformation is in a relation of dialectical unity with social transformation (76). And it is indeed hard to imagine that a revolution does not make use of a country's or the world's already developed scientific and technological infrastructure to enhance the dual transformation.

of capital turns into a metaphysical category. There was production before capital, and there will be production after capital passes away. The overcoming of capital is the overcoming of an essential difference, not of a general necessity. Therefore, maintaining the notion of the necessity of production is not at all remaining open to a productivist logic. Even though it may appear paradoxical, production which is a means, rather than an end in itself, is production with creation. It appears paradoxical because when we say that, under capital, production is an end in itself, we lose sight of the limit of this expression. In fact, under capital the end of production is the making of surplus-value and profit. Thus, it is capitalist production (i.e., the production and valorization of capital) that is an end in itself, not production proper. In Volume II of *Capital*, we read: "The production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making" (Marx, 1978, 137). On the other hand, creative production –under the communal mode of production– does not mean that the usefulness of what is produced no longer counts; that is, it is not, or does not have to be, disinterested production. The creative (or even poetic) aspect of production does not mean that all products of (material or immaterial) labor are works of art, at least not according to the way we usually understand the concept of a work of art. Rather, what it means is that by operating the split away from objectivity toward subjectivity the gap between work of art and mere production narrows; and the gap between conception and execution may even disappear. The result of subjective labor may very well have, and it should, its usefulness outside itself, outside mere contemplation. But usefulness itself must be redefined. It is this redefinition that does not belong to the field of production, of the economy and of the structure; it rather belongs to the field of action or, which is the same, of praxis.

The confusion in the concept of productive labor is, as Isaak Rubin wrote in 1928, "an unclear idea of Marx's own views" (Rubin, 1972, 259). In his section on productive labor, Rubin quotes from the first volume of *Capital*: "Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, in its very essence, the production of surplus-value" (Marx, 1977, 644). Rubin, who like Gramsci had not read the *Grundrisse*, quotes from the sections on productive labor in Volume I of *Theories of Surplus Value* where Marx repeats the arguments one finds in the *Grundrisse* as well. Fundamentally, productive labor is that which produces capital. According to Marx, "Only bourgeois narrow-mindedness, which regards the capitalist forms of production as absolute forms –hence as eternal, natural forms of production– can confuse the question of what is *productive labour* from the standpoint of capital with the question of what labour is productive in general; and consequently fancy itself very wise in giving the answer that all labour which produces anything at all, which has any kind of result, is by that very fact productive labour" (Marx: 2000, 393).[16] Rubin explains that "Marx throws out as useless the question of what kind of labor is productive in general" because "[e]very system of production relations, every economic order has its concept of productive labour" (Rubin, 1972, 260). Thus, "Marx confined his analysis to the question of which labor is productive from the standpoint of capital, or in the capitalist system of economy" (*ibid.*). Then Rubin goes on to speak of the difference between the production and the circulation of capital, which adds confusion to the question of productive labor, and says that, for

[16]It seems to me that the difference between *Theories* and the *Grundrisse* is that in this latter Marx speaks more categorically of *productive* labor as an exclusive modality of capital, calling labor which is productive in general "not productive".

Marx, only one type of labor "is 'productive' not because it produces material goods, but because it is hired by 'productive' capital, i.e., capital in the phase of production" (269). Thus, "[t]he labor of salesmen is not productive, not because it does not produce changes in material goods, but only because it is hired by capital in the phase of circulation" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, "[t]he labor of the clown [in the service of the circus entrepreneur] is productive because it is employed by capital in the phase of production" (*ibid.*). This analytic distinction seems to leave even Rubin unsatisfied. We enter here a scholastic question, a source of confusion which cannot be clarified but must be left to itself. At the end of his study, Rubin himself says that perhaps the term 'productive' was not the best choice to speak of the difference between labor hired by capital in the phase of production and labor hired by capital in the phase of circulation (275).

However, Rubin, whose interest lies more in giving a social and cultural dimension to political economy as against mere economics than in performing a critique of political economy itself, also leaves unsolved the question as to why labor which is not productive (i.e., neither productive nor unproductive, but creative) should not be given theoretical and political consideration. He does not see, therefore, that Marx's definition is one-sided, or, as Antonio Negri says, "*heavily reductive*" (1991, 64). It is of course true that if one considers all labor productive labor one may –as did the political economists Marx wanted to refute– lose sight of the essential difference and the historical character of capital. But for bourgeois political economy that was not a mistake; it was rather a precise and deliberate political endeavor. Yet, by reducing all living labor to either productive or unproductive labor, one risks reducing the political, insurgent potentiality

of subjective labor. Indeed, the confusion Rubin points out in relation to the difference between labor hired by capital in the phase of production and labor hired by capital in the phase of circulation (the latter being unproductive) becomes interesting only if one looks at the phase of circulation in a broader way than political economy does and translates it into the superstructural level. In this sense, circulating is not capital as capital, but capital as transfigured and segmented into the many life manifestations of its own regime, running throughout civil society.

It is in this sense that education, culture, the family, and all the other elements of civil society are related, and yet unrelated, to the productivist logic of capital. The fact that one part of living labor is employed by capital and becomes productive may render the other part unproductive, but no less living. Furthermore, to go back to Gramsci, when the action of the "collective worker" operates the "split" and the new synthesis which makes subjective what was objective, living labor stops being productive of capital, it returns to itself as creative labor, or as productive, but in a different sense of the word. It is in this movement that Gramsci's insurgent ontology -which has a lot to do with the factory movement, but is not limited to it- clearly defines itself: in this radical inversion of the subjective and objective functions. For Marx, capital represents, in relation to the worker, "the social productive power of labor," while the productive labor of the worker represents, in relation to capital, "only the labour of the *isolated labourer*" (2000, 394). In reality, the question, for the theory and practice of revolution, is not merely one of inversion. As Gramsci says: "The nexus [between the technical development and the interests of the ruling class] can be dissolved; technical requirements can be conceived in concrete terms, not merely separately from the interests of the ruling class, but in relation

to the class which is as yet still subaltern" (1971, 202). The dissolution of the nexus, the subjectivization of the social power of labor, cannot be accomplished without bringing capitalist production to ruin. Consequently, productive labor must stop being productive in the capitalist sense, it must become the subject of its own collective and social power, against the objective nexus of technology and political power that confronts it. It must come back to itself, to its difference, which is not merely the separation of antagonism (even though this represents a necessary phase), but the constitution of a new totality.

5.3 The subject of labor

I have suggested above that the dissolution of the nexus that links living labor to the objective conditions of technology and power in the factory can exemplify the passage from a regime of mere production to a regime of creative production. The latter would serve as a general paradigm, within and without the factory; it would cover, in other words, all labor which, under capital becomes either productive or unproductive. This new regime would be led by the subjectivity of the collective worker and therefore of the working community as a whole. The relation between the collective worker and the community is drawn by Gramsci in a section of his critique of Bukharin's *Popular Manual* where he addresses Bukharin's lack of understanding of the dialectical passage from quantity to quality. There he says that Marx has "demonstrated that in the factory system there exists a quota of production which cannot be attributed to any individual worker but to the ensemble of the labour force, to collective man." And he continues: "A similar process takes place for the whole of society, which is based on the division of

labour and of functions and for this reason is worth more than the sum of its parts" (Gramsci, 1971, 469). Of course, this does not mean that the ultimate subject of labor is not the individual worker in the factory or the individual person in the community. Rather, what this does is show, first of all, that labor is a univocal concept which runs throughout the whole of society and is not limited to the factory; secondly, it shows that the recuperation of subjectivity cannot be simply an individual or group issue and endeavor, but is related to the community as a whole; I mean the working community, made up of individuals who are employed or unemployed, who perform material or immaterial work. This community is antagonistic to the objective, institutional forms of technology and power which, as we will see in a moment, are forms of the State and which take, in the factory, their clearest configuration. This antagonism tends toward autonomy and the reconstitution of difference.

This difference cannot be the result of the formation of enclosed and self-centered identities that play the game of a more and more invisible and subtle power. It must rather be the destruction of these forms of power and the constitution, in the open, of difference itself as the subject and substance of new material and social relations. In fact, if the philosophy of difference only engenders a politics of identity –as is often the case today– the relations of power, based on the uneven distribution of labor and wealth, remain untouched within each constituted identity and within the relationship between the sum total of constituted identities and the national or supranational powers. Here difference does not bring about, nor is the result, of a new conception of the world. To the contrary, it points to the increased sophistication and better working of the old conception.

The subject of labor, the antagonistic community present in the factory and in society as a whole, is the working class (as a unity of actually-working and not-working individuals). The not merely external analogy Gramsci draws in his critique of the *Popular Manual* can be seen as an echo of arguments already developed in his earlier political writings. In "The Instrument of Labor," Gramsci starts by saying: "The communist revolution achieves autonomy for the producer both in the economic and in the political field" (1990, 162). In this article, the relation between the Factory Council and society (in the struggle that moves from being against capital to being against the State) is immediately evident. The dialectical passage from quantity to quality in the formation of the community of workers –the passage for which he criticizes Bukharin in the *Quaderni*– is here stated in its concrete, political meaning: "The working class draws conclusions from the quantum of positive experience amassed personally by individuals, acquires the character and mentality of a ruling class and organizes itself as such; in other words, it sets up political Soviets and establishes its dictatorship" (*ibid.*). For Gramsci, the instruments of labor –which he defines alternatively as "the apparatus of production and exchange" (164) and as "the system of economic and social relations" (166)– are no longer property of capital, but of the State (165). The State "has become the agent of the instruments of labor as they fragment and fall apart" (166). However, the working class, with "its newly-won autonomy and its newly-won awareness of self-government" (*ibid.*) is the real subject of labor: "The Factory Council is the foundation for its positive experiences and its appropriation of the instruments of labour. It is the solid foundation for the process which must culminate in the workers' dictatorship and the conquest of State power – a power which can then be used to eliminate chaos, the cancer that

threatens to suffocate, corrode and dissolve human society" (166). Here we see the movement described by Gramsci's concept of historical bloc: the movement from the base to the superstructure, from the economy to politics and society. It is also clear that, when the working class appropriates the instruments of labor, it affirms its collective subjectivity in defense of human society as a whole. This cannot happen if the nexus of technology and political power of capital, the State, the institutions, or the supranational entities in our own days, is not dissolved and their control over labor neutralized. Of course, Gramsci wrote this article in 1920, before the failure of the Factory Council movement. Yet, as we have seen in the first part of this chapter, his call for antagonism and autonomy did not change in his prison writings; rather, it became the center of his philosophy of praxis and insurgent ontology. Nor has his call for antagonism and autonomy lost meaning in our own days.

To be sure, today the concepts related to the subject of labor –the concepts of labor and subject themselves, but also of the individual and the community– are understood in a different historical light, made different particularly by the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Socialist bloc and by the consequent seemingly non-viability of communist discourse. A recent survey of the history of the concept of labor and of its status today, as well as the attempt to offer an alternative, can be found in Dominique Méda's *Le Travail. Une valeur en voie de disparition* (1995). After describing labor as an "invention" of modernity, which comes in the 18th century as an answer to the "great fear" that envelops Europe from the end of the Middle Ages up to the 17th century (295),[17] Méda –who does not mention Gramsci– calls for a renewed *praxis* able to displace the

[17]The translation of passages from Méda (1995) is mine.

centrality of labor. This *praxis*, which is rather informed by the philosophy of Habermas, consists in the concept of the public sphere, where time is liberated from labor making it possible for the individual to have access to "other modes of sociability, other means of expression, other ways...of acquiring an identity or participating in collective management" (Méda, 1995, 301). This public sphere –the space for action and interaction– is not to replace production and labor, but to be placed alongside them. Of course, from the point of view of the philosophy of praxis one agrees with Méda's contention that production does not exhaust all human activity and time. Yet, the problem is that in Méda's view production and action are merely juxtaposed, and one is left to wonder how the articulation between the two spheres would happen. Méda's book, which is good for its historical survey and for its stimulating polemical moments (notably, against liberalism and the philosophy of Rawls), does not seem to consider the question, implicit in its object of study and explicitly presented by Gramsci, as to the necessity of dissolving the objective nexus between technique and political power. Without the recognition and dissolution of this nexus (which is the same as Marx's theory of subsumption), it is difficult to see how the working class can even have access to a public sphere that remains on the other side of the objective nexus itself, related to the interests of the dominant class, and in relation to which the working class cannot but be antagonistic.

In Méda's book there is no trace of the antagonism of labor to capital, and of the former's quest for autonomy. Labor is seen as an "invention" (in itself a dubious concept) of the economists who "for the first time, give it a homogeneous meaning" (Méda, 1995, 65). And this labor is time: "its essence is time" (*ibid.*). Of course, Méda is aware of the

fact that in Smith and the other political economists (indeed up to Marx and his critique of political economy, she claims), the concept of labor that prevails is productive labor. Here labor, one should rather say, is not "invented", but it is displaced from its ontological terrain and channeled into the categories of political economy. Thus, political economy, or even mere economics, can become the social science *par excellence*. But in Méda's account, the ontologization of labor is still part of the general invention of its concept, for it is with Hegel and Marx that labor becomes "an ideal of creation and of self-realization," or, in other words, "the essence of man" (Méda, 1995, 92-129). Thus even alienation is a consequence of this invention (106). But at the end of her book, without returning to the concept of alienation (which of course impedes the full realization and activity of the individual), Méda finally recognizes that "Marx had perfectly understood, in his time, what is at stake in today's expression of 'full activity'" (309). This *full activity* is the "development, alongside labor, of other activities, whether collective or individual, such that everybody may become, as Marx desired, multi-active" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Méda stresses that for Marx –and this is her own position too– the concept of full activity "must be applied not to society as a whole, but to each individual, who would dispose, at the same time, of laboring time [un temps d'emploi] and of time for other activities which would belong neither to employment nor to labor" (*ibid.*). It is difficult to see how Méda justifies this latter judgement on Marx with her previous one according to which Marx is the most exceptional and rigorous exponent of productivism (166). Her ambivalence in relation to Marx depends on the fact that a critique of labor such as the one she presents is forced to see labor in the light of productivism only, for it wants to deny its univocity and ontological power. Such a critique, instead of finding in

Marx a critique of productivism (notwithstanding Marx's own ambiguities, as we have seen), reduces the concept of labor to the economic base and frees the superstructure as the only place of creativity and action. The difference is that now, instead of being in a vertical position, one above the other, superstructure and structure, action and production, are in a horizontal position, one alongside the other; yet they are still far from forming an historical bloc, far from being united in insurgent and constitutive *praxis*.

In the philosophy of praxis, labor is not merely a moment of the base. At the level of production, labor –which is already praxis, that is, engaged and involved in the political movement that tends to transform society as a whole– is the subject that antagonistically confronts the objective ensemble of forces of production and State power. The opening up of a public space of discussion must be, for that which is at the same time included in and excluded from public view, the result of a revolutionary process and of an unrelenting revolutionary will, not the silent companion of production. This means that the question as to what labor is cannot be solved by separating once again, or juxtaposing, production and action, but by seeing production as one of the moments of human creative activity. Labor would be the subject and substance not merely of production, but of all creative activity. Of course, this labor would not be productive of capital. But this should not be a problem; it should rather be the aim of a theory of revolution.

For Gramsci, labor, if understood narrowly as economic production, is not, of course, "the essence of man"; rather, "man" (or real men and women in the world) are the subject of labor understood as praxis. And praxis is precisely the process that does away with the narrow conceptual separation of structure and superstructure. This can be seen in

Gramsci's definition, not immediately of labor, but of technique. To be sure, the two are the same, for Gramsci always resists, on the one hand, the reduction of labor to a merely technical moment; on the other, he widens the concept of technique in such a way as to cover the whole process and movement of praxis. He says that "by technique one should understand not only the *ensemble* of scientific ideas applied industrially (which is the normal meaning of the word) but also the 'mental' instruments, philosophical knowledge" (Gramsci, 1971, 353). Technique is labor, that is, the modality of interaction between a subject and an object, be the latter nature, a machine, a thing or an idea. This interaction can have the form of material production, but it is not limited to it. Indeed, it is through this same interactive modality that history, culture, and the institutions of the State and of society are born. What the philosophy of praxis requires is that the outcome of this interaction be universally valid rather than limited to the interests of the dominant class. This universality, as we have seen, entails a totality. Its subject (the producer in the field of production, the spontaneous thinker in the field of thought; but these may be two aspects of the same individual) finds in itself the measure of its agency and of its interest. In other words, the subject of labor *must become* a subject by appropriating the method and power of its own activity, from the site of production as production to the highest moments of free and disinterested creativity. Obviously, this latter modality of creativity points to aesthetic activity, and the word 'disinterested' is here used in the Kantian sense. However, in the next chapter I will show that this separation (or hierarchy) among forms of creativity is a problematic one.

5.4 Praxis and the danger. The meaning of 'Absolute Historicism'

Praxis is a word for unity. Gramsci says: "Unity is given by the dialectical development of the contradictions between man and matter" (1971, 402). However, the word 'unity' must also be properly understood. Like totality, unity is a Hegelian concept. But in the *Science of Logic* Hegel calls 'unity' an "unfortunate word" because of its externality and abstractness. He says that "[u]nity, even more than identity, expresses a subjective reflection; it is taken especially as the relation which arises from *comparison*, from external reflection" (Hegel, 1989, 91). Because of this, the essence of unity is its indifference in relation to the two objects compared, whose unity it is. Hegel continues: "When this reflection finds the same thing in two *different objects*, the resultant unity is such that there is presupposed the complete *indifference* to it of the objects themselves and is a procedure and a determining external to them" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Hegel says that the two terms which are compared are often opposites, so their unity appears as a further, but external, term. This cannot be what the concept of praxis stands for. Hegel continues by saying that "it would be better to say only *unseparatedness* and *inseparability*, but then the affirmative aspect of the relation of the whole would not find expression" (*ibid.*). In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he says that "what has to be grasped is the unity *in* the diversity" (Hegel, 1991, 143), that is, a concrete and dynamic unity, which is pure becoming in Hegel, praxis in Marx and Gramsci.

The unity of praxis is then not the result of the juxtaposition of two otherwise unrelated terms, but the involvement of one of them –the one which is "humanly objective" and thus already "historically subjective" (Gramsci, 1971, 445)– in the subjective activity of the other. In this sense, praxis is, as Marx put it in his *Theses on*

Feuerbach, "*human sensuous activity*." For Gramsci, when he studies the unity in the constituent elements of Marxism (economics, philosophy and politics), praxis becomes the unitary center in philosophy, as value is in economics and the relationship between the State and civil society is in politics. Value is described as "the relationship between the worker and the industrial productive forces" (1971, 402), and praxis as "the relationship between human will (superstructure) and economic structure" (403). By describing this unity as an active relationship, Gramsci shows that he understands the philosophical difficulty expressed by Hegel. The word 'relationship' breaks with the externality of the word 'unity'. In each of these three relationships, which cover the whole spectrum of social life, we find the same determinations: the form of class distinction and antagonism. The worker, human will and civil society belong together; so do the industrial productive forces, the economic structure and the State.

This unity is not the result of a likeness of the terms; it is not an alliance, but the antagonistic relationship that comes from developing contradictions. The will, for example, could not be understood as an unqualified and generic will, but as a rational and concrete will, as Gramsci says elsewhere (1971, 345, 360). It is the revolutionary will of the worker confronted by the objective nexus of production as well as the will of the subaltern classes whose history is "intertwined with that of civil society" (Gramsci, 1971, 52). It is from the point of view of the subaltern classes that the philosophy of praxis develops as an insurgent ontology where production is but one moment of the revolutionary and creative effort to reconstitute the world in its totality. Without this effort, and its positive result, it is difficult to see how any discourse taking place in the public sphere could be truly democratic. Indeed, in a world in which there are children

who cannot, and will never learn how to, read and write (and this even in the advanced countries), it is difficult to see what the benefits of a pacified public sphere would be. The danger is not only that of an "imbalance between theory and practice" (Gramsci, 1971, 301). There is also the danger of believing that this is no longer a problem and of confusing the unity *in antagonistic diversity*, to paraphrase Hegel, for a pacified and harmonious one. Thus value, praxis itself, and the relationship between the State and civil society, the unitary centers of the constituent elements of Marxism for Gramsci, are no longer seen in their historicity; the necessity of their passing away is forgotten, and the fact that they have originated out of contradictions and struggle is canceled. From being an insurgent ontology, the philosophy of praxis is transformed into a form of discourse that deepens, as it covers up, the gap between living labor and capital, civil society and the State, common sense and philosophy.

Let us go back to the question with which we began, that of the meaning of the essence of Marxism, the philosophy of praxis, and its "new orthodoxy". In that section, Gramsci says: "At the level of theory the philosophy of praxis cannot be confounded with or reduced to any other philosophy. Its originality lies not only in its transcending of previous philosophies but also and above all in that it opens up a completely new road, renewing from head to toe the whole way of conceiving philosophy itself" (1971, 464). We have seen that, even at the level of theory, the unitary center of the philosophy of praxis is praxis itself, a disappearing mediation which takes the form of the relationship of structure to superstructure, their unseparatedness and inseparability, to recall Hegel. Yet, the affirmative aspect of this relationship lies in the fact that the superstructure is human will itself, human subjectivity, and not merely a set of formal laws or a series of

more or less established institutions. This is indeed the living affirmative aspect of the relationship and of philosophy. It is what Gramsci also calls *historical bloc*, defined in many ways, but basically as the unity of structure and superstructure. The concept of historical bloc is also what defines the essence of man (that is, of the individual human being); it is the activity of human will. Gramsci says: "Man is to be conceived as an historical bloc of purely individual and subjective elements and of mass and objective or material elements with which the individual is in an active relationship" (1971, 360). We see that Gramsci never exits the subjective/objective paradigm, but he always gives predominance to the subjective aspect of it. However, this does not make Gramsci a philosopher of the superstructure, confining him to the sphere of culture as opposed to a harder, more basic and real sphere of production. Rather, what this means is that the superstructural sphere, human will and subjectivity, actively reaches into the sphere of production. Or, as Aronowitz and Di Fazio say: "Management's control over the workplace is an activity of politics" (1994, 357). Indeed, Gramsci's "superstructural" philosophy shows how well he understood Marx's critique of Feuerbach and of "all hitherto existing materialism." Basically, Gramsci understood the necessity of conceiving reality from the point of view of praxis without falling into either idealism or ultramaterialism. The philosophy of praxis is then not a philosophy of the subject as a separate entity from the object. It is a philosophy of the subject that always engages the object, is involved in the movement of the object, and involves the latter in its own movement. In this sense, it is a synthetic philosophy.

We have seen that the philosophy of praxis tends toward a totality. The concept of totality necessarily excludes the partiality of heterogeneous forms. We have also seen

that, far from being a totalitarian concept (for totalitarian is the imposition of a partial rather than universal and total will), totality is an essentially and truly democratic concept. Totality, as conceived by the philosophy of praxis – as commonality and universality– is not the denial of singularity and difference, but their exaltation. Indeed, it does not belong to the concept of singularity and difference to be partial entities: fragmented, alienated, disintegrated. Rather, it belongs to their concept to be full entities, constituted by common and specific elements at the same time. To be an individual means to be a total individual. It is only the ideology of the dominant class that can ask people to be content with just one part or fragments of what essentially belongs to them.

This totality is what Gramsci also calls *absolute historicism* – an expression with which he describes the philosophy of praxis. In the note on the concept of "orthodoxy", he says: "The philosophy of praxis is absolute 'historicism', the absolute secularization and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history" (1971, 465). "The absolute secularization and earthliness of thought" stands for a philosophy which has cut its ties with religion and the ontotheological modality of Western metaphysics. It is the rejection of all transcendence, the affirmation of an immanence which is not of metaphysical origin, lying beyond history or beneath the earth. Of course, the philosophy of praxis is not interested in discovering the metaphysical principle of the physical world. It is interested in history and in what Vico called the "world of nations". Its ontology is a political ontology. This means that its concept of immanence has to do with human creative activity and its interaction with the "humanly objective", which Gramsci also calls the "historically subjective" or "universal subjective" (1971, 445). It has to do with the secular earth. In this sense, it is an "absolute humanism of history", that is, history

made by human beings, by their living labor that produces objects of consumption as well as creates the social and political world; that creates, in a word, culture. Then the concept of totality is the concept of plenitude. It has nothing to do with the totalitarianism of a partial will; it is rather the plenitude of being in its history and historicity – a secular and earthly plenitude.

5.5 The rational will

I do not say that something is contingent,
but that something is caused contingently
John Duns Scotus

I have often mentioned Gramsci's concept of the will, and I have said that this will is concrete and rational. The rationality of the will is the same as its historicity (Gramsci, 1971, 346), and it represents for Gramsci the step the philosophy of praxis takes away from classical German philosophy which had introduced the will as creativity but in an idealistic and speculative manner that led toward solipsism (*ibid.*). In the philosophy of praxis, the will is rational in the sense that "it corresponds to objective historical necessities, or in so far as it is universal history itself in the moment of its progressive actualization" (345). This will then is the totality or plenitude of absolute historicism. It is the action of men and women in the world, able to modify the order of things. For Gramsci, the will is also the superstructure (1971, 403), and, as possibility, it is freedom (360).

We have seen that in his 1917 article on the Russian revolution, "The Revolution against *Capital*" (Gramsci, 1990, 34-37), Gramsci praised the freedom of human

subjectivity against economic determinism. Here, the rational will is presented by Gramsci as a "collective, social will". This will "becomes the driving force of the economy and moulds objective reality, which lives and moves and comes to resemble a current of lava that can be channeled wherever and in whatever way men's will determines" (35). This description of the objective/subjective paradigm in its historicist, interactive mode –where the objective is nature, the laws of economics, the analysis of the human intellect, etc., and the subjective is the will– points to the contingency and freedom of the will. Indeed, contingent is the will, not the event produced by it, be it the Russian revolution or the construction of communism. Or, at least, the event is not a primary contingent: "The Bolshevik Revolution consists more of ideologies than of events" (Gramsci, 1990, 34). There is here a redefinition of the concept of contingency, which is in line with Gramsci's ability to think the interaction of subject and object, superstructure and structure, without reducing the relationship to one of the two terms and without compromising their inseparability. This does not mean that, as Laclau and Mouffe claim, "the contingent only exists within the necessary" (1985, 114). The opposite is true: necessity exists within contingency, in the sense that the event can be looked at as necessary after it is caused, but it is caused contingently.

I do not know whether Gramsci was aware of Duns Scotus's philosophy of the will. Yet, the similarity between Scotus's and Gramsci's conception of the will is remarkable, notwithstanding the differences. Duns Scotus also speaks of the will as a rational faculty and, within the discourse of Medieval philosophy, gives the will priority over the intellect. Of course, for Scotus rationality does not mean historicity, but still the relationship of similarity between the two thinkers holds. This is not due to their

emphasis on the concept of freedom, typical of any philosophy of the will, but to the fact that, in their conceptions, the freedom of the will does not lead toward an arbitrary, absolutely spontaneous and irrational modality of action. The will is rather the rational faculty *par excellence*. It is that without which the objective forces of nature would be completely blind and change would occur in a completely deterministic way.

Duns Scotus says: "by 'contingent' I do not mean something that is not necessary or which was not always in existence, but something whose opposite could have occurred at the time that this actually did" (1987, 55). This means that at the time of the occurrence of the event there was a plurality of possibilities; at that time it was not necessary that this event, rather than its opposite or still a different one, occurred. In its occurrence, the event does not become necessary, but actual. Scotus continues: "That is why I do not say that something is contingent, but that something is *caused contingently*" (*ibid.*). The opposite of 'necessary' is then not 'contingent', but 'caused contingently' or, as we shall see, 'possible'. Herein lies the possibility of change. As Scotus says: "something can be changed, for something is possible ('possible' being defined as contrary to 'necessary')" (1987, 44). Possibility, not contingency, is the opposite of necessity. And possibility is to be found at the level of the will and of its freedom. Furthermore, possibility includes the concept of plurality, for at the level of the possible an event could occur, but its opposite could also equally occur, and so could many others. It is indeed the level of the modality of the *could*. However, the occurrence of one of them takes away the possible occurrence of the others, and the present/future *could* becomes a past *could have*. What was caused contingently becomes, by necessity, a fact. However, this is so only at the level of the recognition of the event. There is no necessity at the ontological level.

In his critical reading of Aristotle, Duns Scotus distinguishes between the intellect and the will, which he considers both as active potencies.[18] The intellect "falls under the heading of 'nature', for it is of itself determined to understanding and does not have it in its power to both understand and not understand; or as regards propositional knowledge where contrary acts are possible, it does not have the power to both assent and dissent" (Duns Scotus, 1986, 141). The will, on the other hand, "can perform either this act or its opposite, or can either act or not act at all" (139); it "acts freely, for it has the power of self-determination" (142). For Scotus, without this distinction and without recognizing the power of the will, everything would be left to determinism. He says: "Indeed, if –to assume the impossible– the intellect and its subordinate powers alone existed, without a will, everything would occur deterministically after the manner of nature, and there would be no potency sufficient to accomplish anything to the contrary"(149).

If we look at Gramsci even through this far too cursory excursus into the philosophy of Duns Scotus, we perceive the similarity in their conception of the will. I am convinced that this similarity is not apparent and superficial. Indeed, notwithstanding their differences and the fact that philological continuity cannot be established, this similar conception of the will reaches into the essence of the philosophical problems both Gramsci and Scotus are dealing with; fundamentally, the fact that, as Milton says,

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[18]Even though Aristotle "distinguished, not between nature and will, but between irrational and rational potencies, understanding 'rational' apparently as referring only to the intellect" (Duns Scotus, 1986, 141), the former distinction was implicit, according to Scotus, in Aristotle's assumption that "there were two incidental or *per accidens* efficient causes: chance, which is reducible to nature; and fortune, which includes purpose or will" (139). There was, then, properly speaking, no will in Aristotle's philosophy, thus no potency in this sense. He only spoke of *prohaeresis*, that is, desire or choice (Duns Scotus, 1986, 142). However, for Scotus one has to speak of the will here.

"reason also is choice."[19] Gramsci's emphasis on the will, on human subjectivity and freedom, on the "superstructure", both in his early political writings and in his later notes in prison, would then seem to stem from a philosophical tradition of which he was perhaps relatively unaware, but that he nonetheless felt deeply. It is not my intention to prove here the validity of this comparison – which for me is based on an intuition that I have not yet worked out, but to offer a suggestion for a future line of interpretation. It may be that through this we will come to a better understanding of Gramsci as a philosopher, of his pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will. And it may also be that a rethinking of the concepts of the will, contingency, freedom and the possibility of change will give us some alternatives, not only at the level of philosophy, but of politics as well; or rather, at the level of the philosophy of praxis's insurgent ontology, where philosophy and politics become one and the same process in the much needed construction of a different and truly democratic world.

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19 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Book III, 108). It is a well-known fact that Milton was influenced by Duns Scotus.

Chapter 6 - Production and the Work of Art

6.1 The esthetic dimension of labor

When the concept of labor is considered ontologically, it takes, within social ontology, the place that the concept of being has in pure ontology. This means that labor is still being, but it is not being as such, 'pure' being; rather, it is practical, 'impure' being: it is what enters into the constitution of the whole spectrum of social life. As such, labor is not a category of political economy, yet that does not mean that it has no economic function. The economy itself, economic life, is now understood in a completely different way; to be sure, it remains an essential part of social life, but it does not stand in a relationship of opposition (of determination as opposition) to culture. Nor is culture the superstructural product, the epiphenomenal appearance, of the economy. Labor *between* economy and culture really says that a synthesis now obtains such that the categories of economy and culture are only analytical names for what is in fact a totality: the totality of social being. In this totality, all events have equal value and necessity. These events can go from the production of useful objects to artistic production, from exchange to language, from language in its everyday use to poetry, from the system of laws to the knowledge and management of one's habitat as well as of the universe as a whole. Labor performs the function of the universal concept present in the constitution of all these events. They are events or expressions of nature, yet they go beyond nature. Labor, which is in itself a natural and objective force, reshapes nature, and it is the modality or direction of this reshaping that becomes problematic.

Labor is being as sensuous human activity. The concept of being of traditional metaphysics can only be understood, within a project of social ontology, in terms of the concept of the sensuous, and this, in turn, is nothing but labor itself. It is, of course, not labor as the curse of Biblical memory, but rather labor as the transforming and self-transforming activity of human beings; it addresses both questions of scarcity and the question of desire. The discourse of metaphysics and ontology now enters a *poietic* and practical dimension.

The emphasis on the concept of the sensuous brings us into the domain of esthetics. Yet it should be said that this manner of speaking is not really accurate — not, at least, from the point of view of a thinking that has abandoned the abstractions of political economy. For political economy, the regulation of the totality of life can only happen through a fragmentation of that same totality. In that sense, esthetics would be a separate domain, one that is reached on a second thought and, as it were, after leaving aside other more fundamental and pressing questions. However, from the point of view of poetic ontology, the esthetic dimension becomes a fundamental and univocal disposition. The sensuous, as labor, invests all expressions of life: it is not limited to the sphere of 'mere' production, nor is artistic production a superstructural moment of limited and special interest. The esthetic disposition becomes a metaphysical disposition.

Here one should consider Nietzsche's thought. For Nietzsche, the destruction of traditional metaphysics is followed by a regime of sensuous and artistic activity. Yet, this artistic activity must be metaphysical in character. Indeed, in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says: "An anti-metaphysical view of the world – yes, but an artistic one"

(1967b, #1048). Here art replaces metaphysics. Yet, to say that art replaces metaphysics means to give art a much wider meaning than it usually has. If art replaces metaphysics, then art is no longer an ephemeral expression of human activity, it is not a special modality of life reserved to special circumstances and people. Rather, it becomes a common concept, a subversive and radically new regime. It is a metaphysics of immanence, metaphysics of this world, the world we are. In the world we are, art *becomes* metaphysics – a poetic metaphysics, to be sure. Thus, Nietzsche also says: "...art as the real task of life, art as life's *metaphysical* activity" (*ibid.* #853, IV).[1]

In Nietzsche, perhaps more than in any other thinker, the possibility of living an artistic life is most emphatically asserted. Yet, it is important to bear in mind what we have just seen, namely, that for Nietzsche art becomes metaphysics. The Overman is nothing but the artist as a metaphysician. The fact that art becomes a common concept does not entail a lowering of esthetic values. The word 'common' here must be understood ontologically: 'common' in the sense in which being is said to be a common concept. As for the question of values, there are new and higher values, the values after their transvaluation. They become possible only after the last man follows God's destiny, and the new man, the Overman, replaces him. After the death of God and the destruction of traditional metaphysics, a secular and earthly plenitude can finally become actual. Here, Nietzsche's "most difficult thought" that occurs "at the peak of meditation," that is, the eternal recurrence of the same and the will to power as the closest approximation of

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1 Here Nietzsche is quoting himself from the "Preface to Richard Wagner" which opens *The Birth of Tragedy*. The quotation is not exact, and the original statement is even stronger: "...I am convinced that art represents the highest task and truly metaphysical activity of this life..." (1967a, 31-32).

being and becoming, shows its most fruitful result. In his work on Nietzsche, Heidegger shows this very well. He says, for instance, that "[t]o be an artist is to be able to bring something forth. But to bring something forth means to establish in Being something that does not exist" (1979, 69). The only problem with Heidegger's interpretation, is that he reduces Nietzsche's thought to a traditional metaphysics. Accordingly, Nietzsche does not overcome metaphysics but only brings it to completion. Yet Heidegger says this only on the basis of his misunderstanding of Nietzsche. For instance, Heidegger overlooks Nietzsche's emphasis on the sensuous and on *this world*, and he reintroduces in Nietzsche's philosophy the supersensuous and thus the metaphysical split explicitly rejected by him.[2]

In reality, Nietzsche's new metaphysics of art does away not simply with the supersensuous, but with the split between the sensuous and the supersensuous. This is the meaning of the destruction of metaphysics: it is not simply the true world of ideas that becomes useless, but also this world as a world of appearances. What remains is *this world* in its plenitude and unsurpassable worldliness. Here one really has everything. Even the spirit is not rejected and destroyed as such; it rather becomes secular and earthly. The will to power is everything; thus even the transforming and self-transforming sensuous human activity is will to power. Will to power is what the Greeks called *phusis*, but human activity, labor, is also this *phusis*. Here *phusis* takes on the character of art not because it is *humanized*, but rather because it is *over-humanized*. It is not because man naturally and out of necessity (and this means, deterministically) expresses the *phusis*

[2] I have developed this analysis further in my Master's thesis at San Francisco State University: *Heidegger, Nietzsche, and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1991).

which also constitutes him; in other words, it is not because man is this generic and compulsory will to power that he also becomes an artist. Rather, man becomes an artist (and in this sense a true metaphysician) when *phusis* or will to power is raised above the level of the merely given. One cannot speak of consciousness with Nietzsche, but one can do so with Marx. In any case, what one finds in both Nietzsche and Marx is the discovery and upholding of the sensuous, the discovery of life as what remains once the abstractions of traditional metaphysics (one should here say, of Platonism) and political economy are shown in their falsity. The world that remains after the true world of ideas and the false world of appearances both collapse is neither true nor false, neither ideal nor apparent. It is this living, continuous, contradictory and asymptotic approximation of being and becoming. In the same way, the destruction of productive and unproductive labor leaves us with a labor which is neither productive nor unproductive, a living labor, a "form-giving fire" that also brings about the closest and asymptotic approximation of being and becoming, of time and temporality. What is important is that becoming does not turn into being, whether this is the true world of ideas or the world of dead labor. This also means that being does not turn into an empty abstraction, which would be the same as nothing. Yet, the plenitude which follows from this position is not fixed and immutable. The fact that being and becoming approximate each other without ever becoming one and the same force is a function of the expansive and ever-changing nature of this plenitude.

When labor is understood as the sensuous (αἰσθητικός) human activity, it becomes a concept of both esthetics and ontology. Or rather, esthetics *is* ontology when

the latter is understood not in its pure sense, but rather as a practical and poetic disposition or power. In this sense, the distinction between mere production and artistic production becomes problematic because it is now evident that it is not a necessary distinction. The fact that it is constantly made only says that it has become a commonplace, but it does not say that this commonplace has any philosophical validity. It seems easy to show that at the basis of this distinction there are at least two prejudices: one is the division of labor, and the other, which follows from the first, is the view that mere production cannot share in the freedom and creativeness of artistic production. By problematizing this distinction, I do not mean to suggest that all production should be exactly of the same type. Even in artistic production as usually understood there is difference between one work and the other, as there is greatness or mediocrity. Rather, what I am saying is that the disposition with which one approaches *any* type of production should and could be re-directed toward the discovery and the experience of one's creativity. In other words, to say that all production could become artistic does not mean that we are all expected to create great works of art. Rather, it means to give the concept of production, through creativeness and freedom, its due dignity. No activity is too low or uninteresting unless it is made so by deliberately devised social categories.

In the next two sections, I will try to show how the difference between production and artistic production can be overcome if the concept and practice of creative labor become the universal subject (in the etymological sense of 'subject' as 'ground', 'foundation') of the social. In section 6.2, I will look at Heidegger's concept of production in order to show how his relying on the tacitly accepted idea of the division of

labor makes it impossible for him to overcome the distinction under examination. For Heidegger, creativeness remains something that pertains exclusively to certain activities, but it cannot pertain to all. Then, in section 6.3, I will consider Mumford's overcoming of the distinction in the direction of a newly found balance between the subjective and the objective, the technical and the artistic itself. This balance, or synthesis, which Mumford theorizes as the only meaningful alternative to the fragmentation and alienation of modern life, is really a product of the application of the principles of the philosophy of praxis to the analysis of society. By that, I do not mean to reduce Mumford's original work to another philosopher's ideas. In other words, I am not saying that Mumford works within a Gramscian paradigm. Rather, what I am saying is that the philosophy of praxis, announced, yet not fully developed, by Gramsci, can be generalized to the point that it does become a new paradigm of the social – a paradigm which goes beyond Gramsci's own perspective and the perspective of Marxism in general. Indeed, Gramsci is not the founder of the philosophy of praxis, but with him this philosophy becomes thematic. The claim is that Mumford's work is also a philosophy of praxis. Perhaps the link, which I am here only suggesting, should be looked for in the philosophy of experience known as Pragmatism, which influenced both Gramsci and Mumford, but this goes beyond the scope of my work.

The important point is realizing that we are dealing with a philosophy that posits praxis, that is, human sensuous activity, at the center, and it does so in the most conscious and explicit way. This praxis we have already identified with poiesis (cf., section 3.2 above). This identification, certainly present in Vico and Marx before Gramsci, runs

counter to the traditional Aristotelian distinction of the two terms.[3] For Aristotle, action (praxis) has its end in itself, whereas production (poiesis) does not. But in Aristotle this distinction serves the purpose of emphasizing the meaning of ethics as a practical science and indeed as a part of political science. With modernity and the emergence of capital, a new split occurs, this time within poiesis itself, within the theory of production. However, this was not the case throughout antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, for in those historical periods the distinction between crafts and arts was not what it will become with modernity. With modernity and capital, the distinction between crafts and arts becomes vitally important because there is the formulation of a new concept of the *end*: the end of production is now no longer only external to action; it is even external to production itself, for now the end is no longer the product, but merely surplus-value and profit. With modernity, we can then distinguish between mere production and artistic production. Certainly, in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, capital was already emerging, but it was far from having attained its specificity – a specificity centered around the concept of productive labor and its counterpart: unproductive labor, which was however only needed as the horizon of productive labor, only needed to justify the necessary social category of exclusion. However, the important question here is the question of the *end*: If the labor which counts is productive labor (i.e., that which has its end outside itself), it is then also important to ask what this end is. We have already seen the answer: the end is no longer usefulness, but profit. In fact, when the end of production is usefulness, creativeness (*pace*

[3] See both Aristotle's *Ethics* and, for an excellent analysis of the question, Agamben (1999).

Heidegger) can still be a part of it – as it was in the case of the craftsman/artist. But when the end of production is profit, creativeness must be pushed away from the realm of production proper (mere production) into the complementarity of artistic production, now seen as a luxurious appendage to everyday life, an "esthetic compensation" Mumford will say.

How can then the philosophy of praxis, a philosophy of action, recuperate the lost sense of the original concept of production? For it is not enough to say, with Aristotle, that action and production are different because "production has its end in something other than itself, but action does not, since its end is acting well itself" (Aristotle, 1999, 1140b). And actually one has to go against Aristotle who explicitly says: "Nor is one included in the other; for action is not production, and production is not action" (1140a). In reality, Aristotle is mistaken. The difference does not lie in the fact that action has its end in itself and production has its end in something other. Rather, the difference lies in the fact that one and the same concept, that of action, can be interpreted in two ways: as having its end in itself or as having its end in something other. Once this is done, it is easy to see that production is nothing but action which has its end in something other; a special kind of action, but not a different genus. Yet, this end –its otherness notwithstanding– must still relate to the specific kind of action performed and to the material used. To make a concrete example, the end (and the good) of house-building is certainly something other than house-building itself, but this something other has to be something that relates to both the activity (action) of house-building and the material employed, and that is, a house (this is, by the way, one of Aristotle's examples). It cannot

be something altogether other and heterogeneous. Yet this is what happens under capital where the end (and the good) of house-building is no longer a house, but it is profit.

Thus the philosophy of praxis cannot accept the new split within production itself operated by capital, nor can it recuperate the original Aristotelian distinction, for we now see that production is indeed a kind of action. Instead, the philosophy of praxis will seek to bridge the gap between the two terms (action and production) in the direction of their actual identification. The concept of creative labor, which the philosophy of praxis puts at the basis of the constitution of a new totality of the social, is in fact a synthetic expression in this sense: labor is, fundamentally, action; but its creative dimension relates to the original sense of production as *poiesis*, the transformation of the acting self and of what is acted upon *into another*: a production of difference. It certainly has nothing to do with production as understood by capital and political economy; there is here no productivity and profit, no productive and unproductive labor, but rather an active, synthetic, and subjective withdrawal from these categories. This movement away from the objective demands of mere production is what Gramsci calls a "split" and a "new synthesis" (see section 5.2, above). It is by bearing these considerations in mind that we can make a transition to the last two sections of this work.

6.2 Heidegger and the Question of Production

The question of production (the question of *poiesis*) must be seen in its relation to the question of action (the question of *praxis*). Once it is established that poiesis and praxis

cannot be seen in separation from one another, the question of production moves from being a question of political economy to being a question of ontology.

It is at this point that Heidegger's understanding of production as *poiesis* becomes important. It becomes important because, through this question, Heidegger tries to make a passage, not from political economy to ontology, but from traditional metaphysics to poetic metaphysics (or poetic ontology). As it will become clear later, mine is a critical reading of Heidegger's handling of the concept of production. For Heidegger, production as poiesis is, fundamentally, *bringing forth*. Yet, this bringing forth can be creation (*Schaffen*) or mere making, the making of equipment (*Verfertigen*). On the basis of this distinction, between creation and mere making, Heidegger explains the difference between art and reality. It is this difference (ultimately a form of the division of labor) that constitutes the object of my critique.

Traditionally, production is seen as radically different from action. In his *Ethics*, as we have seen, Aristotle says that action and production are two different things. The Greek words for production (or making) and action are respectively *poiesis* and *praxis*. As Giorgio Agamben points out in *The Man Without Content*, the distinction between production and action, poiesis and praxis, is a fundamental distinction within Greek philosophy. According to him, the history of western metaphysics after the Greeks is the history of the blurring of this fundamental distinction (Agamben, 1999, 71). We have seen that for Aristotle, what distinguishes production from action is really the concept, or the function of the concept, of the end: production has its end outside itself, action has its end in itself.

It is true that the distinction between production and action loses meaning in the history of western thought. Already with Vico, production and action can no longer be seen in separation, and with Marx they truly become the constituent parts of the same process. Indeed, for Étienne Balibar, "...Marx removed one of philosophy's most ancient taboos: the radical distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*" (*The Philosophy of Marx*, 40). Differently from Agamben who takes a trans-historical approach not dissimilar, as we shall see, from Heidegger's, Balibar bases his understanding of the Aristotelian distinction in terms of the division of labor and of class distinction. He explains the distinction between poiesis and praxis as follows: "Since the Greeks (who made it the privilege of 'citizens', i.e. of the masters), *praxis* had been that 'free' action in which man realizes and transforms only himself, seeking to attain his own perfection. As for *poiesis* ..., which the Greeks considered fundamentally servile, this was 'necessary' action, subject to all the constraints of the relationship with nature, with material conditions. The perfection it sought was not that of man, but of things, of products for use" (40-41). Balibar's argument is very important. In the *Politics*, in a way that anticipates Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, Aristotle sees action as what pertains to the slave; of course, the action of the slave is simply a mediation –to use Hegelian terminology– indeed, a vanishing mediation, between the desire of the master and the object of his desire; the slave is a minister of action, an instrument of action, and action is, contrary to production, life itself (*Politics*, I, 1253b-1254a). But since the action of the slave is geared toward production, one can say that the instrument of action is also an instrument of production. What we find here is another anticipation: that of Marx's dialectic between living and

dead labor, between labor and capital, between labor power as a special component of the means of production and the means of production themselves. Thus, it is correct to say that poiesis and praxis collapse into the same concept and that the Greek distinction is blurred. For Balibar, however, the identification of poiesis and praxis is dynamic and dialectical; in other words, he does not say that now we only have one concept instead of two; rather, he says that this identification constitutes "the revolutionary thesis that *praxis* constantly passes over into *poiesis* and vice versa" (41).

Thus the question of production (a specific making) is necessarily related to that of a wider sense of human activity: doing. Poiesis is making; praxis is doing. For Heidegger, however, the traditional distinction between poiesis and praxis becomes, I believe, the distinction, within the concept of poiesis, between creating and making: creating has its end in itself; making has an end other than itself. However, peculiar to Heidegger's interpretation is that both concepts have the thinking and knowing of *techne* as their transcendental structure. Creation is not, therefore, the exact equivalent of human praxis. But what is important is that the concept of production, understood as 'bringing forth' in general, is, for Heidegger, of different kinds. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935-1936), Heidegger distinguishes between creating and mere making. He says: "We think of creation as a bringing forth. But the making of equipment, too, is a bringing forth. Handicraft ... does not, to be sure, create works, not even when we contrast, as we must, the handmade with the factory product" (58). Then he asks a very important question: "But what is it that distinguishes bringing forth as creation from bringing forth in the mode of making?" (*ibid.*). For now, I am not interested in discussing Heidegger's

answer. I only want to point out that the question itself says many things about Heidegger's general understanding of life. Indeed, for Heidegger, the difference between art and life is almost a given. He speaks of it not only in *The Origin of the Work of Art* but also in his work on Nietzsche; and it is on the basis of this difference that he misunderstands Nietzsche.

In the *Origin of the Work of Art*, and particularly in the third and last section of it, titled "Truth and Art," the issue is posed in a special way. The second section ends with the following questions: "What is truth, that it can happen as, or even must happen as, art? How is it that art exists at all?" (57). These are questions that Heidegger also asks in the first series of his lectures on Nietzsche, then published in the first volume of his *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*. The time of the two series of lectures, on Nietzsche and on the origin of the work of art, is about the same, the late thirties. For this reason, I will also look at some sections of *The Will to Power as Art*.

In *The Will to Power as Art*, Heidegger distinguishes between the guiding (or penultimate) and the grounding (or ultimate) questions of philosophy. The former asks: What is the being? The latter asks: What is Being? The grounding question, Heidegger says, "remains as foreign to Nietzsche as it does to the history of thought prior to him" (67). This means that western metaphysics up to Nietzsche (i.e., according to Heidegger, up to the time of its completion) only asks the question as to what the being is, that is, the question about the Being of beings, not the question about Being as such. The guiding question, however, is as essential as the grounding question. Moreover, it is not a question that metaphysics could not have asked. It is part of the history of the truth of

Being; part of this history's destiny. In fact, both questions ask "what beings and Being *in truth* are" (68). The phrase "in truth" is not to be understood in the sense of "truly"; rather, "in truth" has a spatial and temporal meaning. It designates the open region of Being and of its essence: "Beings are to be brought into the open region of Being itself, and Being is to be conducted into the open region of its essence" (68).

But the "where" of this open region is not fixed once and for all. It itself is a happening and a framing. It is in this sense that the "where" of truth is spatial *and* temporal. More than just a place, "in truth" designates a *placing* (*Stellen*).Thus, it is "in truth" that truth as *alētheia* comes to the fore. But "in truth," truth is, at the same time, concealed in the *space* (*Raum*) in which it stands together with Being. This space is the "realm of the grounding question" (68) — not a ground, but a grounding; there, truth and Being are not simply inhabiting the same space; rather, they are "united in essence and yet foreign to one another" (68).

The passage from the guiding to the grounding question of philosophy is a passage to the question of Being *as* truth, where the latter, in its concealedness, is un-truth, and the former, also in its concealedness, is non-being. When Heidegger speaks of art –both in his interpretation of, or confrontation with, Nietzsche and in *The Origin of the Work of Art*– he speaks metaphysically. In the last section of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, we read: "The nature of art is poetry. The nature of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth" (75). Furthermore, we read in the second section, "The work...is not the reproduction of some particular entity [*Seienden*] that happens to be present at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of the thing's general essence [*des*

allgemeinen Wesens der Dinge]" (37; brackets added). Heidegger opposes the view that art belongs to aesthetics and truth to logic. Instead, he affirms the metaphysical nature of both concepts, provided that they are essentially related in and through poetry. There would be no aesthetics and no logic without the essential relation of art and poetry and without the founding of truth. That the essence of art is poetry and the essence of poetry is the founding of truth should not be understood in a hierarchical sense. The word 'essence' is not to be taken as that which lies behind or beyond. Rather, the word 'essence' relates all beings to itself as to their unavoidable destiny. It is to be understood as the Parmenidean *moira*. Thus, Heidegger says, "What is, is never of our making or even merely the product of our minds" (53). Man is not the measure of all things, but the measure itself grounds all things, as well as man, as historical beings.

However, the relation of art, poetry, and truth uses man as an essential measure. Man finds himself in the center of the place that opens up in the midst of beings and because of man. 'Because of man' does not mean that this is what man autonomously wills, as if he could also choose not to will it; rather, it means that what opens up pertains to man's being there. But what is there? There, "Eine Lichtung ist" (40), "There is a clearing" (53), a lighting center which "encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know" (*ibid.*). There is no essential relation and no human measure without the open and lighting center within which all beings must stand. "Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are" (53). Heidegger makes no mention here of either Parmenides or Protagoras. However, it is evident that *the passage*, not man, is the

measure of things that are and of those that are not, of those which *we* are not and of *that-we-are*. The passage, which for Heidegger the artist –and more than the artist, the poet– experiences in a special way, is the space where what is concealed and what comes to the fore as unconcealed (yet always concealed in its *not*) fight their ambivalent battle by both following and refusing to follow their fatefulness. Thus, truth as happening is founded in its historicality. This history, which is not one of dates and events, is the founding of truth as truth-in-the-world. Yet, the world is there only because of its *not*, namely, the earth. The latter, however, is not a solid, external, and ultimately, abstract ground upon which the world can thoughtlessly stand. As Heidegger says, "What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet." Rather, "Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation." The arising is *phusis*, and it relates earth and world. This means that the relationship of earth and world is not an external one: "In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent" (42).

In the Open in which everything finds its place, there is a relationship between earth and world. Once again, this relationship expresses the concept and reality of *alētheia*, the play of concealment and unconcealedness. The earth is a self-secluding essence out of which a self-opening and worlding world emerges, though it remains sheltered and concealed by the earth. "World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world" (1971a, 48-49). As Heidegger explains, "the world is not simply the Open

that corresponds to clearing, and the earth is not simply the Closed that corresponds to concealment" (55). If we take as an illustration the history of philosophy according to Heidegger, world and earth correspond to the guiding and the grounding questions. Indeed, "the world is the clearing of the paths of the essential guiding directions with which all decision complies. Every decision, however, bases itself on something not mastered, something concealed, confusing" (55). But what is confusing also has some clarity, for it still happens within the clearing. The question as to what the being is, is a worldly question of this kind. Even Nietzsche –who, according to Heidegger, brings the series of guiding questions to completion– is only able to point confusedly (and yet clearly) at something different, something unthought. On the other hand, the earth is "that which rises up as self-closing" (55). The question as to what Being is, is an earthly question of this kind.

The guiding and grounding questions, the world and the earth, are in the same open region, i.e., in the region of *alētheia*. As we have seen, they are not external to one another, but, at the same time, they are not the same thing. A political ontology would be able –on the basis of what Heidegger himself says– to individuate the earth and the world respectively in the ethical and the political realms. This political ontology would draw stronger consequences than Heidegger does from the fact that the worlding of the world is immediately an earthing of the earth. In fact, this entails the consummation of the world and the appearing of the earth. It is true that a world must open for the earth to rise up (63), but earth is also what makes a world collapse and disappear. It is the ontological power of creation, able to create and destroy a world, that –confined to human praxis– is

responsible for the kind of world created, and also for the potentialities of its destruction.

Fundamentally, when Heidegger asks the question as to the difference between the two modalities of bringing forth, he works on the basis of the unspoken, tacitly accepted concept of the division of labor. He makes it clear that his main interest is not that of formulating a discourse on art or esthetics. He admittedly starts from the ontological plane of being. When bringing forth has the character of creation, there is something in it, according to Heidegger, that goes beyond what is simply human. To be sure, the ontological power of creation is always historical for Heidegger, but of a history that grounds human history: the history of the truth of being. Thus he does not distinguish between the power of *phusis* and the power of that specific and only human form of *phusis* which is *praxis*. The consequence is a trans-historical concept of history. Yet, even though he does not realize it, it is only within the realm of praxis and human history that the distinction he draws between creation and mere making, the work of art and the making of equipment, can be understood and perhaps criticized and rejected.

Heidegger says that the question as to what distinguishes the different modalities of bringing forth is a difficult one, for even the Greeks are supposed to have understood these two modalities by means of the same concept: *techne*. Heidegger explains that "*techne* signifies neither craft nor art;" it "denotes rather a mode of knowing" (59). The neutrality of *techne* (its neither/nor) has a metaphysical configuration. This means that *techne* comes before the division into creating and making. It is bringing forth in general, or the possibility of bringing forth, and, as such, it constitutes the univocal basis upon

which analogies are to be established. This univocal basis is what Heidegger calls, even in *Being and Time*, the *as*-structure. Through the 'as', something comes to the fore *as* something, and it is also understood and interpreted *as* something. The *as* is the structure by and through which the power of bringing forth expands into everything that can be and is. In fact, any being is only insofar as it rests upon this structure. In their transcendentality, both the *as*-structure and the concept of *techne* cannot be responsible for the difference between creation and making. They are simply ways in which *thisness* presents itself into the world.

In sections 31 and 32 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger shows the nature of understanding and interpretation and the development of the former into the latter. Understanding develops into interpretation. In interpretation something is explicitly understood (i.e., named) *as* something. However, this is not what merely occurs at the ontic level of the statement: when I say, for instance, of a table that it is a table. Rather, to be explicitly understood and named is the *as* itself, and this is what the poetic experience is all about. Heidegger says: "what is named is understood *as* the *as* which what is in question is to be taken" (139). To understand what is named *as* the *as* of something means to avoid falling into the jungle of analogy and likeness and to move toward *thisness*. To say of something, not merely that it is something, but that it is something *as* something, means to see it in its difference from any other thing and thus in its absolute self-identity. The sameness of difference and identity is what the concept of *thisness* stands for. In real interpretation, as different from mere opinion, what is understood and named is grasped as *this* on the basis of its *as*. As Heidegger says, "[t]he 'as' constitutes

the structure of the explicitness of what is understood, it constitutes the interpretation" (140). But this structure is not an original feature of the statement, for it precedes the statement. Indeed, "[t]he articulation of what is understood in the interpreting approach to beings guided by the 'something as something' lies *before* a thematic statement about it. The 'as' does not first show up in the statement, but is only first stated, *which is only possible because it is there as something to be stated*" (140; second emphasis added). This is the ontological reality of the *as*.

In the next section of *Being and Time* (section 33), Heidegger draws a distinction between the existential-hermeneutical *as* (namely, the primordial 'as' of circumspect interpretation that understands) and the apophantical *as* of the statement (148). This distinction is, in reality, one between ontology and predication. The hermeneutical *as* pertains to what something really is. In other words, naming something is not simply adding to its being; it is rather understanding something *as* something, that is, understanding something in its very being, as it really is or comes to be. Of course, the hermeneutical *as* is a feature of language. But what does Heidegger mean by language? The best way to answer this question at this point is to say that Heidegger has two different concepts of language. One is a language built on the hermeneutical *as*, a language to which the *as* is constitutive; a solid language, one could say, which has the same structure as Da-sein. This is the language that is rooted in the "there". The other is a language of the statement, which is built on the apophantical *as* and which is used in many ways; for instance, as an instrument of communication. The language of the poet, of poesis, of production as poesis, is of the first type, for it expresses the univocal ground

of the *as*-structure.

I will argue that, in order for this ground to be rediscovered and for its potentialities to be actualized and practiced in everyday life, poiesis must become praxis, that is, production must become one moment of action, of human activity. This would be a modality not dissimilar from the solitude of labor which, by abandoning or destroying the categories of capital, is able to return to itself.

When I say that Heidegger does not distinguish enough between the power of *phusis* and the power of *praxis*, I mean to say that there is not, in Heidegger, an adequate conception of human agency and freedom. Furthermore, I would like to argue that this lack of clarity comes from an acritical acceptance of assumptions that, as far as the question of production goes, come from the realm of political economy. Heidegger says: "The artist is a *technites* not because he is also a craftsman, but because both the setting forth of works and the setting forth of equipment occur in a bringing forth and presenting that causes beings in the first place to come forward and be present in assuming an appearance. Yet all this happens in the midst of the being that grows out of its own accord, *phusis*" (59). Thus, the artist can be, and actually often is, *also* a craftsman, and the craftsman *also* an artist. The structure of the *also* is in fact the possibility of analogy resting upon something univocal. This does not mean that Van Gogh (whose painting of the peasant shoes Heidegger discusses in the *Origin of the Work of Art*) was also a shoemaker. Rather, it means that shoemaking and painting are related by an *also* to a third something which is included in both. This third something is nothing but the transcendental structure discussed earlier, the as-structure. Thus I find it difficult to

understand why the doing of the artist "is determined and pervaded by the nature of creation, and indeed remains contained within that creating" (60), whereas that of the craftsman is not and does not. In fact, ultimately, the creating power is, for Heidegger, not the doing of the artist, but nature, *phusis*, a general and transcendental doing or bringing forth, notwithstanding the fact that a specific modality of bringing forth must be there.

I would then like to suggest that the difference between creating and making is untenable from the point of view of a more informed and more radical political ontology. This difference can be made only on the basis of three fundamental principles, whether they are made explicit or not. The first is a metaphysical principle (of the traditional kind of metaphysics, or ontotheology) according to which a power remains hidden behind world and social phenomena; the second is a political principle that regulates and legitimizes class distinction on the basis of the division of labor; and the third is the economic principle of the division of labor itself. On the other hand, the abolition of the difference between creating and making does not entail the end of creating, or of what Heidegger calls the extraordinary; rather, it would move toward a different understanding of creating and of the extraordinary. More in the manner of Nietzsche: everything that is, is *ipso facto* extraordinary; more in the manner of Marx, living labor itself is a creative power, once it abandons and destroys the category of capital (and its creative dimension would not be, of course, confined to the economic sphere).

In Heidegger instead, the difference between creation and making presents many problems. In his work on Nietzsche, for example, he says: "Art induces reality, which is

in itself a shining, to shine most profoundly and supremely in scintillating transfiguration" (216). It then seems to be a question of degrees, indeed of hierarchical order. Heidegger explains this order by speaking of the concept of truth. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* he says that art really is the founding of truth, and truth particularly needs what is not ordinary. But this is also highly problematic, and we will see why.

When in *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger speaks about truth, one may very well start suspecting that his discourse on art is a mask for something else. He says: "The nature of art is poetry. The nature of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth" (75). This is basically the answer to the question we have seen at the outset. The question was: "But what is it that distinguishes bringing forth as creation from bringing forth in the mode of making?" (58). The difference is that in creation createdness is contained and preserved and, furthermore, truth is founded. Yet, this is not all. Heidegger also says: "Founding, however, is actual only in preserving" (75). This preserving is history itself. It would be interesting to see how close Heidegger is, at this point, to Hegel's political philosophy on the one hand, and to Cartesian metaphysics on the other. The preserving that follows the happening of truth and its establishment in the Open is what lets truth, not only originate and happen, but also persist in its being. Yet, what are the examples of this historical happening? On the one hand, we have poetry (in the narrow sense), and the work of art in general. But Heidegger also says: "Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state" (62).

Let us then try to understand what is the act that founds a political state. For Heidegger, again, this is not a question that belongs to the history of men and women in

the world, but to the history of the truth of being, to the struggle between world and earth. The concept of founding is in itself "essentially historical" (77). And founding is also, together with preserving, the true nature of art. With art as founding, "history either begins or starts over again" (*ibid.*). But what is history? Heidegger's answer is almost unintelligible: "History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment" (*ibid.*). The relation between art and history is a very intimate one: "Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history" (*ibid.*). The act that founds a state is then an historical act as well as a work of art. But this founding, as well as the subsequent preserving, has nothing of the radicality of the truly historical praxis (of the history of men and women in the world) which tends toward the destruction of the state (in its actual and transcendental forms). For Heidegger, this founding is an extraordinary act, and "Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary" (71). Yet, an alternative and truly radical way of thinking would look for the extraordinary in the ordinary, or rather, it would challenge the distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary – a metaphysical distinction at the direct service of a political ideology.

In his work on Nietzsche, Heidegger tells us that "[a]rt is affirmation of the sensuous" (1979, 162). Furthermore, due to Nietzsche's alleged reversal of Platonism, "truth is the same as what art affirms, i.e., the sensuous" (162). However, by looking at Nietzsche's philosophy as an inversion, rather than the abolition, of Platonism, Heidegger can reintroduce the nonsensuous alongside the sensuous in Nietzsche's thought and justify the distinction between art and mere reality. We have already seen that, in art,

reality shines "most profoundly and supremely in scintillating transfiguration" (216). To be sure, the fundamental distinction is not between art and reality but between art and truth. In fact, "[a]rt and truth are equally necessary for reality," but "[w]hile [they] are proper to the essence of reality with equal originality, they must diverge from one another and go counter to one another" (217).

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Nietzsche's abolition of the distinction between appearance and truth is neutralized by "the appearance that artistic creation is also an activity of handicraft" (64). Indeed, "the making of equipment is never directly the effecting of the happening of truth" (64). Handicraft uses up the material which it employs. Art, on the other hand, brings createdness into the work. Heidegger makes it clear that createdness has nothing to do with the name of a great artist. Yet, if this is not the case, then createdness can express itself even in handicraft. Without trying to solve the problem present in Heidegger's position, I would like to point it out for consideration. The point is this: even though one can accept that createdness expresses itself in the "simple 'factum est'," and that this means, fundamentally, "that unconcealedness of what is has happened here," one cannot accept that "as this happening it happens here for the first time" (65). In fact, each time is a first time. Even an infinite series of repetitions –of Hegel's bad type of infinitude, to be sure– would simply be repetition of first times. Instead, what Heidegger does is ask again the fundamental metaphysical question, namely, the question as to whether "such a work *is* at all rather than is not" (65). The existential "*that* it is" which answers the question can not be –and Heidegger is aware of this– a prerogative of the work of art. However, what distinguishes the "*that* it is rather

than is not" of the work of art from that of the equipment is that whereas the latter's "disappears in usefulness" (65), the *that* of the former finds a unique place in its solitude. Thus, createdness "stands as the silent thrust into the Open of the 'that'" (66).

The word "silent" in the above quotation is important, for silent is what remains concealed in *alētheia*. Silent is also the origin of language and poetry, and silent is the passage of man from thrownness to projection. Creation is the passing over of *Dasein*. Createdness is its having passed over and remaining preserved in history. To be sure, all this is unusual and extraordinary. However, the point is not separating the usual from the unusual and the ordinary from the extraordinary; rather, the point is establishing the unusual and extraordinary nature of any moment. The most usual –what, for example, comes out of mere habit– is the most unusual. Heidegger knows that. Let us think about the peasant shoes, not as they are presented by Van Gogh's painting in their workly character, but in their equipmental character, that is, in their usefulness and, above all, their reliability. This time, Heidegger brings us from the work to the equipment by crossing the unstable bridge hanging over an abyss. The name of this bridge is: *Und dennoch, and yet*. In the "undefined space" (*unbestimmter Raum*) we see "A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more" (33). *And yet* (Heidegger ends the paragraph with the words 'And yet' closed by a dash.) The 'and yet' modality is another way of understanding what we have called the configuration of neither/nor. 'And yet' does not mean both/and; it does not, in other words, describe the positive but superficial changeability of positions, as if everything were really possible. Rather, 'and yet' points to the double negation of refusal and dissembling, to an alternative but/also. In and

through the 'and yet', the work (in its workly character) and the equipment (in its equipmental character) relate to the same common structure. Then, in the next paragraph he says: "From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth" (33-34). The 'where' of truth is here too. In fact, truth can not be saved for special occasions, as it were. Truth is rather a question of everyday life. But Heidegger says: "Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent in thrownness" (71).

Thrownness and projection bring us to the center of poetic metaphysics, namely, to poetry itself. To be sure, the important concept is here projection, not thrownness. The latter is, in fact, more difficult to understand, for it implies a having been thrown which reinscribes poetic metaphysics within the general framework of vulgar metaphysics. In other words, thrownness entails transcendence of some sort, whereas projection is an immanent standing out. Of course, poetry is projection, and thrownness should rather be understood as a finding oneself there, without any allusion to a having been thrown.

Heidegger's next step is to link art to poetry: "*All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*." He rightly explains that "[i]t is due to art's poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual"(72). Heidegger is not wrong in saying that the poetic nature of art brings about the unusual, the "other than usual." But he does not explain why this should be limited to exceptional forms of human existence. In fact, the "midst of what is" must be our everyday life and not at all the manifestations of a

phusis to which we ourselves belong. Yet, is this everyday life really usual? What indeed is usual, especially today that, to use Heidegger's own language, the worlding of the world shows nothing but the absence of the gods? What is usual if the irreducible, poetic power of men and women in the world is all subsumed under capital? That is, if the passage that *Dasein* itself is, is not a passage into an "illuminating projection" (72), but one, without return, into a spiral of madness? Poetry, then, –and by poetry I mean production as a poiesis inextricably linked to free praxis– is more than merely letting truth happen. As Antonio Negri wrote in his work on Leopardi, "poetry breaks the surface of being, to build new and more universal being" (304). However, the constitution of this other being is not the creation within which alone createdness remains as opposed to everyday making and doing; nor is it a founding. Rather, it represents an alternative that belongs to everyday making and doing, production and action; and it is there that poetry stands.

Founding and preserving. This is, in the last instance, the task of poetry. As Heidegger says: "Truth happens only by establishing itself in the conflict and sphere opened up by truth itself" (61). Truth, then, "unconcealment", comes to the fore by affirming itself in its own destiny out of (yet bound to) a double negation in which it is, "in truth", what is and 'is' not. But indeed: What if the essence of poetry is not the founding of a truth which keeps concealed the double negation from which it arose? What if the power of poetry lies instead in the exploding of concealment itself, if the double negation is a battle to be fought in the open and the founding of truth an enduring process which opens a new ground at each founding?

6.3 Mumford's humanist alternative

No doubt, the answer to the above questions is positive, namely, expression is the essential coming into the open of what no longer conceals itself, and the truth of expression does not lie in preserving but in its enduring process of becoming. With a different language from Heidegger's, we find an important contribution to this direction of thought in the work of Lewis Mumford.

Our section on Mumford deals particularly with the concept of the machine as presented in *Technics and Civilization* (1934) and, above all, in the series of lectures *Art and Technics* (1952). The difference between these two works has to do with historical and political circumstances. Fundamentally, Mumford presented in both the same concept of the machine or technics. But World War II, the use of the atomic bomb, and then the ensuing Cold War, naturally changed the framing of that concept. In *Art and Technics* Mumford's concern for the destiny of humanity and civilization is stated in the most explicit and emphatic way. At the end of the lectures he says: "The present curtailment of political and intellectual freedom in the United States, as the result of insidious changes that have taken place within the last decade, is only a symptom of a larger loss: the abdication of the human personality" (2000, 162). This reality was not present, or at least not present to this degree, at the time of *Technics and Civilization* when World War I was referred to as the World War. But in the 50's it becomes one of the most pressing preoccupations for an intellectual, namely, for anyone who thinks, and for Mumford it commands a rethinking of some fundamental positions. As it will become clear later, the problematic concept is not that of the machine or technics. Rather, problematic is the

concept of civilization or art, and that means the way in which the machine or technics is put to use; problematic is the loss of subjectivity and of the human person. Mumford calls for a synthesis or balance between art and the machine, civilization and technics, the subjective and the objective, creativity and necessity. In this sense, his critique is very close to the discourse I am developing in the present work. For Mumford, the solution –to which I subscribe– lies in our capability of "restoring man to the very center of the universe, as the interpreter and transformer of nature, as the creator of a significant and valuable life, which transcends both raw nature and his own original biological self" (159).

It is good to begin this section by underlining a common misconception, according to which the development of the machine is directly proportional to the end of labor. In reality, the machine only implies a transformation of labor. But this transformation should not be considered as a mechanical passage from the human body to the machine as the site of labor. In fact, the machine itself is an extension of the human body and should be used in an organic relationship with it. As Mumford struggles to show, taking the human element out of the picture altogether is precisely what causes that imbalance that threatens our society. The development of technics is then not at all necessarily linked to a de-humanization of the world of labor. Rather, as I have already put it, the world of labor can be over-humanized by the proper use of technics, so as to become the site for an esthetic dimension of production.

The misconception I have mentioned above comes from the false assumption that technics is a relatively recent phenomenon, or rather that, within technics, there was a

drastic passage from the tool to the machine, epitomized by the Industrial Revolution. Yet, in *Technics and Civilization* Mumford says that "[f]or the last three thousand years, at least, machines have been an essential part of our older technical heritage" (1934, 9). In this sense, the machine itself is not the cause of the evils of the 'machine age'. Rather, the cause must be sought, as we have seen in chapter four, in the institutionalization of labor. Mumford says that "mechanization and regimentation are not new phenomena in history: what is new is the fact that these functions have been projected and embodied in organized forms which dominate every aspect of our existence" (4).

Mumford underlines the presence of what appears to be a structural link between technics and capitalism: "Thus, although capitalism and technics must be clearly distinguished at every stage, one conditioned the other and reacted upon it" (26). Yet, this 'structural link' is not responsible for the way in which the machine has been used under capitalism; again, the responsibility must be sought in the nature of capitalism itself. Mumford says: "But while technics undoubtedly owes an honest debt to capitalism, as it does likewise to war, it was nevertheless unfortunate that the machine was conditioned, at the outset, by these foreign institutions and took on characteristics that had nothing essentially to do with the technical processes or the forms of work. Capitalism utilized the machine, not to further social welfare, but to increase private property: mechanical instruments were used for the aggrandizement of the ruling classes" (26-27). This is a central theme in Mumford's critique, and in *Art and Technics* it becomes the site of a programmatic alternative. Indeed, notwithstanding the common misconception in interpreting these facts, it is easy to see the correctness of Mumford's position. No one

could really deny that mechanical instruments could be used to further social welfare rather than increase private property and capital. Then, as we have seen in chapter five, their use really depends on the direction of the rational will, not of some objective necessity. There is nothing, in the concept of technology, which necessarily links it to capital and profit. In other words, there is no necessary connection between technics and capitalism. The machine, "a neutral agent" as Mumford puts it, is utilized by capitalism in such a way that it "has often seemed, and in fact has sometimes been, a malicious element in society, careless of human life, indifferent to human interest" (27). But, Mumford notes, this does not demonstrate the dependence of technics on capitalism: "Capitalism has existed in other civilizations, which had a relatively low technical development; and technics made steady improvements from the tenth to the fifteenth century without the special incentive of capitalism" (27-28). In reality, "[t]he machine has suffered for the sins of capitalism; contrariwise, capitalism has often taken credit for the virtues of the machine" (27).

However, liberating the machine from its equivocal relationship with capital and underlining its positive contribution to the development of human life do not entail an idealization of the machine itself; on the contrary, they are necessary moments of critical clarity whereby the machine can be appreciated for what it really is and be, therefore, an element in a regained "organic equilibrium" (55). For Mumford, the machine contributes to this equilibrium, "like any other work of art" (*ibid.*). This is a very important moment in his critique, and it constitutes the main link between *Technics and Civilization* and *Art and Technics*. When the machine is considered as a work of art and is used as such, it

liberates and deepens the power of human creativity. But under capital and its regimentation of labor, the machine merely becomes an objective means of production, man is reduced to the machine, that is, his activity and body are over-regulated; the machine becomes an element within a system of oppression and externally imposed discipline. The modality of integration necessary to maintain an organic balance – integration between man and nature and man and his products– is replaced by one of fragmentation and alienation. The machine, Mumford will emphasize in *Art and Technics*, becomes godlike.

The distinction Mumford draws between the machine and its use under capital is extremely important. In and by itself, the machine can have liberating effects. Speaking of the eotechnic age,[4] roughly from the year 1000 to 1750, Mumford says: "Thanks to the menial services of wind and water, a large intelligentsia could come into existence, and great works of art and scholarship and science and engineering could be created without recourse to slavery: a release of energy, a victory for the human spirit" (118). It is with the paleotechnic stage of history, the age of coal-and-iron complex usually identified with the Industrial Revolution, that the direction of economy and culture really changes in the name of profit and progress. And the section on progress is one of the most important in *Technics and Civilization*. Here, by anticipating themes to be developed in his works on the cities, Mumford says that the civilization of the 19th century was not ahead of the

[4] In *Technics and Civilization*, Mumford divides the history of technics into an eotechnic phase of water-and-wood complex, roughly from 1000 to 1750 (the prefix 'eo-' means 'dawn'); a paleotechnic phase of coal-and-iron complex, which is the age usually referred to as the first Industrial Revolution; and a neotechnic phase of electricity-and-alloy complex, i.e., the age which begins with the so-called second Industrial Revolution and continues to our own days.

medieval or other past civilizations; rather, its work and life conditions were worse than they had been in the past. Here, too, he corrects another common mistake, which happens in historiography when historical periods are compared not on the basis of the totality of life, but by extrapolating *ad hoc* elements and motifs. Mumford says: "Plainly, by taking some low point of human development in the past, one might over a limited period of time point to a real advance. But if one began with a high point –for example, the fact that German miners in the sixteenth century frequently worked in three shifts of only eight hours each– the facts of progress, when one surveyed the mines of the nineteenth century, were non-existent" (183). Then he compares the systems of warfare in the Middle Ages and in the modern world, with particular attention to what at the time of *Technics and Civilization* is only known as the World War. Here, too, he shows how our century has really made "a step backward" (*ibid.*). The doctrine of progress, as Mumford calls it, really worked rhetorically and ideologically on a global scale. He gives another very good example that I wish to quote for its clarity and importance even today, in the age of global apartheid, as some have recently said. Mumford says: "In the name of progress, the limited but balanced economy of the Hindu village, with its local potter, its local spinners and weavers, its local smith, was overthrown for the sake of providing a market for the potteries of the Five Towns and the textiles of Manchester and the superfluous hardware of Birmingham. The result is impoverished villages in India, hideous and destitute towns in England, and a great wastage in tonnage and man-power in plying the oceans between: but at all events a victory for progress" (184-185).

When the machine is not used with the only aim of increasing production, things stand differently. Then, the question of finding an organic equilibrium –valid on a global, or planetary, scale– becomes possible, and the machine occupies its right place in the order of things. When, again, the machine is used artistically, art is dissolved throughout the fabric of the social, instead of becoming a mere phenomenon of "esthetic compensation," as Mumford puts it (199-205). In fact, the concept of art as compensation becomes critical in *Art and Technics*. Here Mumford says: "the more art can be integrated with the machine, the less need of art as a mere compensation" (2000, 154).

Art and Technics starts with the problem of mechanization, related to violence, nihilism, and the death of the human personality: "Man has become an exile in this mechanical world: or rather, even worse, he has become a Displaced Person" (9). The countermovement should bring about a displacement of the machine thus conceived and, as we have seen, a restoring of man at the center of the universe. This is certainly an unpopular way of talking today, for any humanist stance seems suspect. Yet, it is important to challenge these ideological assumptions and ask why the humanist discourse has fallen in such disrepute. Philosophically, it is easy to see that placing 'man' at the center of the universe is not at all a function of an arrogant and anthropocentric attitude, but rather the humble, responsible awareness that thinking is, in an eminent way, a human activity. Certainly, one can also accept the truth that stones think their own way, that trees and waters and the planets also think. Yet, from the point of view of what we are, our thinking is no less important than that of other beings, and the fact that we choose to express it in one way or the other, that is, the fact that choosing is the most

peculiar characteristic of human thinking, testifies to the responsibility we have toward ourselves and all other beings. Choosing thoughtlessness and destruction cannot be justified by, or find consolation in, the fact that we are being among many others, for the determination of freedom pertains to the human personality in a way which is completely unknown to all other beings. Together with freedom, there comes being responsible, and this should be understood in its universality. The attack against humanism, which became popular in the last part of the 20th century, only testifies to the superficiality of modern philosophical thinking, or rather to the objective confusion, the blindness, into which the century descended. Yet, no one has really shown what the merits of an 'anti-humanist' philosophy would be.

Admittedly, in the present work we have been using many unpopular concepts. The concept of humanism is one; another was the concept of totality. In Mumford, we find attention to both. This is how he states the problem: "The great problem of our time is to restore man's balance and wholeness" (11). The question of balance and wholeness, or synthesis and totality, is really central to our work as well. In this chapter on art, we are trying to see whether a position that challenges the common division between mere production and fine art is tenable. The answer, we already know, is positive. But for this answer to become a real solution, a viable alternative, it is necessary that the concept of labor undergo a fundamental change. This change, however, cannot be the outright abolition of labor, but the lifting of labor to the synthetic mode of human creativity. What must be abolished, we have seen, is the logic of productivism and capital, the regimentation of labor, and the reduction of the human being to the machine.

In his critique of technics and the machine, Mumford says something similar to what we are saying. For him, too, what must be abolished is not the machine, but, again, the logic of productivism and capital. I hope it is now evident what the link between the concept of technics and that of labor is. Labor is the subjectivity which, for Mumford, constitutes the missing element, the synthetic mode, in the development of technics. Technics, on the other hand, constitutes an essential moment in the development of the human personality and human world. Yet, when labor is deadlocked in the logic of capital, utilized by capital only for its own deadly edification, rendered useless to itself and its expressive and joyous activity, then, and only then, it enters a modality which must be abolished. Thus, abolished must be the 'how' of labor, not labor itself. And abolishing the 'how' of labor means, in this case, abolishing capital. The alternative is a different 'how', whereby labor becomes synonymous with art, and art, itself, a common concept.

The esthetic dimension of labor, really the core of labor's poetic ontology, has the character of a synthesis. Mumford calls for a synthesis of the subjective and the objective. He says that "where both aims, the esthetic and the technical, were pursued together, it had the happy result of producing an harmonious relation between the subjective and the objective life, between spontaneity and necessity, between fantasy and fact" (50). However, both concepts, subjective and objective, must be qualified. The right use of technics frees the human personality from "disorderly subjectivity" (*ibid.*), namely, that subjectivity which is often equated with the irrational, the idle and empty. On the other hand, objectivity is false and empty if it does not include the subject: "true subjectivity

must include every aspect of an experience, and therefore one of the most important sides, the subject, must not be left out" (55).

When this balance of the subjective and the objective is achieved –this being the only alternative out of the destructive path of our civilization– then the labor process can include the esthetic dimension which otherwise remains as a mere supplement, a compensation, to a fragmented life. In this sense, Mumford speaks of the craftsman of the past: "The craftsman, like the artist, lived *in* his work, *for* his work, *by* his work; the rewards of labor were intrinsic to the activity itself, and the effect of art was merely to heighten and intensify these natural organic processes – not to serve as mere compensation or escape" (62). This is not nostalgia for the past, however. Mumford simply says how the machine, "only a limited expression of the human spirit" (123), should not be identified with the totality of life. It is also important to note that this identification would not happen without the institutionalization of labor, whereby technics and art are completely separated. In this case, labor becomes a menial activity precisely because all the esthetic, creative value is taken away from it. Under capital, all that labor creates is capital itself, as well as its own reproduction only geared toward an endless production of its own death, so still an asset of capital. The spiral of madness, poverty, and death necessary to capital can only be broken by a labor able to equate basic and non-basic needs of life, to lower artistic production to the level of 'mere' production, or the other way around, raise 'mere' production to the level of art; it can only be broken by a labor that refuses to reproduce productivity and, like the craftsman of the past,

chooses to live *in*, *for*, and *by* its work. This is the meaning of labor's return to its immediacy.

It is now clear that when labor is conceived this way, it has little or nothing to do with political economy. We have also seen how the esthetic dimension of labor has the character of an ontological power, and in this sense we have equated esthetics with ontology. The commonality of the concept of labor becomes a central principle of a communist philosophy freed from all deterministic and productivist elements, for now labor is the same as art, and art is a philosophical as well as poetic disposition. Mumford says that "we must put ourselves in the mood and frame in which art becomes possible, as either creation or re-creation: above all, we must learn to pause, to be silent, to close our eyes and wait" (157). Of course, there is no quietism in this statement, but rather a sense of self-discipline and care. After all, there is in Mumford, as well as in our own discourse, attention to the practical aspects of life. Yet, it is necessary to find an alternative such that "all our mechanical operations, instead of being geared to produce the maximum quantity compatible with profit, will be geared to produce the maximum quantity compatible with a fully developed life for both the person and community" (155). Implementing this alternative is certainly not an easy task, but it is not an impossible task either. The question is choosing between a life which is truly worth living and a further descent into the social idiocy that threatens us, or rather, as Mumford puts it, the *esthetic idiocy* (138); choosing, in other words, between a life of freedom and dignity and the poverty or total loss of reason.

Conclusion: the solitude of labor

Every nature must produce its next, for each thing must unfold, seedlike, from indivisible principle into a visible effect.

Plotinus

I started this dissertation by asking the question as to whether living labor and productive labor were the same thing or not. We have found that they are not, and that productive labor is actually the form that keeps living labor from being what it could be. Specifically, reading Foucault, we have also found out that productive labor is nothing but living labor institutionalized in a certain way. Of course, we have seen that productive labor is still living labor, but a living labor torn away from its immediacy, its expansive power, and its solitude. To get to this answer I had to postulate the neutrality of living labor, a labor which is neither-productive-nor-unproductive before its descent into the categories of capital and political economy. However, I have made it clear that this neutral form of labor is not an abstraction of thought, but rather an ontological reality and structure. In other words, I have said that, whereas living labor is *always there*: a relation of nature, productive labor as defined by capital is not – capital itself is not, nor must it be.

In the first part of the dissertation, I looked at aspects of the critique of political economy. Through a close reading of sections of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and of the *Grundrisse*, we saw how Marx, by rejecting the essentialism of both traditional metaphysics and political economy (whereby capital would be an immutable and eternal relation of nature), lays the ground for those ontologies of liberation that only the rampant social idiocy of mainstream politics and

culture –with its institutions, bureaucracies, armies and police– keeps from becoming actual. We saw some of the problems one faces in radicalizing the ontology of labor and really entering a period of social revolution – problems that have to do also with the fact that often the subjective element is not ready or willing to revolutionize itself. We saw how this question becomes important in the second part of our work, particularly with Bookchin's critique of 'revolutionary' culture. And here a final reflection is in order.

I have said that this dissertation is not a defense of Marxism, but, of course, neither is it an attack against it. My welcoming the position of anarcho-communism as developed by Bookchin should not be taken as a question of choosing between one doctrine (Marxist communism) and the other (anarchism). In reality, I am not interested in this question at all, and I actually think that this kind of interest today (really, this sectarianism) can only have detrimental effects on the potentialities of revolutionary theory and praxis. What is at stake today is not assessing the superiority of one doctrine over the other, but rather thinking philosophically as a way of grounding the possibility of ethical and political (rational) action, as a way of effecting practical social change, real changes within the social. Indeed, I am not interested in who said what, but in the truthfulness and validity of what is being said – a position that also owes something to the Foucauldian paradigm of inquiry. Thus, for instance, I reject Baudrillard's critique of the revolutionary left, for it is merely destructive and ends in contradictions and nonsense. On the other hand, I accept Bookchin's critique because it represents a move forward in the direction of a correct understanding of the nature of labor as well as of the role of subjectivity in radicalizing rational action (radicalizing ontology, ethics and politics) and in subverting the order of society. In the section on Bookchin, I underline the importance

of his central concept of the tension between what-is and what-could-be (presented by him as the central contradiction of capitalist society). This concept points toward a renewed conception of utopia, which is as necessary to social transformation as a lucid analysis is – for it represents, at least in thought (but a thought that values the power of imagination), the moment of synthesis, without which all analysis remains useless. In this sense, I spoke of the reality of utopia, and I said that the mechanical, teleological and onto-theological *ought* must be replaced by the immanence of the *could*.

Chapter 4, the first chapter of part 2, is really a transitional chapter toward the working out of an ontology of liberation (or many ontologies, as I have said). In a sense, this second part remains open, unfinished. We saw that a different understanding of the concept of labor, which begins to become thematic in the section on Bookchin, is the subject of the final two chapters. To be sure, this new understanding of labor is grounded in Marx's critique of political economy and begins with him. Later, it is carried out by both thinkers within the Marxist tradition (such as Gramsci) and outside it (this is the case with Bookchin and Mumford). This new understanding sees labor as the central category of social ontology and history; but this is an adequate concept of labor – adequate because it constitutes the synthetic moment of a poetic praxis, where the subjective and the objective are re-united, the technical and the artistic (as in Mumford) are its equally necessary components; a concept which is located on this side of the objective nexus between technical development and political power (the nexus of hegemony) criticized by Gramsci. It is adequate because it takes into consideration the human factor (as Mumford says), it recuperates this factor and *becomes* human, and in so doing it establishes an adequate relationship with the environment as well.

Thus, the dissertation has both a philosophical and political intent. Philosophically, labor becomes the central category of a poetic ontology (a poetic metaphysics) which, in the spirit of Vico, subverts the order of the human sciences. Labor here is *making*, in all its expressions and manifestations; but it is also the synthetic coming together of making and doing. In this sense, this new poetic ontology becomes, in turn, a new science of the way in which one runs one's habitat, that is, a science of the *oikos*: economy and ecology at the same time. It becomes an ethics in the original sense of *ethos* as the kinship of human beings and nature – we ourselves a part of nature: a kinship which is often conflictual, even disastrous and tragic, yet unsurpassable. It is then an original disposition in which the necessary or freely chosen manipulation of the elements, of the given, may go in the direction of a deepening of life's experience, the meaning of the human adventure, the awareness of history. This ethics grasps the truth that our care (for ourselves, for others, and for the universe as a whole) is the only meaningful function of that reason that we too often vilify only to find ourselves engaged in a movement of destruction and self-destruction, heading toward an abyss, a movement we call 'progress'. In this sense, this dissertation is a re-evaluation of what it means to do philosophy, not in the academic sense, but in the sense of living a philosophical life. In fact, it is not such a re-evaluation because it deals with all possible aspects of philosophical thinking, for it does not. Nor because it claims to represent a new philosophical paradigm, for, again, it does not do that either. Rather, because it calls attention to the necessity of rethinking –following some authors who have worked in that direction– some fundamental concepts of experience, notably the concept of labor, and in general of thinking *tout court*. The ethical dimension, which does not really become

thematic in our work, pervades it nonetheless; and it is actually an ethical concern that made this work possible in the first place.

The various fields and sub-fields of philosophy we are accustomed to are only the product of our analytical need for a certain order of thought and discourse. In reality, the activity of thinking always deals synthetically with the whole. It is in this sense that our poetic ontology seems to become in turn one or the other of the various philosophical disciplines, to have to do with politics and ethics, with the practical sciences, and finally with esthetics, which is, together with economy, a science of production. We have already solved the question as to the distinction between production and action; we have seen that they are compatible with, and really necessary to, one another. But this poetic ontology is also an esthetics because the senses become, as Marx says, *theoreticians in their immediate praxis*, and what they make is a sensible and secular world: a world which is made, which can be undone and remade. At least, this is so at the level of potentiality, and it is there that the esthetic dimension has its power intact, for, otherwise, it is soon turned into an institutional simulacrum: the State, Philosophy (in the narrowest academic sense), the Work of Art. However, when esthetics is a poetic ontology of the type we have seen, it remains on this side of the distinctions (one of them being the division of labor) which turn it into a mere compensation of all other categories of experience.

This crossing of different territories within the philosophical discourse is in itself an element in the political intent of the dissertation. In thinking, too, when it becomes institutional, as in all other forms of labor, specialization entails a loss of the organic relationship with the whole. In this sense, I have tried to cross the boundaries, to

transgress and do away with the categorical wall, the cold cubicles, of which the birth and growth of political economy are an eminent historical example. For the rest, the political dimension of this work has to do with ideas and positions which did not originate in me but which I have joined and adopted: the awareness that "[t]he world does not smell very good" (Lewontin, 1992, 118), the principle of hope, the evident and intelligent truth that another world is possible.

The solitude of labor is labor's independence and autonomy, its remaining on this side of the odious nexus which, left to itself, powerless without the source of its power, will consume in the glacial blaze of its own contradictions, its own madness, indifference, and greed.

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