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Against, Outside & Beyond

The Perspective of Autonomy in the 21st Century

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University
I declare that the material contained in this thesis is entirely my own work, conducted under the supervision of Dr David West, except where due and accurate acknowledgement of another source has been made.

18/08/08
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I am thankful for the opportunity provided to me by the Australian National University, and deeply grateful and honoured by the Graduate School Scholarship that allowed me to take up full time research.

During the time of writing this thesis countless struggles have taken place across the globe, some close to home, some further away. I have endeavoured to make this work porous to and receptive of these struggles. During the time of writing this thesis militants across the globe have faced repression, imprisonment and death for resisting capitalism. It is these people, these struggles, we, the multitude; it is us and our lives, who are the real subject of this thesis.

The picture on the title page is by Eric Drooker and is entitled “Slingshot” and is used under the provisions of Creative Commons.
This thesis is a critical engagement with the work of John Holloway, the Midnight Notes Collective and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno. All these authors are part of 'the perspective of autonomy', a heterodox tendency of communist thought that aims to understand capitalism from the point of view of labour's rebellious self-activity. These authors can be broken into three more specific tendencies: against (John Holloway), outside (the Midnight Notes Collective), and beyond (Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno). Here I present the analysis and politics of each, as well as critical reflections on their limitations and failings. Each tendency provides refreshing understandings of capitalism and struggle, which helps us revive a communist understanding of our condition. Yet in all three tendencies we see the recurring error of trying to stretch their insights too far: as an explanation for 'everything' and in the hope of providing an objective basis for proletarian solidarity. This limits their ability to suggest paths forward for the creation of militant forms of activity. It is the hope that this study will help the development of better understandings of capitalism, class and struggle and contribute to the development of emancipatory politics.
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Introduction

Capital, it fails us now...

Gang of Four

The central task of this thesis is to see how three related tendencies of what we call here the perspective of autonomy can aid in the development of emancipatory anti-capitalist politics. This thesis then rests on the claim that overcoming capitalism is both desirable and possible. As such its core premise is out of joint with the prevailing commonsense of the day. Today the accepted position in relation to the viability of capitalism is one of two variations. Firstly that capitalism, especially in its liberal democratic mode, is taken as the only and best of all possible worlds; so much so that the very word capitalism begins to disappear from our vocabulary – as if simply stating its name would create the idea that there are other possible systems or forms of social organisation. The second variation may express a critique of how things are, but excludes the possibility that there is anything we can really do about it. Both the possibility of other societies and the very existences of subjects and struggles that can create them are dismissed. Apparently such hopes disappeared somewhere between the Gulag and the Shopping Mall. We are told that any alternatives to capitalism have proven to be worse than what they tried to replace and the very social forces that were meant to bring them into being have dissipated: either by the successes and opulence of the commodity economy or the immiseration it creates. When the wretched of the earth do appear on the screens of the ‘spectacle’ (or as objects of study) they either carry banners not of the *Internationale* but of the atavistic claims of communalisms, identity and religion or else they appear only as victims

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For example: “Marco Cicala, a Leftist Italian journalist, told me about his recent weird experience: when, in an article, he once used the word "capitalism," the editor asked him if the use of this term is really necessary - could he not replace it by a synonymous one, like "economy"? What better proof of the total triumph of capitalism than the virtual disappearance of the very term in the last 2 or 3 decades?” Slavoj Žižek, *Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses* (2007 [cited 15th January 2008]); available from http://www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm.
Those who still hold criticisms and reservations about capitalism (and who have no desire to revive a mythic past/future of organic religious or ethnic wholeness) are then offered one of two choices. They can maintain the robustness of their critique but dispense with the methods to realise it; or they can engage in the realism of liberalism in the hope of ameliorating certain injustices. Of course the dominant ideological solution to the problems of liberal capitalist democracy is more liberal capitalist democracy. Whether the issue is ecological destruction, poverty, authoritarianism, whatever, we get the same solution: a solution to be taken up in orchestrated ‘colour’ revolutions or imposed through sanctions and soldiers (with or without blue helmets; with or without cluster bombs or food aid). The attempts at amelioration soon give way under the pressures of commonsense and the very weight of capitalist society. Thus the solution to the global AIDS crisis is not free medication for the poor, a largely un-radical demand, but rather to use credit cards promoted by Bono and Oprah. The benevolence of capitalists is the replacement for even mild and reformist critiques of capitalism.

Those who keep their critiques may keep their honour. Yet when it comes to a substantive challenge, an antagonistic politics that can confront the reality of capitalism there is a stunning silence – or wise warnings about the inherent totalitarianism of all meta-narratives, especially those built around notions of revolution. And thus with a step into social democracy, transformed by

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iv This is the common political position of much of what is called post-modernism and amongst English language Cultural Studies. Žižek argues that “today’s critical theory, in the guise of ‘cultural studies’, is performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible: in the predominant form of postmodern ‘cultural criticism’, the very mention of capitalism as a world
commonsense into a variant of liberalism, we are soon left with no real critique at all. Of course one may easily object to the vicious brutality and stupidity of neo-conservatives but that is far from actually critiquing capitalism let alone arguing for a militant and emancipatory politics.

Often when one is outraged by the latest horror or banality of capitalism part of our objection is to its seemingly overwhelming power to shape and compel our existence. The underside of this objection is our own subjective feeling of powerlessness. Take for example this insight into the role of capital in shaping our lives made by Wendy Brown:

Yet if capitalism has all but disappeared as a subject and object of political theory (notwithstanding routine drive-by references to “globalization”), capitalism is and remains our life form. Understood not just as a mode of production, distribution, or exchange but as an unparalleled maker of history, capital arguably remains the dominant force in the organization of collective human existence, conditioning every element of social, political, cultural, intellectual, emotional, and kin life. Indeed, what for Marx constituted the basis for a critique of capital deeper than its exploitation and denigration of labor, deeper than the disparities between wealth and poverty it organized, is that capital is a larger, more creative and more nearly total form of power than anything else in human history, yet it fundamentally escapes human control.²

Brown’s position, which potently describes the power of capital, also describes our impotence. Any theory that wants to abolish capitalism has to invert the image so perfectly described by Brown. It has to show not the power of capitalism but its weakness, not our hopelessness but our fecundity. It rests on arguing that the subjective experience of powerlessness does not constitute our objective reality: that there is something more.

Historically the revolutionary idea of class fulfilled this function. Not class as a simple socio-economic category for the marking of inequalities but class as the idea that within the conditions of exploitation exist the forces and agents for the system tends to give rise to accusations of ‘essentialism’, ‘fundamentalism’, and so on. “Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology (London & New York: Verso, 2000), 218.
overturning of the dominant order. Obviously this finds an incandescent depiction in Marx's idea of the proletariat. In the *German Ideology* the proletariat is seen not merely as the subject of exploitation, but as those who through their condition of exploitation are formed as a radical substance that can realise the emancipation of all through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Their power arises despite and because of their apparent powerlessness:

Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces and in the thus postulated development of a totality of capacities.  

However, the paradigm of class that constituted the old revolutionary project has come asunder. It has been broken from many sides: the structural changes to capitalism, the incorporation and management of social democracy and the radical claims and challenges of other social struggles. The apparent universalism of the industrial proletariat created a privileged site and methodology of struggle that marginalised the marginalised. It often functioned as a reified image that was used against novel, inspiring and daring struggles and revolts against capitalism – especially those on the campuses, from the kitchens, out of the ghettos and in the peripheries. The official labour movement dragged the working class into the butchery of the First World War and then into class peace and compromise. Finally the restructuring of post-Fordism has seen the mass factory broken apart and new and strange organisations of labour created in complex arrangements across the globe.

In this thesis I present different voices that radically rework the idea of class and attempt to revive its emancipatory potential – and do so in ways that make it refreshing and strange. Each voice – John Holloway, the Midnight Notes Collective and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno – is, in the broadest sense, part a tendency of 'the perspective of autonomy' or 'Autonomist Marxism'. Obviously I use the word 'tendency' very loosely (can an individual be a tendency?): they do not constitute a
tendency in an older, Leninist sense. Rather each voice journeys in a certain
direction, makes certain arguments, and suggests certain ways forward. They have
been chosen as subjects of study and comparison because they all have something
very interesting and novel to say. Also, with the exception of Antonio Negri, there
exist, to my knowledge, no sustained studies undertaken in English on their work.
They have also been chosen because each of them illuminates a broader position
about the overturning of capitalism. Holloway's work largely focuses on negation,
on being against capitalism. The Midnight Notes Collective on building and
defending an outside. Negri and Virno focus on the necessity of going beyond
capitalism. Hence the title: 'Against, outside and beyond'. Each author or group is
given three chapters; the first in which I analyse their understandings of capitalism
and the second their suggestions for political practice. In the third chapter I
present my own critiques.

The Perspective of Autonomy

Our new approach starts from the proposition that, at both national and international level,
it is the specific, present, political situation of the working class that both necessitates and
directs the given forms of capital's development. From this beginning we must now move
forward to a new understanding of the entire world network of social relations.4

But what is this "perspective of autonomy"? Often called Autonomist Marxism,
here the term "perspective of autonomy" is chosen largely for aesthetic reasons: it
sounds better.4 Also it emphasises that what holds this increasingly diverse affinity
of writers together is a certain way of looking at the world, a certain radical
perspective. It views capitalism from the position of labour's immanent ability to
act autonomously – to take control of itself and thus society. Historically it formed
out of the Italian experience of operaismo (workerism) and autonomia
(autonomism) from the 1960s and 1970s. It was largely ignored in the English-

4 The term is used by Dyer-Witheford, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Cyber-Marx: Cycles of Struggle in High-
speaking world. There are no easily available translations of the vast majority of the early work of operaismo.\textsuperscript{vi} Even Negri, who must now be seen as an international figure of politics and philosophy, was relatively unknown and ignored before the publication of Empire. He might have been talked about in relation to the turmoil of 1977, but he was not taken seriously as a political thinker except by a small handful of ultraleft radicals.\textsuperscript{vii} The more recent attention given to Negri often has the very counterproductive result of reducing the complexity of operaismo, autonomia and what comes after them, to his work alone. In this way the creative tensions and dynamism of a movement can be reduced to one person who can then be normalised into the role of the philosopher and inserted politely into the rotating selection of theorists that serve an institutionalised realm of thought broken from the muddy conflicts in society. Whilst obviously this thesis is a thing of the university, I hope it engages with theory in ways that connect with the concerns of broader living politics.

Currently there exist some excellent writings on the perspective of autonomy. For example there is the indispensible history of operaismo entitled Storming Heaven written by Steve Wright.\textsuperscript{5} For a short introduction to the basics of the perspective the introduction to Reading Capital Politically by Harry Cleaver is invaluable, and Nick Dyer-Witheford’s book Cyber-Marx both provides an introduction to the ideas and sets them to work to produce a radical understanding of contemporary capitalism, labour and the digital economy.\textsuperscript{6} The introduction to Negri’s Politics of Subversion written by Yann Boulier also provides an interesting history of the context of Negri’s work.\textsuperscript{7} Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt provide us with Radical Thought in Italy, a collection of relatively contemporary (early to mid 1990s) writings from Italy that show how the perspective of autonomy was

\textsuperscript{vi} Parts of chapters and short works by authors such as Tronti, Bologna and Panizeri are available on the internet on radical websites (see for example libcom.org), and the journals Telos and Radical America published articles by Tronti in the 1970s. Yet there are no complete published translations of their works. There has been some small, yet growing interest in Mario Tronti as a response to a growing sense of disenchantment with Negri – Tronti has taken a very different journey from operaismo to today.

\textsuperscript{vii} Here the terms “small”, “ultraleft” and “radical” are not used pejoratively – indeed it is often such publications like Aufheben from the UK that have kept alive a practice of critical heterodox communist thinking in a time of general political defeat. Such publications have been especially good for actually putting theory to work. Cf. Aufheben ([cited 14th April 2008]); available from http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/.
rethinking its foundations in the context of new situations. All these texts are recommended in order to orientate oneself to the fundamentals of this perspective.

The authors presented here differ in many ways from each other as well as from the original work carried out in Italy by the operaismo in the 1960s; yet their work shares core positions. These positions are presented here, but are argued for more substantially throughout the thesis. The first, and possibly the most important, is often described as the “Copernican inversion” of Marxism made by Mario Tronti in Lenin In England. Here Tronti makes the argument that Marxism on the whole has viewed capitalism from the wrong perspective, and this perspective has to be turned upside down. Too often the depiction of capitalist societies sees the dominance of capital and the subordination of the working class. Thus, except for moments of crisis when capitalism, due to its own internal processes, stumbles or when the class is armed by an exterior political force, the proletariat is largely trapped within the power of capitalist society. This view of capital’s power reflects both the ideological dominance of capital and a common emotional and subjective experience of the conditions of living within capitalist society and ideology. Tronti argues that this has to be turned over and that capitalism must be grasped from the perspective of the struggle of labour:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital’s own reproduction must be tuned.

Struggle comes first. Just as capital is made from the substance of the work of labour, the political life in capitalist society is made from the struggles of labour – in a similarly reified and inverted form. Our understanding of capitalism cannot

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viii Here ideology can be used in the sense that Žižek uses it – not as a veil that covers reality but as a social fantasy that constitutes part of our reality. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London & New York: Verso, 1999).
then be one that emphasises the power of capital as victor and the hopelessness of the victim (whatever the rhetorical power of such a moral claim). Rather the perspective of autonomy sees labour as potentially and in practice autonomous from capital and capital as fundamentally reactive to the struggles of labour. Labour is autonomous in the sense that it struggles to exist in many ways 'before' capital – labour is not dependent on capital for its existence as a social force. And labour is autonomous in the way it fights and what it fights for. It struggles by declaring, and for, its autonomy. Nick Dyer-Witheford, who also quotes the above passage, draws these conclusions from Tronti's position:

Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is in fact the active subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends. Capital attempts to incorporate labor as an object, a component in its cycle of value extraction, so much labor power. But this inclusion is always partial, never fully achieved. Laboring subjects resist capital's reduction.11

Such an argument is counter-intuitive to both liberal and revolutionary commonsense. How can labour come first? Surely any kind of radical history sees the proletariat as a product: the problem child of the bourgeoisies’ destruction of pre-capitalist social forms and the imposition of the wage-relationship. Tronti’s response is that the existence of capital is premised on the existence of something to be exploited into capital – capital cannot just appear from thin air:

If the conditions of capital are in the hands of the workers', if there is no active life in capital without the living activity of labour power, if capital is already, at its birth, a consequence (sic) of productive labour, if there is no capitalist society without the workers (sic) articulation, in other words if there is no social relationship with out (sic) a class relationship, and there is no class relationship without the working class, then one can conclude that the capitalist class, from its birth, is in fact subordinate to the working class.12

Capitals’ exploitation of labour is not a sign of its strength, but rather its weakness, its dependence on those it rules over. Thus to say capitalism is vampiric is not a moral condemnation but rather a precise diagnosis of its conditions – it is the dead reified stuff that is taken from the activity, the very life-blood, of the living. Tronti writes, “[e]xploitation is born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape
from its de facto subordination to the class of worker-producers.” That is, capital’s drive to increase its exploitation is part of its struggle against its dependency, against its existence as a creation of a force (labour-power) that it attempts to control. The autonomist claim, which is revisited throughout this work, is that the attempts by capital to increase its exploitation ultimately only increase its dependency.

This leads to the second claim by the perspective of autonomy that runs through the three tendencies we shall look at: that it is the struggle of labour that drives capitalism. Tronti writes that "[c]apitalist power seeks to use the workers (sic) antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development." The struggle of workers against capital is often taken up by capital to reinvent and reinvigorate itself. But since the struggle against capital is often the struggle against work, capital’s attempts to break our revolts and recuperate our demands often involve the profound reinvention of how we labour. This is explored in the idea of class composition, as Dyer-Witheford summarises:

Class composition is in constant change. If workers resisting capital compose themselves as a collectivity, capital must strive to decompose or break up this threatening cohesion. It does this by constant revolutionizing of the means of production - by recurrent restructurings, involving organisational changes and technological innovations that divide, deskill, or eliminate dangerous groups of workers. But since capital is a system that depends on its power to organise labour through the wage, it cannot entirely destroy its antagonist. Each capitalist restructuring must recruit new and different types of labor, and thus yield the possibility of working-class recomposition involving different strata of workers with fresh capacities of resistance and counterinitiative. 14

Whilst John Holloway, The Midnight Notes Collective, and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno all take the perspective of autonomy in very different directions, what it gives each of them is the ability to attempt to come to terms with the vast changes in the organisation of capitalism over the last 30+ years. Rather than holding to a static and largely sociological understanding of class they create depictions of struggle, dynamism and change. What I put forward here is that it is
the various authors' engagement with these understandings that allows them to construct vital and lively analyses of capitalism and also helps us imagine potential communist politics and activity.

Communism?

In the following pages — perhaps to the surprise or dismay of some of our readers — we will speak not only of labor, exploitation and capitalism, but also of class conflict, proletarian struggles, and even communist futures. Do dinosaurs still walk the earth?!

Throughout this thesis the term communism is used to signify both the movement against capitalism and the post-capitalist condition of emancipation. This may seem anachronistic, naive, obscene and/or callous. To the dominant understanding of our times communism is nothing more than either a tragic delusion or the pure expression of totalitarianism. Communism, we are told, equals Year Zero. Also does not the current ascendency of anarchism as the hegemonic ideology in anti-capitalism in the North make it unnecessary to use a term so covered in blood and filth? Especially since communism is equated with state control, the overt anti-authoritarianism and anti-statism of anarchism seems to mean that it is not only 'cleaner', it also responds directly to the bitter failings of the 20th century. I use communism in this study simply because all three tendencies still describe their own positions as communist, and also because I believe communism as a concept, maintains an ethical, philosophical and political potency.

Communism will probably remain for many only the name of a crime; but we must also acknowledge that it has existed and continues to exist as a name for collective emancipation. The sharpest critiques of Stalinism have, and are, often made by those who maintain a fidelity to communism and who use materialist understandings to expose the links and discontinuities between ideologies and
structures of a society. There exist many powerful communist critiques of the party-state, and the perspective of autonomy is one of them. The authors presented in this thesis are all attempting to revive communism as a tool to understand both our struggles and the potential future they create. But this cannot be done by simply wishing away the legacy of Stalinism – rather the authors, in their different ways, try to grapple with the failures of ‘really existing socialism’ and develop an understanding of the present, a politics of struggle, and a vision of the future that is founded on the possibilities of freedom.

But if communism is not the reign of the party-state then what is it? For if communism means anything, if there is anything to it, it is an opposition to the complex and bound-together forms of domination and control that constitute capitalism – the freeing of human potential through the self-activity of the oppressed. Of course there is a great variety of visions of what emancipation looks like amongst communists – part of the task of this thesis is to see how different authors take up the challenge of envisioning other worlds. Of course there is also the tendency of many communists to refuse to make blueprints of the future – rather they critique the present and try to aid the development of struggles. Such a position trusts the creativity of the multitude in struggle to create the forms of its freedom. In words communism can only be described in the broadest of terms, but it is lived in the most vibrant of ways.

Marx envisioned communism as the profound transformation of social life through the activity and struggle of millions, “the alteration of men (sic) on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution”.16 A revolution not only to destroy the old order; but also as a series of processes that will change those who carry out the revolution – so they can free themselves from “all the muck of ages.”17 Badiou writes that there are certain “communist invariants”, certain core elements of the communist position.18 He lists these to include: “[e]galitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to break with the compromises of the service of goods, the deposing of egotism, the intolerance
of oppression, the vow to end the State..."\(^{19}\) Badiou is quick to locate these invariants in actual, real struggles:

> From Spartacus to Mao (not the Mao of the State, who also exists, but the rebellious extreme, complicated Mao), from the Greek democratic insurrections to the worldwide decade 1966-1976, it is and has been, in this sense, a question of communism. It will always be a question of communism, even if the word, soiled, is replaced by some other designation of the concept that it covers, the philosophical and thus eternal concept of rebellious subjectivity.\(^{20}\)

As the edifices of the Soviet Union have crumbled the various other still rebellious voices of communism have found more space to put forward their unorthodox critiques and visions: all of which contain a great deal of variety in thought and inspiration.\(^{ix}\) But what many share with the quote from Badiou, who as a post-Maoist represents a very different (and once again in English largely unexamined) line of communist thinking from the ones presented in this work, is the idea that communism emerges from the struggles of real people in the present.\(^{x}\) A clear description of this position is made in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels:

> Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.\(^{21}\)

This means that communism cannot be thought of as just a nice alternative. Rather it already exists, at least as a potential, in the lived actual conditions of society. To practice communism then is to practice a material critique of the material conditions: to see, show and make the possibilities of the present radically different. Hardt and Negri write that "[t]here are two closely related elements of the communist theoretical practice proposed by this quote from Marx."\(^{22}\) These are the "analysis of the 'present state of things'”, and grasping what Marx calls “the

\(^{ix}\) One of the best English language resources for anti-statist and non-Leninist communist writings is libcom.org

\(^{x}\) For a study of Badiou's politics see Peter Hallward, *Badiou : A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
real movement’ that destroys” that present state. In other words communist analysis tries to develop understandings of the present state of things that can then aid the creation of collective politics. I have attempted to follow this methodology in this thesis. Hence the first chapter on each tendency will present their analysis of the contemporary composition and antagonisms of capitalism, and the second the potential politics that arises from this. The third will present my critical responses to both.

As for anarchism, there is a general ambivalence towards it amongst all three tendencies. Holloway is willing to acknowledge the similarities of his position to anarchism, whilst Negri emphasises the differences. However in the English speaking, global North outside of the university it is most often only amongst anarchist circles that you will find any ongoing discussion of the perspective of autonomy. The communism of the perspective of autonomy is, in content, deeply similar to the content of what many people call anarchy. Is there a substantial difference? If there is, it is on the question of materialism. Speaking crudely communists (as noted above) see communism arising from specific and concrete historical conditions – anarchists either ascribe it to some essential human nature or to the correctness of its ideology. Debord acerbically writes that anarchism is an “ideology of pure freedom”. That is, it exists as a series of wonderful ideas to which people must be won and transformed – ideas that exist seemingly exterior to the historical conditions of our lives. Debord here is characteristically too savage and he downplays the pluralism and intellectual freedom that exists within anarchism. Yet the core of his critique is an accurate description of the failings of much of anarchism. Anarchism has and does delineate a space where many brilliant ideas and utopian dreams develop and take flight – but it is often ungrounded and absorbed in its own ideology. Against this, communist critique (at its best) rigorously tries to free itself from ideology, to be rather a series of tools to be taken up in the struggles, deeply concerned with contradiction, and engaged in the real, existing material conditions.
1 Andy Gill, "Capital (It Fails Us Now)," Another Day/Another Dollar, Gang of Four (EMI/Warner Bros, 1982).


10 Tronti, Lenin in England.


13 Ibid.


17 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology Part One, 94-95.


19 Ibid., 98.

20 Ibid., 98-99.


Section 1: John Holloway: Against Capital

Chapter 1: In the Beginning is the Scream. The Theory of John Holloway

Introduction

We start from the scream, not from the word. Faced with the mutilation of human lives by capitalism, a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: NO.1

Our first engagement with a contemporary manifestation of the perspective of autonomy is the work of John Holloway. John Holloway’s work provides a radical, ambitious and challenging repositioning of Marx, and a critical engagement with both operaismo/autonomia and the Frankfurt School – especially Adorno. The main work of his we shall be dealing with is Change the World Without Taking Power, complemented with a comprehensive look at accompanying articles and interviews. Holloway’s work is breathtaking in its ambition: it attempts to open up a deeply radical and libertarian version of communism and of communist praxis. The struggles of the EZLN, of the ‘movement of movements’ and of Horizontalism in Argentina play a pivotal role in his work, though the accuracy of his depictions of these struggles is sometimes questionable. His analysis of both the nature of capital and the struggle against it is posed against the vast majority of previous Left positions, especially those of state-centred Leninism and Social Democracy. The core of his work is negation, the breaking of all the fetishised and reified forms
that constitute the social relations of capital. Both the struggle against capitalism, and the very nature of those who struggle, is negative: the assertion of an against. He begins his “Twelve Theses on Changing the World without taking Power” with “[t]he starting point is negativity.” This is both a more general statement about the nature of struggle and a specific definition of his own perspective on the work of theory.

Holloway’s work rejects any pretence of a neutral analysis of capital; rather it is self-consciously partisan and is framed in the same scream of “NO” that he ascribes as the basis of communist praxis. He writes “I take my stance in the printing house of hell.” This is an allusion to William Blake, that “the devils print ‘in the infernal method, using corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.” Holloway continues: “[t]heory, then, is part of the struggle to destroy capitalism. The starting point of theory is a scream against capitalism. The theoretical challenge is to elaborate that scream...” Yet Holloway’s method is not an embracing of a brash nihilism, but rather that negation is the point from which a better form of human existence can emerge. Negation, especially that of the reified and fetishised forms of capitalist existence, opens up other possibilities. Holloway writes:

The negative, corrosive, infernal movement of theory is at the same time the theoretical emancipation of human doing. The melting away of the apparent (fetishised) surfaces is immediately and directly the displaying of the infinite which was hid (the creative power of social doing).

Already with Holloway’s work we see very clearly that the structure that I have chosen for this thesis, the division between the analysis of capitalism and the politics necessary to overcome it can only be grasped as an artificial abstraction to ease comprehension. For in autonomist methodology it is an error to separate an analysis of capitalism and the politics that oppose it, since it is the conflicts in the material conditions of capitalism that give rise to communist praxis. Indeed labour,
as a constant opposition to capitalism, is the cornerstone of the perspective of autonomy’s cosmology. Here politics is the practice of cohering the already present refusals and struggles into the abolition of capitalism – not the entry of struggle into an otherwise stable or self-reproducing system. This reaches diamond point sharpness in Holloway’s work: capitalism is defined as being composed of constant, internal struggles, tensions, refusals and negations that open up the possibility of communist praxis. However, in both his analysis of capitalism and his suggested politics there seems to be two serious flaws: firstly, can negation really build communism? And secondly, despite his attempts to value multiplicity and autonomy, his theorisation is based on a universalism that denies the specificity, contingency and uniqueness of different struggles – rather it absorbs them under a catchall framework.

**Theoretical Inheritance**

Holloway’s work is a radicalisation of the perspective of autonomy through an engagement with the Frankfurt School and vice versa. He writes:

> The development of the autonomist project (the drive towards social self-determination) requires critical theory (just as, indeed, the development of critical theory requires the autonomist project – and not the social-democratic ruminations of Habermas, for example).\(^6\)

He suggests that both Tronti and Adorno, who seem so very opposed, needed each other: even if putting them together is a “creative violence”\(^7\). From autonomism he takes the struggle of labour as the central element in the nature of, and the key to understanding capitalism. From the Frankfurt School he takes the conception of struggle(s) as struggle against a constituted identity. Holloway combines these positions to argue that the struggle of labour is the dynamic force in capitalist society and that this force is a *negative* one. From here Holloway creates an understanding of struggle within capitalism in a way that opens the possibility of a
deeply radical politics that breaks with the defeats, compromises and statism of so much of the historical experience of those whom have seemingly opposed capitalism.

For the perspective of autonomy, proletarian struggle is the motor-force of capitalism. Holloway agrees with this position but argues that the formulations of Tronti and Negri et al do not sufficiently radicalise the categories of capital to explain the general explosive dynamism of the power of labour’s rebellion. Following Tronti's *Lenin in England*, the perspective of autonomy applies a “complete reversal of the traditional Marxist approach, seeing working-class struggle as determining capitalist development...” The original autonomist analysis starts from the refusals of workers on the factory floor and then blossoms outwards. As Holloway summarises, the *operaismo* paradigm sees capitalism developing in reaction to the labour’s revolts:

Taking as its focus first the struggles in the factories, the autonomist analysis shows how all the organisational and technical innovations introduced by management can be understood as a response designed to overcome the force of insubordination on the part of workers. Labour's insubordination can thus be seen as the driving force of capital.

Through the constant tussle of resistance on the factory floor, and the constant attempts to reimpose control, class and struggle take on a certain “composition”. That is a certain way of working (levels of technology, patterns of cooperation, certain divisions of labour etc) is produced in these ongoing conflicts. The constant innovation that typifies capitalism is driven by struggle. Holloway writes:

By analogy with Marx's idea that capital at any point is characterised by a certain technical and value composition, depending on the relation between constant capital (that part of the capital represented by machinery and raw materials) and variable capital (that part of the capital which corresponds to wages), the autonomists developed the concept of class composition to denote the relation between labour and capital at any moment.

Yet as mentioned in the introduction a new composition does not destroy struggle, rather it just changes the shape of the contestation on which capital and labour oppose each other.
In the next chapter we shall look at how Holloway specifically disagrees with Negri over questions of political practice. Here we shall look at how Holloway disagrees with the classic operaismo about how labour is conceptualised. Holloway wants to keep the core thesis – that the struggle of labour is the motor force of capitalism; but he wants to radicalise what is meant by labour. Rather than just seeing labour as a positive and creative force that generates both wealth and opposition, he posits its struggle as labour abolishing its condition of being labour; thus its struggle is negation. For Holloway the work of operaismo typified labour’s struggle as affirmation, capital’s reaction as negation.

In orthodox Marxist theory, capital is the positive subject of capitalist development. In autonomist theory, the working class becomes the positive subject: that is why the positive concepts of class composition and class re-composition are on the side of the working class, while the negative concept of decomposition is placed on the side of capital.\textsuperscript{11}

Holloway firmly rejects such a schema. He argues that all it does is reverse the underpinnings of orthodox Marxism rather than making a genuine radical break with it, which simply repeats the initial error. He writes:

The autonomist project of operaismo was ambiguous precisely because it did not go far enough, because it did not question the identitarian concept of the working class as an identifiable group of people. It turns the capital-labour relation on its head, but to be consistent, it should have turned the whole world on its head, putting non-identity at the centre of the way we breathe and the way we think.\textsuperscript{12}

For Holloway the problem with starting with the working class as a positive subject “presupposes a prior constitution of the working class.”\textsuperscript{13} In other words labour exists as force, as a potentially autonomous subject, that can push itself out of capitalism pretty much as it is. It leaves no room for the radical critique of labour as being labour – which as we shall see is central to Holloway’s understanding of communism.
The above means the conception of class composition becomes a problem. For class composition implies a certain solidity and stability. It is, to quote Holloway, a "way of characterising a period of capitalism."\(^{14}\) Holloway argues that this characterisation means that except in moments of turmoil the balance of class forces assumes a form of stability.\(^{15}\) Also class composition as methodology reads a certain composition to ascertain the appropriate strategies of subversion. Thus it often prioritises certain forms of labour, and ascribes to them pivotal positions and power. \(\text{We shall encounter two different attempts at this in the following chapters.}\) Holloway rather, by posing the struggle of labour as that of against being labour, sees a "contradictory, desperately self-antagonistic subject."\(^{16}\) No form of labour is prioritised as \textit{all} forms of labour are seen as divided, contradictory and open to subversion. The other side to this is a tendency to ahistoricism and universalism in his work. Thus Holloway takes the initial impulse of Tronti’s ‘Copernican inversion’, but has to retell it to fit in with his conception of struggle in capitalist society.

Holloway’s attempt to radicalise the perspective of autonomy through a \textit{negative} concept of struggle shows the influence of critical theory. It is from writers like Adorno that Holloway takes his ideas of negation. It is with Adorno’s help that Holloway develops an understanding of labour’s struggle as a struggle against what it has been made into:

\begin{quote}
We are part of an antagonistic entirety in which the "subject [is] the subject’s foe". Dialectics exists because we are in the wrong place, in the wrong sort of society: "dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction." The dialectical we is the contradictory we who live in-and-against capitalist society, a non-identitarian class we.\(^{17}\)
\end{quote}

Yet Holloway also radically challenges writers like Adorno. Holloway’s objection to critical theory is its tendency to theoretically deny or reduce the spaces from which real rebellion can develop. Those familiar with Adorno will recognise the tendency in his work to present a captivating image of capitalism
from which there is little or no escape. Against this Holloway wants to apply the optimism of operaismo and an understanding of the hope of revolt.

Holloway does this by rejecting what he sees as the “hard fetishism” in the work of theorists such as Adorno and Lukacs. Hard fetishism as an approach sees fetishisation as a process that is essentially closed; once something is fetishised it is largely trapped in the social process of that fetishisation. It thus creates a certain temporality where the possibility for critique and negation is moved to the extraordinary moments and events of capitalism’s history – either in its beginnings or its rare crises. Therefore critique or opposition must come from somewhere else, somewhere outside and to the future. To quote: “[t]hus, for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism involved a struggle to impose value relations, but it is assumed that once the transition has been accomplished, value is a stable form of stable relations.” To continue:

Similarly with all other categories: if the reification of social relations is understood as stable, then all the forms of existence of those social relations (and their interrelation) will also be understood as stable, and their development will be understood as an unfolding of a closed logic. Thus money, capital, the state and so on may be understood as reified forms of social relations, but they are not seen as forms of active reification. These categories are understood as ‘closed’ categories, in the sense of developing according to a self-contained logic. 18

Looking at the work of Lukacs, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, Holloway sees that in their work a concept of hard fetishism means that only special sections of the population – such as political formations that have access to either a privileged exteriority or the marginalised and excluded – can develop critical practices that then can be generalised across society.

For all the differences between these authors, the important point for our argument is that the understanding of fetishism as established fact (the emphasis on the all-pervasive character of fetishism in modern capitalism) leads to the conclusion that the only possible source of anti-fetishism lies outside the ordinary - whether it be the Party (Lukacs), the privileged intellectuals (Horkheimer and Adorno), or the ‘substratum of the outcasts and the outsiders’ (Marcuse). Fetishism implies anti-fetishism, but the two are separated:
fetishism rules normal, everyday life, while anti-fetishism resides elsewhere, on the margins.19

Often the theorists who focus on themes of fetishisation and reification create a radical pessimism that soon gives way to pessimism proper. “If fetishism were an accomplished fact, if capitalism were characterised by the total objectification of the subject, then there is no way that we, as ordinary people, could criticise fetishism”.20 ‘Hard fetishism’ is supposed to weaken the apparent strength capitalism projects across itself. Yet it works in practice to reinforce capital’s appearance of stability: it makes it appear rigid, stable and strong. There are moments of contestation – in capitalism’s origins, when it tries to impose itself on a new territory or when it confronts an overt and militant social movement – but its daily practices are uncontested, closed. The result of this is that the ability to criticise and resist capitalism disappears. How can those of us whose lives are subsumed by capitalism resist?

Holloway however advances an understanding of fetishism that breaks from this, and it is on this basis that he theorises the antagonism of those who suffer and resist proletarianisation. Taking a perspective influenced by Ernst Bloch, Holloway argues that fetishism is a process always in conflict, that it is always contested. Holloway’s argument is that since there is resistance and autonomy that means that fetishism is never total, it is incomplete. This is the central pivot of Holloway’s writing, that the starting point is our rejection, our negativity, and our scream: YA BASTA! To quote: “[T]he concept of alienation, or fetishism, in other words, implies its opposite: not as (sic) essential non-alienated ‘home’ deep in our hearts, but as resistance, refusal, rejection of alienation in our daily practice.”21 This rejection of the solidity of capitalist categories implies also a rejection of the temporality that is associated with such solidity. There is not a one-off moment of enclosure – but a constant contested struggle; both wrapped around each other. It also means that struggle is not outside what is fetishised, but within it, yet its negativity and its refusal offers the possibly of breaking out. Fetishism, refusal and revolution are thus spun together across the social terrain in open-ended and multiple points of
contestation – this is the 'madness of capitalism'. The madness of either the violence and paranoia that is employed in attempts to impose the categories of capital, or the madness of liberation, the insanity of being unreconciled against the order that exists, an insanity of demanding the viability of autonomy despite its appearance of impossibility.

**Class Struggle & the Struggle Against Class**

Crucial to Holloway's reinvention of revolutionary theory is a radicalisation of class; this involves a critique of how class is positioned within Marxist orthodoxy. This radicalisation of class takes the intertwined insights from *operaismo* and critical theory. He sees class struggle as the everyday and ordinary struggle against the process of fetishisation that attempts to fix people into a class. It is a rethinking of class not as a solid identity but as a series of tensions; and an attempt to show how the anti-power of struggle has a material reality. It is important to remember that a definition of class for this line of analysis cannot be separated from struggle – class is not an objective category on which class struggle stands. Rather class struggle is what class is. Thus Holloway's analysis of class is not sociological but rather a theoretical study of the subjectivity and subjectification of class struggle.

Holloway poses a different way to think about how class is generated and how it can be resisted. He starts with a critique of the dominant ideas of class: "[m]ost discussions of the working class are based on the assumption that fetishised forms are pre-constituted."\textsuperscript{22} Class is considered to be something that pre-exists before struggle. Classes are seen as clear, cemented social categories that exist as an underlying reality to social conflict, even if they are obscured by hegemonic capitalist ideologies. This makes class struggle an exterior relationship – pre-formed classes face off against each other over the battlefield of society.
From here a clearly identified social class is posed and with it a series of radical and practical steps advocated to overthrow capitalism. Holloway continues:

In this approach, the working class, however defined, is defined on the basis of its subordination to capital: it is because it is subordinated to capital (as wage workers, or producers of surplus value) that it is defined as working class. Indeed it is only because the working class is assumed to be pre-subordinate that the question of definition can even be posed. 23

The conceptualisation of working class as clearly defined means it is conceived on the basis of its subordination, its powerlessness and lack of agency. The understanding of class as a clear identity, a clear condition, leads to, in Holloway’s mind, a positivist political position. This position creates both a clear set of tasks to do, and a hierarchy of struggles and correct agents of struggle. Once the class is shown as a pre-existing base, the task of revolutionaries is then to pose the questions of organisation and activity that connect to this base. Many of the debates between revolutionary tendencies have been around these issues: what kind of organisation, what kind of struggle, what tactics of revolt, etc. Class exists in these dialogues as a foundation that provides both the truth of the revolutionary project and the force to achieve it. The process of revolution is the affirmation of the proletariat as class – through the usurpation of the ruling class and its organs of power and the development of proletarian class rule – the Soviet, the anarcho-syndicalist union, etc. Yet since the existence of class is seen as being so solid, so firm, Holloway insists it denies the potential for genuine transformation. Critiquing orthodox Marxism, the Marxism of ‘scientific socialism’ where the paradigm of class as pre-existing, clear and fixed is so rigorously expressed, he argues that such a stance denies the radical potential of labour. It ascribes the ontology of revolution and the crisis of capitalism to the objective laws of capitalist development on one hand, and also sees the revolutionary as a special subjective actor that labour needs to catalyse the struggle on the other. 24 Holloway’s rethinking of class aids the development of an idea of revolution that is based on the self-activity of the vast majority.
Furthermore the orthodox and paradigmatic definition of class leads to exclusions; exclusions of people but also of antagonisms and struggles. The apparent promise of presenting class as a clear and identifiable social group is that such a definition should make our social world easy to understand. But as we shall see below Holloway understands identity to be a fetishisation, and as such a category that is constantly being made and resisted, always in process. So too, the apparently simple process of showing a clearly defined working class becomes the messier and far more troubled process of defining the working class, of trying to impose a rigid understanding on a mass of living contradictions. As such the certainty gives way to a series of questions and aporias. Who then belongs to the working class? Is it simply the industrial proletariat and those engaged in wage-labour? What then happens to other struggles – feminism, ecological, in the asylums etc? Either the struggles are denied any worth (derided as middle class distractions) or they are collapsed into the labour movement and denied their vitality and power, or the definition of working class is seen as useless, outdated and as such must be junked and new social subjects unearthed. Indeed throughout the history of the classic labour movement there has often been the exclusion, or a direct repression, of struggles that focused on the liberation of the individual, gender, art, race, desire etc as diversions from the factory floor and the class war. And this exclusion/repression often worked by simultaneously defining these struggles/and those who struggle as non-proletarian: students, women, dangerous lumpen elements, middle class dilettantes and so on. If class is to be a radical and relevant conception it has to be freed from its previous usages. The classic labour movement is defeated; socialism is in ruins, antagonists against capital flare up in new spaces or strangely old ones. As we enter the 21st century and as the composition of class and antagonism changes either the idea of class is rejected or it forms a reef on which theory is shipwrecked.

Holloway's repositioning of class works by rejecting the idea that classes confront each other as pre-formed entities existing in an exterior tension. Rather class is a process; and class struggles are posed against the process of class formation. To quote: “Class, like state, like money, like capital, must be understood as process. Capitalism is the ever renewed generation of class, the ever-renewed
classification of people." This is linked to Holloway's idea of fetishisation detailed above. There is never a point where the process of class is finished; it is always ongoing and contested. It is this methodology that Holloway applies to an understanding of class. To quote: "...the existence of classes and their constitution cannot be separated: to say that classes exist is to say that they are in the process of being constituted." Thus we cannot talk of the proletariat as if they are a clearly defined group – a bounded and singular identity. The proletariat as a solid subject does not exist – rather it is constantly being imposed, rebuilt. Holloway writes:

The constitution of class can be seen as the separation of subject and object. Capitalism is the daily repeated violent separation of the object from the subject, the daily snatching of the object-creation-product from the subject-creator-producer, the daily seizure from the doer not only of her done but her act of doing, her creativity, her subjectivity, her humanity. The violence of this separation is not characteristic just of the earlier period of capitalism: it is the core of capitalism. To put it in other words, 'primitive accumulation' is not just a feature of a bygone period, it is central to the existence of capitalism.

This is an analysis that transforms both the conventional idea of what is class and what is class struggle. Classically the proletariat is seen as something that 'exists' and struggles against elements outside of it to achieve emancipation, and then through its seizure of society it can engage in a transformative project that dissipates its existence into a condition of liberation. In Holloway's work the idea of what is struggle and who struggles shifts. The class struggle is the struggle against class, against being reduced to class. Being classed means suffering the fracturing of human doing, caught in processes of alienation, of investing in the world that is built through our individual and cooperative efforts yet stifles our autonomy.

Holloway sees class struggle as something that is inherent to all the moments of capitalist society – it is an ongoing battle on multiple fronts with multiple tactics carried out under numerous signs, and with various ideas.
All social practice is an unceasing antagonism between the subjection of practice to the fetishised, perverted, defining forms of capitalism and the attempt to live against-and-beyond those forms. There can thus be no question of the existence of non-class forms of struggle. Class struggle, then is the unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between alienation and dis-alienation, between definition and anti-definition, between fetishism and de-fetishism.28

Since the fracturing of object from subject, the alienation and reification of human activity, is something that happens from the molar to the molecular, this definition works to include in revolutionary thought rebellious activity that has been dismissed by orthodox revolutionary traditions. Holloway’s perspective makes no hierarchies between areas of contestation, recognising the validity of each, their commonality and yet also their autonomy and divergence. Holloway’s work is deeply influenced by the struggle of the Zapatistas, and in an essay he takes a cue from their lexicon by identifying the rejection of capital, the revolt against fracture as “dignity” – and this dignity is to be found in a multiplicity of struggles.

Fissures: these are the thousand answers to the question of revolution. Everywhere there are fissures. The struggles of dignity tear open the fabric of capitalist domination. When people stand up against the construction of the airport in Atenco, when they oppose the construction of the highway in Tepeaca, when they stand up against the Plan Puebla Panama, when the students of the UNAM oppose the introduction of fees, when workers go on strike to resist the introduction of faster rhythms of work, they are saying “No, here capital does not rule!” Each No is a flame of dignity, a crack in the rule of capital. Each No is a running away, a flight from the rule of capital.29

Still all these struggles are overt, and open collective struggles – these are ones that register on the cultural apparatus – they are recorded, debated, attacked: they are. But Holloway also wants to bring forth struggles that are invisible: “[a]ll rebellious movements are movements against invisibility.”30 This invisibility is caused by the ideological and spectacular appearance of capital, yet is often reinforced by Orthodox Marxism. Capital often appears as if it is its own creation, and that society is a product of its vitality. Rather, Holloway argues, capital is vampiric. It is based on the reification of the power of the other of labour. And labour is rebellious and inventive and everywhere we look with this in mind, more and more moments of initiative and disobedience become visible. This is the
power of struggles to dissolve the normality of capital's appearance – the more struggles that become visible the more other struggles can be seen. Whilst often a great rebellion will seem like a bolt from the blue, a rupture of the normality of capitalism, it also reveals that the normality of capitalism is not 'normal' – that there are countless defiances that circulate before, during and after the moment of revolt. These incremental struggles are myriad: a grumbled 'no', a defiant piece of clothing, sabotage; countless moments that are irreducible and incomparable. So rather than a pivotal group at the heart of industrial production who are the true owners of struggle, and all others onlookers, class struggle now means any of the multiple resistances against the reification of human doing. All those that were excluded from the category of proletariat, and thus from the struggle, can now enter.

Holloway's analysis widens the terrain of struggles by positioning them as struggles against the condition of being classed. All rebellion comes, for Holloway, not from the fact that we are proletarianised, made into the working class, but that we are and simultaneously are not working class: "...that we-are-and-are-not working class, that we exist against-and-beyond being working class..."31 We are workers inasmuch as we participate in the reification of our activity. We are not inasmuch as we rebel, as much as we generate and affirm ourselves as other out of and through the negation of capital.

We take part in the class struggle on both sides. We class-ify ourselves in so far as we produce capital, in so far as we respect money, in so far as we participate, through our practice, our theory, our language (our defining the working class), in the separation of subject and object. We simultaneously struggle against out class-ification in so far as we are human. We exist against-in-and-beyond capital, and against-in-and-beyond ourselves. Humanity, as it exists, is schizoid, volcanic: everyone is torn apart by the class antagonism.

Here we leap from the apparent clarity of class into a world of tensions, blockages, ruptures and flows. "That which is oppressed and resists is not only a who but a what."32 It is aspects of all of us that both tear through our condition and are present, constitutive of and posed against the elements that make up capitalist
society. Thus Holloway leaves behind the image of class struggle as two opposing forces facing each other across society. Rather it is the conglomerate of struggles that pull society apart.

Yet surely an idea of working class has to actually focus on work? Even if we take a radical critique of labour, one that focuses on alienation and reification, is not this a process that has its true home in manufacturing, or at least the official world of wage-labour? Holloway does argue that the role of production plays a central role in the reproduction and alienation of labour. However production itself fits in a broader context of separation and reification. What is important for Holloway is what can overcome capitalism, and since for Holloway this can come from any element of capitalism there is no need to develop a hierarchy of struggle. Holloway writes:

The central site for the separation of doing and done is production. The production of the commodity is the production of the separation of subject and object. Capitalist production is the production by the workers of surplus value, a surplus which, although produced by the workers, is appropriated by the capitalist. By producing a surplus as surplus value, the workers are producing their own separation from the object produced. They are in other words, producing classes, producing their won classification as wage labour...33

This conforms to elements of Marx's work. Indeed one of the rich veins of Marx's project is the unveiling of how the labour of the proletariat is the production of their own estrangement in the world they make up and create. As Marx writes: "...the more the worker expends himself (sic) in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he comes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself."34 As such the activities of wage-labour reproduce the conditions of being labour – of being a fractured being that is further estranged from the social flow of doing, the more their activity works to commodify said flow. It is important to remember that whilst both Holloway's and Marx's language seems to fit with the image of manufacturing labour, that all work is the work of objectification. Holloway writes:

The notion of the separation of the worker from the means of production directs our minds to a particular type of creative activity, but in fact this very distinction between production
and doing in general is part of the fragmentation of doing that results from the separation of doing and done. The fact that the de-subjectification of the subject appears simply as the separation of the workers from the means of production is already an expression of the fetishisation of social relations. The separation of the worker from the means of production (in the classic sense) is part of, generates and is supported by, a more general process of de-subjectifying the subject, a more general abstracting of labour. 

Whilst often we might actually make a physical thing – a book for example – it is the social relationship that is the crucial nature of capitalism; a social relationship produced by the total sum of labour. Also most importantly whilst the ideological promise of wage-labour is freedom from work through the accumulation of personal wealth in the form of wages, this very same labour reinforces the specific personal proletarianisation of the worker by further estranging their own vital and creative abilities and the production of a world of things, a world of commodities and reification. Holloway is quick to point out that the process of separation that takes place in the workplace is based on a prior separation: a fracturing of human activity that defines one kind of doing as work and hides another. As such wage-labour is just a moment in the general reification of life, of being made labour, that constitutes the cosmos of life in capitalism. Wage-labour is only possible because of “a more general abstracting of labour”. Thus any rebellion on the social field that destabilises the separation and reification of subject and object threatens capitalism. Therefore it is impossible to create a hierarchy of the importance of struggle – no section of rebellion is ever hegemonic over others. Such an analysis ensures the autonomy of rebellion. For whilst we need each other to genuinely end capital, no section of struggle has to be subservient to another since no section contains more potential than any other. For any revolt that destabilises the world of reification and throws up a fracture opens the potential of many more fractures.

The apparent challenge created by advancing a theory based on social relations that tear across and through humanity is that it not only dissipates the working class, but also the class enemy. If the revolt against capitalism is a revolt
against the activity we do, an attempt to break out of patterns focused on our own labour, where is the bourgeoisie? As much as the idea of the proletariat has been one of virtue, the bourgeoisie exist in orthodox theory as a figure of degeneration, corruption, decadence – a pestilent force that has expended its historic virtue.\(^1\) Holloway argues that whilst the whole of humanity is caught up in these tense and antagonistic social relations, we do not all participate in them equally.

...there are clearly differences in the way in which class antagonism traverses us, differences in the degree to which it is possible for us to repress that antagonism. For those who benefit materially from the process of classification (accumulation), it is relatively easy to repress anything which points against or beyond classification, to live within the bounds of fetishism. It is those whose lives are overturned by accumulation (the indigenous of Chiapas, university teachers, coal miners, nearly everybody) in whom the element of against-ness will be more present. 37

Thus there is no specific form of labour that is seen as being revolutionary. What is revolutionary is a condition of tension, an explosive possibility that is presented in all human activity that is caught in the process of being classed, and thus is open to the resistance against class.

Of course such a notion of class has come under critique. A particular example of this is the exchange between Holloway and Simon Clark in *The Labour Debate*. 38 In the first essay in this exchange, "Class and Classification: Against, In and Beyond Labour", Holloway presents a short and lively version of his understandings of class and fetishism: highlighting that fetishism takes places across society, is always internally contested, and that class struggle is the society wide struggle against being reduced to class – that is against fetishisation. Holloway also draws out how this means that theory is also caught up in the process of fetishism and rebellion. 39 Clarke responds by arguing that Holloway vastly misreads Marx’s notion of fetishism. Clarke argues that Marx’s work on commodity fetishism does not depict the nature of social relations in total but rather is a critique of capitalist forms of knowledge. He writes that “the theory of commodity fetishism is applicable in a capitalist society to the relations between

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\(^1\) At least in popular revolutionary ideology the bourgeoisie is presented this way; Marx is far more ambivalent ascribing them a liberating and democratic role against the restrictions of feudalism.
capitalist commodity producers", and thus only describes the relationship that capitalists have to the commodity and to each other. The relationship of workers to capital, Clarke argues, is of a more general kind of fetishism, that of “pure mystification”. Specifically, he argues that the way the wage appears in capitalist society obscures the reality of the exploitation of labour. He continues, “[t]he illusion of the wage form is the illusion that the labourer has been paid in full for her contribution to production.” This is different from Marx’s classic depiction of commodity fetishism where “the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s (sic) own labour as objective products of the labour themselves”. Thus for Clarke, Holloway’s understanding of class as fetishism is spurious.

Throughout the essay Clarke argues for a relatively orthodox model of class struggle: he focuses on the central role of organised labour in the work-place proper. In relation to the role of theory he writes:

> Intellectuals have the training and the resources that enable them to penetrate the mysteries of the fetishism of the commodity, to produce knowledge of the workings of the capitalist system and so to inform the practice and programmes of the labour movement, whether this be in developing spontaneous local struggles or in confronting capital with a working class alternative on a global scale.

Holloway’s response is brief but illuminating. He argues “[a]ll of Simon’s comments are directed towards narrowing the scope of Marxism and the understanding of class struggle.” A restrictive notion of fetishism leads to a restrictive notion of class and thus of class struggle. Holloway rejects Clarke’s depiction of Marx’s conception of fetishism as containing a “distinction between commodity fetishism and the more general theory of fetishism” as being “quite foreign to Marx’s method”. He reaffirms an understanding of class that sees it as the society wide fight against fetishism, and the incendiary quality that such an understanding gives communist thought.

The more we see struggle as an aspect of everyday life, the more radical our concept of struggle has to become. Our struggle is the struggle of that which does not even appear in
'realistic' accounts of capitalist reality. This is why we must break with the 'realist' logic of capitalist reality. This is what the critique of fetishism, and therefore Marxism, is all about.47

From Power to Anti-Power

Holloway's conception of class struggle and communism rests on the concept of anti-power. To understand anti-power it is useful to grasp the distinction between potentia and potestas: that is the difference between "power-to" and "power-over".48 'Power-to' is just that, the ability to do something, to have an effect on the world around us: sing a song, build a house, cook cakes or kiss a lover. This power-to is not a pure realm of isolated agency but is always enmeshed in the general social life of a society, as much as the individual too is always part of a society. As Holloway says:

Power-to, therefore, is never individual: it is always social. It cannot be thought of as existing in some pure, unsullied state, for its existence will always be part of the way in which sociality is constituted, the way in which doing is organised. Doing (and power-to-do) is always part of the social flow, but that flow is constituted in different ways.49

In the context of class society, which involves the fracture of the social flow of doing and the fetishisation of human creativity, power-to becomes radically transformed. When our creativity is taken from our control, invested in practices that destroy autonomy, what develops is "power-over." Power-over is the way human creativity which is a collective, open, social process becomes a force that limits its very flow, fixes doing into social patterns that crush and estrange the doer and elevates her alienated product; which in capitalism is capital, the commodity form and the society of capital and the commodity form. The formation, maintenance and rule of capitalist society are produced by the activity of those it dominates. Power-over is the power of state, capital, commodity, gender etc – the
power of the separation of doing from done, the division of humans into identities, the generation of borders and the application of all types of measures and quantifications to existence.

Power-over is the breaking of the social flow of doing. Those who exert power over the doing of others deny the subjectivity of those others, deny their part in the social flow of doing, exclude them from history. Power-over breaks mutual recognition: those over whom power is exercised are not recognised (and those who exercise power are not recognised by anyone whom they recognise as worthy of giving recognition). The doing of the doers is deprived of social validation: we and our doing become invisible. History becomes the history of the powerful, of those who tell others what to do. The flow of doing becomes an antagonistic process in which the doing of most is denied, in which the doing of most is appropriated by the few. The flow of doing becomes a broken process.

What comes out of this is that, on one hand, we feel powerless. Whilst the social world around us is generated by our efforts, the more we generate the less power we feel we have; the more our lives become subsumed the greater our seeming powerlessness and the greater the society seems to careen out of control. The more capital develops, that is the more it breaks us from one another and from our individual (which is to say social) and collective capacities, the more alone and adrift our condition. But on the other hand, as noted above, fetishism is never closed. Power-over is fraught and tensé with refusals, old and new connections and desires amongst those it is dependent on. "Power-to exists as power-over, but the power-to is subjected to and in rebellion against power-over, and power-over is nothing but, and therefore absolutely dependent upon, the metamorphosis of power-to."51

We are proletarianised as much as our creative capacities are estranged from us into fetishised forms: as much as our power-to becomes power-over. Equally liberation is the freeing of our capacities to be active, self-realising and self-generating in relations of autonomy and cooperation. And as part of the class struggle power-over and power-to confront each other as internal tensions and intermixed antagonisms. This conflict constitutes daily life in capitalist society. But the conflict between power-to and power-over is asymmetrical - it is not a matter of "power against power, of like against like."52 This is due to the fact that the
struggle of capital is for class. Those reduced to labour is against class. They have fundamentally different objectives and thus demand different ways of struggling: "[o]n one side is the struggle to re-braid our lives on the basis of the mutual recognition of our participation in the collective flow of doing; on the other side is the attempt to impose and reimpose the fragmentation of that flow, the denial of our doing."53 As such all efforts against power-over exist in an antagonistic way: as "anti-power" that is opposed both to power-over in method and objective. "Power­to, if it does not submerge itself in power-over, can exist, overtly or latently, only as power-against, as anti-power."54

Anti-power thus is the assertion of a different way of doing against the forms that it currently takes. It is simultaneously the conception of breaking the normality of capitalist society and posing and affirming other ways of social organisation and social relations. Anti-power asserts the linked nature of how we refuse capitalism and build alternatives. Direct attempts to rupture the normality of capitalist society also involve the formation of alternative ways to coordinate our creativity: strikes, riots, graffiti, etc. Equally attempts to affirm cooperative and egalitarian ways of producing-use-values invariably come into conflict with the pressure of the commodity form and the market. It is this creative against-ness, this radical negativity, which Holloway sees as the very magma of class struggle. Thus, as we shall see, a politics of identity is, for Holloway, an error.
Fetishism & Identity

In thought and practice, the warm interweaving of doing, the loves and hates and longings which constitute us, become shattered into so many identities, so many cold atoms of existence, standing each one on its own. Power-over, that which makes our scream echo hollowly, that which makes radical change difficult to conceive, lies in this shattering, in identification.

We experience the antagonisms of fetishism and anti-fetishism on a deeply personal level, indeed Holloway argues that fetishisation contributes to our very conception of the self through the creation of identity. Thus the critique of identity as fetishisation is a core part of his analysis and politics. It is difficult territory. In part it expresses, most painfully and troublingly, how capitalism affects daily life and creates certain forms of subjectivity, consciousness and intimate patterns of existence. His claims can seem so radical as to be outrageous, but it does not mean that on those grounds alone it should be dismissed. However I do think that Holloway’s handling of identity creates a number of real problems.

Holloway argues that fetishism, that is “[t]he separation of doing from done (and its subordination to the done) establishes the reign of is-ness or identity.” Capitalist society imposes certain modes of being, certain ways that those estranged from both their creativity and creation view themselves. For Holloway identity is produced because the social flow of doing is sundered. He continues “[f]rom the perspective of doing it is clear that everything is movement: the world is and is not, things are and are not, I am and am not.” Fetishisation, that is the sundering and reification of doing, splits us, our relationship with the world, and how we view ourselves. We move from a more contradictory, shifting and multifaceted relationship with existence to one that appears to be clear, well defined. Everything in the world becomes something: an object that is discrete and bordered from the social cooperation that created it. People themselves appear as
objects. Holloway writes: “[t]he individual stands apart from the collectivity. He is separated from his species-being or species-life, as the young Marx puts it.”

But of course people still exist in relation with each other and that around them; we do exist in a capitalist society. But these relations are composed of things, of identities, which then become grouped together. This grouping Holloway argues “is no longer the communal braiding of doing”, that is the collectivity of free association, but rather a “lumping together of particulars into the same bag, much as potatoes in a sack.” People are grouped together on the basis of the processes of social fracture and fetishism. Holloway continues “doing might be part of the process of classification, but it is a dead doing.” Classified and identified as part of fetishism, humans start to see themselves as separate from their creativity, individualised from each other, then re-grouped on the basis of reified categories, such as gender, nation, race, occupation, possessions, and so on.

Of course we need to go one step further. In the context of capitalism obviously such identities are not all considered equal, but are rather positioned in hierarchies and set against each other in relation to, and part of, the process of exploitation and accumulation. Thus not only are we broken from each other, so ‘I’ becomes ‘not you’, but rather the ‘I’ is violently opposed to the ‘not you’ – sometimes even trying to realise the latter’s extermination. Thus Holloway writes:

And absolute reification is absolute death. Identity negates possibility, denies openness to other life. Identity kills, both metaphorically and very, very literally. Over all our reflections on identity stands the terrible warning of Adorno: ‘Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death’

Here we face a dilemma. On one hand it is easy to agree with how our lives are lacerated by identity and see its role in various forms of violent oppressions and segregations. But on the other hand does not this line of critique actually reduce our ability to struggle? Especially since so many struggles of the last forty
years have taken the shape of struggles of and for identity: anti-racisms, national liberation, feminism, struggles around sexuality, etc. That is they often do not challenge identity on a whole, but rather a certain social regime of identities and argue that more identities to be included, some widened and the hierarchies between them dissolved and so on; or such struggles postulate that some identities cannot be contained within the framework of the system and thus their affirmation represents a real rupture with society as it currently is. This is a crucially important concern for this thesis, as I hope to articulate radical notions of class that are open to the very struggles that go on under the rubric of identity, struggles that orthodox understandings of class often efface. How does Holloway deal with this? Firstly he does critique what is commonly called 'identity politics'. He rejects forming a politics on the basis of identity as nothing more than a reinforcing of the practices of capitalism. He argues that:

The barrier between what one is and what one is not, between collective self and collective other cannot therefore be seen as fixed or absolute. It is only if one takes identity as one's standpoint, only if one starts from the acceptance of the rupture of doing, that labels such as 'black', 'Jewish', 'Irish', and so on, take on the character of something fixed. The idea of an 'identity' politics which takes such labels as given inevitably contributes to the fixation of identities. The appeal to being, to identity, to what one is, always involves the consolidation of identity, the strengthening, therefore, of the fracturing of doing, in short, the reinforcement of capital.

Yet this does not mean that struggles around gender, sexuality, race etc – the struggles that are often the common terrain of identity politics – are valueless. It is important to remember that Holloway's conceptualisation of fetishism sees fetishism as always internally contested, that it is constituted by antagonism. This is also the case with identity; it too is contested from within. But Holloway positions this to argue that sometimes struggles that seem to be struggles of and for identity are actually subversive because they, in practice, work to subvert identity. He elaborates as follows:

The distinction lies rather in the fact that there are many situations in which an apparently affirmative, identitarian statement carries a negative, anti-identitarian charge. To say 'I am black' in a society characterised by discrimination against blacks is to challenge in a way

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ii For a recent example of this see Critchley's argument around how an indigenous identity can lead to a radical political subject. Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 105-08.
which to say ‘I am white’ in those same societies clearly does not: despite its affirmative, identitarian form, it is a negative, anti-identitarian statement. 62

What is this ‘negative, anti-identitarian’ charge? Holloway argues that in some statements that seem to affirm identity actually, in a problematic and contradictory way, negate it. They negate by asserting a ‘radical excess’: they say that “we are indigenous-but-more-than that, we are women-but-more-than-that.” 63 As such it is an act of “negating the negation of dignity”: a refusal of what identity reduces people to. By saying that “we are more”, they refuse the boundaries of identity: thus refusing identity. Holloway’s thinking on identity rests on his debt to Adorno and a notion of negative dialects. A debt he acknowledges. He writes, quoting Adorno:

> It appears that we are, but we are not. That, at its most fundamental, is the driving force of hope, the force that corrodes and transforms that which is. We are the force of non-identity existing under the fetishised aspect of identity: ‘Contradiction is the non-identity under the aspect of identity’... 64

As such Holloway’s critique of identity argues that radical affirmations of identity are only radical in so much as they destabilise identity. There is nothing, for him, emancipatory or valid in the claims of ‘cultural nationalism’, the subaltern or radical essentialisms. Holloway cautions that “[a] struggle that does not move against identification as such blends easily with the shifting patterns of capitalist domination.” 65

It is in the Zapatistas that Holloway finds an instructive example. For whilst they struggle as the indigenous, this identity is open and unstable, a practical experiment in a non-identity. Commenting on the iconic image of the Zapatista – the balaclava – he notes the tensions at work: “...we cover our face so that we can be seen, our struggle is the struggle of those without face (sic).” And,

> Hence the importance of the Zapatista balaclava, which says not just ‘We are the indigenous struggling for our identity to be recognised’, but, much more profoundly, ‘Ours is the struggle of non-identity, ours is the struggle of the invisible, of those without voice and face’ 66
This reading of the mask and balaclava in Zapatista practice certainly has some currency. There is plenty in the writings of the Zapatistas that problematises identity – specifically Zapatista writing often rejects both an undifferentiated humanism and the limits of concrete identity politics. But as I shall argue later closer comparison between Holloway and the Zapatistas' thinking shows the deficiencies of the former. Indeed it will be through juxtaposing the two that we will see a more complex approach to identity in the Zapatistas' own theory and practice and thus the weakness in Holloway's.

The Material Basis of Anti-Power

Since Holloway wants to revitalise concepts of class as part of a communist project it is not enough that he merely critiques the ideas that we have inherited. The onus is on him to show how his reconceptualisations present an understanding of the material conditions that open up the possibilities of action and subversion. This is not easy for him. Holloway's rejection of a clear proletarian subject raises difficulties. Whilst it destabilises the idea of a clear and restricted proletarian subject that monopolises struggle, it also runs the risk of dissipating the possibility of revolutionary force into the ether. Indeed the challenge that is often thrown at utopian and ultraleftist currents is that while they expand the liberating vision of anti-capitalism they undermine the ability to achieve it. The trump cards of Leninism and social democracy were their apparent successes. The dismal 'failure' of these 'victories', their inability to advance genuine anti-capitalism, has not removed the charge of more revolutionary currents being an 'infantile disorder'. If anything the collapse of the apparently more realistic alternatives to capitalism in the face of the neoliberalism and its proclamations of infallibility and inevitability have heightened this challenge.
Holloway tries to meet this challenge by showing that the alternatives to capitalism are actually existing potentials; that his radicalisation of class does not further diminish the possibilities of struggle but rather opens the idea that communism is imminently possible. To do this, Holloway argues that in the daily life of capitalist society, anti-power is already a material reality. Not only is the process of class a contested one, but it is contested in a way that makes revolution, the complete overturning of capitalism a question of the now. Holloway develops a narrative of capitalism's past and present as being one that reveals the power of communism. For Holloway anti-power is not only ubiquitous; it is the actual motor force behind capitalist society. (Here he posits most clearly his combination of 'Tronti and Adorno'.) For Holloway the task is to show how crisis still exists in capitalism, and how it leads to the hope of communism.

Holloway claims that anti-power is ubiquitous, meaning that rebellion is everywhere: that it is ordinary. The Zapatista claim “that ordinary people are rebels” is for Holloway particularly pertinent. Yet this claim seems counter-intuitive, as it is denied by the surface appearance of capitalism. For Holloway since capital is the alienation and reification of creativity, the transformation of power-to into power-over, the conditions (capitalist production) that produce anti-power simultaneously efface its visibility. To see the presence of anti-power, the scream, one must look from, and engage in anti-power itself. It cannot be approached from a neutral and objective position as such a position does not exist. As such, a theory of anti-power needs to take a certain subjective position:

The first problem in talking of anti-power is its invisibility. It is invisible not because it is imaginary, but because our concepts for seeing the world are concepts of power (of identity, of the indicative). To see anti-power, we need different concepts (of non-identity, of the Not Yet, of the subjunctive).

Thus to see the ordinariness of rebellion, that ordinary people are rebels "we must look at them with infrared eyes, seeing something in them that is not visible on the outside." The other side to Holloway's critique of identity is an attempt to
show that behind the reified image exist a mass of tensions and struggles that is
the ordinary home of anti-power. “On the surface they have an identity, but under
the aspect of identity is the force of non-identity.” Revolution is not the asserting
of an alternative power of a distinct oppressed group but rather a manifestation of
anti-power that exists across the social field. As such the ontology of anti-power is
located in our daily lives:

Anti-power does not exist only in the overt, visible struggles of those who are
insubordinate, the world of the ‘Left’. It exists also - problematically, contradictorily (but
then the world of the Left is no less problematic or contradictory) - in the everyday
frustrations of all of us, the everyday struggle to maintain our dignity in the face of power,
the everyday struggle to retain or regain control over our lives. Anti-power is in the dignity
of everyday existence. Anti-power is in the relations that we form all the time, relations of
love, friendship, comradeship, community, cooperation.

None of these qualities exist as purities: they are caught up in, produced and
reified by capitalism. Yet at the same time these relations push, rebel and mutate:
they exist “in-against-and-beyond”. Yes it is messy, this vision of human life and
resistance, where there are no are spaces that are outside capitalism where a
coherent emancipatory project can launch its fury on the world. But this messiness
is also a volatility, a potentiality. It means that at any time the surface of capitalist
society has bubbles of anti-power rising up through it. Holloway writes there is a
“substratum of negativity”, many layers of rejection, of ‘NO’; of the scream. He
continues:

This substratum of negativity is the stuff that social volcanoes are made of. This layer of
inarticulate non-subordination, without face, without voice, so often despised by the ‘Left’,
is the materiality of anti-power, the basis of hope.

It is not enough to identify the presence of anti-power: just because rebellion
exists does not mean that it can or will find forms that will lead to the overthrow of
capital and the generation of communism. Much of the critical and theoretical
work of the last half a century has focused on capital’s abilities to recuperate
struggles. Writers as diverse as Marcuse and Foucault have worked to show the
ways that disobedience is normalised within the patterns of power. Thus Holloway has to go further to show the effect and potency of anti-power.

Holloway wants to show how this anti-power that lives in the everyday generates crisis. A folly of orthodox Marxism, of scientific socialism, was its belief that it could demonstrate the inevitability of capitalism's downfall due to internal economic dynamics. This is unsatisfactory for Holloway for it works to “deify the economy (or history or the forces of production), to create a force outside human agency that will be our saviour.” Holloway then makes humanity dependent on another force; subordinate to an exteriority. Instead he attempts to demonstrate a materiality to anti-power that opens up the potentials for self-activity and a (or many) form(s) of communist praxis. The dissolving of social antagonism from an external opposition of two separate but related forces into an internal antagonism means the dissolution of both the certainty of class and the concrete appearance of domination. It shows capitalism to be incredibly fragile, dependent on those it subordinates. Anti-power does not just exist marked and formed by its struggles against capital but so too is capital riven with assertions of autonomy. Holloway's reconception of class struggle as a constant insubordination against the processes that constitute class, which happens across the society, means that all the moments of capitalism are contested and explosive:

Fetishism is a two-faced process. It points not just to the penetration of opposition by power, but also to the penetration of power by opposition. To say that money, for example, is the thing-ification of social relations means equally that the antagonism of social relations enters into the 'thing' which money presents itself as being. To talk of money as disciplining social relations is equally to talk of social relations as subverting money. If power penetrates its negation, anti-power, it is equally true (and possibly more interesting) that anti-power penetrates its antithesis power.

This means that throughout the daily life of capitalist society – which is an accumulation of processes of fetishisation – exists from within opposition to fetishisation. As much as capitalism composes the social field so too does opposition to capitalism: even if it often exists in unspoken and covert forms. As much as power-over constitutes our lives so too does anti-power.
It is this deeper internal antagonism which for Holloway defines capitalism and thus why communism is such a rich possibility. But Holloway also wants to show how the trajectory of capitalism's development has been based around the material reality of anti-power due to its dependence on labour that refuses to just be labour.

In all class societies all those who appear to rule are dependent on the cooperative and creative activity of those who appear to be ruled. Yet it takes different forms in different forms of class society and thus Holloway asks: "[w]hat is peculiar in the relation of dependence of capital upon labour that makes capitalism inherently unstable?" To answer this question he returns to the opening chapters of capitalism, to primitive accumulation. Holloway's depiction of primitive accumulation does not see it as simply a singular and unique event, as a one-off. Rather the origin of capitalism shows in stark relief the same practises that characterise capitalism generally – but they appear more vivid than when they have been normalised and naturalised. Holloway juxtaposes the relationship between feudalism and capitalism, suggesting that the differences in dynamics still define capitalism today. Feudalism was a system under which the "relation of domination was a personal one: a serf was bound to a particular lord, a lord limited to exploiting the serfs that he inherited or could otherwise subjugate." Subjugation was thus often a site-specific, contextualised and contingent tension. Holloway dovetails in some ways with Federici's (a participant in the Midnight Notes Collective) work. Federici maintains that capitalism was a reaction to the revolts of the working classes of feudalism, who made that particular system of exploitation untenable. This establishes a particular causal narrative: peasants revolt, nobles transform. Holloway reaffirms that the moment of transition involved both the movement of the exploiters and exploited against the constraints of feudalism. Whilst Holloway sees capitalism as internal tension, feudalism is positioned as a system in which there are distinct, exterior classes. His explanation of the process of transition helps explain this difference.
The transformation from feudalism to capitalism was thus a movement of liberation on both sides of the class divide. Both sides fled from the other: the serfs from the lords (as stressed by liberal theory), but also the lords from the serfs, through the movement of their monetised wealth. Both sides fled from a relation of domination which had proved inadequate as a form of domination. Both sides fled to freedom.\(^7\)7

This flight, this dual explosion of the old order was not symmetrical: “[o]n the one side, the flight of insubordination, on the other side the flight from insubordination: viewed from either side, it was the insubordination of labour that was the driving force of the new mobility of the class relation, the mutual flight of serf and lord.”\(^7\)8 On one side the exoduses to the cities, the Peasant War and the heretical cults were all explosions against the restrictions of feudalism – the bonds of tradition, place and dependency. The flight from this insubordination was a flight towards the monetarisation of exploitation: from tithe to the commodity. A flight towards the New World and a flight away from the populations in rebellion and the forms of life which provided reservoirs of resistance; whether they were steeped in ancient tradition or the new practices and freedoms of the town. The language of flight, of repulsion should not stop us from realising the bloody nature of these trajectories – the antagonism exploded with full violent force. These flights both produced new freedoms and new antagonisms.

The mutual repulsions of and from insubordination that ripped apart feudalism are not over. The flight of serfs from the specific bonded and contingent exploitation of the lord led to the freedom of wage-labour, that is, the freedom from the direct exploitation of one lord to a state of dependency which leads to exploitation by a succession of/multiple capitalists and to exploitation by capitalist society generally. And for the ruling class, a new dependency on labour developed; one in which the capacity for exploitation and the generation of value grew, but so too did dangers of insubordination. As Holloway writes:

The flight to-and-from the insubordination of labour, the mutual repulsion of the two classes did not, of course, dissolve the class relation. For both serf and lord, the flight to freedom came up against the reassertion of the bond of mutual dependence... However this
was not a return to the old relation: they were no longer tied to one particular master, but were free to move to leave one master and go work for another. The transformation from feudalism to capitalism involved the de-personalisation, dis-articulation or liquefaction of the relations of domination. The relation of exploitation was not abolished by the dissolution of ties of personal bondage, but it underwent a fundamental change in form. The particular bond that tied the serf to one particular master was dissolved and replaced by a mobile, fluid, disarticulated relation of subordination to the capitalist class. The flight of insubordination enters into the very definition of the new class relation.79

The subordination that we now face under capitalism is crucially different from that under feudalism. The latter was fixed, rigid, related to a specific lord in a specific hierarchy. It was not free of conflict; it was not the peaceful organic village where people knew their place. Under capitalism we face a situation that is dynamic, where capitalism works not so much by fixing us to a place but by movement, through flux. Rather than our tithe to the lord simply accumulating in warehouses, or spent on armaments and luxuries, the money we create races around the globe, breaking open some territories, holding and closing others. For some workers this experience is still mind-numbingly static: reduced to an industrial process, like a place in an assembly line. But the assembly line itself moves. Workers in China may burn to death locked in dormitories above their workplaces, they may be trapped, but they are trapped in a torrent of movement, of money, of wealth, of capital. To quote Holloway: “Capital Moves”. But this movement arises from the same reason the lord fled the peasant: it is a flight from rebellion, one that originated out of the pores of feudalism and is the machine powering the global empire now. Holloway writes:

On the other side of society, the erstwhile lords who converted their wealth into money found too that freedom was not all they had imagined, for they were still dependent on exploitation, and therefore on the subordination of the exploited, the workers, their former serfs. Flight from insubordination is no solution for lords turned capitalist, for the expansion of their wealth depends on the subordination of labour... Whatever the form of class domination, labour remains the sole constitutive power... The relation however has changed, for capital’s flight from insubordination is central to the struggle to impose subordination (as, for example, in the ever-present threat of factory closure or bankruptcy). The flight from insubordination has become a defining feature of the new class relation.80
Capitalism, as the product of alienated labour flees from what it is constituted of. It wishes to transform into an ether of money, a perpetual motion machine of wealth generation. Capital flees but it cannot escape. It convulses in madness. Labour through the creative activity of humans can burst its chains; push out against the forms it is trapped in. Holloway argues it is only the struggle of labour against being labour that has any real agency – it can be insubordinate. Capital cannot; it can only flee (but not escape) from insubordination.

Capital is dependent on labour in a way which labour is not dependent upon capital. Capital, without labour ceases to exist: labour, without capital, becomes practical creativity, creative practice, humanity. Still it is capitalism that rules. How can this be if it is so weak? It is this internal mutual repulsion that generates the manifold crises of capital. It means that all the categories that proliferate under capitalism, all the moments of its rule, are built around this explosive tension, for it is this tension that is capitalist society. "The insubordination of labour is thus the axis on which the constitution of capital as capital turns." Constitution is the pivotal word here. Holloway argues that capital's response to insubordination is "dis-articulation." Capital moves, it flees, and this fleeing is found in the constant proliferation of mediated forms, most obviously money. As capital grows, oozes, flies and mutates, trying to free itself from the struggle in-against-and-beyond it, more and more social relations are disarticulated. Dis-articulation is the breaking of fixed, direct, site-specific relations and their extension and their replacement with relations characterised by "restlessness, mobility, liquidity, flux, fluidity, and constant flight." This is the sad freedom so championed by liberalism – the disruption of previous personal bonds and their replacement by a liberty that demands greater subordination not to people but to reified things. Or better yet subordination to the endless process of reification, to things that are as tyrannical as they are unstable. This dis-articulation is seen so clearly in the constant monetarisation/commodification of human activity. Holloway writes:
The key to the dis-articulation of the class relation is its mediation through money, or the exchange of commodities. The dis-articulation of the relation of exploitation/domination brings with it a dis-articulation of all social relations. The existence of labour power as a commodity implies a generalisation of commodity relations in society, the mediation of social relations in general through the exchanges of commodities, through money.

In contrast to many theorists of the commodity, for Holloway the disappearance of non-commodified forms does not mean the victory of domination. The horror of commodification should not be underestimated. However, whether it is the alienation of apparent prosperity, the violence of the sweatshop, the immiseration of the slum etc, these horrors should not be mistaken as the rise of stability. For Holloway things are in the process of fetishisation but never fetishised. And capital can never escape. As Holloway writes: [t]he power of labour has been contained, but only at a terrible price."85 This terrible price is that the containment of labour can only ever be partial and incomplete; insubordination pervades the forms of capital. The fetishised categories of daily life rise out of capital’s inability to leave behind labour, labour that is both insubordinate and the real substance of capital. Thus the fetishised categories are plagued by an incurable sickness in their marrow: the ever presence of rebellion.

Holloway’s image of capitalism is seemingly so counter-intuitive and goes against the grain of both liberal and revolutionary thought. He wants to show an image of capitalism that is explosive, fraught, and tense. At any moment it can combust. But this does not solve the crisis. It does not guarantee the inevitability of capitalism’s supersession by communism. Rather it shows that capitalism is driven by its contradictions, and these contradictions are our refusals and thus we, in our lives today – no matter how split, how fractured, how alienated – pose the real possibilities of manifesting another way of being, of anti-power, of communism.
Conclusion

The rejection of a deterministic theory of crisis is a return to agency. The dominant narrative of scientific socialism, that crisis arises from the objective economic laws and contradictions, is overturned. For Holloway crisis is not a one-off event, a moment of potential and disruption noticeably different from the smooth normality of capitalism. Crisis is an ever-present opportunity, an extension of the general ‘dis-articulation’ that is the substance of capitalism in all its everyday moments. The revolt of the working class comes first, and is the magma of the dominant order. But of course the working class for Holloway is not the ‘working class’. Rebellion is the revolt against being classed, the refusal of separation and reification; it is a tendency that cuts through all our lives. In this sense the crisis of capitalism is the proletariat; but only if we understand that the nature of the proletariat is the crisis of capitalism. And this tendency is one based on activity: we are the crisis because we act. Holloway’s work then is to uncover a potential, a possibility, but this does not determine its outcome. Yet it is still the generation of hope. A hope that arises not from what we are but what we refuse to be. The crisis is not an army but a multiplicity of forces, of negations. As Holloway points out:

And yet, there is nothing predetermined about the crisis. We are the crisis, we-who-scream, in the streets, in the countryside, in the factories, in the offices, in our houses; we, the insubordinate and non-subordinate who say No!, we who say Enough!, enough of your stupid power games, enough of your stupid exploitation, enough of your idiotic playing at soldiers and bosses; we who do not exploit and do not want to exploit, we who do not have power and do not want to have power, we who still want to live lives that we consider human, we who are without face and without voice: we are the crisis of capitalism.86

But it is not enough to be the crisis of capitalism. We must become the creators of communism. And to do this we need to act collectively. What then, from his understanding of struggle, class and capital does Holloway propose we do?
Chapter 2: One No, Many Yeses: The Political Practice of Anti-Power

Introduction

Can the scream create communism? Holloway’s depiction of capitalism and class struggle certainly destabilises both the certainties of capital and many of the categories of the Left. He transforms the understanding of class struggle into a series of explosive tensions. What does such an analysis suggest we do against capitalism? What kind of politics does it suggest, and are such a politics either possible or viable? Fittingly Holloway’s suggestions for praxis begin with an opposition to the classic Leftist strategy of taking possession of the state (either by electoral or insurrectionary means) and an opposition to Marxist-Leninism and, also, Antonio Negri. From here he elucidates a vision that draws on the Zapatistas and attempts to see revolution as the immanent and imminent magnification of the everyday ‘screams’ into the creation of another society.

Asymmetry

The core quality of Holloway’s suggestions for possible and effective communist practices it is that they must be asymmetrical to the dominant political practices of capitalism. In a speech at a concert during the 2007 anti-G8 mobilisations in Rostock Holloway said: “[a]symmetry, then, is the key to our struggle. No symmetry. Above all, no symmetry. Our weapon is that we do not act like them, we
do not talk like them, we do not look like them, we are not even comprehensible to them." They don’t just struggle for a different future; we struggle in a profoundly different way for a different future. This can be seen as a continuation of Holloway’s argument that anti-power is posed asymmetrically to power-over, the struggle of labour against being labour is posed asymmetrically to capital’s attempt to fracture human doing. This asymmetry then is both for Holloway the grounding of communist practice in the condition of labour and the basis from which to develop a powerful challenge to capital. To be communist is to be profoundly different from capital, and that means a communist politics that breaks with the practices and values of how politics is most often understood. This difference between communist struggle and capitalist society is one that goes across the spectrum of society. Holloway continues:

Against their sexual dimorphism our polymorphous perversity. Against their definitions our overflowing. Against their prose our poetry. Against their nouns our verbs. Against their pomposity our laughter. Against their arrogance, our knowledge that they depend on us. Against their permanence our understanding that we make them and if we do not make them tomorrow, they will not exist tomorrow. Against their command our insubordination. Against their control, our world that they cannot control, that they will never be able to control.

This suggests that a communist practice is far beyond the territory that is often thought of as politics – rather it is a challenge on and across all the elements of life. Communism is posed against the breaking of activity into different bordered spheres such as the public and the private, economic and politics, etc. As such Holloway rejects the idea of communism being about politics – instead he uses the label “anti-politics”. This does not seem to be only a rhetorical gesture aimed at drawing a line between the corruption of dominant politics and the virtue of communism, but rather a crucial point of analysis. Not only is communism different in practice from what usually constitutes politics, but it is also opposed to
the existence of politics, which is part of the separation of human activity that constitutes class society. He argues:

Our struggle is and must be asymmetrical to the struggle of capital (I have said this before, but it is worth repeating). This does indeed mean thinking of our struggle as an anti-politics, simply because the very existence of the political is a constitutive moment of the capital relation.

Communism then is posed beyond the boundary of what is considered normally as politics; it challenges what constitutes the capital relation, not just the dominance of capitalist powers. Normally politics is reduced to being only the specialist activity of the few as part of class society. In Holloway's schema often the cause of the failure of revolutionary practice is the way it conforms to and copies capitalist modes of understanding, values and practices. He continues:

By every means possible, by brutality, by seduction, by bribery, they try to make us to be like them, to act like them. That is what the real enemy is, not just them but becoming like them. How many revolutions have ended like that in the past, with the revolutionary leaders becoming new rulers! How many revolutionary movements have become bogged down in the violent meaninglessness of one army confronting another, all thoughts of human emancipation long since lost! If we become like them, we have lost.

As we shall see much of Holloway's critique of state-centred approaches to anti-capitalism, especially Marxist-Leninism, is that it is often highly symmetrical to capitalist practice, it operates on similar premises. Holloway argues that such politics are not radical enough, not communist enough. They do not profoundly

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iii Politics can also be posed (as Rancière does for example) as the contestation of the normality of capitalist society – the overflowing space which is made up of and becomes the stage for numerous claims and assertions. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Cocoran (London & New York: Verso, 2006). Also whilst the communist claim to oppose the totality of capitalist existence opens up an incredible emancipatory potential (here we can remember Lefebvre's maxim "Change Life, Change Society"), is there not a danger that trying to oppose capitalism as a totality means trying to imagine a total response, so much so that it becomes increasingly difficult to fight real, specific struggles? (Perhaps it is not enough to pose communism as being asymmetrical but rather subtracted from all the rationales of capital?)
challenge the mode of life enough to generate new ones. In this sense Holloway argues that demands for ‘realism’ are nothing more than demands to not resist capital.

Holloway sees in the Zapatistas a struggle that has broken with the defeatism of post-socialist realism. For Holloway part of what is so radical in Zapatista practice is that it embodies this asymmetry. He writes that “[t]he great joy of the Zapatista movement is that they have shown that in the darkest days of defeat new struggles arise, and that new struggles mean new ways of thinking and new forms of doing things that are experimental, creative, asymmetrical.”91 What Holloway often champions in the Zapatista struggle is that they are “absurd” – they do not conform to the reality of capitalist normality.92 But this absurdity is for Holloway a sign of the actual ability of this struggle to radically challenge capital and create a better form of human society. Its absurdity is symptomatic of both its refusal to keep within capitalist boundaries and also its embodiment of the material reality of anti-power; it is absurd because it is a practice of that which constitutes but is denied by capital. The argument runs as follows: capital is constituted by the fracturing of human doing, a fracturing that is never completed and always contested. Whilst capitalism appears stable and dominant it is composed of forces that can destroy it. A revolt is absurd not just in that it does not tally with the values of capitalist society’s self-image but in that it is also a manifestation of the refusal that is in the substratum of capitalism. In breaking out of the internal tension of conflict that makes up the class struggle, it pushes to the fore that which has been denied: hence it is absurd. It is the world turned upside down.
Refusal of the State

Holloway develops his ideas for praxis in part by connecting it with his understandings of capitalism and in part using these understandings to critique much of what has constituted the Left. This starts with a critique of the idea that the state can be a tool for social change and a space of social contestation. Holloway's work undermines any split between means and ends. He argues that the means of using the state profoundly changes the ends of social struggle. Even if a radical struggle can occupy the place of the state, this comes, Holloway contends, at the unacceptable cost of the actual ability to profoundly change society, due to the nature of power in the state. Holloway argues that any attempt to orientate revolutionary struggle towards the state invariably leads to a statist paradigm that colonises and transforms struggles. To quote:

The reason that the state cannot be used to bring about radical change in society is that the state itself is a form of social relations that is embedded in the totality of capitalist social relations. The very existence of the state as an instance separated from society means that, whatever the contents of its policies, it takes part actively in the process of separating people from control of their own lives. Capitalism is simply that: the separating of people from their own doing. A politics that is oriented towards the state inevitably reproduces within itself the same process of separating: separating leaders from led, serious political activity from frivolous personal activity. A politics oriented towards the state, far from bringing about a radical change in society, leads to the progressive subordination of opposition to the logic of capitalism.93

The reason for this is despite the ideological image of the state being an independent body from 'the market' it is inseparably caught up in and reinforces the general social relations of capitalism. As Holloway writes:

The difficulty which revolutionary governments have experienced in wielding the state in the interests of the working class suggests that the embedding of the state in the web of capitalist social relations is far stronger and more subtle than the notion of instrumentality would suggest. The mistake of Marxist revolutionary movements has been, not to deny the capitalist nature of the state, but to misunderstand the degree of integration of the state in to the network of capitalist social relations.94
The state then is not a neutral tool that can be wielded by the proletariat. It is formed and enmeshed into the fracturing of human activity that constitutes capitalist society. To attempt to step onto it, into it, to grab it, produces subjectivities and organisational forms that also then reproduce the fracturing and stratifications that are the normality of capital. He writes:

The state is capital, a form of capital. The state is a specifically capitalist form of social relations. The state is so tightly bound into the global web of capitalist social relations that there is no way that an anti-capitalist sociality can be constructed through the state, no matter which party occupies the government. 95

Holloway's conception of the state, as being a product of the capitalist fetishism of social relations, has been influenced by the West German *Staatsableitung* or 'state derivation' debate. (The name arises because "the state derivation approach sought to 'derive' the state, logically and historically, from the categories developed by Marx in *Capital." )96 Holloway, along with Sol Picciotto, edited a volume entitled *State and Capital*, which was instrumental in introducing this debate to an Anglophone audience.97 In the introduction to this volume Holloway and Picciotto, critique the two dominant Marxist thinkers influencing thinking on the state within the UK at the time, Miliband and Poulantzas, as well as the debate between them. Despite the differences between these two authors, Holloway and Picciotto argue that both Miliband and Poulantzas see "the political as an autonomous object of study".98 Both accepted the split between the political and the economic but differed over how they relate, specifically how the state functions in capitalism. Against this the core element of *Staatsableitung* is a position "which emphasises simultaneously the unifying totality of capitalist-social relations and the historically conditioned fragmentation of those relations into fetishised forms..."99 Thus the apparent separation of the state from the economy, does not signify a real autonomy. Rather this separation is how capital fetishes social relations. It is important to emphasise that such a view does
not see the 'economic' determining the 'political' but the very split between the two is how they interrelate as elements of capitalist society.

Holloway did not simply aid the popularisation of *Staatsableitung* but contributed theoretically too. Pre-empting his work on 'the scream', Holloway argued, again with Picciotto, that the causal origin of the capitalist fetishism of social relations into the state-form (amongst others), and the particular nature of a state in a specific society, lies in the rebellion of the working class. They write "the state must be understood as a particular form of the manifestation of the crisis of the capital relation."\(^{100}\) This is the struggle of labour. They write:

The reproduction of social relations in fetishised form, i.e. in a 'fantastic form' which conceals their reality as relations of class domination, is an essential part of the reproduction of that domination. The autonomisation of the state must be seen as part of this fetishisation, as part of the process through which reproduction imposes the dead hand of capitalist 'reality', a false reality of fantastic forms, upon the struggles of the working class.\(^{101}\)

The implication of this analysis is that on entering into the realm of the state one is compelled to accept its modes of functioning. Despite the promises of power the state offers (so appealing in terrible times), it compels people to submit to its construction and positioning of subject and society. Holloway argues:

The state imposes upon us hierarchical social relations that we do not want; the state says we must be realistic and accept capitalist logic and the calculations of power when we are clear that we do not accept that logic and those calculations. The state says that it will solve our problems, that we are not capable of it, it reduces us to victims, denies our subjectivity. The state is a form of reconciling our struggles with capitalist domination. The path of the state is not the path of dignity.\(^{102}\)
Even those who seek the destruction of the capitalist state, for whom the state is not something to be taken over but smashed and replaced with a workers state, still end up internalising the social relations of capitalism:

Whether the winning of state power is seen as being the exclusive path for changing society or just as a focus for action, there is inevitably a channelling of revolt...What was initially negative (the rejection of capitalism) is converted into something positive (institution building, power-building). The induction into the conquest of power inevitably becomes an induction into power itself. The initiates lean the language, logic and calculations of power; they learn to wield the categories of a social science which has been entirely shaped by its obsession with power.  

The state then functions according to the practices of power-over. Perhaps it is this that makes the state so appealing. In a society where power-over is understood as the only form of power then the more power-over a struggle or movement can accumulate surely the better it is placed to challenge the rule of capital? Holloway argues that this is illusory: the power of the state comes at the cost of communism. The failure of the Left cannot be only understood as a series of "betrayals". This would mean that the reasons that socialism failed were due to various contingent and subjective actions of pivotal revolutionaries – Bolsheviks corrupted by power, weak trade union leaders etc. Rather it is the very engagement with the state – whether the revolutionary state or the social democratic one – that leads to defeat. And a state-centred strategy is part of the political cosmos that the limited idea of class and a stagiest view of social transformation make up. And engagement with the state leads to a production of certain kinds of subjectivities and a certain kind of conception of the human.

The fixation on the state has tended to destroy the movements pushing for radical change. If states are embedded in a global web of capitalism, that means that they tend to reproduce capitalist social relations through the way that they operate. States function in such a way as to reproduce the capitalist status quo. In their relation to us, and in our relation to them, there is a filtering out of anything that is not compatible with the reproduction of capitalist social relations. This may be a violent filtering, as in the repression of revolutionary or subversive activity, but it is also a less perceptible filtering, a sidelining or suppression of passions, loves, hates, anger, laughter, dancing. The state divides the public from the private and, in so doing, imposes a division upon us, separates our public, serious side from our private, frivolous, irrelevant side. The state fragments us, alienates us from ourselves.
This diagnosis seems to carry a lot of validity to it: the state-centred approaches to social revolution or even reform have seemingly failed to break from many of the practices of capital. Even in their most benign forms 'really existing socialism' and social democracy have only built forms of state capitalism. Also rhetorically it counters the apparent appeal of state centred approaches: their claims to viability come at the cost of their radicality. As such Holloway is highly sceptical of the apparent successes of the electoral Left in South and Latin America, such as the governments of Chavez (Venezuela) and Morales (Bolivia). He counsels that social movements should be wary of the promise of such governments. He sees their rise as a reaction to the rise of general struggles, and their success perhaps threatens these struggles themselves. In an interview he states:

...they are also a response to the rise of social struggles, a very complex and contradictory response. In all cases, they represent the attempt to satisfy the struggle, to give it a state form, which means of course to de-fuse the struggle and channel it into forms of organisation compatible with the reproduction of capital.105

Here in Holloway's critique of state-centred approaches to social change we see most clearly the affinity that Holloway's communist vision has with anarchism. However for Holloway anarchism is still too focused on the state: even if its focus is one of destruction. He wants to shift our horizon elsewhere, where "the old distinctions between reform, revolution and anarchism no longer seem relevant because the question of who controls the state is not the focus of attention."106 As perceptive as this critique is it doesn't necessarily follow that the failure of the state-centred Left means the viability of anti-statist approaches. Even if an anti-statist approach wants to refuse the values of capitalism, can it refuse its bullets? Is the scream enough?
Critique of Leninism

Holloway reserves a particular vehemence for Orthodox Marxism, especially its Marxist-Leninist variant. Of course much of Holloway’s critique of the state-centred nature of the Left can be carried over to Leninism. But Leninism also comes under a more specific attack. His critique of Leninism is that it is based on an incorrect understanding of class. It sees the working class as being predefined, clearly delineated and fundamentally subordinate to capital. This is the opposite to how Holloway depicts the proletariat – as the undefinable insubordination to capital:

Lenin’s workers are limited, self-contained. They struggle, but they struggle up to a certain point. They are contained within their role in society, they are defined. They can go beyond their limits only if taken by the hand by people from outside, by professional revolutionaries.¹⁰⁷

This then creates a very limited model of working class struggle on which the Leninist conception of the professional revolutionary is based. The limitations of the proletariat, their subordination, mean that their struggle is also limited and needs an extra non-proletarian element for them to achieve emancipation. What the revolutionary brings is knowledge. To quote Lenin: “[w]e have said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It could only be brought to them from without.” And that the “…working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness….”¹⁰⁸ It would be fair to say such an approach is widespread throughout various tendencies of Marxist-Leninism, including its Trotskyist and Maoist developments: that an exterior supplement in the form of the party is necessary to go beyond the seemingly impossible limitations such a perspective sees in the proletariat.

This split between the class and the party in Holloway’s view works to reinforce particularly non-communist modes of operating. By defining the working class as being limited and subordinated to capital it is only a small step to seeing it simultaneously subordinated to its self-appointed leadership. Such an
understanding of class then creates a mode of being revolutionary which Holloway sees as being deeply flawed. It supposes a particular access to knowledge and its production and dissemination. Thus it calls into being a particular kind of group relationship, one who’s internal and external dynamics are both inescapably linked. Such groups seek to win the leadership in a battle of ideas that is waged through stern and remorseless polemics. Continuing his critique of this paradigm and the associated praxis he writes:

A central issue is consciousness. The limited subject does not have a revolutionary consciousness, so it is necessary to bring consciousness to the workers. This involves a politics of explaining, of talking. Revolution is understood in prosaic terms. This tends to lead to a certain style of writing, in which the aim is to hammer a point home, to win points against anyone who may differ, rather than to discuss and express doubts, to shush rather than to listen. Built into the very concept of revolution is an idea of authority, leadership, hierarchy which dovetails easily with state and power.109

Holloway extends this critique by arguing that the very conceptualisation of knowledge that the Leninist model advances is fatuous. As Holloway has previously argued he sees the nature of capitalism as contestation, struggle and tension. The Leninist model (which Holloway argues is an extension of Engels’ idea of a scientific socialism) rather believes that an objective understanding, an outside view of capitalism, is possible. This effaces the centrality of struggle to capitalism’s composition and as such the possibilities of communism; it builds a division between the worker who does not know and the privileged revolutionary who does. But why should the party be believed? The Leninist model of the party forgets that “knowledge is a social relation” and as such it shrinks the understanding of capitalism.110 In contrast to this Holloway argues that there is no objective knowledge that the party can take hold of because knowledge is part of struggle – it too is constantly contested. Not only is the Leninist claim elitist, it is implausible.

Of course a defence that Leninism marshals is that it takes fighting capitalism seriously. If you want to counter capitalism you need to build the kinds
of disciplined organisational structures under central leadership that can arm the proletariat and disarm capitalism. This arming is the transfer of state power from the latter to the former. There is no point dreaming of communism if you can’t first defeat capitalism. Thus there is a clear separation between struggle and utopia. This then creates a certain temporality of struggle that does not see communism as an immanent and imminent possibility of labour, but rather the end product of Leninist politics. Holloway describes this element of the Leninist narrative as follows:

There is a gap between the capacities of the working class and the social revolution which is necessary. This gap can be filled only by constructing a series of mediating steps, of which the two most important are building the party and taking control of the state. Thus, revolution is conceived in terms of a number of essential steps: limited working class - construction of the party - taking state power - implementing social revolution.  

Holloway argues “[t]he orthodox Marxist tradition, most clearly the Leninist tradition conceives revolution as an instrumentality, as a means to an end.” This is the paradigm of the Revolution: the mythic storming of the winter palace, the moment when one world ends and another begins. The Marxist-Leninist model which internalises the practices of power-over, sees revolution as a gateway between the today that must be overcome and the utopia that is tomorrow. Revolution is only a tool; something one builds (the party, the union etc), an army, a force. Liberation can only be grasped in the future. Holloway’s critique is that such a perspective, which defers communism for the sake of the struggle today, permanently defers communism. That the acceptance of a certain necessity due to a limited understanding of the possibilities of the present helps build a kind of practice that reinforces current social relationships. As we shall see below Holloway’s rejection of Leninism means a different temporality of revolution and a different conception of meaningful activity for the revolutionary.
Critique of Negri

Though Holloway’s criticism of Leninism has much in common with other autonomists there are nevertheless significant differences between him and others. Of special interest to this study is Holloway’s critique of Negri. This is very important for there is not a lot of direct debate between the three orientations that constitute our thesis, even though in English they often appear side by side in the same volumes.\(^{iv}\) Also Holloway’s critique avoids the vitriol and rancour most often associated with a rivalry between ‘Marxist intellectuals’.

Negri is someone Holloway is (relatively) politically and theoretically close to, and as such the differences are expressed very sharply. Holloway sees a certain similarity in his work with Negri, arguing that Negri’s work “responds to a desperate need”; faced with the failures of the past “Negri refuses to give up thinking and rethinking revolution: this is the great attraction of his work.”\(^{113}\) As already noted Holloway sees the struggles and existence of labour and capital as bound up in an internal tension. As such the revolt of labour is one of a divided non-subject against its very constitution – the scream against. His critique of Negri is a continuation of his critique of much of the perspective of autonomy having an affirmative understanding of class: it is a critique of its political implications. Holloway’s argument is that an affirmative understanding of class, or in Negri’s case the multitude, “separates existence from constitution.”\(^{114}\) For Negri the multitude is seen as largely an already autonomous force, one that pushes against the power that capital tries to use to contain it. Struggle, for Negri then, is the affirmation of capabilities already in clear existence. Holloway argues that:

To treat the subject as positive is attractive but it is inevitably a fiction. In a world that dehumanises us, the only way in which we can exist as humans is negatively, by struggling against our dehumanisation. To understand the subject as positively autonomous (rather than as potentially autonomous) is rather like a prisoner in a cell imagining that she is

already free: an attractive and stimulating idea, but a fiction, a fiction that easily leads on to other fictions, to the construction of a whole fictional world. 115

Such an understanding, Holloway argues, also leads to a historical periodisation: a belief that capitalism has a history of different stages of political development. The perspective of autonomy does often write a historical narrative of capitalism based on different forms of class composition. "Again, there has at times been a tendency to rigidify the concept of class composition, to generalise from the experiences of a particular group of workers and project it as a model for judging all class struggle." 116 What is wrong with this, Holloway argues, is that it leads to a model of struggle based on reinforcing what exists rather than destroying it. Negri tries to take what is already in existence and extend it, rather than undermine all the elements of social existence. Negri's politics is the autonomous affirmation of labour against capital, Holloway looks to labour's autonomous negation of itself as labour. Holloway critiques the example of the anti-capitalist militant Hardt and Negri provide at the end of Empire, Francis of Assisi:

The idea of Saint Francis of Assisi as the example of communist militancy is the repugnant culmination of positive thought. For over a hundred years communism has suffered the nightmare of the Pure Subject: the Party, the working class hero, the unsullied militant. To resurrect the image of the Pure Subject, just when it seemed at last to have died the indecent death that it merited, is not just a joke, it is grotesque. We hate capitalism and fight against it, but that does not make us into the embodiment of good fighting against evil. On the contrary, we hate it not just because we adopt the common condition of the multitude, but because it tears us apart, because it penetrates us, because it turns us against ourselves, because it maims us. Communism is not the struggle of the Pure Subject, but the struggle of the maimed and schizophrenic. Unless we start from there, there is no hope. 117

Rather than Saint Francis, Holloway looks to "Mephistopheles, the spirit who always negates" as the point of reference, for it is "negation that is the substance of hope". 118 But how can a spirit of negation be a point of reference for an effective and possible communist politics?
Ordinary People are Rebels

Where does Holloway suggest we go from here? It is not uncommon that the practices of the ultraleft, especially since the demise of council communism in the 1920s, amount to little more than a relentless criticism of capitalism and of the manifold failings of the Left. It has been less successful at developing a real communist practice, and what is communism if not a practice? From the above critiques we can extract a core idea that communism is the practice of negation based in the everyday antagonisms of class society with a temporality that sees the possibility for rupture now; with communism being both a living possibility and also an open unending journey. Revolutionary activity is the amplification of these negations.

One of the virtues of Holloway's transformation of class is that it leads to a rejuvenation of the paradigm of revolution; a rejuvenation that strikes a chord with many elements of recent struggles. Holloway's work implies a way of looking and acting in the world, one that prioritises the immanent and imminent possibility of struggles, autonomous and open political forms, and a narrative of revolution that starts with negation as the necessary first step. What we must remember is that despite the often-abstract language Holloway uses, all this is meant to be embodied, lived, fleshy. He depicts a society of struggle carried out by real living humans. These conflicts and antagonisms happen in our daily lives. This leads Holloway to an ultimately optimistic position. His rejection of a defined and limited idea of class then places the possibility of communist activity in everyday struggle. He quotes the Zapatista maxim that they are ordinary people and "ordinary people are rebels." Holloway is not saying that everywhere people are in open insurrection but rather:

To say that the people we see in the street are rebels even though they are not at this moment rebelling is to see them as contradictory and self-divided. They are rebels and
non-rebels at the same time. Their rebelliousness is repressed. Their subjectivity is contained at the moment but not inherently limited. On the contrary: if they are rebels, then their subjectivity is overflowing, bursting through the limits which contain it, potentially infinite.120

This position implies a number of perspectives on struggle. On one hand an individual could look at Holloway’s argument and come to the opposite position: that ordinary people are non-rebels. One could emphasise all the parts of human activity that reconstitute the world of capital. As we have already seen Holloway rejects the idea that knowledge is objective; rather it is caught up in the antagonism of capitalism. Theorists are presented with a choice. To emphasis the compromises, the repressions and conformities of daily life is to leave the realm of revolutionary theory. Holloway presents it like this:

Theodor Adorn (sic), German, Jewish, communist returned from exile at the end of the war saying, 'After Auschwitz one has to ask if it is possible to go on living.' Ernst Bloch, German, Jewish, communist, returned from exile at the end of the war saying 'Now is the time to learn to hope.'121

What is personified in Adorno and Bloch is embodied in our condition: the split between submission and insubordination. This is our torn and fractured nature due to the social relations of capitalism – the intertwining of our rebellion and defeat in the substance of the daily life of capitalism. To place Adorno here, Bloch there, is an abstraction – we may not experience it so clear-cut. But the radical (anti-)politics of Holloway is based on how we can amplify our internal Bloch through collective processes of refusal and autonomy and escape our internal Adorno that thrives on our atomisation and defeat. The possibility of hope is the possibility of revolution that has its origins in the fissures and contestations that constitute our ordinary lives.

Revolutionary struggle is the drawing out of these tensions into cascading flows of acts and organisation, and the linking of individual moments of refusal
into open processes that break the power of capital and establish collective and autonomous ways of organising our existences.

Two Temporalities of Struggle

The open-ended nature of the Zapatista movement is summed up in the idea that it is revolution, not a Revolution ("with small letters, to avoid polemics with the many vanguards and safeguards of THE REVOLUTION"). It is a revolution, because the claim to dignity in a society built upon the negation of dignity can only be met through a radical transformation of society. But it is not a Revolution in the sense of having some grand plan, in the sense of a movement designed to bring about the Great Event which will change the world. Its claim to be revolutionary lies not in the preparation for the future Event but in the present inversion of this perspective, in the consistent insistence on seeing the world in terms of that which is incompatible with the world as it is: human dignity. Revolution refers to present existence, not its future instrumentality.122

Holloway depicts the daily life of capitalism as being filled with tension. For him it is our condition of being split and antagonistic that is the basis for affirming a radically different conception of revolutionary activity, of revolution and of being in the world. Reality is shown to be broken, contradictory and explosive. This leads to Holloway positing a new temporality of struggle.

Actually for Holloway there are two new temporalities: one of negation, one of affirmation - "two steps...they are simultaneous".123 This is the breaking of the present order of things and the journey into tomorrow; we don’t have to wait for either the maturing of objective conditions or the ripening of subjective forces of politics. Revolt, the break into communism, is ever-present. To quote:

The traditional left operates with a capitalist concept of time. In this concept, capitalism is a continuum, it has duration, it will be there until the day of revolution comes. It is this duration, this continuum that we have to break. How? By refusing. By understanding that
capitalism does not have any duration independent of us. If capitalism exists today, it is not because it was created one hundred or two hundred years ago, but because we (the workers of the world, in the broadest sense) created it today. If we do not create it tomorrow it will not exist.\textsuperscript{124}

Thus the first temporality is that refusal of “¡Ya Basta! Enough! A temporality of impatience and intensity and revolution here-and-now, because capitalism is unbearable, because we cannot go on creating our own destruction.”\textsuperscript{125} This temporality of refusal is a present one, a time that lives now, and now and also now. This is because all the categories of capitalism are split: creativity is caught, fractured and alienated. Yet this fracture is also the fissure of refusal and anti-power. So in all the moments of capitalism, life is struggle, is refusal, is the scream – which is of course Holloway’s starting point – revolution is present.

The second temporality is the one of generating new liberated social relations. And this is posed as an open journey. For the temporality of the traditional Left, communism is the end point – we will reach a utopia. For Holloway communism is a beginning, a start and adventure that stretches out from our refusal in the now. He describes the relation of these two temporalities of revolution:

First: do not wait, refuse now, tear a hole, a fissure in the texture of capitalist domination now, today. And secondly, starting from these refusals, these fissures and simultaneously work with them, build an alternative world, a different way of doing things, a different sort of social relations between people. Here it cannot be a sudden change, but a long and patient struggle in which hope lies not in the next election or the storming of the Winter Palace but in overcoming our isolation and coming together with other projects, other refusals, pushing in the same direction.\textsuperscript{126}

Both these temporalities place communism as a present project(s) and a present reality, not a “living despite capitalism, but living in-against-and beyond capitalism.” This is an “interstitial conception of revolution” a “commun-ism.”\textsuperscript{127}
This has direct practical consequences. The practice of the Left is often justified by the split between struggle now, liberation later. All kinds of internal and external disciplines, the restriction of rebellious desires, violence against enemies, etc, can be justified through a conception of time and struggle that sees a split between the practical and bloody work of struggle now, and the utopia later. Also Holloway's work breaks open the time of the present, it dissolves the solidity of capitalist time. Any moment can burst into mass collective revolt. These are great social explosions like Mai68 or the more recent revolts in France (both at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006) where: "[a]t their best, such events are flashes against fetishism, festivals of the non-subordinate, carnivals of the oppressed, explosions of the pleasure principle, intimations of the nunc stans." 128

The different temporalities of struggle are inexplicitly bound to a way of being, a way of acting, to practice; just as different practices that oppose capitalism create different temporalities. The focus on the state (which is a focus based on a wider view of the political and philosophical nature of the world we live) generates a sense of the potentials (or lack thereof) in the present and a narrative of social struggle. As too does Holloway's conception of class, of being in-against-and-beyond. It means that our actions now, in the present, must be consistent with the way we want to live: we move from rupture to generation. This is Holloway's use of the alterglobalisation maxim: "One No, Many Yeses".

Dignity

This maxim presents us with a problem. Where does the "yes" come from? If Holloway's theory is centred on negation how does this lead to creation? Or to put it differently, how is it to account for the negation of negation, from the move from the abolition of capital to the generation of communism, if all there is the scream?
Holloway's negation is the assertion of that which has been alienated. If this is the case surely one could ask why does the assertion require negation, and does negation proceed affirmation? Does the No come before the Yes? We will examine this below in the case of the Zapatistas, but generally, facing the necessity of building an effective challenge to capitalism, it is unclear that the first temporality is that of negation. The formation of collectivities that can animate and are animated by communist praxis may equally begin with a ‘yes’ – a positive construction of relations between comrades around the desire for another form of social existence. And alternatively, struggle may begin with a ‘no’ and a ‘yes’ (or ‘Nos’ and ‘Yeses’) simultaneously. This is not to say such a collectivity is not built from negation or that negation is unimportant. Rather, that the causal relationship of Holloway’s schema seems unjustifiable and unhelpful: negation may be just an element of communist activity.

Holloway in some of his work does attempt to grapple with the problem of how the scream can lead to communism, how negation can lead to generation, through the concept of “dignity”. This is the only concept that he takes directly from the Zapatistas. It does not solve the problem but rather shows the difficulties his schema presents.

In many ways dignity is a competing, not a complementary, attempt to explain the source and nature of rebellion to the scream. His most detailed description of dignity pre-dates his work on the scream – the 1996 article “Dignity’s Revolt”. Here he writes:

Dignity, the refusal to accept humiliation and dehumanisation, the refusal to conform: dignity is the core of the Zapatista revolution of revolution. The idea of dignity has not been invented by the Zapatistas, but they have given it a prominence that it has never before possessed in revolutionary thought. When the Zapatistas rose, they planted the flag of dignity not just in the centre of the uprising in Chiapas, but in the centre of oppositional thought. Dignity is not peculiar to the indigenous peoples of the southeast of Mexico: the struggle to convert ‘dignity and rebellion into freedom and dignity’ (an odd but important formulation) is the struggle of (and for) human existence in an oppressive society, as
Dignity is also used in the book *Change the World Without Taking Power*. To quote: “...dignity: the rebellion that is in all of us, the struggle for a humanity that is denied us, the struggle against the crippling of humanity that we are. Dignity is an intensely lived experience that fills the detail of our everyday lives.” Dignity is like the scream: it is a metaphor for the struggle against capital, something that is ordinary and communist. The politics that “Dignity’s Revolt” asserts is very similar. Yet its negative nature is more ambiguous, indeed it is something one struggles for, something asserted, something positive. For example, “Dignity is and is not: it is the struggle against its own negation.” Here both the affirmative and negative nature of dignity is asserted, and more problematically capital is defined as that which negates. I think this tortuous metaphysics is the results of Holloway’s error – his overstating of negation, of the scream. He tries to make what is a crucial and often forgotten element of communism – labour’s revolt against being labour – into the keystone of everything. It can’t be, it isn’t. His theoretical twisting and turning is a result of being pulled hither and thither to try to complete an impossible task.

Communist Praxis

But what does Holloway suggest that we could *actually do* to embody and affirm a way of life worth living? What is the nature of the future that we build in the present? Holloway’s critique of an objective conception of knowledge means that in his work there is no postulation of a perfect utopia, nor is there a clear path to it. Rather there is desire for, and an incitement to engage in, utopian projects and struggles that are open-ended and immersed in the antagonisms of capitalist society. It is from here that we find limited suggestions for conscious communist activity.
Borrowing from the Zapatistas Holloway typifies this praxis as "[p]reguntando caminamos" – walking we ask questions. This Zapatista maxim poses the question both to those who ask it and those who hear it – which we could take as analogous to the division of revolutionary and class – in a way that either destabilises both, or denies their separation. His instruction is that those who would define themselves as revolutionaries should not enter into struggle with a preformed program but rather they should be porous to the contradictions and creativity of rebellion; to grasp praxis as praxis, as the constant interplay of thought and action. Thus revolution, the eruption of our ordinary rebelliousness, is fecund: we constantly generate more thought, more questions, more desires, more insights and more doubts. The question is also aimed outwards. Political practice generally (the practice of power-over) places thought, most often as ideology, above the swirl of society; revolutionary activity is seen as winning people to this position. Preguntando caminamos refigures revolutionary struggle. To rebel one does not try to win others to a solid position but rather works with others to produce moments of collective questioning. "The problem is not to bring consciousness from outside, but to draw out the knowledge that is already present, albeit in repressed and contradictory form." The rebel reaches out, tries to generalise rebellion and contribute to a proliferation of knowledges, communication and language (perhaps this is similar to what Haraway calls heteroglossia). To ask a question implies that we listen to the answer, and that listening rather than being a passive response of those who are being commanded is an active part of the negation of commodity society. Again returning to the Zapatistas Holloway writes:

And they learnt to listen...Above all, learning to listen meant turning everything upside down. The long revolutionary tradition of talking is not just a bad habit. It has a long-established theoretical basis in the concepts of Marxism-Leninism. The tradition of talking derives, on the one hand, from the idea that theory ('class consciousness') must be brought to the masses by the party and, on the other, from the idea that capitalism must be analysed from above, from the movement of capital rather than from the movement of anti-capitalist struggle. When the emphasis shifts to listening, both of these theoretical suppositions are undermined. The whole relation between theory and practice is thrown

into question: theory can no longer be seen as being brought from outside, but it is obviously the product of everyday practice.\textsuperscript{134}

For Holloway, this is since our condition is fractious and rebellious. Revolution is the eruption of our everyday conditions. Holloway writes: "[c]ommunism is the movement of that which exists in the mode of being denied".\textsuperscript{135} Communism erupts from the tensions of our existence. The revolutionary process is the expansive asking of questions because this is how we manifest what is hidden, what is repressed but also what is the substance of both capital and its negation. This means that revolution (and thus communism) exists now in the present. But this existence is split, it is a presence, a possibility. The question becomes how these potentials can be realised in a way that destroys capitalism and creates communism.

In Holloway's work there is the assertion of a generally councilist model: that the basic form of the construction of communism is some kind of (anti-)workers' council. Firstly it is important to note that Holloway's councilism does not advocate a particular model of council; rather he is a partisan of the open, mass, horizontal coming together of those in struggle. This could be the Soviet of 1905 or the general assemblies of occupied universities that erupted through France at the end of March 2006; or any of the other countless smaller strike councils, collective meetings, squatted social centres and so on. Possibly and tentatively it could be seen embryonically in any gathering where dissatisfactions are expressed, similar to a micro-politics or infra-politics. For Holloway it is in any of the moments in which people come together to question, to refuse, to rebuild, to weave solidarity, that is 'the council'.

The council provides the space in which the antagonistic and rebellious currents in our condition can cohere, ask questions and explode. It is the place that allows the rupture with the surface appearance of capitalist society, and it itself is a rupture. We must come together to collectively break the fracturing of our activity
and we must break the fracturing of our activity to come together collectively. It is here where *preguntando caminamos* takes form:

The council as a form of collective self-determination is the form that follows from the perception that we are ordinary, therefore rebellious. The council is the collective process of self-analysis which makes possible the distillation of a revolutionary We. The difference between the party approach and the council approach is not just a matter of organization, but of a whole theoretical construction. In the council approach there is no model to be applied. It is inevitably a question of making the path by walking on it. There is an openness about this approach, simply because the movement is a process of self-determination. Communism is the movement of self-determination against the command of capital. This means there are no certainties, no clear path to be followed, no model...\textsuperscript{136}

It is also important to point out that this assertion of the council is quite different from other positions focused on workers self-management. Holloway does not posit the council as the form that can take over the means of production or generate a collective ownership of property – because both these elements of the social field rest on the fracturing and reification of our creativity. To quote:

\begin{quote}
Our struggle, then, is not the struggle to make ours the property of the means of production, but to dissolve both property and the means of production: to recover or, better, create the conscious and confident sociality of the flow of doing. Capital rules by fetishising, by alienating the done from the doing and the doer and saying 'This done is a thing and it is mine.' Expropriating the expropriator cannot then be seen as a reseizure of a thing, but rather as the dissolution of the thing-ness of the done, its (re)integration into the social flow of doing.\textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

The importance and ambiguity of the council form is also highlighted by what Holloway portrays as capital’s reaction to our revolt. Since capital tries to flee from us, to run away from the labour that it cannot escape (and thus its flight is increasingly violent, despairing and desperate), we must take up the challenge of what life would be like without it. "The more the march of dignity advances, the more capital flees."\textsuperscript{138} The council, the manifestation of our negation of this world, the manifestation of the persistent nightmare of capitalism, the spectre that
continues to haunt the balance sheet, also becomes the start of trying to live beyond capital, and a response to capital’s threats.

“But how do we survive without our exploiters, when they control access to the richness of human doing?” Holloway asks. “That is the great challenge. How do we strengthen the fissures so that they are not just isolated pockets of poverty but a real alternative form of doing that allows us to say to capital “well yes, go away then, if that is what you are always threatening to do?” Capital’s attempts to flee from us often manifests with a violence and brutality which is terrifying. But when the strike committee forms, when the faculty is occupied, when the empty building is squatted, when we chain ourselves together in front of bulldozers – that is, when we manifest together and against, we are confronted with the challenge of what lies beyond this. As Holloway states:

But this is not enough. We cannot eat democratic discussions, we cannot drink comradeship. It is no good if, after the democratic discussion in the asamblea barrial or frente zapatista in the evening, we have to sell our capacity to do (labour power) to capital the next day and participate actively in the process of separation that capital means. Yet here too the energy of the struggle carries us forward, from talking to doing.

The rupture with capital, since it is the manifestation of our collectivities exploding against this condition, begins to generate alternatives. Looking at Argentina he writes:

The asambles barriales in Argentina are increasingly moving from discussing and protesting against the government to taking their lives in their own hands and occupying clinics that have been abandoned, houses that are empty, banks that have fled, in order to provide better health care, and to provide places for people to live and centres for people to meet and discuss. When factories close, the workers are not just protesting but occupying them and using them to produce things that are needed.

But Holloway is not presenting this as a final answer. His elucidation of praxis is an imagining of the combustive potential in daily life and the libratory potential of collective action. His work moves to pull apart the apparent limitations
and stability of daily life (an appearance that the Left, for the most part, reproduced); an appearance which arises from the reification of our abilities. He pulls apart the categories of political thought to present the tangled messy antagonisms that are the basis of a praxis of hope, a praxis of anti-power which is grounded in the possibilities of the here and now. But this hope is a hope that is based in uncertainty, in tension, in fluidity. Holloway clearly rejects the state as a model of struggle but he does not pose clear alternatives. "What does revolution mean?" asks Holloway, "It is a question, can only be a question."142

Conclusion

Holloway’s work is an important addition to radical theory and takes the pioneering work of operaismo in directions that its original protagonists would have struggled to imagine. In times such as ours his work provides us with courage and hope. His work certainly tries to meet the challenge detailed in the introduction – to show how the material conditions of capitalism contain the potential for other, more desirable, modes of social life. Central to his project is an attempt to transform the solidity and apparent dominance of capitalist power into terrains of contestation and struggle. He wants to show that even after the defeat of the Leninist and Social Democratic Left, and the failures of various smaller more radical perspectives (anarchism, council communism, the New Left, etc) to become ongoing mass movements, the possibilities for communism and emancipation still exist. To do this he elaborates a theory based around the idea of the “scream”, of the constant struggle of labour’s negation of itself as labour. This involves a rejection of a solid, sociological idea of class, and identity more broadly. He advocates a political practice based on the formation of radically democratic councils as the starting point for the transformation of society. In doing this he challenges many of the certainties and shibboleths of the Left, arguing that they do not go far enough in breaking with capitalist social relations. He regularly references the Zapatistas as an inspiration for both his analysis and his suggestions
for ways forward. Yet much as he advances a theory based on *negation* he also reduces the complexity of struggle to *only* negation.
Chapter 3: A Critique of Holloway

Introduction

Holloway’s work, with his radicalisation of our understanding of class, capitalism and revolution, is very valuable. However, his schema ultimately falters in its ability to suggest a viable form of militancy. Holloway’s work over-emphasises negation until all struggles are reduced to it. He often ignores the context and singularity of struggles. So too the difficult work of creating and affirming political agency and rebellious solidarities is discarded for an easy answer. When we compare Holloway’s conception of struggle with that of the Zapatistas (in both word and deed) – who he cites as a pivotal inspiration – we find him sorely lacking.

The real flaw in Holloway’s work is the reduction of everything to “the scream”. This is the universalism that allows his theory to function: all revolts are seen to be motivated by the same eruption of negation. All social activity is seen through this lens, explained the same way and given the same prescription. Holloway, who wants to pose a theory of autonomy and multiplicity, can only do so because he believes each multiple to actually be fundamentally the same as all others. This is because for him all revolts are moments of the against, all voices enunciate with the same scream. The revolt against, the negation of what is, is a crucial element in struggle, but only an element. A more nuanced, open and multilayered approach is needed.
The Subversive Quality of Labour

As inspiring as Holloway's work is it is deeply flawed. It is my contention that Holloway fails to really grasp the subversive quality of labour, to really understand what it is in our condition that opens the door to the possibility of communism. The radical contention of his work, that the subversive quality of the proletariat is its ability to negate itself and the world of capital is potent and important. It provides Holloway (and others like Marx, Debord, etc) with the theoretical tools to show the possibilities of freedom. However it can only ever be part of our understanding of our social world, and only part of communist politics (or anti-politics if you prefer).

Marx writes that "Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man (sic)". This notion of positive abolition is far more complicated than just negation. Rather it is negation and affirmation together, the destruction of some forms of our alienation and the reappropriation of our own creativity that exists bound up within reified forms.

On a simple level a communist praxis can only ever be the activity of real existing people: people that are immersed in a broader social world. As much as this broader context is, as Holloway argues, composed of antagonism and contestation, our subversive relationship to it is not simple one of negation. We are often compelled to resist capitalism by our affinities, affections and attachments. Again, on a simple level, communist politics is the space in which our everyday antagonisms manifest in forms that become excessive to the boundaries of capitalism. It is composed by what we experience as joyous and desire to protect in our lives as we find it, as well as what humiliates us, fills us with rage and thus what we want to abolish.
On a theoretical level Holloway stumbles when he *reduces* the subversive nature of labour to its ability to negate itself as labour, that is as a category of capitalism. I believe the mistake here is actually to not really grasp the contradictory nature of labour under capital. Holloway sees this contradiction as one between what we do for capitalism and how we refuse it. This leaves him little scope to see how perhaps the same tasks, the same activity, that produces a use-value and an exchange-value within capitalism (and here I am talking in the most imprecise, broadest sense) also may create things of worth beyond capitalism. One may build a house (for example) and in that work suffer the rigours of alienation, participate in reifying their own creativity and that of their workmates into an estranged product, all under the watchful and ever-present tyranny of the boss and the larger logics of the market and the commodity. Yet at the same time this process of work may be physically and emotionally rewarding, the company and process of collective creation stimulating and so on. And we can see that this occurs across capitalism. Our real solidarities that we experience are produced both by our labour *and also* how we rebel against it.

Holloway attempts to address this in “Two Temporalities of Struggle”, where he argues that after our one unifying ‘No’ come the many ‘Yeses’ of creation. This fails to take into account how it may be our ‘Yes’ that precedes our ‘No.’ Sometimes it is our desires for creation that drive us to revolt, and as we shall see below, it can be that the tasks of political creation come before the actions of revolt. Perhaps the mistake is to even create a paradigm that sees some kind of split between ‘Nos’ and ‘Yeses’. Rather could not it be that our attempts to fundamentally change social relations always have these elements bound up within each other. It is an error to argue that one must precede the other.

A more nuanced understanding of the subversive quality of labour is found strikingly in the work carried out by feminists on the questions of reproductive labour. Here there is particular care to grasp how the work of ‘love’ is entwined
with aspects one may desire to refuse and others that one may cherish. This is seen clearly in the essay *A Very Careful Strike* written by the collective Precarias a la Deriva. Here the collective looks at how the work of “care”, which has traditionally been the labour of women in the home, is now, in contemporary conditions, deployed outside the home in the realms of wage-labour and the public sphere more generally. When our work is the work of looking after each other, of producing webs of interpersonal relations, attending to our physical and emotional health and so on, then it becomes obvious that we cannot think of the subversive quality of our labour as only negative, or our struggle as only negation. Rather Precarias a la Deriva see struggle as a gestalt of intermeshed complex interactions which try to autonomously realise caring labour outside of capitalist control and simultaneously revolt against that which is abhorrent and needs to be abolished. They write of the “caring strike”:

The strike appears to us as an everyday and multiple practice: there will be those who propose transforming public space, converting spaces of consumption into places of encounter and play preparing a “reclaim the streets,” those who suggest organizing a work stoppage in the hospital when the work conditions don’t allow the nurses to take care of themselves as they deserve, those who decide to turn off their alarm clocks, call in sick and give herself a day off as a present, and those who prefer to join others in order to say “that’s enough” to the clients that refuse to wear condoms... there will be those who oppose the deportation of miners from the “refuge” centers (sic) where they work, those who dare - like the March 11th Victims’ Association (la asociación de afectados 11M) - to bring care to political debate proposing measures and refusing utilizations of the situation by political parties, those who throw the apron out the window and ask why so much cleaning? And those who join forces in order to demand that they be cared for as quadriplegics and not as “poor things” to be pitied, as people without economic resources and not as stupid people, as immigrants without papers and not as potential delinquents, as autonomous persons and not as institutionalized dependents. There will be those who...
unacknowledged. He is forced to revert to a universalism to hold his work together. Such universalism nullifies his claims to respect difference and multiplicity. Rather there is a constant reductionism in his work: all revolts end up being the same: it is all "the scream".

Holloway's reduction of all struggles to the same starting point, the scream, negation, means he is also confronted by another problem. He struggles to take into account not only how our revolts may be different but how differences work to split the proletariat against itself and how this may be addressed. Holloway argues that the tensions of labour's revolt against being labour are experienced by "nearly everybody". But could there also not be other splits in this "nearly everybody" which means "against-ness" is not "more present", or is submerged or sublimated by other social fractures? Holloway makes no allowances for the ways that certain sections of the global proletariat are recruited into a defence of capitalism – the power of nationalism, white-skin privilege, the labour aristocracy etc. Or the ways the real divisions of race, gender, nation, etc function. Ignoring these forces and histories blunts us from the political projects, ideological deconstructions, social subversions and organisational creations that are needed to realise functional solidarities and the generation of real social alternatives.

Holloway may argue that we are all divided subjects but he does not go far enough. When confronted with the different divisions and hierarchies that exist within the proletariat Holloway's response is always the same trump card: the scream. He does not see the different ways that we are divided and how such divisions are then placed into a hierarchy. The virtue of Holloway's position is it sees the potential for rebellion. Holloway chooses to see the possibility of the revolt-against despite present appearances to the contrary. He sees that behind the seeming solidity of capitalist society there exists countless refusals – refusals that compose society itself. But to see this, to refuse the camera obscura of the commodity, takes a subjective choice. But if this subjective choice cannot take into
account the structural practices that work to hold people within the world of capitalism then the worth of it is reduced.

The Limitations of Holloway’s Critique of Identity

Holloway’s overemphasis on negation is compounded by his dismissal of identity. These failings become particularly apparent when we compare Holloway with the Zapatistas.

Despite Holloway’s claim, the Zapatistas have a far more complex conception of identity than simply a refusal of it. In an opening statement at the First International Encounter For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism they define themselves, their struggle and the relationship to humanity as “[t]he voice that arms itself to be heard, the face that hides itself to be seen, the name that hides itself to be named”. This concurs with Holloway’s depiction as an assertion of a non-identity. However the Zapatistas also make explicit that behind the mask is a general humanity, a general humanity that suffers and struggles. They write: “[b]ehind this (the black mask), we are the same forgotten men and women, the same excluded, the same tolerated, the same persecuted, the same as you. Behind this, we are you.” Yet this general humanity, that is both the Zapatistas who address us and we who listen, is then composed of minorities, minorities that are clearly identified and also hidden by the power of capitalism:

Behind our mask is the face of all excluded women, of all the forgotten native people, of all the persecuted homosexuals, of all the despised youth, of all the beaten migrants, of all those imprisoned for their words and thoughts, of all the humiliated workers, of all those dead from neglect, of all the simple and ordinary men and women who don’t count who aren’t seen who are nameless, who have no tomorrow.
The mask then is not just a move against identity: it is the space where multiple minority experiences find themselves and each other. And these are minorities in a very Deleuzian sense – not necessarily just numerical minorities but rather those who don’t fit into the various logics of power that are in play. In this sense I would argue that the Zapatistas are beyond Holloway. They argue that a universality, ‘humanity’, exists behind the mask, and then populate this ‘humanity’ with minorities. This construction of humanity as the intermeshing of minorities undercuts the homogenising tendencies of humanism. They reinvigorate the idea of humanity so it can answer both to the past and the future.

Also the Zapatistas argue that liberating struggle, the struggle of humanity against neoliberalism, functions through asserting these identities, or at the least trying to prevent neoliberalism from erasing them. In the novel *The Uncomfortable Dead*, written by Subcomandante Marcos and Paco Iganacio Taibo II (a novel which can also be seen as an important political statement by the Zapatistas), the Zapatista character ‘the Russian’ defines “Evil”, in part, as follows:

Betraying the memory of our honoured dead. Denying what we are. Losing our memory. Selling our dignity. Feeling shame for being Indian, or black, or Chicano, or Muslim, or yellow, or white, or red, or gay, or lesbian, or transsexual, or skinny, or fat, or tall, or short. Forgetting our history. Forgetting ourselves.

Unlike Holloway’s work, this is clearly an argument for the radical assertion of identity, if not identity politics as it is understood in the North. The Zapatistas depiction of a rebellious and ordinary humanity composed of minorities is an important political innovation. It is very different from Holloway’s over-emphasis of negation.

Secondly, indigenous and Mexican identity is crucial to how the Zapatistas function as a collective political endeavour. For example the practice of masking has specific meaning from within the indigenous ethnic and religious traditions of

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vi There are similarities here with notions of “queer”, itself a radical claim that developed beyond the limits of previous identity-based approaches to struggles around sexuality.
the Indian communities that constitute the Zapatista movement; as well as the symbolic-political role discussed above, and the practical role of hiding from the state. Mihalis Mentinis argues that the Zapatista practice of masking, both the balaclavas worn by prominent figures like Marcos and the red bandanas or *paliacate*, can only be understood in reference to the "indigenous social imaginary." Mentinis argues that covering one’s face arises from and in reference to Mayan cosmology: how the religious tendencies, especially around *nagualism* (a Mayan cultural-religious conception and practice), that tend towards social conservatism, can be redeployed for revolutionary and collective struggle. “The collective masking is thus the symbolic means by which nagualism and the project of autonomy come together.”

Masking amongst the Zapatistas functions because it is deeply tied to the lived practices of specific Indian identities. It is potent evidence of Holloway’s mistake in refusing to understand the specifics of a situation, and to grasp how identity can be both subverted and reaffirmed as part of anti-capitalist struggle, not simply negated or asserted as a non-identity. The Zapatista struggle cannot simply be thought of as being radical because it refuses or goes beyond identity; for so much of it is only possible in reference to very specific, complicated and contested local cultural and identity formations. The ability of this struggle to pose a broader universal politics suggests that Holloway’s schema cannot even adequately grasp a struggle that he celebrates and moves to the centre of his work.

Holloway’s ahistorical approach, his refusal to think about singular and concrete situations means that he produces a grand theory for all circumstances; even if this theory overtly claims to be attentive to multiplicity and autonomy. At the same time as it gives some struggles voice it effaces others by reducing them all to the same basic substance. And this leads to a real deficiency in being able to construct a politics that can grasp difference.
Limitations of Holloway’s Politics

What Holloway suggests as meaningful revolutionary activity largely consists of demolishing other modes of praxis – mainly by denying their status as being revolutionary. Beyond this his suggestions seem to be either relentless questioning or as a partisan for the council. Both are crucial elements of communist activity, but they are not enough. Holloway’s thinking is actually deeply deficient. This deficiency is, again, due in part to the universalism in Holloway’s work and his failure to take into account the actual composition of the proletariat. His failures to grasp the complex subversive relation of labour, to truly understand both the multiplicity of revolt and the hierarchies of difference within the proletariat, and his complete rejection of identity, means he cannot really suggest an effective, emancipatory communist politics.

Holloway gives the same general model for all struggles: the council. More profoundly the council is only viable because he sees all revolts as reducible to the same: the scream. The council works in Holloway’s writings because our revolts, despite their various overt differences, all express a basic unitary core. Now this of course is not incorrect but it’s just not enough. Revolution is possible because in many ways capitalism has united us through proletarianisation. Revolution is also possible because rebellion gives us the means to transform our relationships with each other. And the process of revolt does involve the collective coming together. But also capitalism has generated divisions amongst us just as much as it has united us, and whilst Holloway acknowledges these divisions he does not accord them sufficient weight. It may be that our revolts open the potential to break, dissolve or subvert these divisions – but this does not make them disappear. Rather to effectively craft solidarities, creativities and disobediences in the present across all the actual existing multiplicities and differences involves a more difficult project. The hierarchies of power within the proletariat need to be taken into account. The divisions of gender for example, cannot be radicalised or subverted
simply by the promise of various rebellions meeting in the council. It is only \textit{part} of an answer. Despite his previous claims to reject determinism and promises of final victory, Holloway still owes too much to a Marxism of the past – one that hopes in its analysis to reveal a basis that is the guarantee of success. Rather we can only wager on hope and the possibilities of our own creativity.

Once again these deficiencies become starkly apparent when we counterpoise Holloway's work with the political statements of the Zapatistas themselves. As we have already seen the Zapatistas have a more sophisticated approach to universalism – their revolt is the revolt of a humanity composed of minorities. As such from the very beginning it takes seriously both the divisions that exist within the global population exploited by capital and also works to articulate a vision in a way that allows for a genuine multiplicity of struggles that enriches the collectivity of revolt. The writings of the Zapatistas, their poetic and political innovation all deserve thorough analysis. Here we can only look briefly at their writings to see if Holloway's politics of the scream resonates with their political discourse.

Zapatista writings contain a complicated discourse that uses the metaphorical political concepts of "silence" and "the word". These are used to explain a nuanced interlinking of their condition, methods of struggle and aspirations. Silence often means the condition of oppression, of being effaced or lacking the power to determine social reality \textit{and} a tactic of hiding from the eye of power. The word becomes a mixture of communication, political construction and weapon of struggle. For example a compendium of Zapatista documents is entitled, \textit{Our Word is our Weapon}. The word seems to describe \textit{constituent power}, a term from Negri we shall explore in later chapters.\textsuperscript{vii} The Zapatista strategy of resistance seems to be twofold: against the continuous deprivations and misery of neoliberalism they work to create practical living autonomy in Zapatista

\textsuperscript{vii} For a brilliant study of Zapatista practice and thought that uses Negri's idea of constituent power (as well as Badiou's work on the Event) see Mentinis, \textit{Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What It Means for Radical Politics}. 
communities to meet needs and generate decent lives. Against the repression of the state they attempt to extend their struggle through alliances, networks and cooperation. The Good Government Juntas and La Otra Campana are the latest incarnation of both. For example they write: “Power uses the word to impose his empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves. Power uses silence to hide his crimes. We use silence to listen to one another, to touch one another, to know one another.” The formation of political alliances is then the “echo” of rebel voice, of the speaking of the word. The Zapatista use of this metaphor articulates how specific struggles, differences and singularities can meet in ways that develop interrelated solidarities in the struggle against capitalism. This is the “echo of this rebel voice transforming itself and renewing itself in other voices.” They continue that this is:

...an echo that turns itself into many voices, into a network of voices that, before the deafness of the Power, opts to speak to itself, knowing itself to be one and many, acknowledging itself to be equal in its desire to listen and be listened to, recognizing itself as diverse in the tones and levels of voices forming it.

We see the complicated and evocative use of metaphor in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle: a document that contains both self-reflection on the Zapatistas’ development and also the announcement of the new political perspective that is La Otra Campana. In this version of their history the Zapatistas do not start with the scream but with silence. They write:

In the beginning there were not many of us, just a few, going this way and that, talking with and listening to other people like us. We did that for many years, and we did it in secret, without making a stir. In other words, we joined forces in silence. We remained like that for about 10 years, and then we had grown, and then we were many thousands.

The starting point for the Zapatistas is not the scream of negation but painstaking political construction. Their collectivity does not arrive as a manifestation of a

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ix Holloway does also use the idea of the echo of rebellion in “Dignity’s Revolt” – the piece of writing that is the most discordant with his other writing and the focus on “the scream”. Holloway, Dignity’s Revolt.
universal 'No', but through an ongoing and open process of communication and creation. Being denied a voice becomes a condition which provides them the cover to organise. When the Zapatistas do announce themselves to the world at the start of the insurrection they do so with the defiant 'No', that of 'Ya Basta!' (translated as either "Enough!" or "Enough is Enough!"). Unlike Holloway's 'No' the Zapatista's is not so much a statement of negation, but rather of affirmation posed against the power of capital. They continue in the Sixth Declaration that "when the rich were throwing their New Year's Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over. And we left a message to everyone that we are here, that they have to take notice of us."155

Admittedly there are elements in Zapatista discourse that do emphasise negation. Take for example one of the Don Durito stories. Here rebellion is described as a butterfly launching out across an ocean to find an island constructed by other rebellions (the story itself functions as a utopian critique of the promise of a distant utopia) that "the butterfly is saying NO! No to logic! No to prudence. No to immobility. No to conformism."156

The point is not to throw doubt on the seriousness of the Zapatista revolt for Holloway's thinking, or to only raise that problematic question of the relationship between theory and social struggles. Showing the differences between the Zapatistas and Holloway provides us a route to critique Holloway. For the Zapatistas negation is just an element of emancipatory politics that takes its place with affirmative forms of political construction. This latter element is crucial; for unlike Holloway the Zapatistas pay close attention to the differences in the struggles of different sections of humanity – in relation to how to make effective solidarities and also how various struggles might want to defend certain elements of their singularity in opposition to capitalism. The Zapatistas seriously pose the

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x A series of satirical stories where written by Marco where the main character is a beetle called don Durito de la Lacandona. Cf. Subcomandante Marcos, Conversations with Durito: Stories of the Zapatistas and Neoliberalism (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2005).
relationship between local and global, particular and universal. There are many voices, not just one scream.

Finally, whilst Holloway’s work simply denies any space for political activity that sees itself as being separate from the class as a whole, the Zapatistas have a more complicated view. In their written theory we do see a detailing of a complex relationship between organisations, militants and the broader population. On one hand they do see themselves as ordinary people and as rebels and thus reject the crippling practices of Leninism. Yet on the other hand they acknowledge that in their struggle there are differences of authority and leadership amongst them – especially due to the EZLN being a guerrilla army. Their response to this is not to valorise this division as a necessity for liberation; something that is typical to the guerrilla *foco* strategy, where the military leadership of the guerrillas present themselves as liberators of the people.\(^{xi}\) Nor do they simply deny it. Rather they make it explicit, then problematise and destabilise it. The Zapatistas do not deny leadership, instead their maxim *mandar obedeciendo* ("leading by obeying", sometimes translating as "rule by obeying") turns it on its head and opens the door to rethinking the meaning of political action.\(^{xii}\) The most obvious example of this is Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos himself – his persona is an ironic repositioning of the iconic guerrilla hero such as Che. Marcos’s wearing of the balaclava functions (complementing its more specific function as a mask mentioned above) by creating a symbol that is open, which anyone can take up – anyone can wear the balaclava. The Zapatistas’ approach to political militancy can be seen as a specialised activity that works to create the conditions in which it is no longer a specialised activity. It does not simply deny that a division between militant and class might exist. Another Durito story explores this division: “Durito says that the Zapatistas’ problem is this: to plant the seed and guard its growth. Durito says that problem for everyone else is to struggle to be free to choose how


\(^{xii}\) We could speculate that there may be continuities between “leading by obeying” and the older Maoist instruction “to serve the people.” In my investigations there exist no thorough studies of the politics of the EZLN precursor the FLN – beyond them being a Marxist-Leninist group with radical left nationalist politics common to their time. This could involve an engagement with Maoism. There does seem to be a certain residual Maoist trace in their practice.
to eat the apple that will come.” If we take the apple as a metaphor for emancipation then the leadership of the Zapatistas works to create the conditions in which all are leaders in their own liberation and the special role of the militant is no longer needed – or special. True to form Durito mocks the Zapatistas and especially their spokesperson Marcos. The story (narrated and penned by Marcos) continues that “we Zapatistas are like the kid next door. If anything, we’re uglier, says Durito, while watching from the corner of his eye as I take off my ski mask.”

Behind the mask of political initiative, the Zapatistas are, in the best way, ordinary.

**Conclusion**

Finally then we can acknowledge both the importance of Holloway work and its limitations. It would be an error to doubt the seriousness of Holloway’s commitment to creating a relevant communist theory or to deny the power of his writing. He reopens old categories in an attempt to create a liberating understanding of our condition. But he fails to grasp the interplay of negation and affirmation, of creation and destruction and thus his work is insufficient in and of itself to really grasp that which is subversive in our condition. Holloway’s refusal of the state, his critique of the failures of the Left and his emancipatory vision for politics, his emphasis on the need to be asymmetrical to capitalist social relations, are all important and timely. Yet the universalism in his work prevents him from advocating a form of militancy and politics that could actually deal with the deep inequities, splits and fractures that keep us tied to capital.
2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 161.
10 Ibid., 162.
11 Ibid., 163.
12 Holloway, *Adorno Meets Tronti*.
15 Ibid., 170.
16 Holloway, *Time to Revolt - Reflections on Empire*.
17 Holloway, *Adorno Meets Tronti*.
19 Ibid., 88.
20 Ibid., 89.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 140.
23 Ibid., 140-41.
24 Ibid., 118 - 39.
25 Ibid., 142.
26 Ibid., 143.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 143-44.
31 Ibid., 144.
32 Ibid., 157.
33 Ibid., 147.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 145.
41 Ibid., 50.
42 Ibid., 51.
44 Clark, "Class Struggle and the Working Class: The Problem of Commodity Fetishism," 58.
46 Ibid., 62.
47 Ibid., 64.

49 Ibid., 28.

50 Ibid., 29-30.

51 Ibid., 36.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 37.

55 Ibid., 73.

56 Ibid., 57.

57 Ibid., 60.

58 Ibid., 63.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 74.


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 102.

64 Ibid., 151.

65 Ibid., 102.

66 Ibid., 156-57.


69 Holloway, *Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels*.

70 Ibid.


72 Ibid., 159-61.

73 Ibid., 178.

74 Ibid., 177.

75 Ibid., 179.

76 Ibid., 180.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., 181.


80 Ibid., 163-64.

81 Ibid.


83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., 183.

85 Ibid., 185.

86 Ibid., 203.


88 Ibid.


90 Holloway, *Our Place, Our Time*.

91 Holloway, *Class Struggle Is Asymmetrical*.


93 Holloway, "Twelve Theses on Changing the World without Taking Power."


95 Holloway, "Is the Zapatista Struggle an Anti-Capitalist Struggle."


98 Ibid., 3.

99 Ibid., 15.


151 Ibid., 174.


154 Subcomandante Marcos and The Zapatistas, "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," in *The Other Campaign / La Otra Campana*, Subcommandante Marcos and The Zapatistas (San Francisco: City Lights, 2006), 65.

155 Ibid.


Introduction

The second tendency of autonomism for our study is that of the Midnight Notes Collective (MNC). Put simply the MNC focus on the importance and continuation of an outside to capital from which struggles draw sustenance and communism may be formed. The MNC provide a powerful counterpoint to the work of both Holloway and Virno and Negri, although of course there are also many confluences as well. The MNC have not however received similar attention in academic circles to writers such as Negri; they remain part of a militant discourse largely outside of the university even though many of its participants are academics. Starting in 1979 they have irregularly published a journal, each issue themed around various issues, flashpoints, tensions and resistances in capitalism. Two books have also been published under their collective editorship: *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992* and *Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles of the Fourth World War*. The MNC have also published a number of short interventions into specific debates and struggles, letters in journals etc. On top of this individual members publish under their own names, and collaborate with people outside the formal membership of the collective. Various participants have appeared in other journals with a generally similar politics – such as *Common Sense* and *The Commoner*. A number of their titles have been published by Autonomedia: home of many of the...
more unorthodox titles of contemporary radicalism. Also some projects authored by Midnight Notes are signed as “Midnight Notes and Friends” or have been developed with other projects such as the Gulf Information Group. In *Auroras of the Zapatistas* (which like *Midnight Oil* is an edited volume) six of the sixteen pieces are written by authors who are not stated members of the collective.

Whilst there seems to be a broad commonality around the MNC, there is not a ‘line,’ nor does there seem to be a desire for one. As such, a study of the MNC cannot be based on reading of a central canon, for there is none. Over more than twenty years there have been a number of issues that have come into focus in the work of MNC. They are deeply influenced by the writings on reproductive labour - that is the work of reproducing labour - by the autonomist feminists of *Lotta Feminista* such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. They regularly examine the themes of energy and war. But what is most interesting for this study is the deployment of the tropes “Commons” and “Enclosures” as conceptual tools to understand capitalism, class conflict and resistance and the way that this reworks the possibilities of revolutionary politics. These tropes are irregularly applied by the MNC in their writings: sometimes they take centre stage, other times they are in the background. A deliberate study of them does bring to light the general paradigm, keeping in mind the above qualifications.

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Primitive Accumulation(s)

In 1991 The Midnight Notes Collective published an issue of their journal Midnight Notes entitled "New Enclosures". Defying the apparent jubilation at the end of the Cold War and pushing aside the focus on the novelty and uniqueness of this period, MNC argued that despite appearances it was class struggle, capitalism and enclosure that typified the period. The introduction opened with the following paragraph:

Glasnost, End of the Cold War, United Europe, We are the World, Save the Amazon Rainforest....these are the typical phrases of the day. They suggest an age of historic openness, globalism, and the breakdown of political and economic barriers. In the midst of this expansiveness, however, Midnight Notes poses the issue of "The New Enclosures". For a corrosive secret is hidden in the gleaming idols of globalism, the end of the blocs and the Gaian ecological consciousness: the last decade has seen the largest Enclosure of the worldly Common in history. Our articles reveal this secret in detail, as well as the importance of Enclosures, both Old and New in the planetary struggle of class.2

What they were attempting to do was to look at the changes unfolding across the globe from the perspective of class struggle, and in a way that allowed them to rethink the possibility of class struggle. The do so from the starting point of workers' self-activity and thus it is a consistent application of the perspective of autonomy. They locate the causality for these transformations in proletarian struggle. They did this by rethinking and radicalising the concept of "enclosure" and "commons" which they had taken from a challenging reading of the Marxist idea of "primitive accumulation". The MNC start their introduction with a partial quotation from this section of Capital, on the subject of primitive accumulation, which is worth reproducing here:

...the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for the bourgeois historians. But on the other hand these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production
Marx writes about primitive accumulation in the first volume of Capital. At least two arguments are made here. One is a critique of capitalism's self-image of its own origins: that capitalism's original accumulation of wealth is due to the hard work of capitalists and the vitality of the market. Marx summarises and mocks capitalism's mythology as follows:

Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living...Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour have up to now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work.

Against this mythology Marx argues that the origins of capitalism was the violent destruction of what came before it, and the dispossession of the population: "In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force played the greatest part." However, the violence of primitive accumulation cannot just be explained through the avarice of the early capitalists, their lusts for the wealth of Mexico and so on. Capitalism is a social relationship, not merely an accumulation of wealth. For capitalism to exist certain kinds of populations need to be created. It needs a proletariat: those who are compelled to sell their labour. Primitive accumulation was not just about the transfer of 'resources' into the circulation of the bourgeois market (though of course the colonial plunder of the world was crucial) but the dispossession of people from their subsistence so they would be compelled into the bitter 'freedom' of wage-labour. Commenting on E. G. Wakefield's study of the unfortunate case of Mr. Peel, in which an English capitalist finds it hard going in Western Australia as he is deserted by his employees as they head off to try to escape the enslavement of wage-labour, Marx writes: "So long, therefore, as the worker can accumulate for himself (sic) – and this he can do so long as remains in possession of his means of
production – capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production are impossible.”6

The orthodox, and arguably Marx’s, view of primitive accumulation is that it is a unique and specific moment that opens up the development of capitalism. Once the population is dispossessed and property rights enforced, primitive accumulation ends and we are into the normal operation of capitalism – the exploitation of surplus-value in the factory. Class struggle continues but in a different terrain, or for Orthodox Marxism, class struggle is now on its proper terrain and begins properly. Primitive accumulation is often seen as a necessary horror, something violent and bloody, but since it establishes capitalism it thus establishes the potential for communism. In the linear historical narrative of orthodox Marxism it is an unfortunate but necessary stage.

The MNC radically break from this narrative. The MNC do not see primitive accumulation as a single and unique event that contains capitalism’s origin but as a constant returning feature often forced by the resistance of the proletariat. This in turn leads to and is premised on an expansion of the concept of the proletariat and of its struggle.

There are two parts to this break. Firstly they dispute the causality behind primitive accumulation. They see it as a reaction against the insurgencies and rebellions of the feudal working classes rather than springing from capitalism’s own motivations and dynamics. Rather “[t]he Old Enclosures were a counter-revolutionary process...”7 This thesis has been developed largely by MNC participant Silvia Federici, especially in her work Caliban and The Witch. It starts with an attempt to flesh out the claim that capitalism arose as a counter-revolution to the explosion of class struggles within and against feudalism. A particular focus of her work is the history of gender and reproductive labour within this conflict. Federici writes:
A history of women and reproduction in the ‘transition to capitalism’ must begin with the struggles that the medieval proletariat – small peasants, artisans, day laborers – waged against feudal power in all its forms. Only if we evoke these struggles, with their rich cargo of demands, social and political aspirations, and antagonistic practices, can we understand the role that women had in the crisis of feudalism and why their power had to be destroyed for capitalism to develop, as it was by the three-century-long persecution of witches.8

Federici details manifold struggles of the peasants against feudal authority; struggles which often manifested in revolutionary-religious movements. These heresies and millenarianisms attacked the overall structures of power as well as attempting a radical recreation of social life – all of which happened in the context of the Black Death and the corresponding labour crisis.9 Although the most overt attempts for power by the peasant revolts – such as the formation of New Jerusalem in Munster – were repressed, the peasants won numerous concessions and freedoms from the feudal order and achieved a great deal of autonomy which imperilled the dominance of the ruling class.

The ‘scandal’ of high wages the workers demanded was only matched, in the eyes of the employers, by the new arrogance they displayed – their refusal to work, or to continue to work after having satisfied their needs (which they now could do more quickly because of their higher wages); their stubborn determination to hire themselves out only for limited tasks, rather than for prolonged periods of time; their demands for other perks beside their wages; and their ostentatious clothing which, according to the complaints of contemporary social critics made them indistinguishable from the lords.10

Federici argues that “for a broad section of the western European peasantry, and for urban workers, the 15th century was a period of unprecedented power.”11 The mixture of rebellion and the labour shortage (caused by the Black Death) meant that serfdom was crumbling and workers were now demanding higher wages and refusing work beyond that which met their desires.

This rise in autonomy was part of a general disintegration of the feudal economy. Federici identifies “some basic estimates indicating that between 1350 and 1500 a major shift occurred in the power-relation between workers and
master." These are that "[t]he real wage increased by 100%, prices declined by 33%, rents also declined, the length of the working-day decreased, and a tendency appeared towards local self-sufficiency." 12

This is the context of capitalism's development. Federici argues that "the mounting class conflict brought about a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and the nobility, without which proletarian revolts may have not been defeated." The liberal and orthodox Marxist view of the bourgeoisie sees them as partisans of democracy and freedom against feudal privilege. Federici sees collusion between the merchants and the old order. This was the basis of the development of increased state power and capitalist social relationships:

For in the peasants and the democratic weavers and cobblers of its cities, the bourgeois recognized an enemy far more dangerous than the nobility - one that made it worthwhile for the burghers even to sacrifice their cherished political autonomy. Thus, it was the urban bourgeois, after two centuries of struggles waged in order to gain full sovereignty within the walls of its communes, who reinstated the power of the nobility, by voluntarily submitting to the rule of the Prince, the first step on the road to the absolute state.13

It was not enough to stop a revolution. The ruling powers had launch a new régime of accumulation. "It was in response to this crisis that the European ruling class launched the global offensive" that had at its basis "the relentless attempts to appropriate new sources of wealth, expand its economic basis, and bring new workers under its command".14

Unsurprisingly the counter-revolution was marked by direct violence and repression. For example Federici points outs that after the Peasant War of 1525 "[a] hundred thousand rebels were massacred in retaliation." 15 The counter-revolution also involved a sexual politics, with a direct encouragement of misogyny to divide the working class population and direct the anger and energy of young men into violence against poor women. This took place through the overt (or
practical) decriminalisation of rape against poor women and the proliferation of state-sponsored and sanctioned brothels and prostitution. Both were mass phenomena that attempted to hold and destroy insurgency and also create the social framework for capitalist development; in part through the growth of the state, the interpolation of men into patriarchal practices and ideologies and the deepening of the de-valorisation of women and their labours. She writes:

It is difficult retrospectively to tell how far playing the "sex card" helped the state to discipline and divide the medieval proletariat. What is certain is that this sexual "new deal" was part of a broader process which, in response to the intensification of social conflict, led to the centralization of the state, as the only agent capable of confronting the generalization of the struggle and safeguarding the class relation.

Federici argues that the oppression of women and the disciplining of the body were crucial to the origin of capitalism, and not merely products of it. Federici argues that due to the violence, disorder and immiseration of capitalism’s origins it was essential to its survival to normalise reproduction. This rested on the creation of certain forms of patriarchal divisions within the proletariat that would make it more useful and manageable. Thus women’s labour underwent a campaign of violent devaluation as it was driven from its productive role in the peasant economy and pushed out of urban professions, as prostitution (contra the above) became increasingly criminalised and so on. This is similar to what Maria Mies calls "housewifeization" – the pushing of women into a newly created territory of the home, exiled from the recognised circuits of (formal and overt) productivity and transformed into what appears ideologically as a natural good. Federici’s work details the massive (violent and ideological) campaigns necessary to achieve this and that they produced an intensified rift of gender within the class.

To guarantee the existence and availability of labour-power a proletariat had to be created and recreated which involved the formation of deeply gendered

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xxiv Federici is not making an argument here against legalised prostitution, but rather how at a particular moment in was used by the state to ensure the rule of capital by intensifying divisions within the proletariat.
division, often manifested by state violence, religious ideology and reactionary populist participation. The subordination of reproductive labour and the intensification of gender divisions were prerequisites to creating the working class.

Thus against the dominant orthodox Marxist progressive reading of primitive accumulation that fits it within a deterministic telos Federici posits four points, which are worth quoting in full:

I. The expropriation of European workers from their means of subsistence, and the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans to the mines and plantations of the "New World" were not the only means by which a world proletariat was formed and "accumulated".

II. This process required the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force. Most of all, it required the destruction of the power of women which, in Europe and America, was achieved through the extermination of the "witches".

III. Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender as well as "race" and age, become constitutive of class rule and formation of the modern proletariat.

IV. We cannot, therefore, identify capitalist accumulation with the liberation of the worker, female or male, as many Marxists (among others) have done, or see the advent of capitalism as a moment of historical progress. On the contrary, capitalism has created more brutal and insidious forms of enslavement, as it has planted into the body of the proletariat deep divisions that have served to intensify and conceal exploitation. It is in great part because of these imposed divisions – especially those between women and men – that capitalist accumulation continues to devastate life in every corner of the planet.19

Federici catalogues the violence, pauperisation and extreme exploitation that was unleashed to accumulate wealth and labour on both sides of the Atlantic.20 The most apocalyptic part of this process was undertaking in the
colonies of the New World. Despite the image of the development of capitalism put forward by liberal ideologues, in which wage-labour was joyfully taken up, force was necessary to compel people to work. Of course the critique of the 'freedom' of wage-labour has long been part of many different Marxists accounts. What Federici's work does is to place the active refusal of 'the lower orders' at the centre of our understanding of capitalism's historical origins. The workers on either side of the Atlantic were not passive victims: on the contrary, they deployed numerous forms of revolt and refusal.21

The second break the MNC make with Orthodox Marxism's narrative of the primitive enclosures is over the questions of the commons. Classically Marxism has seen capitalism as a necessary stage of development that creates the conditions necessary for communism. Such a teleological view sees the enclosures as unfortunate but necessary. For the MNC the commons were, and are, the substance of communism. Thus they cannot be seen as just some pre-capitalist relic to be brushed aside so capitalism can develop and thus till the soil for the development of communism.

The progressivism of Marxism has suffered harsh critiques from many sides: critiques that expose how orthodox Marxism is tied to a certain form of Enlightenment rationalism that contains a positivist and deterministic view of history. They have also shown the colonial and patriarchal foundations of such thinking. If the tropes of commons and enclosures are to be used as radical tools against the conditions of the present, then this has to be rethought – both in its application today and in its original context. The MNC write:

The problem with this analysis is simple: the New Enclosures (and probably many of the Old) are not aimed only at petty private producers and their property. They also aim to destroy communal land and space that forms an energy well of proletarian power. A Quiche Indian village in the Guatemalan hills, a tract of communally operated land in the Niger Delta, an urban neighborhood like Tepito in Mexico City, a town surrounding a paper mill controlled by striking paperworkers like Jay, Maine, do not fit into the classic Marxist
model of the Enclosures. In each of these examples we are not confronted with a number of isolated, petty producers but a staging point for proletarian attack or logistical locus.²²

The commons then are not just residual places of pre-capitalist forms of social relations that must be overcome by capital for the basis for communism to be created. The MNC contend that through capitalism's history the commons exist as a wellspring of resistance against capitalism and for the direct creation of communism. What is radical about the commons are the kinds of social relationships they sustain, and the kinds of social relationships that sustain them. The commons as a concept functions both as a signifier for the non- and anti-capitalist forms of collective subsistence and the interlinked relations of collective autonomy. For the MNC the commons are a reoccurring part of struggle. They provide both a point of origin for struggle and also a goal. In the Many Headed Hydra MNC participant Peter Linebaugh, with Marcus Rediker, see the waves of struggles that arose after the Old Enclosures, and before industrialisation, that swept across the Atlantic as all part of the "struggle for the commons."²³ P. m. (a MNC participant and author of bolo'bolo) sees the commons as something produced by collective practices arguing: "[t]here is also no such thing as the commons - they are only its regulations" and that, "[a] lot of communication, information, and bargaining and democratic decision-making are needed to keep the commons going."²⁴

The MNC continue that it is a serious mistake to then consign any forms of commons to the dustbin of history for the sake of a linear historical narrative:

It is plain madness to accept the demise of such villages, tracts of land, neighborhoods and towns as necessary and ultimately progressive sacrifices to the destruction of capitalism and the development of truly "universal" proletarians. Universal or not, real, living proletarians (that do not live on air) must put their feet some place, must rest some place, must retreat some place. For class war does not happen on an abstract board toting up profit and loss, it is a war that needs a terrain.²⁵
This ‘madness’ has political implications – especially a praxis that sees the struggles around the commons as subordinate to those of the industrial proletariat proper. In the “New Enclosures” they argue that such a perspective was at the time of writing dominant in “third world” variants of Marxism. These variants were in crisis in 1990 and are probably more so now. Part of their crisis, argue the MNC, is and was their subscription to Marxism’s teleology which leads them to often oppose the commons:

“Third world” Marxists accept the notion of the progressivity of original accumulation. Consequently, even though they officially fight against the New Enclosures, they envision their own party and state as carrying out their own Enclosures on their own people even more efficiently and “progressively” than the capitalists could do. They interpret communal ownership of land and local market exchanges as being marks of “petty bourgeois” characteristics they must extirpate.

This creates a direct conflict between the revolutionaries and those they would liberate. Also the forms that these revolutionaries pose as progressive alternatives, “state plantations (Mozambique) or capitalist farms (Zimbabwe)” for example, are capitalist forms. As we see so often national liberation struggles, despite their allegedly socialist objectives, work to further establish capitalism, by transforming land holdings, proletarianising the population and intensifying the role of the commodity and the market. The political consequences of Marx’s error, taken up by many Left organisations and parties when in power, are disastrous.

The New Enclosures

As noted the MNC reject the idea that the enclosure of the commons is a unique historical event that precedes the normality of capitalism proper. Rather they contend that it is a constant feature of capitalist counter-revolution against different waves of proletarian refusal. They argue:
The Enclosures, however, are not a one time process exhausted at the dawn of capitalism. They are a regular return on the path of accumulation and a structural component of class struggle. Any leap in proletarian power demands a dynamic response: both the extended appropriation of new resources and new labor power and the extension of capitalist relations, or else capitalism is threatened with extinction. Thus, Enclosure is one process that unifies proletarians throughout capital’s history, for despite our differences we all have entered capitalism through the same door: the loss of our land and of the rights attached to it, whether this loss has taken place in Front Mill, England, in southern Italy, in the Andes, on the Niger Delta, or in the Lower East Side of New York.  

The MNCs’ development of these concepts is tied to presenting a narrative of the rise and fall of the organisation of global capital around Fordism, Keynesianism and the Welfare/Warfare state. Enclosures are the “secret” of neoliberalism, its motivating rationale. Consistent with autonomism they depict the rebellions and revolts of the proletariat as the force that caused the crises that pushed capital towards these changes.

The New Enclosures are seen as “The Apocalypse of the Trinity of Deals”. The MNC argue that in the wake of the Second World War, capitalism attempted three ‘deals’ to try to ensure class peace and its viability and stability. These deals included things such as the Welfare State, political freedoms, union rights etc. These were attempts to grant concessions so proletarian demands would stay broadly inside the framework of capitalism. Even if workers went on strike for more wages, they perhaps would not try to abolish wages, and wage-labour, all together. Different but related deals are developed in the First, Second and Third Worlds. This is of course a simplification of complex processes of confrontations, demands and appeasements. The MNC argue that it is not the case that these deals extinguished or satisfied the root causes of class struggle, but that they were able to be placed in a certain manageable framework. It was the rebellion against these deals, the breaking of them by the working class that compelled capital’s shift to enclosure. That is the by the late 1960’s the masses across the globe were refusing to play by the rules of the deals, and were expressing and struggling for demands
that actually called into question many of the fundamentals of capitalist society. The MNC summarise this argument as follows:

At the end of World War II capital (in its Western and Eastern modes) offered a variety of slogans to the world proletariat: from "collective bargaining" and "racial integration" in the US, to the family "social wage" in the USSR, to "colonial emancipation" in Asia and Africa. An enormous struggle ensued to determine the content of these slogans; but between 1965 and 1975, proletarian initiatives transcended the limits of capital's historic possibilities. From the Watts riot to the "Prague Spring" to Italy's "hot autumn" to the last US helicopter escaping from the fall of Saigon, the profit picture internationally turned sour and capital was facing euthanasia. Consequently all deals were off and capital went on the attack everywhere.30

The MNC describe a largely unified and coherent global response by capital that attempted to decompose the power of the rebellions, defeat opposition and impose a new régime of accumulation. They write:

The "debt crisis", "homelessness" and the collapse of "socialism" are frequently treated as different phenomena by both the media and left journals. For us at Midnight they but deceptively name aspects of a single unified process: the New Enclosures, which must operate throughout the planet in differing, divisive guises while being totally interdependent. 31

This interdependence is key; for the MNC the assault on the three deals is not just a repetition of the same process all over the globe. The New Enclosures are only possible in one place because the New Enclosures are also happening everywhere else. The MNC asserts that the successes of specific moments of the capitalist counter-offensive were contingent on and constitutive of a global phenomenon. Also each deal, that of the First, Second and/or Third Worlds could only be broken because they were all being broken.

The enclosures work to decompose proletarian resistance and power. They break apart the spatial relations and régimes of power on which the proletariat have learnt to understand, struggle within and potentially overcome. Capital threw
into disarray the previous régime of global and national organisation of capitalism because it was becoming ungovernable. The New Enclosures are the global intensification and reinforcing of capitalist social relations. The MNC write:

Under the logic of capitalist accumulation in this period, for every factory in a free-trade zone in China privatized and sold to a New York commercial bank, or for every acre enclosed by a World Bank development project in Africa or Asia as part of a “debt for equity” swap, a corresponding enclosure must occur in the US and Western Europe. Thus when communal land in Nigeria is expropriated or when the policy of free housing is abolished in China, there must be a matching expropriation in the US be it the end of a “good paying” factory job in Youngstown, the destruction of a working class community in Jay, Maine or the imposition of martial law in New York City’s parks. With each contradiction of “communal rights” in the Third World or of “socialist rights” in the Soviet Union and China, comes a subtraction of our seemingly sacred “social rights” in the US. Indeed, this subtraction has gone on so thoroughly in the 1980s that even the definitions of what it means to be human is being revised by both capital and the proletariat. 32

This counter-attack leads to the uprooting, impoverishment and criminalisation of millions across the globe. Here the MNC argue that the reinforcement of the subordination of labour was often realised by the reduction of wage-labour. For example mass unemployment technically reduces the number of people in wage-labour. However it may also immiserate people and break their willingness to struggle. The old sites of proletarian power such as the mass factory may be shut down and moved to another area or country. Thus whilst people are out of work, their subjection to the general capitalist rule of the wage is intensified. Capitalist counter-offensive, which is an attempt to increase the proletariats’ subservience to work, often functions by changing how they work. The MNC want to emphasise the importance of marginalised, unwaged and impoverished forms of labour. They write:

These New Enclosures, therefore, name the large-scale reorganization of the accumulation process which has been underway since the mid-1970s. The main objective of this process has been to uproot workers from the terrain on which their organizational power has been built, so that, like the African slaves transplanted to the Americas, they are forced to work and fight in a strange environment where the forms of resistance possible at home are no longer available.
Thus, once again, as at the dawn of capitalism, the physiognomy of the world proletariat is that of the pauper, the vagabond, the criminal, the panhandler, the street peddler, the refugee sweatshop worker, the mercenary, the rioter.\textsuperscript{33}

The MNC then work to trace the processes and forms of the New Enclosures and the corresponding developments of resistance that have arisen against them. How do the New Enclosures work? How do they break up previous spaces of resistance and impose new, intensified burdens of labour and commodify an expanding range of activities? The New Enclosures, they argue, work at five levels: first, the continued destruction of "communal control of subsistence"; second, "seizure of land for debt"; third, they "make mobile and migrant labor the dominant form of labor"; fourth, they "require(d) the collapse of socialism..."; and fifth is an "attack on our reproduction."\textsuperscript{34} All this is a combination of straightforward dispossession, the recuperation of proletarian struggle and/or initiative and the generation of new spaces of exploitation.

The first three aspects of the New Enclosures (so depressingly similar to enclosures of old) are easy to grasp – they represent the fundamentals of many of the basics of the stratagems laid out by the IMF and other partisans of the market and so-called 'development'. They are the breaking of whatever remains of collective subsistence, the privatisation of land, and the destruction of various forms of social bonds; the transfer of more and more property into the circulation of the market and the proletarianisation (or intensification) of those driven from the land. A proletarianised population that is then set into motion right across the globe.

The fourth point, the collapse of socialism, is more ambiguous and as we shall see in the next two chapters the MNC maintain a contradictory relationship to the Left, social democracy and socialism.
The fifth point perhaps needs more elaboration. MNC are deeply influenced by Italian feminist writers such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati and their work on reproduction, which often means the labour that is necessary to reproduce labour – starting with housework and looking at many other forms of unpaid labour. These are forms of labour most often previously thought peripheral to capital. The MNC use the idea of reproduction and reproductive labour in an open way to refer to manifold forms of work, often unpaid and not recognised as work per se, that create the abilities and conditions for individuals to work. For example in an essay on the anti-nuclear movement, the MNC comment about the lives of intellectual workers in areas of New England of the USA:

By the term reproduction we mean all the work that has to be done in order to keep us in shape so that we are able to work: eating, clothing, relaxation, medical care, emotional ‘services’, discipline, education, entertainment, cleaning, procreation, etc. Sometimes what we call ‘life’ is, in reality, only reproduction for capitalist exploitation.35

Reproduction refers to a complex collection of activities that allows our continual survival. It is the labour that reproduces labour: both the labour of work for capital and the labour of resistance to capital. What the MNC are arguing here is that for labour-power to be realisable, certain kinds of daily practices are necessary so that people have the health, ability and motivation to work. Obviously the forms of work vary from situation to situation. Part of the argument of the New Enclosures is that capital is willing to inflict a high level of immiseration including violence, impoverishment and starvation, to discipline people. The above example is about workers in creative and intellectual industries. The MNCs’ contention is that many of the practices that these workers engaged in rejected the normality of corporate society yet were actually the very activities that allowed such workers the capacities to create value for capitalism. The “retreat to the country side and the alternative life-styles are forms of struggle by intellectual workers against capitalism.” Yet since “there is no such thing as ‘outside of capital’ in capitalist society: from a long-term perspective the, ‘back-to-the-land’ intellectuals are just testing out new capitalist possibilities of dealing with certain problems of cheap production.”36
In the realm of reproduction we may find the kinds of social relations that allow us to survive in capitalism and also to start moving towards emancipatory politics. Thus the fifth aspect of the New Enclosures is the enclosure of all that allows life to continue – in a way that works to intensify the reproduction of labour, even as it may make many lives difficult and some impossible. Capitalism may reproduce the proletarian condition generally through the extermination of some proletarians specifically. Thus:

The highly advertised disappearance of the rain forests, the much commented upon hole in the ozone layer, the widely lamented pollution of air, sea and beach, along with the obvious shrinking of our living spaces, are all part of the enclosure of the earthly commons... You do not need to be a science fiction freak to feel that we are guinea pigs in a capitalist experiment in nonevolutionary species change. Human proletarians are not alone in this speed-up and shrink down. Animals, from protozoa to cows, are being engineered and patented to eat oil spills, produce more eggs per hour, secrete more hormones. Increasingly land is no longer valued for how much food it can grow or what kind of buildings it can support but for how much radioactive waste it can 'safely' store. Thus a tired earthly commons, the gift of billions of years of laborless transformation, meets tired human bodies.37

The MNCs' work on reproduction is one of the few moments where ecology is seriously thought about by the perspective of autonomy. Otherwise ecology is often ignored or unaccounted for. The other prominent example would be Mariarosa Dalla Costa, whose recent work has tried to explore connection between ecology, the indigenous, rural labour, feminism and anti-capitalism.xxv The MNC argue here that the destruction of the environment is firmly linked to capital's desire to dispossess labour of any space for autonomous or rebellious reproduction and to intensify the conditions under which labour labours. They remark that capital's ideal environment is one of total control, the space station:

Capital has long dreamed of sending us to work in space, where nothing would be left to us except our work-machine and rarified and repressive work relations (see "Mormons in Space" Computer Space Notes, Midnight Notes #5). But the fact is that the earth is becoming a space station and millions are already living on space-colony conditions: no oxygen to breath, limited social/physical conditions, a desexualized life, difficulty of communication, lack of sun and green...even the voices of migrating birds are missing.38

Resistance to Enclosure

The point of the MNCs' detailing of these developments is neither to catalogue a stream of horrors nor to merely understand the changes to capitalism. They want to show how an understanding of the changes to capitalism can help us understand the possibilities of the next wave of struggles. Whilst the New Enclosures may have broken apart the previous terrains of struggle, they have not extinguished struggle itself. Sometimes the enclosures are truly experienced as apocalypses – the destruction of a way of life, the increased uncertainty of survival or for many, death. Yet they have not been uncontested. MNCs' analysis not only attempts to explain the changes as capital's reaction to proletarian struggle, but also attempts to understand the possibilities for rebellion.

Interestingly the MNC do not generally look to the factory floor to chart the experiences and possibilities of resistance to capital during the New Enclosures but instead to what they call the Land War; meaning the multiple rebellions stretching from peasants defending communal land to squatters in the North opposing financial speculators.39 (However both in the introduction and in a later article of the "New Enclosures" issue of Midnight Notes the industrial struggle of Jay Maine is referred to.) Perhaps the emphasis on struggles outside the workplace proper is for two reasons. Firstly, the important task of highlighting the often forgotten spheres of life where the class war is waged; and also to show how an
effect of the New Enclosures is the difficulty to fight in the spaces where previously
the proletariat had been powerful. Whilst these struggles have been limited, the
MNC optimistically argue that the experiences of enclosures, resistance and
contestation have led to radical possibilities:

First the New Enclosures have led an enormous increase and intensification of proletarian
knowledge of international class composition. For example, the average West African
farmer in the 1980s knows about the deals that can go down in Brooklyn, London and
Venice. Second, the New Enclosures have forced an internationalism of proletarian action,
since the proletariat has never been so compelled to overcome its regionalism and
nationalism, as people are losing not just the plot of land but their stake in their countries.
Third the very extremity of the debt crisis and the need to organise reproduction outside of
the money relation has often forced workers to develop their autonomy by imposing the
task of creating a whole system of production and reproduction outside of the standard
operating procedures of capitalist society.40

This last point is crucial – it suggests that in the defence of the commons, not
only is the proletariat globally forced to transform itself, develop a global relation
and forsake the nation state, but that to struggle and survive it creates "a whole
system of production and reproduction outside of the standard operating
procedures of capitalist society." That is, the struggle to defend the commons
generates new commons! Though in this piece of writing, like in much of the MNCs’
work, commons whilst a crucial term remains open and undefined.xxiv Here we get
a sense that it is not something that is just found – a piece of land, an empty house.
But it is something produced by those who use it. As much as the commons
sustains the commoners, it is the relationship of commoners to each other, their
ability to be commoners, which makes a commons. It is thus a thing of struggle and
antagonism.

Whilst the MNC dismiss Orthodox Marxism as being inattentive to the
struggles around the commons they look with some favour on ‘green’ – that is
environmentalist – resistance. It has been amongst environmentalism where the

xxiv This open and undefined use of the commons could in fact reflect the open and undefined nature
of the commons.
enclosure of the commons, the attack on the reproduction, the continual despoiling of the earth has been so often so bravely and fiercely contested. However ecological struggle is often limited to a certain class composition – both in the participants of the movements and in its blindness to the concerns of a proletariat lower down the hierarchy of the division of labour. They write:

In the looming shadow of these bleak capitalist prospects and with the collapse of socialism, the "greens" have come forward with a perspective calling on human aspirations transcending the market. From Earthfirst!’s "Think like a mountain" to "Greenpeace's "Nuclear-free seas" the ecological movements seems to have been a major force in confronting the New Enclosures in the 1980s. "Green" militants have sabotaged deforestation, blown up power lines, aborted nuclear tests and in general have played the "Luddites" of the New Enclosures, while "Green" parties in Europe attracted the support of many (who in previous periods would have joined the socialists or communists) by voicing political and ideological resistance to the grossest consequences of capitalist development. The "Greens" (along with their animal liberation allies) have brought some outlaw guts and angelic passion to the struggles of the last decade. But their class composition has limited their efforts up to now.41

This is explored in greater depth in the Midnight Notes pamphlet Strange Victories: The Anti-Nuclear Movement in the US and Europe. This pamphlet presents an analysis of the anti-nuclear movement and argues that this movement is simultaneously restricted to a small section of the proletariat yet ideologically projects a universal solution by speaking in the name of 'humanity.'xxvii The pamphlet argues that by speaking for and on behalf of humanity as a whole, the anti-nuclear movement remains stuck within the boundaries of the forms of labour of those that make it up – largely intellectual and cultural workers. They become "anti-planners", developing other modes of designing how capitalism would function – often with a focus on low-energy and high intensive work and thus continuing a vision of the world in which most workers are excluded from self-determination and ignoring that the struggle against capitalism is not one for its better management but its abolition.42 Also the pamphlet argues that the anti-nuclear movement's ideology contributes to it failing to make connections with both the workers in nuclear power plants and the demands around energy of those who live in the cities. The MNC critiques the green movement by arguing that it

xxvii There is a possible correlation between the MNCs' critique of elements of green politics and Marx and Engel's critique of utopian and feudal socialists.
makes a moral criticism of the industry on the whole. Such criticism, they argue, ignores the class confrontations between workers and capital that splits the industry.\textsuperscript{xxviii}

The introduction to the \textit{New Enclosures} continues this critique as a general critique of ecological struggles:

\begin{quote}
The contemporary ecology movement, however, has not learned the secret of its predecessor’s "strange victories." The peculiar dialectic between rioting petroleum junkies and anti-nuke struggles in 1979-80 never developed into a truly proletarian movement that could have gone beyond merely managing the environmental consequences of capitalist accumulation.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Previously under the Keynesian deal both workers’ wages and the social wage were premised on ever increasing production. This increasing commodity production was able to recuperate elements of proletarian desire (MNC do not provide a comprehensive explanation of where this desire comes from) into efforts that led to increasing industrialisation and degradation of the earth. However with the end of this deal, capitalism continues to increasingly despoil the planet but without, or with a vastly lessened, bribe.\textsuperscript{xxix} Thus more sections of the proletariat could be won over from capital’s efforts. They argue that ecological struggles that took up daily conditions, and struggles over quality of life, as well as ecological devastation could become revolutionary. The MNC write:

\begin{quote}
Such a shift in the direction of the ecology movement would be one part of a larger process which would transform the New Enclosures into a definitive occasion of proletarian unification and capitalist catastrophe. In practice this means the creation of individuals and organizations that can both think and act globally and locally which is exactly what the struggles around the New Enclosures do. The root result is actualized in the struggles
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{xxviii} Such a critique does ignore similar critiques and other efforts emerging from within green circles.

\textsuperscript{xxix} Here the MNC fail to take into account the function of credit in supplanting the wage as the mechanism for increasing this desire. The exponential growth of credit has been used to increase consumption beyond the limits of the wage and heighten the fervour of commodity fetishism.
against the New Enclosures that simultaneously reappropriate and hold *places* from capital while opening *spaces* for proletarian movement.\textsuperscript{44}

**Oil, War, Work**

The MNCs' reconceptualisation of capitalism and class struggle is also carried out through their analysis of the Gulf War. Here again the image of capitalism is shifted away from that of the apparent stability of the liberal democratic state and continual wage-labour. Here again capitalism is shown to use violence, repression and pauperisation as tools to break the insubordination of labour. Here again class and class struggle is rethought and expanded. Benjamin's maxim that, "[t]he history of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule", is presented with vigour.\textsuperscript{45}

Just after publishing their New Enclosures thesis, the bloody events of the 1991 Gulf War refocused the MNCs' attention on petroleum production and its political economy – something that they had already been attentive to. The MNCs' collective position on oil can be summarised in two strands; the first is that "energy frees capital from labour."\textsuperscript{46} Through industrialisation and mechanisation, capitalism seeks to escape the potentials of the revolt of labour and maximise the exploitation of labour-power. A study of this is traced out by MNC participant George Caffentzis in *The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse*.\textsuperscript{47} Secondly oil works as a commodity "whose buying and selling greatly controls the global level of prices, wages and profits."\textsuperscript{48} Thus oil is a tool of capitalist planning on a global level; the rates and flows of oil and who has the hand on the tiller are crucial for the determination of capitalist strategy for the whole of the earth. The conflicts over oil are not just about control over who has access to a commodity that produces a sizeable profit but also over who has the power to determine (in part) the direction of the system of commodity production. Commenting on the current
Gulf War and the so-called 'War and Terror' and its relation to global strategies for capitalist accumulation, the MNC write:

However, increasing the immediate profits of the oil companies, though important, is not the consideration that makes Iraq the first object of the new Bush policy. Oil and natural gas are basic commodities for the running of the world’s industrial apparatus, from plastics to chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, and energy for cars and electric power plants. Whoever controls the commodity, its price and the profits it generates, has a powerful impact on the whole capitalist system.49

The war over oil, the bloody struggle over a tool to plan the global economy, is linked into the necessity of constructing a plan of accumulation (régimes of power, capitalist investments, patterns of work etc) that can decompose the sites of proletarian initiative and increase capital’s control of the social terrain: in short the motivations and practices of enclosures. They write:

The Gulf War emerged out of the intersection of two basic tendencies of capitalism in the late 1980s: the “New Enclosures” and “recolonization of land and natural givens of the planet... and the decisive demise of various forms of state-led capitalist development (sometimes called socialist and/or fascist) from the Soviet Union to South Africa50

The MNC argue that the Gulf War (and the New World Order it signalled the start of) was a method of disciplining the proletariat and recalcitrant members of the ruling class to accept the application of the New Enclosures. In the previous global régime of oil production, oil-producing states often used income from oil to create certain deals with the working class to generate security, whilst the working class had come to expect a certain share of the immense wealth that their labour produced. MNC write:

The war and its aftermath centered around the commodity that has been the fulcrum of class relations internationally in the post-WWII period: petroleum. In this new era of recolonization, the oil commodity posed a paradox to capitalist development: if the oil fields of the Persian Gulf nations, the Soviet Union, Mexico, Angola and the other countries that had decolonized Western capital between the 1920 and 1970s were to be recolonized or "enclosed" then a whole new wave (sic) investment must be injected to make them
profitable. Yet the statist régimes that would be receiving this new investment had to be hardened to reject any demand by the proletarians in and around their oil fields for a share of the new wealth they would be producing. Moreover, the proletarians themselves would have to be terrorized into accepting a life of extreme poverty.51

They argue that the Gulf War used Iraq as a practical example to convince oil-producing states of the necessity of adhering to the New Enclosures. It showed in practice how to decompose the oil proletariat and its networks and formations of struggle and resistance through direct militarisation.

To summarise the narrative, MNC argue that the energy crisis in the mid 1970s was a crucial part of the capitalist counter-offensive against struggles that had destroyed the political stability of the Keynesian deal and anti-colonial resistances that were threatening the world-system. Yet by the end of the 1980s, debt and austerity – those pillars of the New Enclosures – were generating resistance, especially amongst oil-producing proletariat. This is what the MNC call the 'international intifadah'.52 This refers to a wave of uprisings and riots against a decade of IMF imposed austerity; a wave of struggle that threatened the viability of continual oil production and often resulted either in coups or concessions as attempts to return stability. These proletarian upsurges unsettled the mechanism for the global planning of capitalism and made specific states worried about their viability. The interests of parts of the ruling class were at odds with those of the global capitalist system as a whole. The ruling classes of oil-producing nations were more inclined to grant concessions to help maintain their own stability than act in the interests of global capital. However both the former and latter's troubles arose from the rebellions of labour on a whole and those of the oil proletariat specifically. War then was a necessity to realise the enclosures. They write:

By the late 1980s, the decade of deep austerity and widespread war was met by this international intifadah. But as the wave of insurgency was surging across the planet, capital was planning oil price increases and a restructuring of the oil industry, particularly in the “low-cost” (high profit) regions such as the Gulf. For this to succeed, there would have to be a quantum leap in repression to thwart the possibility of revolutionary explosions similar to
those of the late 1970s and 80s. Oil prices could not just be automatically hiked up, massive new investment programs begun and the oil proletariat reorganized. There were already mass uprisings throughout the MidEast and any attempt to act against the interests of the oil producing proletariat (both waged and unwaged) would have meant an even more serious and widespread insurrection in a most vital branch of production. The only solution for capital was to establish the preconditions of uncompromising terror before launching any major changes in the oil industry. What we are witnessing in the Mideast is a familiar pattern under capitalism: the forcible and violent decomposition of the working class.53

The MNC argue that the Ba'athist state had maintained its power through a classic national socialist strategy of “guns and butter”: militarism and authoritarianism but also a comprehensive welfare system and state employment opportunities.54 Whilst a police state and nationalist aggression worked in part to maintain the party's rule, much of the population could also be incorporated into the dominant structures – paid for with oil money. Thus the stability that allowed oil to be produced could only be bought by redistributing substantial amounts of the oil profits. Attempts to break from this to implement general social austerity were met with substantial opposition. Thus: “[t]he Iraqi government could not impose austerity nor privatization without committing political suicide.”55 The MNC argue that the motivations for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait were an attempt to break this deadlock by grabbing a larger share of the oil reserves and freeing itself from its debts to the Kuwaiti government.xxx

All the régimes that officially fought the war survived – but the conditions of the entire oil proletariat in the region were made increasingly horrific and miserable. This horror and misery was not just a byproduct of the avarice of the ruling class and a desire for a possession of oil, but rather the very tools used to decompose knots of proletarian strength. The MNC argue that the main victims of

xxx Kuwait being a country whose own wealth was built on guest labour: from the oil fields to the nursery. MNC provide a description of the composition of the Gulf proletariat in the essay To Saudi With Love: Working Class composition in the Mid East; a working class that is comprised largely of immigrant workers (from Muslim nations) and faces such restrictions and unfreedoms that the MNC point out that “even the Financial Times characterized the labor system in the Gulf as indentured servitude.” Midnight Notes Collective, "To Saudi with Love: Working Class Composition in the Mid East.," in Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992 ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 28.
the Gulf War were the Iraqi proletariat – the force whose recalcitrance and autonomy were preventing the imposition of austerity. The bombing of cities and infrastructure and the massacre of retreating Iraqi soldiers did not weaken the grip of the Ba'athist police state. Rather it worked to destroy social bonds and kill those who fled their role as soldiers (and took their arms with them) and who could prove to be a force for revolution against all the capitalists in the area. Indeed the Iraqi proletariat responded to the aftermath of the war with revolution – particularly the formation of workers' councils in the South and the North of the nation.\textsuperscript{xxxi} The Coalition forces stood by as these revolts were decimated by the Ba'athists. Thus facing the violence from all around, the Iraqi proletariat was broken to a point of accepting the most extreme forms of enclosure. The MNC argue that the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the war, sanctions which would result in 1 million deaths, made Iraqi a "paradigm of austerity."\textsuperscript{56} MNC summarise their position:

The war was not an attack on Iraq as a nation-state, it was an attack on the Iraqi working class and a defense of an Iraqi police state (even though the police state has been weakened and is entirely dependent upon the whim of the US government, it remains in place and functioning). One motivation for the war was the desire to destroy the basis of working class power in Iraq and fundamentally alter the relationship between capital and labor. Before the war, many Iraqi workers had a kind of informal and tacit social contract with the Iraqi government. But the US achieved what the Ba'th (sic) Party was unable to do alone: annul the social contract and render the workers free to starve and the state and private capital free to accumulate.\textsuperscript{57}

The decomposition was not just focused within the borders of Iraq. MNC note how the entire region was militarised and the entire system of guest workers on the oil-fields and in oil-producing states terrorised – largely through deportations. The war was used as justification for intensifying the discipline

\textsuperscript{xxxi} This narrative does not pay attention to the importance of Kurdish national or Shiite religious identity in the revolt. It is consistent with Marxist analysis that prioritises class explanations. However it is at odds with those parts of the MNCs' work that stress the importance of divisions within the proletariat.
against the entire oil proletariat. It was a pretext that allowed the mass expulsion of the most disobedient populations and sections of the oil industry.xxxii

The war was not just intended to decimate the Iraqi working class and enforce an extreme form of austerity in Iraq, it was also intended as an attack on the oil producing working class, especially migrant and non-citizen laborers. Observe what the war on Iraq accomplished: Kuwait expelled most the Palestinians working there and the Palestinians population is soon expected to decline to 40,000 – from a pre-war population of roughly 400,000; Saudi Arabia expelled around one million Yemeni workers, and over a million Egyptian workers were displaced from Iraq and Kuwait. All of these displacements are now allowing the various Persian Gulf countries to implement what they now call “rationalizations of the workforce.” 58

The MNC contend that capital’s strategy for global expansion and decomposition of opposition – enclosure – relied on oil prices increasing but with the share of profits going directly into wages or into a social wage decreasing. In a situation where states were authoritarian but brittle (the Gulf states for example) and where the technological composition of production of oil was easily open to sabotage, even the smallest possible resistances could threaten this strategy. They continue:

The three groups of workers explicitly targeted in the war were the Iraqis, the Palestinians and the Yemenis: three of the most educated and politicized groups of workers in the region, the three vanguards, so to speak, of the workers within the Mideast social factory. 59

The image of capitalism developed here is one in which war is not about a conquest of territories alone, nor the creation of peripheral colonies, but about decomposing class power and imposing particular régimes of accumulation. War,

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xxxii The MNC have also produced an essay, entitled “Post-Energy Crisis US Working Class Composition”, that in part argues that the Gulf War was about creating a state and ideological configuration and oil price strategy to intensify internal divisions within the proletariat in the USA and put downward pressure on wages and state services. Midnight Notes Collective, “Post-Energy Crisis Us Working Class Composition,” in Midnight Oil: Work Energy, War 1973-1992, ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992).
rather than being outside of the normality of capitalism, is actually often how capitalism works best to enforce the rules and norms of work – even when it tips towards genocidal or apocalyptic possibilities.

Work Beyond Wage-Labour

How does this work by the MNC change or challenge our ideas about class, class struggle and capitalism? At its most simple the vision of capitalism put forward by the MNC widens the spheres of struggle, and dismantles any idea of capitalist stability. Crisis and violence are the recurring conditions of capitalism, as the imposition of work is a task of oppression, restriction and horror.

Again like the other two threads of the perspective of autonomy presented here the MNC challenge what we think work is and thus what we think the working class is. For the MNC the daily lived and embodied struggles over survival (the contestation of daily life) is the place of origin for all revolutionary theoretical explorations. The work of the MNC is directly positioned against those tendencies amongst academic anti-capitalism that increasingly move into the realms of language, culture and communication to try to understand the tensions underscoring and animating society. They write: “[b]ut just as capitalism has not transcended the blood and dirt of the world, and spiralled off into some pure world of signs and symbols where profit is nothing more than a rhetorical gesture, our analysis too must remain rooted in our struggles for survival.” Of course this may not seem unique. It may appear to be another Marxist response to post-modernists and post-structuralism by insisting on a return to the economic as the site of the truth of capitalism and a reestablishment of the base/superstructure division. Whilst the MNC affirm the crucial centrality of class as a concept they are also pushing the standard Marxist lexicon open. Indeed what is so striking about the
New Enclosures thesis is that it focuses on peoples and struggles both in history and the present that would have been excluded for the dominant understanding of the proletariat. Also it pushes open the notion of work. The New Enclosures reinforce work (labour for capital generally) at the same time they might actually be producing unemployment (reduction of wage-labour). Both work and the working class refer to something larger than wage-labour and those that perform it. The MNC write:

At Midnight Notes, we pose the reality and centrality of working class struggle. The struggle over the control of the means of production and subsistence substantially explains contemporary history. By the term working class we mean both those people who have to sell their labour power to survive and those who ensure that the labor power is in fact there to sell; in other words, those who reproduce the working class. Marxists and non-Marxists commonly understand the working class as comprising only those who are paid a wage. Yet today, as in the past, much of the labour performed in society is done outside the institutional framework of waged labor. Slave labor, which greatly defined four centuries of capitalist life, is the most obvious example of unwaged labor directly integrated into the accumulation process (e.g. producing the cotton for worker’s clothes thereby cheapening the worker’s means of subsistence).⁶¹

This expansion of the concept of the working class has at least two elements. One is a focus on reproductive labour and the crucial role it plays in the functioning of capitalism. The other is an attentiveness to capitalism’s counter-attacks on proletarian revolt through the destruction of wage-labour and the imposition of various supposedly irregular or non-capitalist forms such as unemployment or slavery. Here MNC challenge the understanding that wage-labour is the norm of work under capitalism.

We see this in the essay From Capitalist Crisis to Proletarian Slavery: Introduction to the Class Struggle in the US 1973-1998 written by MNC participant George Caffentzis. Caffentzis puts forward a narrative very similar to that of the New Enclosures but without the terminology the latter uses – which surely problematises the relationship of the MNC and its participants to the creation and
use of concepts. Focusing on the capitalist counter-offensive against the mass and diverse wave of struggles that reached a high point in the early 1970s, Caffentzis looks at the return of slavery within the borders of the US. He argues that “[i]t is now possible that at the dawn of the new millennium there were 8 to 10 million adults – which would constitute about 7% of the ‘economically active population’ in a slave-like status.”62 This is not slavery as it is often imagined – it is a not a return to cotton plantations. Rather it is the proliferation of work in conditions that cannot be called free and are often outside formal wage-labour. Caffentzis cites developments in prisons, welfare and immigration as intensifying this slave-like status. A large section of the proletariat face, through an intensively authoritarian neoliberal state, a situation in which the liberal freedoms of wage-labour, the ability to negotiate its sale, do not even apply or are deeply hindered by the various state forces. Those in prisons cannot escape it, welfare is used as a disciplinary apparatus to force those on it to accept any kind of work, and without legal status millions work undocumented and in constant threat of deportation. Caffentzis writes:

Prisoners, single mothers, and undocumented workers are all entering into a new legal status: that of waged workers who cannot legally negotiate their wages. In other words, millions of adults in the territorial U.S. are finding themselves in situations reminiscent of the 19th century, with its plantation slavery in the South, coolie workers in the West and indentured servants in the East of the U.S. This revival of slavery constitutes a major defeat for the U.S. proletariat, for how can one launch a major wage struggle knowing that there are millions of people in slave-like situations undercutting wages? Slaves, not computers are the sombre basis of U.S. capital’s “bright prospects” in the winter of 1998.63

Caffentzis makes similar arguments in a critique of Rifkin and Negri. Those who see capitalism heading towards a high-tech jobless future (Rifkin) or see communism incubating within the cyber-labour of the North (Negri) fail to realise capitalism’s need for low-tech labour-intensive work, work done in conditions of violence and immiseration. xxxiii Working from Marx, Caffentzis argues:

xxxiii This is Caffentzis image of Rifkin and Negri and as evidenced from the following chapters, it is, I believe, at least an inaccurate reading of Negri.
In order for there to be an average rate of profit throughout the capitalist system, branches of industry that employ very little labor but a lot of machinery must be able to have the right to call on a pool of value that high labor, low-tech branches create. If there were no such branches or no such right, then the average rate of profit would be so low in the high-tech, low-labor industries that all investment would stop and the system would terminate. Consequently, "New Enclosures" in the countryside must accompany the rise of "automatic processes" in industry, the computer requires the sweatshop, the cyborg's existence is premised on the slave.64

A quick scan across the globe exposes the restriction on movement in Special Economic Zones, the violence of diamond mining, the labour camps in Dubai, and on and on. Exceptions to the 'normality' of the apparent freedom of wage-labour are, in fact, the normality of actually existing capitalism.

The Work of Women

The MNCs' understanding of the importance of non-waged labour arises, in part, from engagement with Italian feminists Lotta Feminista, such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. xxxiv Harry Cleaver in his broad summary of the perspective of autonomy describes the work of Lotta Feminista:

On the theoretical level they vastly expanded Tronti's work on the nonfactory part of the working class. They focused on the key role of the wage in hiding not only the unpaid part of the working day in the factory but also unpaid work outside it. They drew on Marx's work on the reserve army and the wage, yet they went beyond it in seeing the reproduction of labour power as within capitalist planning. They brought out the way the wage divides the class hierarchically into waged (factory) and unwaged (housewives, students, peasants, etc) sectors such that the latter groups appear to be outside the working class simply because they are not paid a wage. They pushed forward the analysis of the work of

reproducing labour-power and analyzed its structure both within the home and in socialized forms of schools, hospitals and so on.65

The target of Lotta Feminista's critique is the nuclear family of the 1960s and 1970s. They look at this in the context of the Fordist factory and the Keynesian state. Thus their work seems, understandably, dated as the nature of the family in relation to the other circuits of capital and power is in the 21st century has shifted. A more contemporary mapping of reproductive labour/gender/capital is, for example, the work of the Madrid collective Precarias a la Deriva whose essay A Very Careful Strike was published in The Commoner in 2006 alongside the work of Silvia Federici.66 However the work of Lotta Feminista is still useful to understand the nature of reproductive labour even if it has to be grasped with qualifiers due to the changes in the organisation of reproduction – changes caused by the society-wide rebellion that their work was part of.

*Lotta Feminista's* challenge is an analytical and political one. They argue that reproductive labour such as housework or prostitution only appears to be outside of the creation of value. The first may appear as a natural task, part of women’s lot and relatively menial in the scheme of things, the second as a simple transaction between male worker and female sex worker (to speak in generalities). As such they are commonly thought of as both natural and inescapable and not a real terrain of struggle. As Fortunati writes:

> While the first (wage-labour) appears as the creation of value, the second, reproduction appears as the creation of non-value. Commodity production is thus posited as the fundamental point of capitalist production, and the laws that govern it as the laws that characterize capitalism itself. Reproduction now becomes posited as “natural” production.67

But this is just appearances. Both forms of reproductive labour produce the central capitalist commodity – labour power – through the creation of a healthy
and functioning worker, and the production of subjectivities that can and will work. Thus struggle in these terrains would threaten the smooth functioning of the capitalist system by subverting the creation of labour-power for capital. In a 2002 conference reflecting on the history of operaismo, Dalla Costa summarised the work of Lotta Feminista: "[w]e revealed that production originated fundamentally from two poles, the factory and the house, and that the woman, exactly because she produced capitalism's fundamental commodity, possessed a fundamental level of social power: she could refuse to produce." 68

In The Arcane of Reproduction Fortunati looks specifically at housework and at prostitution which at the time of writing 1981, were changing in light of the struggles of the previous decade yet on the whole were realms of labour still carried out by women. She argues that reproductive labour which is both material and immaterial is the reproduction of labour-power through the reproduction of the working class. It is a complex process but is largely focused on the family. Whilst housework and prostitution appear to be a relationship between male worker and female worker (within the dominant coordinates of capitalist society) they are the production of a commodity for capitalist society and thus in fact a relationship between “capital and the female worker mediated by the male worker.” 69

This means that reproductive labour is different to wage work, more hidden; harder to grasp than wage-labour even though it is no less central to capitalism. It also means that in the carrying out of reproductive labour a hierarchy around the wage is generated, a division within the class that means simple slogans of unity become impossible. In the reproduction of labour-power (and thus capitalist society) men and women are posed against each other, the latter subordinated to the former even though both objectively have an interest against capital. (Note: Fortunati argues that whilst non-heterosexual relationships contain a radical potential they also tend to conform to the family pattern and do not in themselves represent a way out of capitalist relations of reproduction). 70
The power difference which arose between waged man and non-waged women under capitalism cannot be compared to the power difference of male/female relationships under slavery or under feudal serfdom. The qualitative leap introduced by capital is reflected in the depth of the division between men and women. The man becomes part of the waged-work relations, the capitalist relation *par excellence*, and was formally defined as the women's master. The woman, at the formal level came to be excluded from any direct relationship with capital, and was defined as being in a relationship of service with the man. Given this situation, not only did the man's social power become much greater than the woman's, but the relationship between, by definition came to be based on conflicting, antagonistic interests. The division of power is clearly reflected by the power stratification and hierarchy within the proletariat.71

Reproduction is not, however, disciplined solely by the male worker/family patriarch. For one thing Fortunati's analysis sees the male proletarian as a contradictory figure, as an intermediary of capitalism in the home, but generally also in contestation with capitalism. This is quite different from English language radical feminism that would see the bonds of patriarchy overwhelm class antagonism, though it shares links with other Marxist-Feminist positions. (Indeed Fortunati does not seem to argue that *patriarchy* exists, rather that capitalism is premised on a *patriarchal* or sexist division of labour.) Also all the elements of family, father/husband, mother/wife, children have to be produced and deployed and ideologically interpolated and invested in its structure. She asserts that continual state intervention is necessary to create and maintain the capitalist family and the overall coherence of reproduction. Whilst in liberal theory state/public sphere and family/private sphere appear clearly separate (perhaps antithetical), here there is a deep interlocking of the state and the family. This insight might be particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century where the family seems to be simultaneously collapsing (divorce rates, widespread rejections of traditional sexual morality, growth of unmarried cohabitation etc) yet the family as an object and subject of political discourse and governmentality intensifies. Indeed the state is needed to try to reinforce reproductive labour, because capital *cannot directly do so because the house worker is unwaged*: they do not come into direct contact with a "boss". Capital's direct power is blunted by the very conditions that
allow reproductive labour to take place. Fortunati remarks that the state plays a firmer role in the normalisation of reproduction than production. She writes that:

Within *production* the state only needs to function as the expression and instrument of collective capital’s control, as there is already a direct relation between the individual male worker and the single capitalist. However, within *reproduction* – where the relation between the individual female houseworker and the single capitalist is indirect – the state must also act as the direct manager and organizer of reproduction.\(^{72}\)

Numerous tactics and strategies are therefore applied to assure the coherence and conformity of reproductive labour: from seemingly benign moments such as compulsory schooling (for example) to the intervention of social workers into families that are seen to be deviant. We could also think of the recurring moral panics over single mothers or the debates over abortion. As Fortunati writes:

To control the quantitative aspects of the production of labor-powers, and to regulate the numbers to meet capital’s requirements, the state posits itself as the owner of the means of production of this commodity – the womb – expropriating women, leaving them in possession but without ownership. *Law on contraception and abortion* should therefore be seen in this light, and understood in all their strategic importance to capital in material production of the commodity labor-power.\(^{73}\)

Here it is possible to see a predecessor to Virno’s work on *biopower* (see chapter 7): that the regulation and management of life is related to capital’s parasitical reliance on labour-power and thus the need to control the bodies that contain this potential. Fortunati focuses such an understanding so clearly on the sphere of reproduction and thus highlights what in liberal theory is seen as private and excluded from the public realm is in fact a necessity for the activities of production/circulation/consumption. Fortunati’s work appears to be somewhat clumsy as the tools it uses, the familiar Marxist concepts of state and ideology, don’t carry the subtleties that many post-structuralist ones do. Thus the description of the mechanism for the enforcement of discipline and control of reproductive labour could do with revitalisation.
The importance of reproductive labour reveals that it is also a site of contestation, revolt and autonomy that offers up possibilities of communism that capital must attempt to manage, repress and/or recuperate. Silvia Federici’s essay *The Restructuring of Social Reproduction in the United States in the 1970s* argues that women’s revolts against reproductive labour led to society-wide changes. Federici argues that the revolt against housework in the USA began in part “through the welfare struggles of the mid 1960s”, where: “[w]elfare mothers, for example, denounced the absurdity of the government policy that recognizes childcare as work only when it involves the children of others, thus paying the foster parent more than the welfare mother, while devising programs to ‘put the welfare mother to work’.”74 This was joined with a larger phenomenon: as part of women’s liberation struggles women left reproductive labour to enter into wage-labour directly. This seems somewhat paradoxical, the fleeing from one form of labour to another. But Federici argues this movement must be seen as a “strategy” which worked to subvert the domination and restriction women experienced in the family and the various compulsions and controls that surrounded reproductive labour. By breaking with and refusing the organisation of reproductive labour, women increased their individual and collective autonomy and this then required capitalism to reorganise. Federici cites the begrudging legal recognition of women’s right to be free from domestic and sexual violence in the home. She see this as a result of women’s struggles against what were often part of how the régime of reproductive labour (which always had an emotional, affective and sexual component) was reformulated due to the mass and collective, overt and covert rebellion of women.75 She also notes a growing “desexualization of housework”, involving a move towards it being shared by men and women, mixed with a growing proliferation of family and relationship forms outside of the nuclear heterosexual paradigm. However she does add that the continuing vast difference between wages for work more commonly done by men and that which has been feminised means that vast pressures remain.76

Part of capital’s response to the demand for wages for housework was that it increasingly commodified reproductive labour. “Finally, the clearest evidence that women have used the power of the wage to reduce their unpaid labour in the home
has been the explosion of the service (reproduction) sector.” Federici argues that: “cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, even problem solving and companionship, have been increasingly ‘taken out of the home’ and organized on a massified industrial basis.” So too the affective and emotional work of reproductive labour has been commodified in the explosion of the “recreation and entertainment industry which are picking up the traditionally female task of making one’s family happy and relaxed.” Added to this is the growth of commodities and services around care – health, sexual, mental. Federici concludes, “[i]n fact, as wives and mothers have ‘gone on strike’, many of their previously invisible services have become saleable commodities around which entire industries are built”. This is very similar to the general argument of the perspective of autonomy that proletarian struggles drive the changes in capitalism. The rebellion of reproductive labour pushed capital to reorganise too.

Such feminist work shows clearly the importance of directly unpaid reproductive labour, the ability for reproductive labourers to resist and challenge capitalism. It also reveals how capitalism needs state-intervention and divisions within the proletariat to maintain reproductive labour.

Conclusion

Here we can see how the MNC view and describe capitalism. Gone are any ideas of a stable capitalist normality, rather capitalism appears to be caught in a series of violent spasms and spiralling authoritarianism. The division between state and market melt away as the attempts to enclose the commons, to proletarianise the population and to generate private property require the growth of the state. Wage-labour appears as just one form of the capitalist work. Also as the proletariat is created, divisions within the proletariat are manifested. Thus the paradigm of a
homogenous proletariat is dispensed with and so too the kinds of politics that rest upon this concept and the historical determinism that hold it up. What is positioned in the centre of this is the commons. Unpacked to refer generally to the collective relations created by the proletariat, it is posed as a point of contestation; both as the target of capital's enclosures that seeks to expand commodification and intensify the subordination of labour; and as a wellspring of resistance and refuge for the proletariat. This wellspring opens up the possibility of communism. From these theorisations what kind of politics can and do the MNC develop?
Chapter 5: Jubilee, the Political Practice of the Commons

Introduction

What do the MNC then impart to us about struggle? Particularly, how do they imagine struggle and thus what lessons can we learn to both increase and to help ignite forms of anti-capitalism, rebellion and the generation of communism? The New Enclosures in its reformulation of our understanding of capitalism allows for both a critique of some approaches to anti-capitalism and presents the possibility of others. There is no clear line or central position. Rather there are a number of tendencies that arise from an engagement with various struggles and are shaped by this interaction. Like so much of the perspective of autonomy they are deeply influenced by the EZLN/Zapatistas. Also there seems to be a diversity of political emphasis, based on the task of an individual piece of writing. For example Silvia Federici and Massimo De Angelis' piece on the war in Yugoslavia finishes with a call for anti-war struggles to connect to the anti-debt and anti-globalisation ones, putting forward a relatively reformist slogan: “[t]he alternative to war is often simpler that (sic) our arrogant governments think: just put the money where your mouth is and fund human rights!”79 p.m.’s work on the other hand, for example bolo’bolo, presents fantastical and humorous utopias. xxxv But if there is a common point at which those in the MNC meet it would be this: just as capitalism moves to enclose the commons, the commons is the basis for anti-capitalist resistance. Communism then is the accumulation of an ‘outside’ to capital. As noted in “The New Enclosures”, they see the basics of new proletarian resistance to the enclosures as struggles that “simultaneously reappropriate and hold places from capital while opening spaces for proletarian movement.”80 This focus on the commons leads the

xxxv p.m. is a pseudonym of a participant in the MNC.
MNC to revisit ideas of class composition and focus on those often seen as the most marginalised and rejected as those who have the most to offer struggle.

The MNC write in “The New Enclosures” that “every struggle against enclosure and for the commons inevitably becomes a call for jubilee”. Jubilee, writes Linebaugh, has its origins in Judaic law. Jubilee is often presented as a practice within a society that attempted to address the worst elements of inequity through the cancelling of debts or the freeing of slaves every 50 years, for example. To quote: “[a] prevailing view is that jubilee was an anti-accumulation device, similar to the potlatch or the carnival, that actually preserved accumulation.” But Linebaugh stresses there are other meanings to this term. Jubilee reflects part of the radical, egalitarian and revolutionary elements of Hebrew society. Elements which resurfaced in radical Christian practices during the struggles within and against the early colonial capitalist project: that is, as part of the struggles against the Old Enclosures. He cites the work of José Miranda as evidence of the continuation of Jubilee as part of contemporary liberation theology. Jubilee becomes a fundamentally revolutionary idea – not just the struggle against inequity but one that poses the possibility of fundamental change and liberation. For the MNC struggles around the commons connect to society-wide transformation; they are not just defensive but generative of communism. The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is repositioned as the defence and re/foundation of the commons. It is the part of the proletarian condition that is seemingly outside or on the edges of capitalism (the existing commons or the commons to come) that is the basis of the proletarian ability to transform society. This then is a profound rethinking of the concept of the proletariat.
Class Struggle

MNC’s deployment of the ideas of the proletariat and the working class (they never make a clear distinction) radicalises the terms and increases their relevance. To quote: “[i]t is important that we redefine ‘the working class’ in this way so that we can comprehend the anti-capitalist thrust of what appear to be non-working class struggles and demands.” And it is struggle that is crucial. The pre-MNC collective ‘Zerowork’ argued that “the working class is defined by its struggle against capital.” Class then is not simply a signifier for a seemingly objective analysis of the technical composition of work, power and wealth in society. Class is a political term.

When this is combined with an understanding that capitalism exploits labour generally – not just wage-labour – then a range of struggles, ‘social movements’, fit under the MNC conception of class and class struggle. They continue that:

A recategorization of the working class allows us to see the diversity of agents behind a distinctly anti-capitalist project. If capitalism is all-pervasive, the struggle against it must operate on many fronts. Instead of evacuating the working class content of various “social movements”, we must attempt to deepen this content.

However, posing all these struggles as “working class” does not, in the MNCs’ view, instantly resolve how these different components can struggle together. In a general sense “recomposition involves the increasing power and unity of the working class”, but this does not specifically show how this unity is achieved. As Federici’s historical work showed that the formation of the proletariat rests on the formation of hierarchies of difference within the proletariat there is a growing concern that unity can be used to submerge the specific autonomies of different elements and struggles to an abstract image of the class.
A core part of this work is to valorise the struggles of the unwaged. In “Dr Sachs, Live8 and Neoliberalism’s Plan B”, Caffentzis presents a stinging attack on Sachs’ *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*. Caffentzis argues that, under the veil of good intentions, Sach’s work aims at managing poverty to save capitalism from the poor rather than freeing the poor from poverty. Caffentzis presents the wageless as possessing a source of autonomy and resistance to capitalism arising from their very condition of being unwaged. For Caffentzis the wageless exist as a product of capitalism. They are something necessary to its global functioning, as they are used to guarantee the overall global increase in available labour and the expansion of capitalism. Yet the wageless maintain a continual connection to pre-capitalist commons and/or the formation of new ones; and associated insurrectionary activity to defend and extend these commons threatens capital on the whole. On the first point he writes:

Consequently, capitalism has carefully produced wagelessness, but capitalism remains ambivalently anxious about the wageless, for capitalism, as Prospero said of Caliban, cannot do without them. After all, the existence of the vast continent of the wageless is the basic disciplinary threat to be used against the waged workers of the world. On the one side, they are to be the ‘horrific’ image of what could happen to a waged working class, if it refuses to accept the dictates of neoliberal capitalism and, on the other side, they are to be a standing ‘reserve army’ in case capital decides to pick some subset of them for ‘development’. Finally of course, the wageless, especially women, are the basic reproducers of the waged working class.88

The wageless are thus created and put into motion by capital in very crucial ways. They are not only what is left over in shanty towns after the commons has been enclosed, labouring in various forms of agricultural production or eking out an existing on the edges and peripheries of capitalism. Their existence is an integral part of how the conditions of labour, globally, are reproduced.88 Of course much of Marxist thought has argued that the ‘reserve army of labour’ plays a crucial role in the functioning of capitalism. However they simultaneously deny the power these immiserated masses have in challenging capitalism – often rather

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88 A tangent here, but one worth exploring at another time, is that perhaps part of the development and deployment of such great repression against undocumented migrants could be due to their fleeing destabilizing the ability of capital to use the wageless and poor.
designating them as “part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.” Here is the important break that the MNC make. They see the poor and unwaged as having incredible power to resist capitalism. Caffentzis continues:

But the world does not wait on capital. The ‘extremely poor’ (in Sachs’ terminology) necessarily have created non-monetary reproductive systems that have demonstrated the power of communal relations to resist enclosures and provide subsistence in ways that the Scottish highlanders could never have imagined. On the basis of these systems the wageless are beginning to set off new political earthquakes (especially in South America). Or in face of increasing demonetarization, their reliance on communal relations is creating a situation where they stop being credible potential competitors on the international labour market (especially in Africa).

The self-activity of the wageless then throws the world of work into trouble. Indeed if we scan across the revolts of South America: the indigenous campesin@s of Chiapas, the landless peasants of the MST, the coca growers of Bolivia, the piqueter@s of Argentina, and the poor in the slums of Caracas - those newly wageless and those deeply impoverished seem to be often the animating forces behind the movements. It is often some form of commons, of collective subsistence, that both motivates and powers these struggles.

Hammer and/or Sickle; Zapatistas, Class Composition, Organisation

Part of the contention of MNC’s work is that often class unity means subordination of sections of the class under the section that is seen as being most productive. This is most often industrial work, either because industrial labour is seen as being more important to capital; or because it is seen as more clearly embodying the proletarian condition and thus communist subjectivity. In the introduction of Auroras of the Zapatistas the MNC deconstruct this paradigm by deconstructing
that symbol of 20th century revolution, the hammer and sickle. They remark that “the whole problem of twentieth century anti-capitalism is to be found in the enigma of the hammer and sickle…”91 The hammer being workers in advanced industrial production, the sickle being those who work the land. Whilst they are presented as if they are united in struggle, the hammer was often ascribed dominance, even when the revolt was happening in the countryside.xxxviii The MNC argue that this paradigm can be found in operaismo’s conceptualisation of class composition and their prioritising of the hegemony of the mass worker in large factories. The MNC argue that this hegemony is based on an illusion of power. Part of the importance of the Zapatistas for the MNC is that they “remind us” that “the land is the source of a tremendous revolutionary power and those who wield the sickle often instigate revolutionary change even in the stratosphere of high-tech production, because they have the capacity to subsist without capital’s mediation.”92 That is, it is their seeming condition of powerlessness, their apparent consignment to the margins of capitalism, which can be the very source of their power. They are not celebrated by the MNC for being peasants as such (and this detail is crucial) but rather because of the continuation of common that exists as a site of (and because of) resistance.

The reformulation of class composition in light of a loose paradigm built around the commons and developed in relation to struggles, especially that of the Zapatistas, is seen most clearly in “Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas” by Monty Neill.xxxix Neill looks at the classic operaismo theory of class composition and its implications for struggle in reference to the struggle of the Zapatistas and the defence/construction of the commons.93 By doing this he profoundly critiques the vanguardist notions he finds in operaismo. This opens up new ways of understanding who struggles, what is struggle and what is struggled

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xxviii Of course there is an entire Maoist tradition of Peoples’ War that does not confirm to this paradigm.

xxxix Which is a reworked part of a broader document called Towards the New Commons that was “prepared for the second Intercontinental Encountro against Neoliberalism and for Humanity, 1997.” Monty Neill, “Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas,” in The Aurora of the Zapatistas: Local & Global Struggles of the Fourth World War ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY Autonomedia, 2001), 138.
for. Neill's critique is positioned against the work of Romano Alquati, specifically his *The Network of Struggles in Italy*. xi

Neill’s critique of Alquati owes a fidelity to the original insights of *operaismo* but it is a fidelity that leads him to challenge their conclusions. He argues that to answer the question “*how* can the planetary working class stop the capitalist machine” we must understand “the nature and shape of the working class, in order to overcome capital and create new societies.” 94 Thus class composition is integral to the formation of anti-capitalist praxis, but Neill, continuing the line(s) of investigation of the MNC, sees the approach of Alquati specifically, and *operaismo* more generally, as stunted by a paradigm that concentrates on certain sections of the class over others. The debate (proletariat or peasantry, core or periphery etc) here is obviously not a new one. It constitutes many of the rifts of revolutionary thought. What is new is that the MNC take the approaches of *operaismo* and *autonomia* to areas of work and struggle previously ignored by the tradition. By doing this they unearth problems in *operaismo’s* foundations and critique many of its original presuppositions.

*Operaismo*, Neill argues, attempted to find a vanguard section of the class (which is very different from the notion of the vanguard *party*) in the mass workers of large-scale industrial production. He summarises their argument as follows: “A class vanguard gathers the rest of the class around as a focus of demands and struggles because other social sectors, such as schools and medical care, are modelled on the factory.” 95 The result, Neill contends, is a stunting of both the possibilities of struggle and our vision of post-capitalism. It overestimates the importance of this vanguard section and silences the strengths and specific demands of other parts of the proletariat – parts whose militancy defy their relegation to a position of political subordination. Neill also argues that such an

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xix Like many of the original partisans of *operaismo* Alquati’s work is largely unknown (in English) outside of a few radical circles and largely untranslated. Interestingly Neill himself did not have access to Alquati’s entire article; rather it is based on “typescript in English of notes summarizing the piece (unknown note-taker).” The depiction of Alquati’s position is on the whole taken verbatim from these notes. Neill, “Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas,” 140.
understanding reduces our vision of what we can replace capitalism with. It imposes a singular unified image of communism – one that emerges in line with the apparent struggles of this “vanguard”. This vision is deeply limited: “such a society may owe more to capitalism than to anti-capitalism, precisely because its model is the capitalist factory.”

Neill points out that Alquati’s work, unlike Orthodox Marxism, isn’t based on simple and mechanical understandings. Rather Alquati argues that there is a network of struggles. Neill summarises:

A network is the unity of struggles in both their vertical and horizontal articulations. The vertical articulation locates the point within the capitalist circuit of production/reproduction at which the struggle occurs; the horizontal articulation describes the spatial distribution and linkages. This combined vertical-horizontal articulation of struggles pivots around decisive points of interconnection.

These nodes can then be placed, for Alquati, in a strategic hierarchy. This hierarchy is not based on technical composition, but on political struggle. The class is recomposed through the circulation of struggles and becomes powerful and homogenous. Alquati sees “factory workers working in the centres of power and command of international capital” as the “apex of international struggle”. These are nodal points where struggles coalesce, find their most advanced expression and set the level and form of resistance for the class as a whole.

Neill argues that the effect is still the effacing of much of proletarian experience. Alquati’s answer to the diversity within the proletariat is to argue for its homogenisation behind a certain section. The elevation of the struggles of the mass worker to the nodal point in the network of proletarian recomposition, due to their supposed political content, leads to the subordination of other sites of struggle. It places them in a dependent position or sees them as limited, as either fighting for reforms, or having to wait for capitalism to be more mature before they can pose the question of communism.
To the schema of Alquati and operaismo, struggles like that of the Zapatistas have little or no power. In contrast, Neill argues that they are powerful and for exactly the same reason: their relation to class composition of global capitalism. Neill sees in the Zapatistas an approach that “critiques vanguardism and provides a strategy to begin reconstructing society out of the fragments of the division of labour.”\textsuperscript{99} It is in reference to this that he attempts to rethink class composition and in the process flesh out some of the MNC’s insights on struggle. Class composition remains useful because it is an attempt to search for the “the material and social bases of anti-capitalism and post-capitalism...”\textsuperscript{100} It grounds revolutionary praxis in the antagonisms that constitute capitalist society.

Neill argues that the continuation of pre-capitalist substance and collective practices, a commons, allows the Zapatistas the possibility in the here and now to directly create alternative post-capitalist social relations as a \textit{fundamental part of} their resistance to capitalism. As Neill writes “[T]his discussion poses a clear challenge to “workerism” including the original class composition analysis, which in its own way appears to reproduce the Stalinist ‘stages of history’ argument, as it assumes in effect that capitalism is the \textit{necessary} precursor to communism...”\textsuperscript{101} Neill’s argument, and that of the MNC generally, that pre-capitalist social relationships pose the potential of directly creating communism, is not the same as the romanticisation of the peasant that is common to much of a western New Left position, nor does it concur with the historical narrative, militarism and statism of Mao. Peasant life is not romanticised. Neill works to identify the potentials that exist for autonomy and rebellion amongst those who work the land. They live and struggle at the intersection of the implementation of capitalist forms and the continuation of other practices. Neill identifies the importance of agricultural production and the enclosure of the subsistence agricultural commons to contemporary capitalism – and thus the power of those who work and struggle on the land. Neill quotes Holloway (a delicious intersection) who writes “[a]nyway, which does more ‘damage to capital’ - a prolonged strike by industrial workers or a rebellion in the jungles of Mexico which stirs up again the idea of revolution and
the dream of a different type of society?"\(^{102}\) Here it is not the actual composition which is of primary importance – but the effects of the struggle. Part of the overturning of the hierarchy of older ideas of class composition is not to enforce another, but to show the potential of those who are ignored and thus open the possibilities for everyone.

In the Zapatistas Neill finds an approach that expresses the trajectory of the work of the MNC – a way to deal with the differences and singularities within the proletariat that allows each moment of rebellion to speak in a rebel chorus with others. Neill highlights the power to both oppose capitalism and create post-capitalism in those struggles that are seen as taking place in areas previously described as ‘backward’ – it refuses the teleology of industrial development.

Neill draws out two threads of Zapatista practice which he sees as offering important political contributions. Whilst seeing the Zapatistas as a “methodological mix” (and for Neill this is good) what the “EZLN has asserted foremost is a radical participatory democracy.”\(^{103}\) This radical participatory democracy both poses ways of organising the different parts of class struggle and the emancipation of social relationships in the here and now. This breaks with Alquati’s reduction of both struggle and liberation to the node of the factory. Neil argues that “[t]he Zapatistas do have a strategy of revolution” and it is one where “different sections will reach agreements and act on them, initiating a chain of events” that would both destabilise the Mexican state (the then regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party) and open the political terrain for further struggle; “the revolution to initiate the revolution.”\(^{104}\) This description seems a fairly accurate one, and the latest stage of struggle by the EZLN, La Otra Campana seems to conform to this.\(^{105}\) Thus no section plays vanguard; rather the communication of struggles creates revolution. And revolution is conceived in a way that breaks with two more usual and problematic elements; a temporality that postpones liberation till ‘after the revolution’, and the necessity of the party. The struggle is the direct creation of alternative social forms in the present, and a refusal of the mediation of
The ability to do this rests, in part, on the continuation of subsistence practices amongst those who work the land, which Neill calls “indigenous communism.” It is the continuation of the commons that grants the Zapatistas so much power to both challenge capitalism and build with others a new life for themselves. Many would see this as a fatal challenge to Marx and Marxism. However Neill argues that Marx had already investigated the possibility of communism developing from pre-capitalist forms in *The Ethnographic Note Books*. Marx and Engels had also written in the “Preface to The Russian Edition of 1882” of the *Communist Manifesto* in the context of revolution throughout Europe that “the present Russian common ownership of land (*obshchina*) may serve as a starting point for a communist development”.

However there is a problem. If it is the *spaces* outside capitalism, the continuation of the commons, that are a source of power, what does this mean for those of us who live in conditions where the real subsumption of social life is far more evident? This is linked to the theoretical weaknesses in the foundations of the idea of the commons, which becomes shakier as they are extended to more and more situations and forms of rebellions. The way that Neill tries to resolve this is to argue for the ongoing continuation of an outside throughout capitalism that allows the possibility of the generation of new commons. It is described like this:

We might envision capital as a power grid overlaid on a vast nebula, with the working class as that nebula. Workers are captured by and in some ways denied by the grid, the multifold structures and processes of accumulation. That is the sphere of exploitation. However, the nebula is life: capital must draw on it and cannot survive without it, but the workers have life and can survive without the grid. This is the sphere of everyday life, however corrupted and influenced by capital which seeks to control it and tap into its energy and creativity. But no matter how controlling, capital cannot be everyday life, which thus remains a great reservoir of energy against capital. This is in some ways more visible when, as with the Zapatistas, everyday life incorporates social structures and relations that pre-date capital and have visible anti-capitalist potential. But such potential is everywhere – though being everywhere is no guarantee it will be mobilized against capital.
Neill argues that this outside is actually crucial for capitalism to exist. It is the presence of an outside world of everyday life which allows workers the space to negotiate to sell themselves. This in turn allows their capacities to be realised as labour-power and thus create capital and capitalism. If capitalism succeeded in dominating the entirety of the social field, and reduced life to a functionalist machine (the argument goes), capital would actually no longer be capital but rather some relation of pure domination that is imagined in science fiction. Thus the continual existence of the nebula beyond the grid is "the fundamental source of power against capital as well as the basic source of capital itself."110

This grid/nebula analysis leads to a re-theorisation of struggle around the extension of the common. Life and vitality become the cores of anti-capitalist struggle. Neill reaffirms anti-capitalist struggle as the "class struggle to cease to be proletarian." He argues that the struggle against capitalism in the here and now should attempt to re/build commons – that is:

An alternative strategy to expecting the working class to throw up its post-capitalist possibilities in the heat of anti-capitalist battle is the rather deliberate constructing of alternative institutions or relationships within the larger current society, sometimes in the hope of living outside of capital, sometimes in the hope of creating better social arrangements within capital."111

Thus the MNC look closely at struggles in the global North that are often seen as marginal to class struggle proper. They spend a good deal of time looking at how squatting works as a practice that resists proletarianisation by removing the need to pay for housing, and also creates communist forms of social life. It is seen as part of a commons that are resisting enclosure. Special attention is given to the squats in the Lower East Side of New York and their connection with a multiplicity of other struggles.112
Neill is quick to pre-empt criticisms and admits that these struggles by themselves can quickly become recuperated or crumble under the general pressures of capitalist society.

If struggles against capital are in themselves insufficient for creating something new, attempting to create the new while ignoring the world capitalist system will merely produce new commodities or pools of labour for capital. That is, the working class must simultaneously attack capital and create its own society/societies.113

The commons then are not just places to exist in outside of capital, but places to attack from. He continues that “[c]apital cannot be defeated without both opposition and creation.” Yet there is no singular hegemonic part of the class, no central node. The struggle faces a number of polarities: between revolt against capital that emerges from struggles within it, and deliberate attempts to construct an outside, and between taking over the means of production “which implies capitalism as the precondition of communism” and “revolution as the negation of most of those means of production as necessarily destructive to human and other life...”114 Such juxtapositions do show the current dilemmas of communism, dilemmas that perhaps can only be solved in actual struggles.

But what is present beyond these generalities and what is suggested or implied as a mode of action? Whilst Neill cautions against copying the Zapatistas, the lesson he takes from them is of ‘creating new proletarian combinations’ that are open to diversities of composition and take up the challenges of constructing structures of autonomy and confronting the rule of capital and state. Neill suggest tasks for militants to help create revolutionary theory and to do so immersed in struggles. "If theory is to be an element of struggle, it must live in the interplay between analyzing struggles and analyzing capital." This involves an immersion in, and openness to, struggles; consideration of all kinds of strategy and a practice of "listening to the particulars of struggles to hear both the anti-capitalism and post-capitalism that might exist (commons-ism or communism), for pushing to make all kinds of new circuits of struggle."115 The role of militant as the missionary of ideology is overthrown. This is clearly a rejection of the Leninist stance where the professional revolutionary stands outside the pull of daily class struggles to
produce the knowledge gleaned from bourgeois science that can then be introduced via the party to the class as the spark to go beyond trade union consciousness. Any model of struggle that sees the necessity of bringing ideology, whatever its content, to struggles is rejected for a process of producing theory immersed within, participating in and listening to struggles – coupled of course with the study of capitalism and its developments. Neill then proposes eight tasks which essentially are about the circulation of experiences and reflection on different struggles.

It is worth noting at this juncture an essay by MNC participant George Caffentzis entitled "Lenin on the Production of Revolution". On the whole it rejects Lenin's model of party and militant, noting that What is to be Done "is hardly a good model for anti-globalization organization in general. It is too riddled with the elitism and suspicion of democratic procedures that have been pointed out ad nauseam during the Cold War." Yet Caffentzis's work is not a total break with Lenin. Instead he insists that there "is another face to What is to be Done? – the communicative model of revolutionary organising." He argues that part of Lenin's conception of an organisation of professional revolutionaries was to build a semi-clandestine structure that could effectively disseminate information and experiences of struggle – the very kind of communication that the Tsarist state and secret police were attempting to suppress. Whilst Caffentzis rejects the party-form, he argues that communicating the experiences of struggles throughout the proletariat is essential. Especially in the context of globalisation, where capitalist production exceeds the nation state, now more than ever different struggles need to circulate across borders to generate necessary bonds of solidarity. "For the key to understanding class struggle now is not rooted in the nation state; organisations that can circulate and communicate struggles world-wide are crucial for anti-capitalist politics of social transformation." Neill continues this argument about circulation and communication, though with no reference to Lenin.

\[xii\] Cf. Lenin, What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement
Interestingly Neill suggests the reader should look at more formal organisations but he does not advise how to create them. Instead we need a process of “identifying forms of immediate political organization that do not reproduce the capitalist division of labour.” Apart from this there is a suggestion for loose and open networks that allow the proliferation of experience, theory and reflection. Again we see a common trait to the post-autonomia: a refusal to see revolutionaries as special, or if they are special it is because they try to go further towards what is shared in the condition of being proletarian.

Critique of Socialism

The communism of the common, put forward here by Neill, is strikingly non-socialist. The theory of the MNC contains certain ambivalences towards socialism. This ambivalence is around whether the collapse of ‘real existing socialism’ is a precondition or a result of the new enclosures; and if ‘real existing socialism’ was ‘enclosed’ does that mean that it contains in part the commons? This last point stands at odds with the professed anti-statism of the MNC. We can find the rejection of socialism in one of the early documents of Zerowork which the MNC reprinted in Midnight Oil. It is worth retracing the argument made by Zerowork for it fills in some of the background of how the MNC think about socialism and the assertion of the autonomy of the proletariat.

Zerowork argued that socialism had been superseded by actual class struggle. The crisis of the mid 1970s (against which neoliberalism was a counter-revolution) was caused by struggles that were breaking all the deals of capitalism. They write “[t]he intensity and dimensions of these struggles demonstrated that the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the class recomposed itself and expressed its political autonomy from capital.”120 That
is, the entire 'high wages for higher productivity' deal offered by capital was assaulted by demands for a greater quality of life (ranging from access to more wealth to the breaking of the disciplinary regimes that underscored society) and a freedom from work. It was a revolt against work in the broadest sense. The Left and socialism, they argue, could not grasp this, responding to the crisis with a defence of work. Since for the Left the crisis is seen as the product of capitalism's internal flaws and since part of this is unemployment, the defence of the working class (here positioned as hard-working and innocent victims) meant a defence of wage-labour. Zerowork argued, but do not fully explore, that "socialism clashes with the working class demands against work." It is possible to surmise that this argument is based on the standard ultraleft critique: socialism is like a self-managed prison, workers enforce their own alienation as workers.

The critique of socialism is intensified by the MNCs' celebrations of the struggles of the proletariat that take place autonomously from left-wing organisations and trade unions. This is consistent with the early innovations of operaismo and autonomia. The MNC place a specific focus on the unofficial activities of the proletariat covertly in the workplace and/or outside the sanction of official structures. The MNCs' approach to understanding struggles is not one (especially in Australia or the Anglophone world more generally) that we would expect of the Left. That is, there is very little space given to deconstructions of the ideological positions of those who would lead the movements – including those who group themselves as anarchists. Rather the content of actual proletarian struggle is the focus. (But unlike much of the ultraleft there is no inverse Leninism here – none of the wholesale rejection of any form of organisational activity that is not 'The Revolution' itself.) An article on Nigeria describes the following as its focus of analysis:

Covert forms of resistance are those actions employed by workers, mostly at an individual level and in small groups, to "get even" with employers or resist exploitation. They are informal or "underground" and constitute part of "the everyday forms of consciousness and action" of the proletariat. At first glance they look unorganized, infrequent, irrational

xiii There is not a clear distinction made by the MNC between socialism as a broad concept and the experience of 'real existing socialism.'
and even of limited effect on existing relations of production. A careful study would however reveal the opposite of these features.\textsuperscript{122}

Here is an image of capitalism built on constant opposition, an image that gels with ‘ordinary rebelliousness’ that makes up a constant theme of this work. This intertwines with the commons as the wellspring of hope, opposition and creativity that the MNC see as the basis for the possibility of a world radically other. But what do the MNC suggest as ways of acting to advance and develop struggles? We can look at their suggestions from articles written as interventions in particular struggles and the radical and utopian suggestions of p.m..

\textbf{Some Political Suggestions, Some Political Problems}

Looking at the statements produced by the MNC in regards to specific struggles and movements, there seems to be a distance between the theoretical apparatus they have constructed and the content of the statements themselves. Take for example their latest intervention (at time of writing), \textit{Migration, Movements, Wages and War in the Americas: Reasons for Unity on May Day 2006 – and After}. Admittedly it does not represent a closed position but rather “comes at the start of our investigations of these multiple movements, and early in the unfolding of these struggles, and represents therefore simply a partial first draft.”\textsuperscript{123} In this document we don’t find any of the language of the New Enclosures, but the general overall analysis of the situation of global capitalism carries deep points of continuity. The essay tries to connect to the wave of struggles moving through the Americas (both North and South). It focuses on the boycotts and strikes of Mayday 2006 in which mainly Latino workers and communities inside the US took action against a “congressional bill that would criminalize them simply for being in the US without proper papers, and criminalize US citizens who provide them with assistance.”\textsuperscript{124} The article presents an analysis of neoliberalism that is in line with the New
Enclosures thesis. However both its depiction of struggles and suggestions for action are not in accord with their theoretical schema.

The article describes a movement of struggles that is against the destruction of the commons and the intensification of state repression:

In these surging movements we are witnessing a rebellion of people throughout the Americas. They are rising up against their fate of being driven from their lands, targeted for repression and even death, forced into sweatshops paying starvation wages or finding no income at all. The millions who have been forced to migrate to the US and other nations face humiliation, repression, discrimination and super exploitation as second-class persons in apartheid systems constructed on immigration status.¹²⁵

Here are all the points of interest and contestation from *The New Enclosures*: the destruction of subsistence, and movements of peoples and labour in the context of increasing state repression. It would be consistent with the argument of the MNC that in this situation they propose the defence and re/formation of the commons. But they don’t. Rather they define the wave of struggle in relatively statist and socialist forms and argue for the legal recognition of undocumented workers within the US. The wave of struggle they talk about in Latin America is described as follows, “the people of Latin America in election after election are voting into power governments whose platforms and sometimes their practices, reject the economic policies that the US government, on behalf of corporations, has been supporting for decades.”¹²⁶ Later in the article they write that:

Across Latin America and in the Caribbean, a variety of movements and struggles are gaining strength. One form of the struggles has been the elections of new governments. Some that are supposed to represent and be responsive to working/low-income/indigenous people appear not to be so (e.g. Lula in Brazil); some seem now to be (Chavez in Venezuela); while other cases it is too early to tell (Evo Morales in Bolivia; Preval in Haiti).¹²⁷

Whilst the ambiguities trying to use the state as a tool for social change are displayed, the state itself is not rejected. Rather here the MNC advise that the
response to the potential of state betrayal should be to “explicit(ly) support (them) to the degree (that) they practically oppose Neoliberalism and are responsive and even supportive of the movements.” Here the state is not seen as irredeemably caught up in the net of capitalism and fundamentally part of the social relations of class and power. The ability to use the state as a tool to resist neoliberalism is based on “many factors” though “the power of movements to ensure the governments do their bidding is among the most important.” What is noticeable here is what is left out. There is no comment on the content of the refusal of neoliberalism that is carried out by governments of those like Chavez. It is clear that even the best of these governments are only engaged in socialist and/or social democratic projects. The critique of work, the formation of the commons is not part of this agenda. Also the movements that would previously have been the focus of the work of the MNC like the Zapatistas are absent.

**Bolo’bolo**

It is amongst the utopian writings of p.m. that we find the clearest and most imaginative depiction of what a politics of the commons applied directly to conditions of the global North would look like. Like the others who partake in the MNC, elements of p.m.’s work contain their own idiosyncrasies and do not conform to a ‘line’. For example p.m. sometimes seems to attribute crisis to internal mechanisms within capital, thus breaking with the early operaismo contention that class struggle is the source of capital’s crisis. To quote from *The Next Mutiny on the Bounty*:

In its intellectually pure form the industrial capitalist system could not have survived the 18th century. Its inbuilt mechanism of the “tendential decrease in the rate of profit” – the more you invest in machinery, the lower the pro rata returns on it – push it into structural collapse every 5 to 7 years.
p.m.’s best known work is *bolo'bolo*, a pamphlet that is semi-legendary in underground and counter-cultural circles (and currently out of print). An abridged version of the first half of *bolo'bolo* was published in the 1984 edition of Midnight Notes entitled *Lemming Notes*, an issue of their publication attempting to deal with capital in the midst of reaction. Here we shall also focus on p.m.’s more recent works *The Next Mutiny on the Bounty* and *The Golden Globes of the Planetary Commons*. These latter works, like the latter work of the MNC generally, focus more on the concept of the commons. p.m.’s general prescription for praxis, put so simply at the beginning of *bolo'bolo*, is:

The name of the monster that we have let grow and that keeps our planet in its grip is: the Planetary Work Machine. If we want to transform our spaceship into an agreeable place again, we’ve got to dismantle this Machine, to repair the damage it has done and come to some basic agreements on a new start.

Superficially p.m.’s work seems to hold much in common with many utopian writings, as much of it is about how to create alternatives in the here and now beyond capitalism and breaks with a narrative of revolution-in-the-future-liberation-after-that. Yet p.m. does not see this as carving out a special space or isolated moments of liberation that just let global capitalism keep turning. They are suggested as a *praxis* that will cause the overall supersession and subversion of capitalism. As such p.m. takes the idea of the commons seriously as something that can be taken up and used and accordingly fleshes it out.

Interestingly p.m. refuses the label of utopian and the claims to perfection that it marshals. Rather they describe their work as “pragmatic arrangements, using exactly the experiences of that ‘muddling through’ to which the majority of the inhabitants of the planet is being forced under unnecessarily bad

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xliii As well as the title of a book *bolo'bolo* is the term that p.m. uses to describe communism both as a movement and a post-capitalist community – displaying an attempt to sidestep the historical weight of language. Part of the charm of *bolo'bolo* is its imaginative use of language, the proliferation of new words for old and the various comic elements to it which, for sake of clarity and length, cannot be reproduced here with any justice.

xliv Interestingly the author is identified as “ibu” not p.m. Ibu is the word that p.m. uses to describe an individual in *Bolo'bolo*.
circumstances at the moment." As such p.m. tries to locate this imagining of other ways of being in the currently existing composition of capital and class. They continue: "[a] new start can only be based on available experiences. Rather than re-inventing the world, we'll have to re-combine its already existing alternatives." 

p.m. tries to flesh out how the formation of communism can emerge from capitalism, how the outside can be built. Firstly p.m. confronts the question of negation, the need to destroy capitalism:

If we deal with the Machine, the first problem is obviously a negative one: How can we paralyse and eliminate the Machine's control (i.e., the Machine itself) in such a way that bolo'bolo can unfold without being destroyed at the start? We can call this aspect of our strategy "deconstruction" or subversion. The Planetary Work Machine has got to be dismantled carefully, because we don't want to perish with it.  

This subversion is fundamentally constructive. p.m. argues that "[s]ubversion alone, though, will always be a failure, though with its help we might paralyse a certain sector of the Machine, destroy one of its capabilities. Finally, the Machine is always able to reconquer it and occupy it again." Instead, "[c]onstruction has to be combined with subversion into one process: substruction." Separated, p.m. sees either activity as actually just reinvesting our desires into capitalism - by creating disorders that capital manipulates in its management of the population, or by the formation of collective practices that are quickly reabsorbed into the exchange of commodities and the rule of work. Similar to Neill's metaphor of life being the nebula and capital the grid, p.m. writes that "[l]ife as a whole still manages to slip away from the Machine's basic pattern." Substruction is the weaving together of all these different slippages into durable modes of living. Special attention is given in bolo'bolo to how this weaving can be a meeting of slippages that emerge across the great division of labour within the proletariat. Pre-empting the MNCs' adoption of the term commons, p.m. articulates a vision that is copasetic with it. Substruction, p.m. envisions, is the creation of alternative institutions of living as part of the process of leaving capitalism. We could "attempt the organization of mutual help, of moneyless exchange, of services, of concrete cultural functions in
neighbourhoods" and build "[a]ll kinds of meeting points - bringing together all three types of workers (a reference to the three deals that MNC believed predated the new enclosures) on the basis of common interests...”

p.m. focuses on the role the commons could play in anti-capitalist struggle in the North, and does so in such a way that the creation of the outside overshadows the attack against what is. At the core of p.m.'s praxis are suggestions to collectively move outside of capital through the creation of autonomous communities that can provide our subsistence and also, p.m. claims, a quality of life greater than that offered by commodity society. This is what p.m. (in more recent work) calls "The Big Offer": that the commons will both provide a way of reforming social life that is more desirable than the apparent prosperity of capitalism in the North and pull apart the system that condemns so many in the rest of the globe to misery. For whilst much of the focus of the MNC is on highlighting the power and struggles of those effaced by capitalist and leftist ideologies of technological progress alike, p.m. focuses on what could be an effective and attractive practice for those surrounded by commodities. This they contend is crucial due to the global structures of capitalism:

At this moment everyone on the planet is watching the people of the USA and wondering how they are reacting to the present global crisis. For the most ‘dangerous’ working class on this planet is the US working class. When its compliance with capital ends, US capital will collapse and thereafter, like dominoes all the secondary capitals. Here p.m. ascribes to the working class within the USA a pivotal role due the USA's role in the global management of capitalism (this runs contrary to much of the other work by the MNC). This proletariat is the most dangerous because of the damage it can do to the US state and also due to US power, “[i]f it keeps on supporting it actively or passively, there can’t be an end to the world’s turmoil, destruction and misery.” Capital attempts to secure the loyalty of this section of the class, p.m. alleges, through the promotion of a lifestyle of commodity consumption based around suburbia (obviously not extended to the entire population). Suburbia is the practical offer to strategic sections of the class, and functions globally as a lifestyle to dream for and aspire to. Its function then is to
work as a practical and ideological system to redirect desire back into the
commodity form and work. And it does this by offering a vision of life that seems to
transcend the actual disempowerment, alienation and atomisation of existence in
late capitalism. p.m. argues that living in suburbia is living in a “near-paradise, in a
state of bliss, in a virtual utopia, beyond, in non-capitalism”; that “it signifies
subsistence, virtual independence, a sense of autonomy”. But this “near-
paradise” is based on global hyper-exploitation and ecological devastation, and is
vastly costly for capital.

Suburbia was created as a model of paradise – in reality it never worked on its own.
Independently from its ecological lack of sustainability, suburbia actually went in (sic)
crisis for internal reasons right from its start. In spite of all neoromantic (sic) Hollywood
movies, the man on his lot was faced with instant desertion by his wife. The American
male’s dream was dismantled as a trap of lies, deceptions and impossible ambitions by
authors like Arthur Miller (Death of a Salesman), Edward Albee (Who’s afraid of Virginia
Woolf) right after WWII. The immense boredom of life between single houses and
shopping malls pushes young people in drugs, random violence, gothic and neonazi cults
and into acts of amok. At the end of the nineties suburbia wasn’t much more than a cynical
joke (The Simpsons and other serials), a depressed real estate agent’s nightmare (Richard
Ford, Independence Day, 1995) or the downfall of gated communities (T.C Boyle, Tortilla
Curtain, 1996). So suburbia is clinically dead, but still here, still being maintained
physically alive by all kinds of palliative therapies (communitarianism, Prozac, more police,
security systems, the mobile phone etc). Paradise mustn’t die, although fewer people live
there and enjoy it less and less.141

p.m. alleges that whilst suburbia was/is reality for the few and the dream for
the many the dominant experience is the camp or “lager”- a German term that “is a
synonym of ‘depot, storage’...The lager is the original way of keeping proletarians
ready for work: the workhouse, the factory-cum-dormitory, prisons, plantations,
orphans’ homes etc.”142 p.m. extends the lager/camp to include everything from
the camp proper to high density housing in inner cities of the North (“...New York
city is a refugee camp (or therapy ward) for all those that run away from
suburbia.”)143 Lagers are sites that are both cheap for capital and manifest direct
authoritarian control:
The lager is cheap in all aspects, for the 'variable capital' (workers) is stored right on top of the 'constant capital' (machines) and the synergetic combination of the two happens on the spot. Whereas suburbia is a form of symbolic subsistence of socially isolated families, the lager is a militarized, hierarchical, authoritarian form of community. The lager working class is brought together and pre-organised by capital itself. 144

The very intensity of the lager, the source of its productivity means that it is a "highly explosive 'social reactor' with all the characteristic risks of reactors." p.m. recognises that against capital's use of lagers to organise prisons, factories, refugees, armies and others, the lager can "become expensive (for capital) for a number of reasons: defections or ‘softening’ of supervisors, epidemics, flights, breakdowns of discipline, mutinies, ‘hysteria’, fires, tensions between the two sexes etc."145 Despite the lager’s position within capitalist social organisation and the internal social relations common to it, p.m. asserts that:

...the idea of communal life itself on a lager scale (500 to 1000 persons) is actually not unattractive, depending on the conditions and the way such as community is run. Considering the current density of the population of the planet, some form of communal or 'lager' life is in fact the only sustainable option.146

Both suburbia and the lager not only fuel global capitalism but also rely on the structures of global capitalism for their survival. And since this economic situation is one that increasingly destroys the viability of the biosphere, the survival of these forms runs contrary to the survival of life in a broader sense – not just in the future but in the here and now with the very real misery that condemns, for example, 40,000 people to death through malnutrition on a daily basis. p.m. then argues that the “obvious solution” is “combining real subsistence and self-governed communal housing”. That is the reforming of the lager around the re/establishment of the common, a process that would “contradict capitalist organization, in fact make it superfluous.”147 Thus p.m. is suggesting a radical praxis towards communism and against capitalism – the creation of entire different ways of life, which work to create liberated existences, break modes of discipline and cause capitalism to wither away.
What does this mean for the militant (indeed who is the militant?) in the here and now? p.m. argues that the creation of life around the commons is happening anyway, as a reaction against capitalist austerity. But it needs to be extended:

The crisis in Argentina (for example) has ignited manifold forms of neighborhood kitchens, barter systems, even ‘non-profit’ industry. All this happens without any preparations, not even as a strategy, but spontaneously. But what was born out of need in some places could become a conscious strategy of subversion and alternative forms of life in other places and would be even more powerful... If capital/state is planning to put some of us into camps (for terrorists), we’d better organise our own camps on our own terms.148

From here p.m. identifies some parameters for struggle both in relation to the state and to violence. On the first point p.m. argues that the “struggles of the imminent period of crises can’t be about asking national capitals to reinvest, to create jobs or return to the ‘good old times’; rather it is one of the “appropriation of resources”, the direct take over and re/creation of the means of living. On the second point p.m. acknowledges that the “experiences of the EZLN in Chiapas have shown that some military activity is sometimes necessary and possible as a means of self-defence, but only below the threshold of frontal attack and combined with symbolic action and solidarity on a planetary scale.”149 This is a very hopeful position, and communism needs hope. But it could be an error to imagine the project of recreating social life through the appropriation of creativity and resources and not imagine having to have a terminal conflict with the state: and this would mean a real clash of forces. One of the virtues of the EZLN is their ability to contain the military element of their struggle so they can have the space to carry out social transformation and the creation of emancipatory modes of living. This means that they avoid the fate of groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) where it seems fighting the state becomes an end in itself. p.m. argues that what is necessary is a mutiny – a rebellion that will allow the lager to be built differently in a way that realises the common. This mutiny then seems to be almost exactly the same as defending or building the commons itself. p.m.
argues that the response to state violence or repression of creating new forms of life is to continue to create new forms of life – and thus try to escape the whole logic of confrontation.

In *The Golden Globes of the Planetary Commons* p.m. again ascribes the terminal crisis of capitalism to its own internal mechanisms (something I hope the rest of this work has refuted). Apparently “[t]he situation is already excellent and will get better. Of course there are minor problems, but they can easily be solved.”

Here, due to the crisis in the availability of oil, and thus capital's ability to maintain a global regime of accumulation, “[t]he global economy will collapse just in time to return to a simpler lifestyle that will be accessible to all the 6 billion inhabitants of the planet.” What is left is just the realisation of this lifestyle, a process that p.m. sees as luxurious and easy:

Everything will fall in place – there is no need for revolutions, pushy militancy, demos, meetings. We can lie back and watch it happen. The only thing we must do is not hinder this development and let it happen freely...The era of doing will be over. All the rats will have won, the race is over. Champagne for everybody!

Elsewhere, contradictorily, p.m. does not actually agree with their own imagined serendipitous narrative of history and actually argues for the proactive re/creation of the commons. For the relations that allow the commons to exist are crucial. p.m. states: “[t]here is also no such thing as the commons – there are only its regulations.” That is egalitarian relations and agreements between people determine the existence of the commons, as much as the commons always generates egalitarian relations. Despite their above position of the relaxed inevitability of communism, p.m. writes:

The commons is not something natural and self-regulating, not comparable to ecotopes like the jungle, the prairie or the oceans. When you are a species of 6.5 billion wily bastards you have to be very careful about how you regulate access and rights of usage to it. A lot of democratic decision-making is needed to keep the commons going.
p.m. then presents a rough plan for a five level structure from the local to the global, and again contradicts themself by writing: "[t]he road to the commons (and there can only be one, for all the different resources are interrelated) seems difficult, even unthinkable at the moment." Indeed the entire structure of capitalism works to militate against the common, enclosing it and working to keep it enclosed. Interestingly p.m.’s response to this challenge is to argue that what is needed to start the process of creating free communities that enable and are enabled by the commons is to attempt to create spaces of coming together, meeting, communication and the circulation of experience. p.m. then proposes that people establish public bars throughout the world (signified by golden balls hanging outside the doorway). p.m.’s politics end up in a position of pleasant optimism. It is no surprise that their most recent work, *Akiba: A Gnostic Novel*, is a science fiction novel in which the main characters suicide in order to “live” in a simulated utopia in cyber-reality.

**Conclusion**

By placing the ideas of “enclosure” and “commons” at the centre of their understanding of capitalism and struggle, the MNC develop a challenging rethinking of communist politics. They open up the concept of the proletariat to include in it the struggles of the rural poor and the unwaged more generally. Neill’s work, inspired by the Zapatistas, shows how many positions of the original *operaismo* contained assumptions about the nature of the proletariat that led it to focus on and valorise the struggles of the industrial workers in the North over others. Not only does such a position efface the struggles of the great many it also, according to Neill, maintains a vision of post-capitalism that is too tied to capitalist paradigms.
A politics of the commons identifies the power that the pre- and non-capitalist social relationships have to both provide a space for resistance and the substance for creating communism. The MNCs’ politics is based on the continuation of an outside to capitalism: one that we should constantly attempt to expand. Capitalism is a grid, and life is a nebula. It is in this nebula that the MNC see the hope of both resistance and communism. Communism is not to be put off till a later date but rather is to be constructed today from and in this ‘outside’ to capitalism, in the hope that such efforts will be able to subvert capital on a whole.

This schema is continued in the utopian work of p.m. p.m. attempts, through imaginative writings, to argue how a similar politics of the commons can be created in the North. Thus the author tries to take into account both the apparent absence of collective and autonomous subsistence and a critique of the commodity. p.m.’s visions of the larger or bolo’ bolo see the creation of collective and free modes of life as the prime tasks for the subversion of capitalism – this would involve generating modes of existence that are both more desirable and also allow us to free ourselves from the alienation of wage-labour and the humiliations of capitalist power. As such there are no special political tasks that are needed, rather efforts that would create the space for people to come together.

In the work of the MNC there is a general faith that struggle in itself will create communism. They do not argue for the need of a special organisation of militants and are also willing to see the positives in struggles that use ideologies that are divergent from the MNC’s basic positions. It is my contention that whilst the commons does help us recognise the power of those so often rejected as powerless, it is a flawed notion that hampers the development of a more thorough politics.
Chapter 6: A Critique of the Midnight Notes Collective

Introduction

The MNCs' work takes the notions of primitive accumulation and the enclosure of the commons, and expands them to understand the contemporary struggle of capital and labour. They do this to challenge and make us rethink our ideas of capitalism, struggle and communism. Responding to a real need they also generate for themselves problems and limitations. It seems that the hope of the MNC is to understand the diversity of the proletariat. They wish to move away from a position that privileges the confrontation in the factory in the metropolis, to a wider understanding. This understanding grounds itself in the activity and power of the most immiserated in the world. The MNC use the notion of the commons to argue that their very exclusion, or at least partial marginalisation, from wage-labour proper is a source of power for the poor. Not only are the poor and unwaged included in capitalist production, but the commons that sustains them presents the material possibilities of communism.

The concept of the commons has a number of theoretical and political problems. Using the commons to refer to the collective creation of the proletariat in rebellion is innovative. It emphasises the ability of ordinary people to directly create alternatives to capitalism. But the MNC use the concept in a way that becomes unconvincing, and ignores the very diversity of the proletariat that they wished to highlight. It also blunts their critique of social democracy and socialism, something that is intensified by their more recent support of Left nationalist governments.
The Conspicuous Absence of the Commons in the North

The commons is clearly a useful tool for analysing the forms of communal property holdings that typify many agricultural populations before capitalism and during periods of ‘formal subsumption’ – where capital imposes its rule on pre-capitalist forms of production.\textsuperscript{xiv} It could also be easily extended to include hunter-gatherer and nomadic peoples. But the MNC want to take this definition further, to include the gains of struggles of the proletariat in developed capitalism, and also the forms of autonomous social relations created by ‘commoners’. This seems very useful when describing the collective subsistence and mutual aid that keeps so many people alive across the globe. Politically it has a power, as it works to open and radicalise the concepts of proletarian struggle and it threads together disparate rebellions. These are important objectives considering the widespread disavowal of revolutionary and proletarian politics, and the actual experiences of fragmentation and defeat experienced under neoliberalism. But how valid is it? It is my contention that the MNC stretch the definition of the new enclosures too far; they try to include too wide a range of struggles within its conceptual framework. This both fails to be intellectually convincing and also generates a series of political problems. This becomes very clear when the MNC try to apply the idea of the commons to the global North.

One of the examples of the MNC trying to apply the concepts of commons and enclosure in the North is a protracted strike in Jay, Maine USA. David Riker, a MNC participant, summarises the conflict thus: “[t]he strike was organized against the company’s attempt to impose a new contract that would have cut jobs, reduced wages, ended the closed shop, and radically transformed existing working practices”.\textsuperscript{157} The author places this struggle in a context of the “wider class

\textsuperscript{xiv} Cf.\textit{Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy} 1019-23.
experience of the 1980s.” He argues that “[t]he age of the guaranteed job is over. In its place, those workers who had enjoyed it are experiencing the New Enclosures”.158

But what are the commons being enclosed? In “The New Enclosures” the MNC write that here the commons is “a town surrounding a paper mill controlled by striking paperworkers like Jay, Maine” because it is a “staging point for proletarian attack or a logistical locus”.159 Here the commons is the ensemble of relationships of the life of people in the town that allows them to carry out their struggle in the workplace. Riker writes:

In Jay, in the midst of all these activities, the strike was having a profound effect on everyone. The experience of a long and protracted struggle radically transformed the community. In place of three separate towns, working separate shifts, the people in Jay were creating a lively community. A number of organizations were created during the strike including a food bank, a clothes bank, and a job bank. In addition, weekly meetings organized by the union became regular social events.160

Here, the commons would appear as something that arises because of the struggle, not something enclosed by it; the commons are what the proletariat establishes despite capitalism. On one hand this is not something particularly novel; it does after all conform to Marx’s notion of communism as the movement against capitalism in which new social relations are formed in struggle.161 However on the other hand this is quite a break with how the MNC more generally use the commons, and also with its more widespread understanding. If the commons exists in Jay, Maine only because people develop forms of collective solidarity through the struggle against the attacks of the company then we cannot say that this is actually a pre-existing commons that is being enclosed.

Other examples of the commons identify situations where the collective relationships between people provide at least some form of partial subsistence that provides a space to struggle and something to fight for. I do not mean to argue that for the people of Jay, Maine both the relations between people before the
strike and the radicalisation that they went under during the strike were unimportant. Rather, that to call these relations a "commons" massively stretches the idea of the commons to be a theory of 'everything', something to describe all forms of proletarian struggle. The MNC do this rather than call attention to the elephant in the room: that the commons do not exist in any meaningful sense in the North. In the North people have been almost totally enclosed from any form of collective subsistence and commodification has extended across almost the entire totality of life. Perhaps there maybe a few isolated remnants. And yes, proletarians in struggle in the North may generate collective modes of subsistence (in the broadest sense): community gardens, free kitchens etc. Perhaps pre-capitalist commons may be an inspiration and arguably such projects could be called a commons after they have been constituted. It even makes sense to argue for the reestablishment of the commons, or to call for a 'new commons' as political position. But this is different from the error the MNC make.xlvi

The error of the MNC is to fit almost all struggles by capital and labour into the terms "enclosure" and "commons". Through the work of the MNC just as enclosure comes to depict a constant, a returning feature of the role of capital, the commons comes to signify a similar and opposite proletarian refusal. Struggle constructs in the here and now collective spaces through the practices of resistance (overt or not). However it means that the MNC are compelled to describe situations as containing the commons where the paradigm does not fit. Rather than wrestle with this problem, they deny it.

As vivid as the definition is, it actually effaces the differences between the commons as non-capitalist subsistence and the ensembles of collectivity created through resistance against capitalism. And thus it also effaces the specific difference between different sections of the proletariat. There is a crucial

xlvi Other authors have attempted to rework the notion of commons to fit in with the conditions in the global North – for example the idea of an 'undercommons'. An excellent site for the various experiments and debates around the commons is the journal The Commoner available online www.commoner.org.uk. The MNC have not, to date, made any such qualifications and thus generate the problems discussed here.
difference between autonomy of collective land, the forms of mutual aid in a slum and the forms of solidarity in a workplace (to list some examples). In the broadest sense in all three we can see the struggles between labour and capital, but how these struggles manifest, how people organise and what people fight for are radically different. To put it starkly collective land is something that is most often fought for and is quite clearly a common defended against enclosures; that is defended against the imposition of capitalist power. A workplace is already enclosed, already bound within capitalist power and the solidarities of struggle must be created and affirmed, not defended. This is one of the difficulties that have confronted militants trying to transpose Zapatista politics to the North. That rather than having something like the collective land of the ejidos to develop forms of autonomy from, we often have to work out how we can build a functioning form of collective autonomy so we can struggle for the creation of a commons.

What is happening here? I believe what the MNC try, but fail, to do is explain how the struggles of the proletariat create real and concrete solidarity. They want to express how struggle itself creates forms of social organisation that can become the basis for the radical transformation of society. The idea of the commons is used to posit the direct creation of use-values and autonomous social relations as a recurring feature through proletarian resistance. Also what the MNC admirably try to do is to show both the unity and the diversity of the proletariat. As they write, "[w]e experience the unity of capitalism in very different and at times apparently contradictory ways, but nonetheless the unity remains." The commons is an attempt to describe this diversity and unity in both how we work and how we struggle. But it errs on the side of unity, minimises the differences and thus is politically limited.
Problems with the Politics of the Commons

This conceptual error then creates a series of political problems. By overstretching the concept of the commons the MNC efface the specific problems and dilemmas of different sections of the proletariat. This is a real shame as Federici’s work was so effective in pointing out how the creation of hierarchies of difference within the proletariat is an a priori condition for the creation of a proletariat that can be put to work by capital. Also Neill’s work on the Zapatistas presents them as a useful model of how different and distinct sections of the proletariat can struggle together. However their use of the commons reduces these insights. This is seen in a number of problematic absences and anomalies.

For example, we have already seen that the MNC’s work pays special attention to the unwaged reproductive labour of women. However the MNC do not articulate a feminist conception of struggle nor have they fleshed out proposals for struggles in the home. Their book Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War carries a reprinted piece from ‘Zerowork’ that looks favourably on the self-reduction struggle of housewives in Italy in the 1970s, struggles where women collectively reduced the prices they paid for rent, energy and groceries. But since then there has not been a further elaboration of the forms of struggle that could confront the internally gendered nature of the proletariat or attack capital’s contemporary exploitation of reproductive labour. This is particularly striking because Federici’s work enriches our understanding of the importance of the labour of women for capital and exposes the problems of forms of class struggle that are blind to gender.

Could part of the problem be the concept of the commons? If the reproductive labour of women still largely takes place in the home and the
experience of it is largely atomised and pushed from the public sphere then such forms of labour are those least likely to reside in a commons. Also there is a strange retreat from the critique of reproductive labour. If the commons are non-monetary exchanges that in part allow us to sustain life, how is this to be distinguished from reproductive labour?

The original arguments by Dalla Costa and Fortunati posit that despite being unpaid for and formally considered to be outside the processes of capitalism, reproductive labour is in fact included in capitalist production. It produces the crucial commodity, labour power, and is disciplined by internal divisions within the class and by state and ideological intervention. The struggle of women consigned to the home is a struggle both against elements of reproductive labour and also for their autonomy from capitalist processes (which would free and transform the elements of reproductive labour that remain desirable). Yet the notion of the commons pastes over these insights. How much of what is identified as the commons is actually reproductive labour? This is an unanswerable question as the MNC use the commons in such an open way it cannot be clearly identified. We are at an impasse. If something is the commons it is meant to provide an outside to capitalism that is both a refuge and a base for attack. Yet the work by Lotta Feminista presents such spaces in a more complicated way. As sites of reproductive labour they are split and divided antagonistic spaces. Struggles need to be waged within them. Here the MNC is blind to feminist strategy and ignores the previous insights of an understanding of reproductive labour.xlvii

This strange disavowal of reproductive labour is intensified by Neill’s depiction of resistances arising from a permanent everyday outside to capitalism: that life is a ‘nebula’ and capital is a ‘grid’. There is something powerful in this

image: that there is 'something' in our everyday condition that is excessive to capitalism, some vital thing, which capital chases after. More concretely there are specific social formulations (the commons proper) that do exist as an exterior place of subsistence that capital desires to enclose. Yet the generalised formula Neill advances loses the specificity of these insights and collapses into a more confusing morass. This line of argument seems to run into some problems regarding other theorisations about the nature of reproduction. For what is this “everyday life” if it isn’t, at least in part reproductive labour? By seeing it as the nebula outside of capital Neill’s argument once again hides the work of reproduction at the very same time that he is trying to show the power of those who labour outside wage-labour/industrial production. Or perhaps this everyday is everywhere. Is it what goes on in the workplace between workers, the life on the street, in homes and schools, that somehow exists within yet without the command of capital? Neill does not make this clear, nor flesh out this conceptual framework. Either way this limits us from being able to articulate a feminist content to communist activity.

The description of relations of solidarity in the North as the commons creates difficulties in arguing for the kinds of militant activity that could create actually existing commons. p.m.’s suggestions for activity present a pleasant and convivial mode of trying to create spaces where people come together. Whilst the idea of creating collective spaces as part of the many processes that work to allow the self-organisation and recomposition of proletarian power is very credible, p.m. puts forward a very limited and inadequate vision for collective struggle – even if you subscribe to their idea of the benign and timely collapse of capital. p.m.’s rejection of the operaismo insight that struggle is the source of crisis for capital is, at least sometimes it seems, also a rejection of struggle itself. Also it is far from obvious that capitalism is collapsing in any meaningful way. The immiseration of millions and the decimation of the biosphere have not led to a melting away of capital’s social relationships, far from it; they are its product and reinforcement. Considering the horror of its existence, if capitalism was to melt away is there any hope that it would leave much for humans in its wake? Anything beyond total devastation?
If we take a more concrete example of trying to form the commons in the North, say the history of squatted and autonomous social centres, what comes to the fore is the conflictual relationship such efforts have with the state and broader capitalist society. People organised together, there were flurries of activity, and also mass collective violence against the police and property was carried out. Rather than simply arising from commons that were already there, such projects had to be posed antagonistically against the logics of commodification and alienation in the North. It is true that for a time many social centres may have found some kind of resentful and anomalous acceptance in the outer edges of the welfare state. Yet as this thesis was being written many of these centres were under attack. A recent “international call for decentralised days of action for squats and autonomous space” notes:

They (capitalism) are attacking long-standing autonomous spaces such as the Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen, Koepl and Rigaer Straße in Berlin, EKH in Vienna and Les Tanneries in Dijon, squatted social centres in London and Amsterdam, Ifanet in Thessaloniki, etc. In France, squats have become a priority target for the police after the anti-CPE movement and the wave of actions and riots that happened during the presidential elections period. In Germany, many autonomous spaces have been searched and attacked before the G8 summit. In Geneva and Barcelona, two old and big squatting “fortresses”, the authorities have decided to try to put an end to the movement.

The creation and defence of a commons in the North, of an outside, necessitates a collective, militant practice of the offensive.

The MNC have not connected their ideas on the commons with the need to fight the capitalist state. In their historical work they pay attention to the virtues of historical insurrections and uprising, as they do in the “New Enclosures”. Yet they don’t offer up visions of how to realise mass and collective rebellions that can actually break with the state of normality. It is a question of emphasis. Whilst

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xlviii For an interesting history of squatting and social centres in Western Europe, and a critical engagement with the perspective of autonomy, see George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Edinburgh & Oakland: AK Press, 2006).
insurrection is figured in the broader approach of the MNC, it fades into the background of their work as the emphasis on the creation and defence of the commons becomes increasingly central. However it is difficult to imagine that it would be possible to stop a wave of enclosures or re-establish any commons without comprehensive social insurrection that breaks down the power of the state and shatters the normality of daily life. *Capitalism always fights for its survival.* If capital maintains régimes of discipline these must be attacked and broken. This is even more pressing given that the proletariat has not developed a successful theory of insurrection. Rather the history of insurrection is either one of bloody defeat or of a victory that reproduces authoritarian modes of life. It is possible that the commons could be a tool to break out of this mode of activity. It is a useful concept to refuse that cleavage between means and ends. Commons – the creation of other ways of being – linked to insurrection, as both its fertile terrain and its product might help us rethink the relationship between the necessary destruction and violence that must be deployed against capital and anchor this relationship in a future that is worth destroying capital for. p.m. has attempted to rethink this, but ultimately this rethinking involves a retreat from the precipice, a refusal to face the tasks that must be done. The point of thinking of communism as the reaffirmation of an outside of the commons, may have validity, but only if it can be imagined in a way that actually confronts the forces of enclosure. Revolution has to be on the agenda.

**Confusions over Social Democracy & Socialism**

A related problem is how the ill-advised conceptual stretching of the commons leads to confusion about the nature of social democracy and socialism – confusion that goes against the MNCs’ otherwise stated opposition to both as forms of capitalism. The argument of the "New Enclosures" is that that neoliberalism, as a reaction against proletarian struggle, seeks to reimpose and intensify capitalist accumulations through enclosing the commons globally. How do the MNC take into
account that what neoliberalism often destroyed was previous capitalist régimes of accumulation, namely social democracy, socialism and the states produced by national liberation struggles?

The MNC cite as an example of the enclosures in the USA that "[t]he post-WWII interclass deal that guaranteed real wage increases is now definitively over and the homeless are the shock(ed) troops of this fact." Writing on the process in China they note that "[i]n China, the transition to a 'free market economy' has led to the displacement of one hundred million from their communally operated lands. Their urban counterparts are facing the loss of guaranteed jobs in factories and offices and the prospect of emigrating from one city to another to look for a wage." In other words what is being enclosed here is the Keynesian welfare state 'deal' and the 'deal' of socialist state-capitalism.

It is important to note that the MNC collective do not overtly celebrate either. Commenting on the collapse of the three deals (Welfare State, Socialism, National Liberation), they write, that: "[w]e refuse to mourn them. For who first voided them but brother and sister proletarians around the planet who desired and demanded more, much more than what was settled for." Previously we saw how the predecessor to the MNC, Zerowork, argued against socialism and social democracy. Zerowork argued that both were continuations of capitalism and were still based on the exploitation of labour. Proletarian self-activity is pitted against capitalism in all its forms – including socialist state-capitalism.

However, and this is where the MNC start to falter, the historical narrative of the 'New Enclosures' argues that enclosure is the "secret" of a vast diversity of historical phenomena, that accompanied and constituted the rise of neoliberalism, including "Glasnost", that is the collapse of socialism. If social democracy, socialism, and nation liberation is what is being enclosed, does this not imply that
they were/are the commons? And therefore a ‘space’ to both be defended, and to launch anti-capitalist struggles from?

I do not believe that the MNC actually want to defend or celebrate social democracy, state socialism or national liberation states. A vision of the commons is meant to free us from allusions in state-centred ‘solutions’ to capitalism. On the whole the commons refers to anti-statist social creation, organised autonomously and from the bottom up. What they do want to articulate is how the various ‘deals’ made by capitalism functioned as a “terrain on which their [the proletariat’s] power was built...”169 People had learnt to struggle on this terrain, they had build relationships of solidarity and created appropriate tactics of rebellion. It was from this basis that the proletariat launched its offensive against capitalism. Thus the destruction of the three deals and the implementation of neoliberalism was a destruction of certain forms of proletarian struggle.

However, the historical narrative of the “New Enclosures” retrospectively ‘radicalises’ state-capitalism and class compromise. Their conceptual framework of enclosures and commons prevents us to have a more nuanced understanding of the historical trajectory of the Left. It makes it difficult to separate the rebellious struggles that went on within state-capitalism from the state-capitalist order since both are being ‘enclosed’. This is one of the problems created by the MNC stretching the idea of the commons, and again it is one they do not take account for.

The notion of the commons leads to a confusion. It collapses within it the social orders of pre-neoliberal capitalism and the forms of proletarian rebellion that happened within them. What we are left with is a strange ambiguity about these régimes. This confusion becomes a more troublesome problem when the MNC try to deal with the return of state-centre and social democratic movements in the 2000s.
The MNC's ambiguity about social democracy and socialism is intensified by their paradoxical optimism and pessimism about proletarian struggle. On one hand they see all collective proletarian activity, under whatever ideological guise as being communist. On the other they worry about looming capitalist domination.

As argued in the previous chapter in the most recent political statement of the MNC, *Migration, Movements, Wages and War in the Americas: Reasons for Unity on May Day 2006 – and After*, there is a general celebration of the new social struggles across the Americas and a generally uncritical position in regards to the social democratic and Left nationalist elements of these struggles. Since, for the MNC, any defence of the commons becomes a call for jubilee – that is any refusal of the agenda of neoliberal capital opens the pathway to, perhaps even becomes, the realisation of communism – there is little room for the critique of proletarian struggles that may not head in this direction. The assumption is that struggle is communist. This narrative underscores their work. The MNC can critique the Left – but only really when the groups and ideologies of the Left are out of touch with the movements of the proletariat. As we saw above, part of their critique of socialism is that it was superseded by the working class. Their critique of ecological politics is possible on the basis of its limited class composition. But when the grave diggers of capital are in motion there is little space to criticise elements of the actually existing politics that these struggles may create or clothe themselves in.

This might also be related to the MNCs' historical work. Linebaugh and Federici, in their different explorations, work to show the revolutionary content of many struggles that have been previously ignored by self-proclaimed revolutionaries. Thus the practice of the MNC is to emphasise struggles' radical qualities rather than critique their ideological forms. Of course there is great value to this. The contention that any struggle, since it compels people to cooperate together, challenges the dominant order and develops practical autonomy, and thus contains of the atoms of communism, is an important one. But so too is the
ability to critique the ideological and political practices of struggles, especially if like Left nationalism, social democracy and Bolshevism they may deform and direct struggles back towards the capitalist structures.

All this is made even more complex by a comment made in *Midnight Notes 12 One No, Many Yeses* which runs contrary to the general direction of the MNC:

It is important to remember just how powerfully the working class itself rejected the state, even whilst demanding social welfarism from the state. Such rejection, coupled with the general inability of the working class to create a viable alternative to capital, opened ready space for offensives by capital that took neoliberal form.170

Here there are a number of tensions. This seems to suggest, despite the previous comments, that proletarian struggle does not necessarily lead to communism. Rather proletarian struggle may destabilise capitalism but does not necessarily destroy it. And this very destabilisation is what fuels the growth of capital, its reinvigoration and thus the further subsumption of social relations into its body. This is an aporia in the perspective of autonomy. Capitalism is driven by the revolt of labour; so if labour fails to actually abolish capitalism, to win the class struggle, then does the struggle of labour lead only to the increased power of capitalism? Holloway's ahistoricism and Negri's historical narrative allow for an escape clause. For Holloway, capitalism is always torn by tensions of doing and done and as such it does not matter if it increases in size because the tensions increase too; for Negri, a historical narrative is created that argues even if capital recuperates struggles, the cost is the further gestation of communist potentials within it – each wave of struggle drives emancipation forward. But if for the MNC liberation is in the commons and capital launches further enclosures after each wave of struggle, this mean that struggle becomes increasingly difficult and confined. If for Negri each defeat is a victory (and *Empire* quotes William Morris to this point), for the MNC each defeat is defeat.171 Thus the MNC is left just with a grim optimism, a hope in the potentials of struggle and the necessity to refuse to be defeated. Perhaps this leads to either an uncritical celebration of all struggles, or pragmatism.xlix Both

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xlix Maybe this just exposes how struggle challenges theory. To engage in actual battles (here that of a large, mainly immigrant, section of the proletariat) and to attempt to spread this struggle across...
positions prevent a critique of the social democratic nature of struggles – either they are moving towards communism, or must be defended because they are better than nothing.

Conclusion

The MNC provide us with a theory of capitalism – “enclosure” – and a broad paradigm of proletarian resistance and emancipation – “the commons”. This concept presents us with both promises and problems. If we keep the idea of the commons to be the forms of non-capitalist subsistence based on autonomous and egalitarian relations between commoners then we have a powerful concept. The commons can refer to a range of activities and structures that both predate capitalism and are created by the proletariat in struggle. This shows the power that millions of people have to directly create alternatives to work and the market and how these alternatives can transform our condition into communism. As such it helps us escape from limited and older ideas of the proletariat and revolution. But the MNC push the commons in directions where it becomes untenable, actually denies the diversity amongst the proletariat the MNC wish to promote, and limits the construction of an effective communist politics. The MNC have equipped us with a powerful rhetorical, analytical and political tool, but its uses must be limited so it can maintain its effectiveness.

the encrusted race divisions of contemporary America, may mean that it is necessary to drop the tropes and forms of theorisation that may isolate you. As much as theory can be a buttress against capitalism, it can also keep out the experiences of struggles. The position of theory, the position you may take to make sense of the world, may separate you from others in struggle. Also if one is to refuse vanguardism, as the MNC does, then the privileged position of the theorist over the class in the production of knowledge, indeed the very idea of the theorist as separate specialist, is undermined and broken up. The ability to talk in different voices may actually be part of the lesson the MNC wants share: how to be revolutionary and suggest a different nature and character of politics.


Midnight Notes Collective, "Recolonizing the Oil Fields," 43.

Midnight Notes Collective, "Recolonizing the Oil Fields," 49.

Midnight Notes Collective, "Recolonizing the Oil Fields," 50.

Midnight Notes Collective, "Introduction," xi-xii.


Peter Linebaugh, "Jubilating; or, How the Atlantic Working Class Used the Biblical Jubilee against Capitalism, with Some Success," *Midnight Notes*, no. 10 (1990): 84.

Midnight Notes Collective, "Introduction," xii.


Midnight Notes Collective, "Introduction," xiii.


Caffentzis, "Dr Sachs, Live8 and Neoliberalism’s ‘Plan B’," 57.


Neill, "Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas," 119.

Ibid., 120.

Ibid., 123-25.

Ibid., 120-21.

Ibid., 121.

Ibid., 124.

Ibid., 126.

Ibid., 127.

For an introduction to the politics of the La Otra Campana see Subcomandante Marcos and The Zapatistas, "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle."

Neill, "Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas," 128.

Marx and Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 14.

Neill, "Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas," 129-30.

Ibid., 130.

Ibid., 128.

Ibid., 126.

Ibid., 127.


Neill, "Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas," 133.

Ibid., 134.

Ibid., 136.


Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 162.

Ibid., 162-63.

Zerowork Collective, "Introduction to Zerowork 1," 113.

Ibid., 114.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., Bolo’bolo (Brooklyn, NY Autonomedia, 1995), 33.

Ibid., The Next Mutiny on the Bounty.

Ibid.

Ibid., Bolo’bolo, 58.

Ibid., 59.

Ibid., 63.

Ibid., 63-65.

Ibid., The Golden Globes of the Planetary Commons," 51.

Ibid., The Next Mutiny on the Bounty.
This account of the revolt in Argentina seems to be quite mythological, ignoring the accumulated knowledge and forms of struggle that preceded the economic collapse. Again here p.m. is outside of the perspective of autonomy, forgetting that it is the struggles of the class to compose itself that is generative of communism, not that proletariat is hurled into action by capitalism's crises.
Section 3: Antonio Negri & Paulo Virno: Beyond Capital

Chapter 7: Life Put to Work, the Theory of Antonio Negri & Paulo Virno

Introduction

The object before us, to begin with, material production ¹

The purpose of this section is to directly engage with Paulo Virno and Antonio Negri. Both were part of the development of operaismo and autonomia, have maintained a fidelity to radical politics, and have also been active in developing a radical thought that can grapple with contemporary conditions. Out of the three manifestations of the perspective of autonomy examined in this study, it is Negri and Virno who focus on the importance of what is new in contemporary capitalism. The core of their argument is that the changes capital has undergone, due to the revolts of the 1960s-1970s, have simultaneously led to capital subsuming society but also the development of deep radical potentials for communism. They look to

¹ There has been a lot of attention on Negri's work in the last few years. Such work has largely examined, often critically, his theorisation of the organisation of power in global capitalism: the 'Empire' thesis detailed with Michael Hardt. Cf. Hardt and Negri, Empire. Whilst not downgrading the importance of the idea of 'Empire' in Negri's work the attention here is on how the contemporary conditions of production are based on and create the potential for the multitude. Here Negri is a theorist of struggle rather than of sovereignty. I contend that this is a more accurate reading of Negri's project and also a corrective to the view that postulates him as a world-system theorist. Also a lot of the work looked at here has been co-written with Michael Hardt. How much of what is attributed to Negri is actually the work of Hardt? This raises issues about the nature of collective authorship. It would be an interesting line of investigation to try to show the nature of the cooperative relationship between Hardt and Negri – but this is, alas, a task for another day.
Marx's work in the *Grundrisse* and explore how production goes on beyond the official workplace and how labour involves emotional, linguistic and immaterial qualities. Both also take up Spinoza's conception of the multitude and use it to critique the notion of the people and revitalise our understanding of the proletariat. Both try to show how the changes in capitalism make possible the existence and the struggle of the multitude. And both also try to reformulate a communist praxis around the notion of 'exodus'; and escape the choice of either elections or civil war. It is because of this shared history, theoretical commonalities and political affinity that here they are presented together.

**The Relationship and Differences of and between Negri’s and Virno’s Work**

Negri’s and Virno’s work is an attempt to grasp the contemporary class composition of capitalism, to understand how the new forms of capitalism are imbued with the possibilities of a different kind of class struggle. Thus their attempts to understand contemporary capitalism are also attempts to bring to light the current possibilities for communism. Also they put to work that fundamental insight of *operaismo* that capital and capitalist society is secondary to labour. Both Virno and Negri see contemporary capitalism as the *product* of the revolts that precede it. Their politics is based on the potential for the kinds of activity that is carried out for capitalism to be manifested in autonomous forms that create communism. Negri with Hardt in *Empire* writes:

The history of capitalist forms is always necessarily a *reactive* history: left to its own devices capital would never abandon a regime of profit. In other words, capitalism undergoes systematic transformation only when it is forced to and when its current regime is no longer tenable. In order to grasp the process from the perspective of its active element, we need to adopt the standpoint of the other side – that is, the standpoint of the proletariat along with that of the remaining non-capitalist world that is progressively being drawn into capitalist relations. The power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and
not only determines the crisis but also dictates the terms and nature of the transformation. The proletariat actually invents the social and productive forms that capital will be forced to adopt in the future.  

Contemporary capitalism takes on many of the demands and innovations of those who revolted against the rigidity, oppression and boredom of Fordism and the Keynesian state. The rage against the tyranny of the assembly line, the desire for flexibility and cultural freedom (for example), are all turned back on and against labour. Post-Fordism is thus a genuine "counter-revolution". As Virno remarks, it is "not simply the restoration of a previous state of affairs, but, literally a revolution to the contrary, that is, a drastic innovation of the economy and institutions in order to re-launch productivity and political domination."

Such a counter-revolution can only work because it takes up proletarian demands and attempts to posit them for capitalist ends. It is thus very different from simple reaction. Rather it is a process that attempts to deal with the struggles and also pre-empt them before they reach a critical juncture where revolts are captured with a web of reform, concession, recuperation, and violent repression. As such Virno sees post-Fordism as a "communism of capital" – in that it took the communist forms of struggle, its demands and its passions "(abolition of work, dissolution of the State, etc)" as the basis to build a regime of accumulation. But of course this is a paradoxical situation in which the creations of struggle are expressed and experienced still within the framework of capital – thus the abolition of divisions between life and work becomes the expansion of work into all areas of life, the dissolution of the state is the further penetration of control into daily life, the desire for flexibility becomes precarity and unemployment and so on. The contemporary qualities of labour are still there as an accumulated wealth for both capitalism and communism. The historical narrative that then flows through Negri's and Virno's work is that each period of capitalism contains within it the products of the previous wave of proletarian struggle that a new wave of revolt can ignite. But to do so it must realise what has changed; new politics are needed for new compositions.
However from the outset it is important to stress the differences between the two authors, especially since the perspective of autonomy is often reduced solely to Negri.\textsuperscript{11} Negri describes the present as being split (an internal split) between ‘Empire’ and ‘multitude’, with ultimately one triumphing in the end. Virno, on the other hand, proposes an autonomist politics of the multitude as a possibility; one that is open and undefined.

For Negri the concept of the multitude is inseparable from that of Empire: the two face each other as antagonistic realities across the social terrain as the two currently existing alternative futures. (Though as Hardt and Negri point out, this is an asymmetrical opposition: “...whereas Empire is constantly dependent on the multitude and its social productivity, the multitude is potentially autonomous and has the capacity to create society on its own.”\textsuperscript{5}) Empire and multitude emerge together out of the same conflicts; interlocked in an internal conflict spread across the entirety of the globe. In Negri’s work there is a certain and apocalyptic tone: great forces stalk the globe, lightning flashes across the sky. At the end of \emph{Multitude} two immanent, present possibilities confront us: “...today time is split between a present that is already dead and future that is already living...”\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{11} The appeal of Negri is understandable: a prolific theorist, his works are readily available, especially those written with Michael Hardt such as \emph{Empire} and \emph{Multitude}. However, Negri’s reputation as the ‘leader’ of Autonomism is an artifice. A prominent activist in both \emph{operaismo} and then \emph{autonomia}, Negri was demonised as part of the ‘strategy of tension’ employed by the Italian state; transformed into the image of an evil mastermind leading Italy’s children off a precipice – the “\textit{cattivo maestro}, a wicked teacher” – Antonio Negri and Anne Dufourmantelle, \textit{Negri on Negri}, first ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 31. The culmination of this was his framing for the assassination of Prime Minister Moro and the subsequent years of imprisonment and exile. Thus the invention of Negri as the leader of \emph{autonomia} is inseparable from the repression of the movement. As Maurizio Viano writes in the introduction to Negri’s \textit{Marx beyond Marx}, the process of transforming Negri into the intellectual leader of the movements is one of: “[a] linear causality which seeks leaders and led ones, and describes Negri as the brain of a terrifying organization: the brain-that-is, the highest part of a unitary organism, the part of a body where responsibilities can be sought and washing purifications can be exerted.” Maurizio Viano, “Translator’s Introduction Part lii,” in \textit{Marx Beyond Marx :Lessons on the Grundrisse} Antonio Negri (Brooklyn, NY & London: Autonomedia & Pluto Press, 1991), xxxiv It is worth paying attention to the other voices that have arisen along these radical trajectories. These other voices reveal that many of the concepts that we are accessing via Negri are not Negri’s ideas alone but are moments from conversations – conversations that circulate through the spaces of the movement as much as the halls of the university.
Virno’s work does not contain the certainty about the current global order, and is less ambitious (and perhaps less optimistic). Virno doesn’t believe that there is yet a solid form to the global regime of capital; rather that it is just being formed and the lines of its realisation are unclear. In an interview he comments:

If we identify the new figure of global sovereignty with the Clinton years, calling it “Empire”, we risk muting ourselves when Bush enters the scene. I think that only now, with the Iraq war, does the real “after-the-wall” start, that is to say, the long redefinition of political forms. Only now does the “constituent phase” begin. It is terrible, certainly, but it has open possibilities, although it will only be because in this phase does the movement of movements come to act.7

It is perhaps ungenerous of Virno to reduce the concept of Empire to an identification with the “Clinton years”; that is the years of humanitarian interventions, the bombing of Serbia etc. (Also it is possibly too generous to the neo-conservatives in the Bush administration to believe that they are forming a new world order through their actions alone.) Empire is a more complicated and nuanced concept.

Virno is more ambiguous, less certain than Negri. This should not be taken as criticism: this ambiguity and lack of certainty arises from a commitment to seeking out the radical possibilities of the present. It also saves his work from some of errors of Negri’s work. This ambiguity stretches through Virno’s understanding of the possibilities of struggle – which remains more cautious and undefined than Negri’s. Writing in introduction to *A Grammar of the Multitude* Sylvia Lotringer summarises this ambivalence within Virno. Lotringer is implicitly counterpoising Virno to Negri’s more prophetic stance – though Lotringer might be amplifying these differences for polemic reasons: “Virno doesn’t have any telos up his sleeve, no ready-made program for the multitude – certainly not coming out “the other side”.8 Rather:

Fights should be expected, but not war that would allegedly destroy the enemy. A combat rather, meant to strengthen some forces present in capital, and join with other forces in order to form a new communist ensemble. This is what Virno has been attempting to provide: the description of a combat, a cartography of virtualities made possible by post-
Fordism, elements in contemporary life that could eventually be mobilised. The problem is not to destroy capital or Empire – destroy, they say – but to bolster one's own power. What is a body capable of? The ambiguities and uncertainties in Virno's work are complemented by careful, cautious and specific analysis. He looks at the transition of labour and struggle from 1977 to now, with Italy as his laboratory. His conclusions are disciplined and the possibilities left open. Negri on the other hand locates his politics across a greater span of time (the entirety of the twentieth century) and territory (the globe) and thus is prone to greater generalisations.

With these differences stated, we can now move through the work of both writers and see how their commonalities and disjunctions might help us understand and resist capitalism today.

Multitude

For both Virno and Negri the concept of the multitude is crucial for understanding both contemporary capitalism and the forms and possibilities of communist praxis. Negri states that the multitude "has three distinct senses." The first is a way of conceiving the Many as the "multiplicity of subjects." Multitude poses a way of thinking about the Many that is different, and often opposed to, the idea of 'the people.' Virno writes:

One must keep in mind that the choice between 'people' and 'multitude' was at the heart of the practical controversies (the establishing of centralized modern states, religious wars, etc.) and of the theoretical-philosophical controversies of the seventeenth century. These
two competing concepts, forged in the fires of intense clashes, played a primary role in the definition of the political-social categories of the modern era.\textsuperscript{12}

It was the concept of the people that was victorious and as such has most often been the basis for how the Many are thought of. The people is a model of the Many as a unified and single social subject that manifests in a unified and single social project. The people provides the template for many other categories: the workers, the masses, the peasants, women etc. The return to this debate is a way to revisit the losing term and thus help in the generation of a completely other way of social radicalism. The multitude is the idea of the ability of a collective of multiplicities to express themselves together in relationships of freedom:

For Spinoza, the *multitudo* indicates a plurality which persists as such in the public scene, in collective action, in the handling of communal affairs, without converging into a One, without evaporating within a centripetal form of motion. Multitude is the form of social and political existence for the many, seen as being many: a permanent form, not an episodic or interstitial form. For Spinoza the *multitudo* is the architrave of civil liberties (Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*).\textsuperscript{13}

Virno remarks that for "...the seventeenth-century apologists for sovereign power, 'multitude' was a purely negative defining concept: a regurgitation of the state of nature within civil society..."\textsuperscript{14} The multiplicity of the multitude means that it could not be reduced to something that could be represented and as such could not be then embodied into the state. Its open and dynamic nature throws schemes of stability into disarray; this is the reason Hobbes detests the 'multitude'. Virno makes this comment on Hobbes' opposition:

In the social and political existence of the many, seen as being many, in the plurality which does not converge into a synthetic unity, he sees the greatest danger of a 'supreme empire'; that is to say, for the monopoly of political decision-making which is the State.\textsuperscript{15}

Virno argues that the conceptions of people and multitude express opposite images of the Many – and thus embody opposing political projects. The former is a project of sovereign and state, and the latter of un-representable non-state democracy. As 'the people' the Many, ungovernable and chaotic, converge into One that is represented in, to and defined by its relation to the State. He writes: "The
people are the result of a centripetal movement: from atomized individuals, to the unity of the ‘body politic’, to sovereignty.” The multitude however is “the outcome of a centrifugal movement: from the One to the Many.” The Ones and the Many of the people and multitude are not equivalent as they signify quite different relationships. The One for the multitude is crucial, because this is what differentiates it from an atomised mass. The One stands at the point of common of the multitude, the shared relationships that make their singularities possible and richer. It is the collective experiences that allow the autonomy of singularities; singularities that make themselves enriched and at the same time establish the ability to be an autonomous collectivity:

For the multitude, the collective is not centripetal or coalescent. It is not the locus in which the “general will” is formed and state unity is prefigured. Since the collective experience of the multitude radicalises, rather than dulling, the process of individuation, the idea that from such experience one could extrapolate a homogeneous trait is to be excluded as a matter of principle; it is also to be excluded that one could ‘delegate’ or ‘transfer’ something to the sovereign. The collective of the multitude....establishes the feasibility of a non-representable democracy.17

The other two meanings of multitude relate to the forms of contemporary class composition and struggle. Negri continues:

In the second place, the multitude is a conception of class: the class of productive singularities, the class of operators of immaterial labour. This class is not itself a class – it is rather the creative strength of labor as a whole... (In the) [t]hird aspect: the multitude is an ontological power. This means that the multitude embodies a mechanism that seeks to represent desire and to transform the world – more accurately: it wishes to recreate the world in its image and likeness, which is to say to make a broad horizon of subjectivities that freely express themselves and that constitute a community of free men (sic).”18

Multitude posed like this has parallels with the old contradiction of the proletariat – the difference between a class in and a class for itself. Indeed this is a central point of communist praxis: the potentials for emancipation exist in our conditions today. Such a communist critique is neither moralistic nor ahistorical. Rather we are engaged in the antagonisms and struggles, the mess of the present, the daily refusals that point to the potential of a collective transformation of our situation.
Multitude then is a depiction and conceptualisation of the contemporary composition of labour, and as such is the naming of the possibilities of emancipation. Writing with Hardt in *Multitude*, Negri comments “[p]olitical action aimed at transformation and liberation today can only be conducted on the basis of the multitude.” The contemporary composition of the multitude opens the way to its emancipatory affirmation. In this sense multitude (for both Negri and Virno) is not a *dialectic* concept – the proletariat does not negate itself, rather it affirms a different way of being based on its existence in the present. Hardt and Negri continue, drawing out this conceptualisation:

From the socio-economic perspective, the multitude is the common subject of labour, that is the real flesh of postmodern production, and at the same time the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global development. Capital wants to make the multitude into an organic unity, just like the state wants to make it into a people. This is where, through the struggles of labor, the real productive biopolitical figure of the multitude begins to emerge. When the flesh of the multitude is imprisoned and transformed into the body of global capital, it finds itself both within and against the processes of capitalist globalization. The biopolitical production of the multitude, however, tends to mobilize what it shares in common and what it produces in common against the imperial power of global capital. In time, developing its productive figure based on the common, the multitude can move through Empire and come out the other side, to express itself autonomously and rule itself.

Multitude then is a tool to understand both how contemporary capitalism puts to work multiple labours, and how these efforts can be grasped in the struggles against capitalism.

**Real Subsumption**

Both Negri’s and Virno’s understanding of contemporary capitalism owes a great debt to Marx; and simultaneously pushes at, and often beyond, the edges of Marx’s work. Virno comments on his political development as *Potere Operaio* in Turin as
being one in which they "read Marx without 'Marxism'". Interestingly whilst the New Left were (at the same time) turning to a young humanistic Marx, the operaismo were looking at *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. Negri's and Virno's attempts to imagine and critique the current capitalist forms of life draw deeply on Marx's work on 'real subsumption'.

In *Capital* Marx makes a distinction between *formal* and *real* subsumption of labour. Simply put *formal* subsumption is "...the takeover by capital of a mode of labour developed before the emergence of capitalist relations." In formal subsumption there is a radical transformation of social relations, yet capital's dominance remains a step away from reshaping the direct nature of labour. Marx writes:

> When a peasant who has always produced enough for his needs becomes a day labourer working for a farmer; when the hierarchic order of guild production vanishes making way for the straight-forward distinction between the capitalist and the wage-labourers he employs; when the former slave-owner engages his slaves as paid workers etc, then we find that what is happening is that production processes of varying social provenance have been transformed into capitalist production.

On one hand the world is radically remade, the old bounds of custom and fealty are broken apart and replaced by the rule of money. Those newly proletarianised experience the bitter freedom of capitalism – freedom to sell their labour in new conditions of dependency. But this remaking is capital imposing itself on the world it finds, not genuinely forming it in its image. Formal subsumption is both a break from – with much violence and ferocity ("letters of blood and fire") – and a continuation of the social relations it emerges from. (Indeed in part the violence of formal subsumption could be due to its attempts to force pre-capitalist ways of labouring to capitalist ends.) Marx writes:

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**iii** This could in part explain why these different currents developed very different images of capitalism and struggle. For a comprehensive discussion, focusing on technology, that compares the humanist, neo-luddite New Left and operaismo inspired tendencies Cf. Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism*.

**iii** Of course this, like the terms real and formal subsumption, is an abstraction that is more complicated in actual real-lived history.
All this notwithstanding, this change does not in itself imply a fundamental modification in the real nature of the labour process, the actual process of production. On the contrary, the fact is that capital subsumes the labour process as it finds it, that is to say, it takes over an existing labour process, developed by different and more archaic modes of production. The work may become more intensive, its duration may be extended, it may become more continuous or orderly under the eye of the interested capitalist, but in themselves these changes do not affect the character of the actual labour process, the actual mode of working. This stands in striking contrast to the development of a specifically capitalist mode of production (large-scale industry, etc); the latter not only transforms the situations of the various agents of production, it also revolutionises their actual mode of labour and the real nature of the labour process as a whole.\(^\text{25}\)

Formal subsumption transforms into real subsumption, in which the nature of labour is radically changed across the entirety of the social terrain.\(^\text{lv}\) Marx draws this evocative image of real subsumption and the seismic changes it means to the existences in and compositions of society:

The *social* productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, *socialized* (i.e. collective) labour come into being through co-operation, division of labour within the workshop, the use of machinery, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious *use* of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of *scale* corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialized labour that is capable of applying the *general* products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate processes of production; and conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production). The entire development of the productive forces of *socialized labour* (in contrast to the more of less isolated labour of individuals), and together with it the *use of science* (the *general* product or social development), in the *immediate process of production*, takes the form of the *productive power of capital*.\(^\text{26}\)

Real subsumption involves at least two interrelated phenomena. What goes on in the processes of production increasingly involves the social, and the social increasingly becomes part of the general processes of production.

\(^{lv}\) This raises a host of questions: When did this happen? And where? Marx writes as if this moment of real subsumption is emerging or has emerged as he writes. Yet capitalism has changed massively since then – and the development of capitalism is uneven. With confidence we can look at the modern metropolis and say that life is subsumed by the relations of capital – the commodity, wage-labour, (cyber-)industrialisation etc – but what about in the peripheries, that is if they even still exist? Is there something beyond real subsumption – a total subsumption for instance? Such a scenario is discussed by Camatte, see Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave & Other Essays* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1995). All these are questions that beg answers.
The clear distinctions between work and what is outside work crumble under a general logic of capitalism—*even if they maintain an illusory appearance of separation*. Jason Read writes that in "real subsumption...every act of production incorporates knowledge, instruments, discoveries, and social relations that are not present in the limited space or time of the factory. The factory becomes a social factory."27 In *Empire* Hardt and Negri describe the scissor-like movement of real subsumption:

> On the one hand, the relations of capitalist exploitation are expanding everywhere, not limited to the factory but tending to occupy the entire social terrain. On the other hand, social relations completely invest the relations of production, making impossible any externality between social production and economic production. 28

It becomes almost impossible to find human interactions that are not stamped or formed by capitalism. If some spaces can be found that are not directly under capitalist logics they seem to be, at least, *generally* motivated by them. This arises partly through increasing amounts of human activity being organised via wage-labour, and the tasks of social reproduction that sit outside that wage are 'work' (activity commanded by capital that serves its regime of accumulation) in the period of real subsumption. These processes involve the emergence and development of the collective intellectual, communicative and cooperative powers of the population and their application in the now society-wide matrix of production.

**Biopolitical Production, Post-Fordism & Real Subsumption**

In *Empire* Hardt and Negri describe the situation of real subsumption in contemporary global capitalism as *biopolitical production*. In many ways it is an attempt to understand the condition of real subsumption aided by the work of
Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. From Foucault they take the idea of biopower. Biopower refers to the interlinked processes of the expanding management of the general life of the population as well as the construction of internalised subjectivities within individual members of the social body. They write “[b]iopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it and rearticulating it.” Biopower is constructive power and rather than being extraneous to society it is positioned within it, immanent to its functions. And, importantly, it invests in the organisation and activity of real living bodies. They continue:

...when power becomes entirely biopolitical, the whole social body is comprised by power's machine and developed in its virtuality... Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development,reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population – and at the same times across the entirety of social relations.

However Hardt and Negri also argue that Foucault’s work does not understand how biopower fits into the antagonism of capital. "What Foucault fails to grasp finally are the real dynamics of production in biopolitical production.” Biopower needs to be placed within the complicated dynamics of material production, just as the concept of material production must be opened to the crucial role that the creation of subjectivities and processes of normalisation play.

Deleuze and Guattari help them part of the way. “... Deleuze and Guattari present us with a properly poststructuralist understanding of biopower that renews materialist thought and grounds itself solidly in the question of the biopolitical question.

production of the social being."\textsuperscript{33} Deleuze and Guattari's work aims to show the multiple and open relations of power and activity that produces capital and involves both the production of value and the exploitation of labour and the creations of subjectivities and desire.\textsuperscript{34} In \textit{Anti-Oedipus} they write:

The truth of the matter is that \textit{social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions}. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and relations of production. \textit{There is only desire and the social, and nothing else}.\textsuperscript{35}

Hardt and Negri critique Deleuze and Guattari as being inattentive to struggle and politics. Hardt and Negri accuse them of creating an image of capital but "manage to articulate it only superficially and ephemerally, as a chaotic, indeterminate horizon marked by the ungraspable event."\textsuperscript{36} Deleuze and Guattari's work can be so effervescent as to be ephemeral. Yet drawing from their work real subsumption imagined as biopolitical production creates an evocative picture of contemporary capitalist society.

The core of this is an argument that in contemporary capitalism \textit{the whole of social life} merges in a complicated arrangement of increasing integration. It means that in biopolitical production the divisions of production and society crumble, as do the divisions between social spaces. "The term \textit{biopolitical} thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural become increasingly blurred."\textsuperscript{37} Of course radical critiques of capitalism have for a considerable time looked beyond the factory floor. How the state, culture, ideologies and subjectivities are created has long been the target of many varied critiques. The conception of biopolitical production goes further: it is not that capitalism integrates the social body into a general regime of normalisation, or that certain forms must exist to allow the smooth function of the factory floor: but that production now happens everywhere and nowhere across the social terrain, and the work of capitalism – that is the harnessing and putting to work of the
immense cooperative powers of the multitude – is the direct work of producing society.

It is a claim that "living and producing tend to be indistinguishable. Insofar as life tends to be completely invested by acts of production and reproduction, social life itself becomes a productive machine."38 Not only are collective social capacities put to work, but work takes place across society – the production of value and general social activity intermesh, merge and mutate. At its most simple biopolitical production means just that: life (bios) – in the most open and broadest sense – is put to work, and is the site of work. Capitalist production is concerned with, and made up of, the creation and recreation of the relationships of power across all of life. As such the entire social terrain is the battlefield of rebellion; life – in the most open and broadest sense – is the subject of our struggles.

The factory is no longer the home of capitalism, where the real work gets done, whilst everything else are just support structures. Rather the diffuse and amorphous entirety of the social terrain is where we labour and it is across this that capitalism produces. This means that the division between base and superstructure that previously defined so much of a Marxist approach is even more inadequate than it ever was.\textsuperscript{vi} The divisions between the site of creation of value – the factory – and the structures that reproduce a society around value – school, family, media, prison etc – have collapsed. And the old socialist world view that gave the economic the determining weight in social affairs and privileged it as the site of struggle has been made irrelevant.

\textsuperscript{vi} Again Negri's work on biopolitical production takes much from Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, whose work also has rejected the rigidity and determinism of a base/superstructure paradigm. See Hardt and Negri, Empire, 27-28.
relations, and in so far as they are exploited we consider them part of the multitude, inasmuch as they are singularities. We see the multitude as a multiplicity of exploited singularities. The singularities are singularities of labour; anyone is working in different ways, and the singularity is the singularity of exploited labour. 39

In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri engage directly with Marx. They argue that Marx's paradigm positions the creation of value and the exploitation of labour within the boundaries of the working day and within the boundaries of the workplace. This, they claim, has been superseded. Yet they also argue that their position is an extension of Marx (a Marx beyond Marx) rather than a rejection and that “after beginning to walk ahead of Marx in this way we continually have the haunting suspicion that he was already there before us.” 40 One of their crucial differences is a going beyond “of Marx's concept of abstract labor and its relation to value.” 41 Hardt and Negri argue that we have seen the end of the clearly defined working day as the sight of the exploitation of labour and thus its other role as the crucible of class struggle:

The regular rhythms of factory production and its clear divisions of work time and nonwork tend to decline in the realm of immaterial labour. Think how at the high end of the labor market companies like Microsoft try to make the office like home, offering free meals and exercise programs to keep employees in the office as many of their waking hours as possible. At the low end of the labor market workers have to juggle several jobs to make ends meet. Such practices have always existed, but today, with passage from Fordism to post-Fordism, the increased flexibility and mobility imposed on workers, and the decline of the stable, long-term employment typical of factory work, this tends to become the norm. At both the high and low ends of the labor market the new paradigm undermines the division between work time and the time of labour. 42

Whilst Virno does not use the concept of *biopolitical production* his depiction of post-Fordism creates a complementary image. Virno argues: “*If for the post-Fordist multitude every qualitative difference between labour time and non-labour time falls short.*” 43 The activity that takes place in the working day is no longer a realm that is the centre of capital's life, nor does it contain patterns of activity that are unique and distinct from the rest of society. He continues: “...work
ceases to constitute a special and separate praxis...it includes also the world of non-labor, the experiences and knowledge matured outside the factory and office."44 Rather what is productive in the workplace is only productive because it consists of skills, cooperations and capabilities that are generated across society. "The really decisive competencies needed to complete the tasks demanded by post-Fordist production are those acquired outside the processes of direct production, in the 'life world'."45

Of course as a lived relationship there is a very real difference between wage-labour and unwaged-labour: the wage. Virno and Negri argue that this difference isn’t based on anything real to production, since production happens across society and involves complicated social activity. Rather the wage, and money broadly, works as a form of capitalist control and command. Negri argues that money is no longer the bond between labour and capital, the remuneration for effort done. In the context of post-Fordism money "becomes the artificial reality of a command which is despotic, external, empty, capricious and cruel."46 Virno remarks: "[t]he old distinction between 'labor' and 'non-labor' ends up in the distinction between renumerated life and non-renumerated life. The border between the two lives is arbitrary, changeable, subject to political decision making."47 Those whom capital consigns as unproductive, as doing labour not worth remuneration, are participating in biopolitical production, and the demarking of waged and unwaged is part of the relations of power that puts (global) society to work.

Thought at Work

Both Virno’s and Negri’s work on real subsumption as biopolitical production and/or post-Fordism contend that these processes involve profound changes to
the types of labour the multitude carry out. Both argue that intellect becomes increasingly important to capitalism. Virno posits the concepts of general intellect, mass intellectuality and virtuosity; and from Negri we get immaterial and affective labour.

What then is the 'general intellect'? The general intellect appears in Marx's Grundrisse in the section often known as the "Fragment on Machines". Here Marx argues that in a certain period of capitalism's development, the generation of value becomes increasingly dependent on the direct application of the broad social knowledge of society. Marx writes:

"...to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production."\(^{48}\)

Here is the point where the general intellect comes into play. Marx continues:

The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to which degree, hence the conditions of the process of social life have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed into accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledges, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.\(^{49}\)

The general intellect is then the totality of social knowledge and it becomes the key component of production. For Marx the general intellect is embodied in fixed capital, it finds its life in the literal machinery of production, alienated and concretised in physical mechanisms.

Here is Virno's point of divergence. Luogo Comune (a journal of which Virno was a part) critiqued Marx's understanding of the general intellect. Virno recalls:
We made a critique of Marx, critique in quotes, saying that today the general intellect was no longer deposited in machines but rather existed and lived in the cooperation of living labor. We said it with the following formula: general intellect = living labor in place of fixed capital.50

In Virno's understanding, the general intellect corresponds to our general sociality. “The general intellect includes, thus, formal and informal knowledge, imagination, ethical propensities, mindsets and 'linguistic games.'”51 All of this is now the source of wealth for capitalism.52 It does not matter what specific kind of work we are doing; what is crucial is our social cooperation, our ways of relating to each other, our nuances and performances – all the seemingly unperceivable parts of the human subject.

Virno is at pains to stress that the general intellect does not exist primarily in the activities of 'knowledge workers' but rather in the capacities of all living labour through society. Post-Fordist society is a society containing “mass intellectuality” and mass intellectuality is the “form in which the general intellect is manifest today”.53 “Mass intellectuality”, Virno argues, is “not so much a specific stratum of jobs, but more a quality of the whole of post-Fordist labour power...”54 If the general intellect expresses general social knowledge that is embodied in living labour on a whole, mass intellectuality expresses the quality of this embodiment.

Virno’s argument is not that we are all computer programmers or that all work is similar to being a computer programmer (as such arguments are often characterised). Rather his claim is that in post-Fordism there is no single kind of work that typifies all others. Post-Fordism is both the development of the general intellect and the proliferation of endless varieties and combinations of work. Virno writes:

Different from Fordist organization of labor, today’s organization of labor is always spotty. Technological innovation is not universal: more than determining an unequivocal productive model, it keeps a myriad of different models alive, including the resuscitation of some out-dated and anachronistic models. Post-Fordism re-edits the entire history of
labour, from islands of mass labor to enclaves of profession workers, from re-inflated independent labour to re-instated forms of personal power... Paradoxically, just when knowledge and language become the principle productive force, there is an unrestrained multiplication of models of labour organisation, not to mention their eclectic co-existence.

This is also coupled with an organisation of work that increasingly makes the lives of all those who must labour appear like Marx’s ‘reserve army of labour’. Post-Fordist organisation generalises a condition of instability, precariousness and illegality. Individuals are now compelled to move from job to job, to endlessly re-train; ‘cash-in-hand’ work proliferates, and so on and so on. The rigidity that existed between different professions melts away, and many of us spend our days moving from white collar to blue collar then pink collar (service and care) work, to welfare benefits and to the black market and back and forth and up and down – sometimes in the course of our lives, sometimes in just one day. Virno argues that the general intellect “causes every rigid division of labor to fall flat on its back.”

Yet this does not result in the end of social inequalities. The rigid division of labour is replaced with “an unchecked proliferation of hierarchies as groundless as they are thriving.” Post-Fordism is micro and chaos management applied to the entire society – spiralling antagonistic divisions of all kinds (types of labour, ethnicities, gender, cultural preferences) that threaten to collapse into maelstroms and black holes. This is the multitude as constructed by capitalism – there is no longer a singular proletarian experience to unite behind but rather a series of irreducible singularities flowing from and across node to node.

So how does the general intellect actually align the vast diversity of activities that create value in post-Fordism? Virno quotes from Grundrisse, where Marx sees in real subsumption a situation in which “labor activity moves ‘to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor’”. What becomes the chief activity of work is the forms of social cooperation that enable production. Virno continues: “[i]n other words: the tasks of a worker or of a clerk no longer involve the completion of a single particular assignment, but the changing and intensifying of social cooperation.” But it is a particular kind of social cooperation that becomes crucial. Virno writes that in Marx’s work the concept of social cooperation...
is "complex and subtle" and can be "thought of in two different ways"; it can be either "objective" or "subjective." The former could be typified by the assembly line of the mass worker – the way in which the labours of individual workers are combined to greater effect under a particular disciplinary regime and in relation to a certain technological composition. In the pure Taylorist schema the worker is reduced to a fleshy appendage of production, the individual is silenced. In the second aspect (and we should keep in mind that most often both aspects may be present, but at different volumes and of differing importance), which Virno contends "prevails" in post-Fordism, "a conspicuous portion of individual work, consists of developing, refining, and intensifying social cooperation itself." He writes in *Virtuosity and Revolution*:

When labor carries out tasks of overseeing and coordination, in other words when it "steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor," its function consists no longer in carrying out a single productive object, but in the modulating (as well as the varying and intensifying) of social cooperation, in other words, that ensemble of relations and systemic connections that as of now are "the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth." This modulation takes place through linguistic services that, far from giving rise to a final product, exhaust themselves in the communicative interaction that their own "performance" brings about.

This labour of social cooperation appears to be strangely like a series of performances without an end product. Commodities are made, but the activity that creates them is directed towards group cooperation, which is a collective performance. "Within post-Fordist organization of production, activity-without-a-finished-work moves from being a special and problematic case to becoming the prototype of waged labor in general." Virno names the qualities of this labour as virtuosity; that is having the qualities of virtuosos. Virno writes:

> Let us consider carefully what defines the activity of the virtuosos, of performing artists. First of all theirs is an activity which finds its own fulfilment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a "finished product," or into an object which would survive the performance. Secondly, it is an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience.

[^Ivi]: Here Virno uses the same quote he uses later in *Grammar of the Multitude* – this repetition of phrases and paragraphs being a feature of his work. Rather counter-intuitively it does not create a sense of tiredness but is indicative of rigour, perhaps even a precision in his work.
The activity of work in post-Fordism then is one of constant performances focused on the continual innovation and application of social processes. But every performance requires a "score." For Virno it is the general intellect. A score which does not produce a single act or performance; it is a "'score' only in the broadest of senses."\textsuperscript{lviii} He writes:

> It is certainly not some kind of specific composition (let us say Bach's Goldberg Variations) as played by a top-notch performer (let us say Glenn Gould, for example) but rather a simple faculty. It is the faculty that makes possible all composition (not to mention all experiences).\textsuperscript{66}

Thus it is our general social knowledge that provides the basis for the complicated performative social cooperation that typifies post-Fordism. If for example you work in a call centre your knowledge of computer systems, social communication, manners and etiquette, current trends, notions of the team etc, all provide the general background capacity that enables you to deal with customers, manager data bases, sell products, meet team goals and so on.

Here the general intellect, which is embodied in living labour as the condition of mass intellectuality, is put to work through constant performances of social cooperation. The general intellect is the social phenomenon that is necessary for labour to take on the character of being virtuoso. But by the same token virtuosity becomes the character of labour when the general intellect is the prime wellspring of production. This is how thought is put to work.

Negri also stresses the importance of intellect at/as work in contemporary capitalism. Like Virno he uses the ideas of general intellect and mass intellectuality. However he maintains some distance from other post-autonomia writers (such as Virno) arguing that their ideas are too disembodied. Hardt and

\textsuperscript{lviii} Whilst this is a beautiful analogy one wonders if Virno's score is actually a score at all! A score after all is a master manuscript notating a single specific piece of music, rather than the more general capacities put to work during performance by talented performers.
Negri state that these authors “treat the new laboring practices in biopolitical society only in their intellectual and incorporeal aspects.” Biopolitical production as deployed by Hardt & Negri tries to place immaterial labour into the corporeal and fleshy bodies that are put to work:

The labor involved in all immaterial production, we should emphasize remains material – it involves our bodies and brains as all labor does. What is immaterial is its product. We recognize that *immaterial labor* is a very ambiguous term in this regard. It might be better to understand the new hegemonic form as ‘biopolitical labor,’ that is, labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself. The term *biopolitical* thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social and the cultural become increasingly blurred. Biopolitics, however, presents numerous additional conceptual complexities and thus in our view the notion of immateriality despite its ambiguities, seems easier to grasp initially and better at indicating the general tendency of economic transformation.

Negri argues that immaterial labour has become *hegemonic*. Negri writes with Hardt in *Multitude*:

In any economic system there are numerous different forms of labor that exist side by side, but there is always one figure of labor that exerts hegemony over the others. This hegemonic figure serves as a vortex that gradually transforms the other figures to adopt its central qualities. This hegemonic figure is not dominant in quantitative terms but rather in the way it exerts a power of transformation over others. Hegemony here designates a tendency.

Take for example agricultural production – which is arguably one of the forms of work in which the largest percentage of the world’s population participate in (house work possibly being the largest). Hardt and Negri argue that the forms of agricultural production and the types of cooperation that constitute it change in relation to the kind of labour that is hegemonic in a specific period of capitalism’s existence:

Agricultural modernization relied heavily on mechanical technologies, from the Soviet tractor to the California irrigation systems, but agricultural postmodernization develops biological and biochemical innovations, along with specialized systems of production, such as greenhouses, artificial lighting, and soilless agriculture.
These changes of technology in agriculture are indicative of changes in labour. The nature of the work, the tasks people perform, their relations to others and their existence in a society change. Thus various tasks – making shoes, teaching high school students, etc – all conform to the hegemonic form of labour. This becomes increasingly important in relationship to the common which Negri postulates as the axis that allows the multitude to become autonomous and end capitalism.

So what then is immaterial labour? Mario Lazzarato uses the term in an essay of the same name. For Lazzarato immaterial labour refers to two crucial new developments in the nature of labour in contemporary capitalism. One is “the skills involved in direct labor and increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication).” The second is that the cultural content of the commodity means that numerous elements of the broad cultural and communicative aspects of society – “defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically public opinion” – are put to work in the conception, creation and circulation of products. This provides a kind of base definition of immaterial labour that could be quickly applied to specific forms of knowledge work that have risen with and to prominence in post-Fordism; as well as typifying the relationship between consumerism and culture in post-modernity.

Though they share much with Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri use a more expansive definition. They pose two interlinked threads. Firstly they argue “[t]he central role previously occupied by the labor power of mass factory workers in the production of surplus value is today increasingly filled by intellectual, immaterial and communicative labor power.” This line of research leads to a second that looks at the “immediately social and communicative dimensions of living labour in contemporary society” and how these qualities work to be an extensive source of wealth for capitalism – as social life is put to work – but also constitute the common that can animate the multitude as in the production of practices of freedom. Hardt and Negri write:
The immediately social dimension of the exploitation of living immaterial labor immerses labor in all the relational elements that define the social but also at the same time activate the critical elements that develop the potential of insubordination and revolt through the entire set of labouring practices.

They identify three aspects of immaterial labour: "...the communicative labor of industrial production that has newly become linked in the informational networks, the interactive labor of symbolic analysis and problem solving, and the labor of the production and manipulation of affects." These three aspects do not exist as demarcated separate qualities but rather they typify tendencies. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri elaborate a 'Sociology of Immaterial Labor' to describe how these aspects manifest themselves. Firstly they posit the change in industrial manufacture from a Fordist to a Toyotist model of production. The former, they argue, "constructed a relatively 'mute' relationship between production and consumption". It was the "mass production of standard commodities" in the context of Keynesian social management and the production of the social order within the disciplinary society. They continue: "Toyotism is based on an inversion of the Fordist structure of communication between production and consumption." Toyotism involves new spatial relationships and a radically different relation between production and the social terrain. The large centralised sites of production are broken apart and dispersed across the globe and production becomes integrated within the flows and circulations of consumption:

This model involves not simply a more rapid feedback loop but an inversion of the relationship because, at least in theory, the production decision actually comes after and in reaction to the market decision. In the most extreme case the commodity is not produced until the consumer has already chosen and purchased it. In general, however, it would be more accurate to conceive the model as striving toward a continual interactivity or rapid communication between production and consumption. This industrial context provides a first sense in which communication and information have come to play a newly central role in production.

Even in sites of production that are associated with the image of the mass worker, immaterial labour becomes a crucial component of their operation. In the
recuperation of the demands of the mass worker and then the deployment of these aspirations in a way that decomposes their resistances we can also recognise the use of immaterial labour. The destruction of the classic production line, a destruction caused by the clashes of labour and the capital, followed by the deployment of robotics and team production, is also the creation and application of immaterial labour – labour that relies more and more on the cultural and techno-scientific abilities of the workers.

It is in the rise of industries that have come to prominence with post-Fordism that immaterial labour is often seen the most clearly. These industries would stretch from what is seen as the lower rungs of service work to the heights of information, cybernetic, scientific and cultural work. Hardt and Negri quote Robert Reich when they argue that this work is “symbolic-analytical services” which involves “problem-solving, problem-identifying and strategic brokering activities.” There can be (a) step division(s) of labour in this work – some well paid and exclusive, some generalised, routinised and lacking in social status for employees. In the popular imagination this includes the call-centre worker in both Sydney and Bombay and the rise and the fall of the dot-com industry. What is shared is that this “labor produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.” Computerisation is crucial across these forms of work. Many of them rely more and more on diffuse networks of information technology. This extends from the ubiquitous computer in the workplace proper, to workers’ mobile phones, computerised surveillance, accounting and ordering systems, the proliferation of communicative media and on and on. Not only does information technology often provide the sinews of coordination that allow biopolitical production to take place, but the qualities associated with information technology actually typify human interactions: much in the same way that during Fordism we could talk about life being generally similar to the machinery of the factory. Hardt and Negri write: “The computer and communication revolution of production has transformed laboring practices in such a way that they all tend toward the model of information and communication technologies.”
This becomes sharper as we grasp how in biopolitical production the divisions between wage-labour and general social activity are porous or non-existent – to the extent that all activity is ‘work’. Throughout global capitalism immaterial labour expands in close relation to that of computer and digital technologies. So much so that it begins to define what it means to be alive and human in post-Fordism. Hardt and Negri write:

Interactive and cybernetic become a new prosthesis integrated into our bodies and minds and a lens through which to redefine our minds and bodies themselves. The anthropology of cyberspace is really a recognition of the new human condition.81

This description of immaterial labour invokes an image of new interfaces between the organic and the inorganic. One pole of which is that activity appears to be increasingly disembodied; abstract flows of data and communication passing across digitally animated vistas. In Labour of Dionysus Hardt and Negri evoke the imagery of cyberpunk. For example “the social worker” (which was the trope under which at this point the investigation of immaterial labour was being developed) is “a cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism that continually crosses the boundaries between material and immaterial labour.”82 Hardt and Negri are engaging with Haraway’s essay A Cyborg Manifesto. An essay in which the cyborg is manifested not so much as a sociological category but as a figure of fiction that can work to both explain the nature of lived social reality and be deployed to conceive of a fecund opening of new politics.

Yet this is only one side of immaterial labour – “[t]he other face of immaterial labor is the affective labor of human contact and interaction”.83 Affective labour is the production of relations of the mind and body within a social context. To quote from Multitude:

Unlike emotions which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking. Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being,
satisfaction, excitement, or passion. One can recognise affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, at least in the dominant countries, is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character and “prosocial” behaviours as the primary skills employees need. A worker with a good attitude and social skills is another way of saying a worker adept at affective labor.\textsuperscript{84}

Affective labour is more than the generation of a singular affect in isolation. Rather it is the production of “social relations and forms of life.”\textsuperscript{85} The deployment of affective labour in the workplace proper takes many forms. For example we can think how more of the service industry moves towards the generation of an experience whether that be the creation of a particular relationship between waiter and patron, the ubiquity of ‘cracked pepper’ (being a trope that employs a range of cultural understanding about service, the gourmet, luxury, etc) or how an entire venue will be based on the evoking and reproduction of a certain cultural experience: it’s not the food it’s a dining experience, it’s not the bands playing it’s the festival experience. But affective labour is found in multiple other places. The advance of Human Relations, management psychology, advertising, etc, is all evidence that the labour of the production of certain human interactions becomes increasingly woven through all patterns and forms and moments of wage-labour.\textsuperscript{lix}

But immaterial labour goes beyond the workplace. Hardt and Negri argue that the very nature of immaterial labour means that what is being produced and what is put to work spreads across the social terrain. Classical industrial production may have generated the “means of social life”; it produced the commodities and concrete structures that allowed the social relations of capital to exist. “Immaterial production, by contrast including the production of ideas, images, knowledges, communication, cooperation, and affective relations, tends to create not the means of social life but social life itself.”\textsuperscript{86} This production of social life demands capacities and qualities of living labour that are qualities of the social life of the population. As argued above what capitalism puts to work is excessive of the boundaries of the workplace proper. Rather it is social cooperation as a whole,

\textsuperscript{lix} They acknowledge that in many ways affective labour is similar to reproductive labour. Hardt and Negri, \textit{Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire}, 110.
cooperation that takes place across the social terrain, which is productive for capital. Thus immaterial labour cannot be pinned down, cannot be separated from the interaction of bodies and the broader social life that sustains it, fills it with its capacities and makes it exist. But these open and boundless qualities partially exist beyond the boundaries of capitalist control. It is "immeasurable, because it cannot be quantified in fixed units of time" and it is "always excessive with respect to the value that capital can extract from it because capital can never capture all of life."^^87

The Common

Immaterial and Affective labour, Virtuosity, the General Intellect and Mass Intellectuality are by themselves powerful tools to understand how the multitude is put to work in global capitalism. They do not, by themselves, help us grasp how the multitude exists as either the ensemble of singularities that works for capital and struggles against it. To grasp this we have to take up the idea of the common. The common describes the axis that allows the multiplicity of the multitude to work together. For both Virno and Negri this presents us with potentials and ambiguities. Negri states that "I am perplexed when I confront the issues of the common."^^88 For Negri this confusion lies possibly in the dual nature of the common.

Virno makes scant use of the term the common, rather in Grammar of the Multitude he talks of "common places" and "the One."^^89 As mentioned above the multitude is based around an axis that allows it to function in capital and create itself in projects of emancipation. This axis is the common place of the general intellect that provides "the One". Virno writes: "[t]he unity which the multitude has behind itself is constituted by the 'common places' of the mind, by the linguistic-
cognitive faculties common to the species, by the *general intellect*".90 It contains in it the linked potential that defines the very duality of the multitude. He continues:

The public intellect, however, which appears in the post-Fordist world as a mere resource of production, can constitute a different ‘constitutional principle’; it can overshadow a non-state public sphere. The many, in as much as they are many, use the publicness of the intellect as their base or pedestal, for better or for worse.91

Negri does overtly invoke the common, as the base of the multitude and as its product. The common, in its relationship to the multitude has at least two sides: the multitude as the figure that expresses the current composition of labour; and the multitude as the practitioners of emancipation. In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri write:

> From the *sociological standpoint*, the constitutive power of the multitude appears in the cooperative and communicative networks of social labour. The relationship of the common to the multitude, which appeared paradoxical from the ontological standpoint, in that the common is both precondition and result of the production of the multitude, now appears perfectly unproblematic in social terms, and specifically in terms of labor. As we argued earlier, there is today a progressive becoming common of the various forms of labor throughout the economy and throughout the world.92

Thus whilst global capital involves a constant proliferation of singular forms of labour that have no basis of unity with others in and of themselves, at the same time there is a common which allows these singularities to function for capital and potentially overcome it.

Virno stresses that there is no singular form of labour that can provide a basis for a political project for all others. The various moments of work, say driving a cab, or programming computers have very little direct unity with each other. But their experiences of social life, and the society-wide general intellect is largely similar. He writes:

> We may well ask what the software engineer has in common with the Fiat workers, or with the temporary worker. We must have the courage to answer: precious little, with regard to
job description, to professional skills, to the nature of the labor process. But we can also answer: everything, with regard to the make-up and the contents of the socialization of single individuals outside of the work place. That is to say, these workers have in common emotional tonalities, interests, mentality, expectations... The essentially unitary character of socialization detached from the labor process stands in counterpoint to the fragmentation of productive models, to the World’s Fair style co-existence.

It is again important to remember that for Negri the common arises out of the struggles of labour and is built through the biopolitical production that happens across the entirety of the social terrain. We make the common, the common makes us: this is biopolitical production. They continue:

We are witnessing a decline of the previously unbreachable divisions that separated agricultural from industrial workers, the working classes from the poor, and so forth. Instead, increasingly common conditions of labor in all sectors place new importance on knowledge, information, affective relations, cooperation, and communication. Although each form of labor remains singular – agricultural labor remains tied to the soil, just as industrial labor to the machine – they all nonetheless develop common bases, which today tend to be the condition for all economic production; and, in turn, that production itself produces the common – common relationships, common knowledge, and so forth.

We exist both as the source of wealth for capital and the result of the production of wealth for capital, and we exist this way because of our generation from and of the common: “there can be no cooperation without an existing commonality, and the result of cooperative production is the creation of a new commonality...”

The common, existing in the here and now, is the basis for new society and the autonomous multitude that will constitute it. They continue:

The future institutional structure of this new society is embedded in the affective, cooperative and communicative relationships of social production. The networks of social production, in other words provide an institutional logic capable of sustaining a new society. The social labor of the multitude thus leads directly to the proposition of the multitude as constituent power.
In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri identify the poor as a perfect example of the tensions of the common. They argue: “[c]ommunists and socialists have generally reasoned that since the poor are excluded from the capitalist production process they must also be excluded from any central role in political organization.”

That is the poor, here they mean the mass of the unwaged, are seen as being outside of the central relationships of capitalism and thus outside the sites of struggle and thus the revolutionary project. (Hardt and Negri here ignore those elements of the revolutionary traditions from Bakunin onwards that see the poor as being revolutionary for exactly the same reasons). But in biopolitical production, those that might be outside of wage-labour are still included in the creation of the common and thus have the potential for the revolt against capital and the creation of practices of freedom. They write:

The poor, the unemployed, and the underemployed in our societies are in fact active in social production even when they do not have a waged position. It has never been true, of course, that the poor and the unemployed do nothing. The strategies of survival themselves often require extraordinary resourcefulness and creativity. Today, however, to the extent that social production is increasingly defined by immaterial labor such as cooperation or the construction of social relationships and networks of communication, the activity of all in society including the poor becomes more and more directly productive.

Hardt and Negri illustrate this in regards to the production of language. They argue that the “common nature of creative social activity is further highlighted and deepened by the fact that today production increasingly depends on linguistic competencies and community.” And despite often being outside the realm of wage-labour it is with the generation of language that the potency of the poor, their role in biopolitical labour, their crucial function for capital and thus their antagonistic power is shown. A prime example would be cultural forms such as hip-hop. Hardt and Negri continue that it is important to remember that language is caught within a series of hierarchies that attach it to the world of capital. Here again we find that difficult element of the common: produced by antagonisms and put to work by capital, and yet it can also be posed against both work and capital. They continue:

In fact, the contradiction between linguistic hierarchies and linguistic production and commonality is what makes language today such a powerful site of conflict and resistance. This paradox helps invert the traditional image of the poor: since the poor participate in
and help generate the linguistic community by which they are excluded or subordinated, they are not only active and productive but also antagonistic and potentially rebellious. The paradoxical position of the poor within the linguistic community is indicative of their position in social production more generally. And, in fact, the poor can serve in this regard as the representative or, better, the common expression of all creative social activity. To complete the inversion of the traditional image, then, we can say that the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also productive life itself.\textsuperscript{101}

Any discussion of the common should not work to efface the multiplicities and singularities of the living multitude. In fact the common and multiplicity are posed in non-contradictory ways. How we are put to work by capital and how we resist generates both elements. Of course multiplicity under capitalism is deployed as a method of rule, with a hierarchy of differences, whilst struggle opens up new territory for this to be explored. As much as we participate in life, in the bios, the multitude generates not only the common, but opens the possibility for new politics, for the emergence of communism.

The Society of Control

Negri's and Virno's description of capitalism sees an expansion in the range and amount of activities that capital exploits. Also these activities are seen as being internal to capitalism. We could imagine that capitalism spreads out like some kind of viscous fluid which absorbs creativity and cooperation within it. However this has to be balanced with the keystone of the perspective of autonomy: that labour and the revolt of labour come first. Whilst capital subsumes society, exploits all social interaction and puts us to work, it also becomes increasingly full of rebellion. As much as we cooperate for and under capital we have the potential to cooperate beyond capitalism. Thus real subsumption demands complicated forms of power and control.
Virno argues that the putting to work of such a diversity of cooperation based around the general intellect involves the deployment of a “thick net of hierarchical relations”.\textsuperscript{102} He remarks on the “hypertrophic growth of the administrative apparatus.”\textsuperscript{103} Post-Fordism has been accompanied by an expansion of the techniques of repression, control and normalisation. To understand this we can quickly look at Virno’s repositioning of biopower. Following Marx, Virno argues that capital purchases labour-power, which is a “dynamis”, a “potential.” But it is a potential that is embodied, that is inseparable from living flesh. Virno writes:

The living body becomes an object to be governed not for its intrinsic value, but because it is the substratum of what really matters: labor-power as the aggregate of the most diverse human faculties (the potential for speaking, for thinking, for remembering, for acting, etc).\textsuperscript{104}

Since post-Fordism puts to work the general intellect, the modes of rule demand a particular complexity and depth of biopower. The mind has always been at work; even if the view of capital may have looked at a factory and seen only silent machines of flesh. Those who laboured were complex human beings, and the struggle over subjectivity was crucial. But when subjectivity is something that not just allows production to take place but is itself the substance of what is productive, new arrangements of biopower are needed: increased state power, the swarming of surveillance devices, a permanent ‘state of emergency’, the reimposition of reactionary ideologies, etc.

In an interview Virno remarks that Deleuze’s “‘society of control’ aptly describes the situation in which the ‘general intellect’...has become, yes, the new principal productive force...”\textsuperscript{105} Deleuze’s formulation of the society of control is a critique and development of Foucault’s disciplinary society. The disciplinary society was based on the organisation of “vast spaces of enclosure”.\textsuperscript{106} Life in disciplinary society is one ruled by interrelated, but still clearly distinct, institutions and
apparatuses that clearly mark out and enforce the boundaries of behaviour. “Disciplinary power”, say Hardt & Negri (following Deleuze), “rules in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and proscribing normal and/or deviant behaviours”.107 This structuring of the social terrain works to clearly compartmentalise the life of the subject. Deleuze writes:

The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first, the family; then the school ("you are no longer in the family"); then the barracks ("you are no longer in school"); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preeminent instance of the enclosed environment.108

A Foucaultian idea of power sees power as being constructive and giving form and animation to the subject. The disciplinary society produces the governmentality of the individual and the social mass, and builds and regulates the structures of life. Yet still it does, in a sense, reign over the subjects even whilst they are subsumed within the marked borders of the institutions, discourses, techniques, etc.

We should understand the society of control, in contrast, as that society (which develops at the far end of modernity and opens towards the postmodern) in which mechanisms of command become ever more ‘democratic’, ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens. The behaviours of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorised within the subjects themselves. Power is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communicative systems, information networks, etc) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity. The society of control might thus be characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks.109

The society of control describes an aspect of biopolitical production/post-Fordism that is not a separate regulatory mechanism that is imposed onto it. Instead control is threaded and woven through the general activity of life within
capital, and conversely general life within capital has control threaded and woven through it.

The Crisis of Politics

The changes in the composition of capitalism and class have, argue Negri and Virno, also provoked a crisis in politics. True materialists both, they see that politics, of both capital and reaction or of communism and emancipation, can only exist in relation to the material conditions. The territory on which the politics of modernity stood has given way. Negri even goes as far as to talk of an “earthquake which is today shaking the old paradigm of sovereign order.” Due to what is new in capitalism, capitalism can no longer continue as it did before. Thus the history of neoliberalism becomes one of capitalism attempting to govern new cooperative relationships that fundamentally threaten its governance and its very existence.

In Negri’s work this crisis is portrayed in a number of different ways. Partly he attempts to show how capital has tried to change its global mode of rule, a view articulated most prominently with Michael Hardt in Empire but which was also previously theorised as Integrated World Capitalism with Guattari. The basic thesis is that capital has had to move beyond the nation-state to become a global network of power that attempts to envelop the multitude and assume its qualities for itself.

In Empire Hardt and Negri argue that the entire globe is becoming a single smooth territory of capitalism, in which old divisions and orders are broken down

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Ix See Hardt and Negri, Empire. and Guattari and Negri, Communists Like Us: New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance.
and deterritorialised and new segmentations proliferate. Part of this, as afore mentioned, is that distinct and clear terrains, discourses and institutions tend to break down and exceed their previous boundaries and move across society. Thus specific structures for the production of subjectivity – the school, the factory, the family – move together, become a larger bricolage machine; they “tend to lose their definition and delimitations.” This is a process of multi-directional movement, the institutions moving towards each other and downwards into the social terrain, and the social terrain moving through the institutions – leaving no blue sky above. This leads to a proliferation of apparatuses of control and normalisation that Hardt and Negri describe as “Imperial Administration”. Hardt and Negri argue that Imperial Administration does not work through the regulation of the same and the containing and effacing of differences – as we could typify the modes of discipline through most of modernity – but rather by deploying and controlling differences. The former is seen as a linear model, the latter, fractal. The former separates, marks, coheres; the latter is a “disseminating and differentiating mechanism.”

Across the globe there is the constant production of both state and non-state forces that exist within the life of the multitude that work to tie it to the general global order. Whilst these are often localised and autonomous and specific to certain conditions, they work in general to maintain the overall axioms of global capitalism – even if certain elements may be in conflict with others – conflicts across spaces of various size and in different forms of alliances. In the conditions of empire, formal states are just part of the plethora of specific administrative forces that proliferate and manage the differences and segmentations in hierarchies that work to include the population in biopolitical production. These numerous localised forces of administration are complementary and in many ways coordinated by what they call “Imperial Command”. This command is maintained by “the bomb, money and ether”: nuclear weapons, the global flow of monies on the world market and the vast deployment of communication, the culture industries and simulation.

Within this global smooth space of power Negri talks of how specific moments of capitalist politics have had to conform to the character of the multitude. For example he writes of a potential “[p]ost-modern fascism” (which he does not identify with any specific government), that “seeks to match itself to the
realities of post-Fordist labor cooperation, and seeks at the same time to express some of its essence in a form turned on its head." He continues that:

...post modern fascism seeks to discover the communist needs of the post-Fordist masses and transform them, gradually, into a cult of difference, the pursuit of individualism and the search for identity – all within a project of creating overriding despotic hierarchies aimed at constantly, relentlessly, pitting the differences, singularities, identities and individualities against the other.114

Negri also sees in Berlusconi a new figure of capitalist politics, one that is appropriate to the times. "Berlusconi is a new figure of the collective capitalist, an emblem of capitalist command over society: in him communication and production have become the same thing."115 But for Negri what defines contemporary capitalism the most clearly is war. Negri argues that "[w]ar has become the foundation of Empire."116 Of course Negri realises that "[w]ar has always been a fundamental aspect of the capitalist organization of society."117 What he is arguing is that now war changes and its role in the social order changes. Since capital cannot actually build a satisfactory system to capture and hold effectively the cooperation of the multitude on which it is a vampire, the various state and non-state authorities that constitute Empire become increasingly violent against both each other and the multitude proper. Against the richness, the fullness of the multitude, there is the desperate, pathetic and tragic violence of capital. War is no longer the clear and symmetrical clash between sovereign powers. Rather "war seems to be heading at once in two opposite directions: it is on one hand, reduced to police action and, on the other, raised up to an absolute, ontological level by technologies of global destruction."118

Despite war being pulled in two different directions, what unites its function is that it is no longer used to conquer new territories but rather works to order and manage the people and territories that are all ready inside empire. Negri writes "[n]ow war is inserted in this schema, war is a biopolitical machine that sets out from the destruction of the enemy's weapons and develops in the attempt to completely organise the life of the masses, of the populations and of the multitudes that it relates to."119
Ironically there is certain optimism in Negri’s reading of the crisis. Empire is constituted by war *because* of the material ungovernability of the multitude. Capitalism has been reduced to a state of deep dependency on the creative cooperation of an increasingly independent multitude whose desires for emancipation capital struggles to satisfy. Therefore it is compelled towards violence as it can no longer use the state as a tool of mediation and management:

Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them.\(^{120}\)

War reveals the constitutive split in modern capitalism, intensified by the development of collective coordination within the multitude. The permanent state of war is a dark mirror that shows us the living death of capital and the presence of the communist spectre.\(^{11}\) This enthusiasm is infectious and certainly a comfort when facing the permanent and violent state of war. All this seemingly random and pointless violence actually testifies to some better reality that lies fleshy and living in the substance of daily life. Of course it is just as easy, and possibly more sobering, to agree with Badiou that the current war is a testament to the *absence* of an emancipatory politics; that war is the void caused by the lack of a counter-power against capitalist nihilism and the lack of a real praxis of hope for the immiserated of the globe.\(^{12}\) But to his credit Negri does try to ground such optimism in the material conditions of the present.

\(^{11}\) At this point one may ask how is this new or novel in capitalism’s history? Isn’t communism always a present potential reality and violence capitalism’s last and sometimes first response to this presence within it? Here we see the veracity of Holloway’s critique that Negri’s work suffers from a ‘periodisation’.

\(^{12}\) Badiou writes: “The clash of civilisations, the conflict between democracies and terrorism, the fight to the death between human rights and the rights of religious fanaticism, the promotion of racial, historical, colonial or victimizing signifiers, such as ‘Arab’, ‘Jew’, ‘Western’, ‘Slav’ - all this is nothing other than an ideological shadow-play behind which the only real drama is taking place: the painful, dispersed, confused and slow replacement of the defunct communisms with another rational path towards the political emancipation of the large human masses currently consigned to chaos” Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Albert Toscano (Malden & Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 166.
For Virno the situation is different. He also sees a crisis in politics caused by the changes in capitalism. But what he emphasises is a more general decay in what politics is thought to be, and how it is lived and how this is experienced by the multitude as an ambiguity which both opens and blocks paths to self-emancipation and realisation. For Virno the crisis of politics in post-Fordism is a condition of subordination, yet one that still contains some emancipatory possibilities.

Virno argues that "[n]othing appears so enigmatic today as the question of what it means to act." A conceptualisation of what it is to act, especially politically, implies and rests on a number of understandings. It presupposes a certain form of social relations, certain spaces from where agency emerges, particular forms that organise and cohere the strength of social subjects and so on. Thus when the question of what it means to act becomes enigmatic it suggests a much deeper, more profound disorientation. In Do You Remember Counter-Revolution Virno develops a particular historical narrative specific to Italy to investigate this development. However he also posits a more general cause located in the changes of the organisation of production that has already been presented. He develops these notions in an unusual style, using Aristotle and Arendt. Virno argues that from Aristotle and Arendt we get three figures that represent divisions of human activity: "Labor (or poiesis), political Action (or praxis) and Intellect (or life of the mind)." Until recently, this division seemed to constitute a commonsense, "a widely shared pattern of thought." Virno writes:

When I began to get involved in politics, in the Sixties, I considered this subdivision to be something indisputable; it seemed to me unquestionable as an immediate tactile or visual perception. It was not necessary to have read Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics to know that labor, political action, and intellectual reflection constituted three spheres supported by radically heterogeneous principles and criteria. Obviously, this heterogeneity did not exclude intersection: political reflection could be applied to politics; in turn, political action was often, and willingly, nourished by themes related to the sphere of production, etc. But as numerous as the intersections were, Labor, Intellect and Politics remained essentially distinct.
But what are the constituent elements of these three categories? He continues:

Labor is the organic exchange with nature, the production of new objects, a repetitive and foreseeable process. The pure intellect has a solitary and inconspicuous character: the meditation of the thinker escapes the notice of others: theoretical reflection mutes the world of appearances. Differently from Labor, political Action comes between social relations, not between natural materials: it has to do with the possible and the unforeseen; it does not obstruct, with ulterior motives, the context in which it operates; rather, it modifies this very context. Differently from the Intellect, political Action is public, consigned to exteriority, to contingency, to the buzzing of the "many;" it involves, to use the words of Hannah, "the presence of others" (*Human Condition*, Chap. V, "Action").

Virno contends that in post-Fordism the application of the general intellect leads to a situation in which the characteristics of politics become part of the experience of work. This leads to a particular political situation: an ambivalence that is servile as much as it is antagonistic. Virno directly rejects Arendt's formulation that politics is becoming too much like work, rather, "I maintain that post-Fordist labor, the productive labor of surplus, subordinate labor, brings into play the talents and the qualifications which, according to a secular tradition, had more to do with political action." Labour becomes too much like politics. The labour of virtuosity, the constant performing together, the management of languages and knowledges, the putting to work of social cooperations, the complicated networks of being with others, all those embodied tasks were previously seen as political. We could grasp this in a vulgar form: the proliferation of the "meeting" in the workplace for example. Labour is asked to organise itself, to deploy knowledges produced across the social field, to cooperate autonomously in the process of its own exploitation.

Where labor moves to the side of the immediate productive process, instead of being one of its components, productive cooperation is a "publicly organised space." This "publicly organised space" – interjected into the labor process – mobilizes attitudes which are traditionally political. Politics (in the broad sense) becomes a productive force, task, "tool box."
But perhaps it is also seen in the repositioning of the substance of politics, utopian dreamings, collective identities, popular mobilisations within the realm of work/commodity – a realm that now typifies (if not completely and finally constitutes) the entire social terrain. This leaves politics as it is commonly understood to seem to be an empty reflection of what already goes on in work; He writes:

The inclusion of certain structural features of political praxis in contemporary production helps us to understand why the post-Ford (sic) multitude might be seen, today, as a depoliticized multitude. There is already too much politics in the world of wage labor (in as much as it is wage labor) in order for politics as such to continue to enjoy an autonomous dignity.\textsuperscript{128}

This lack of autonomous dignity can be grasped in two ways: that either politics proper seems to be an impoverished version of what goes on in the sites of wage-labour; or that the subsumption of the qualities of Action into Work brings the entirety of Action into disrepute. That either the advertising campaign of any of the dominant political parties lacks the imagination, the spark, the hope, the cultural nuance, of say the advertising campaign for a pair of shoes. Why would anyone go to a meeting when they have spent half their day in an office in meetings engaging in political organisation as work? Politics, that is the demarcated space of official politics in neoliberalism, becomes far more an integrated space for state-administration and the rule of capital.\textsuperscript{xiii} For there to be a revival of the virtue of politics the link between Intellect and Work has to be severed.

Conclusion

Virno and Negri work to create an image of capitalism that provides the basis for an emancipatory politics: a politics that lives in the antagonisms of the material

conditions of global capitalism. Virno and Negri create an image of capitalism in which productive activity now spreads across the social terrain, in which a limitless variety of efforts are put to work, yet intellectual activity (broadly defined) stands at the core of capitalism. Such a depiction has immediate political consequences. It aims to show how the multitude exists not just as the sum of forces that capital exploits but as a living potential.

The depiction of capitalism that has been presented here dissolves the previous central importance that was applied to the factory and the struggle in the workplace of the industrial proletariat. They do not say such struggles today are unimportant; rather they reject the hierarchy that was used to encase them. This hierarchy attributed vitality and potential to some struggles and simultaneously removed them from others. It was a hierarchy of value that often mimicked and reinforced the actual hierarchies of power that existed within the working classes. Both Virno and Negri contest that there is no longer a centre to capital and as such the points of resistance multiply endlessly. Each moment of society is a point of contention as powerful and rich as any other. Also the idea of the multitude poses the idea of the proletariat being a 'Many' as many. This stands against the sequence of politics that argued for the coming together of the proletariat into a single and unitary class that could then be represented in the party and then the party-state. As such their work on the material nature of contemporary capitalism opens the potential for communist politics. But how? What kinds of politics are needed to affirm our capabilities, creativity and cooperation in ways that dismantle capitalism and generate emancipation?
Chapter 8: Exodus & Disobedience, the Political Practice of the Republic of the Multitude

Introduction

Our question is the following: how can this biopolitical (intellectual and co-operative) mass, which we call 'multitude', exert 'governance over itself'? How can the plurality and the cooperation of singularities express governance of the common, in so far as they form the constitutive power of the world? 129

As we saw in the last chapter Negri and Virno work to describe the novelty of contemporary capitalism in an attempt to show the new compositions of class and thus the material basis for communist politics. This challenges both the neo-liberal ideology that says emancipatory anti-capitalist politics are not only misguided but impossible and the traditions of the Left that want to carry on with a politics that denies these changes. Negri and Virno try to show how the multitude as the subject of capitalist exploitation can transform itself into the autonomous subject of emancipation. While Marx's proletariat liberated itself by negating its condition as proletariat, the multitude creates its emancipation through autonomously affirming its creativity and cooperation. Negri's and Virno's politics is a politics of going beyond capitalism, of escaping the society of control. This is realised in what both call exodus, the attempt to create non-state, non-representative democratic forms that manifest the common; and practices of disobedience that disarm and dissolve sovereignty and the state. Their response to capitalism is creativity and generation – capitalist society is resisted by posing a counter-society that arises out of and melts away the one it emerges from. Virno poses the choice as one between "life put to work" and "the good life."130 Hardt and Negri write in Empire:

As Spinoza says, if we simply cut the tyrannical head off the social body, we will be left with the deformed corpse of society. What we need is to create a new social body, which is the
project that goes well beyond refusal. Our lines of flight, our exodus must be constituent and create a real alternative. Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community. 131

The Communist Flesh of the Multitude

What is the new body of Communist struggle?132

Virno and Negri both argue for a communist politics that is rooted in and relevant to the current class compositions of, and antagonisms in, contemporary capitalism. Communist politics is neither an ideology that hovers above society nor something that emerges from, a supplement that is extra to, the substance of daily life. Rather it must be appropriate to the composition of social forces, the material nature of the contemporary experience of being proletarianised. Equally, the conditions make the politics possible. Negri at his most optimistic sees communism as something already present in the forms of cooperation that currently power capital. With Hardt in Labour of Dionysus he presents an image where capitalism stands above the social totality and in which it tries in vain to direct and exploit the cooperative labour that ultimately could go beyond it. They write:

Cooperation, or the association of producers, is posed independent of the organisational capacity of capital; the cooperation and subjectivity of labor have found a point of contact outside the machinations of capital. Capital becomes merely an apparatus of capture, a phantasm, an idol. Around it move radically autonomous processes of self-valorisation that not only constitute an alternative basis of potential development but also actually represent a new constituent foundation.133

As noted in the previous chapter Virno talks of the communism of capital: a far more ambiguous formulation that shows both the potentials and defeats of our

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xiv Here we see how such work is almost diametrically opposed to that of Alain Badiou.
condition. He writes of the condition of the multitude being ambivalent. He explains this ambivalence in an interview:

To say it is "ambivalent" alludes to those distinctive characteristics of the multitude that can manifest themselves in opposite ways: as servility or as liberty. The multitude has a direct link with the dimension of the possible: each state of things is contingent, no one has a destiny - understanding by destiny the fact that, for example, no one is sure anymore that they will have the same job for life. This contingency is structural in this epoch and can have opposite developments: it can favor opportunism, cynicism, the desire to take advantage of the occasion in order to prevail over others; or it can express itself as conflict and insubordination, defection and exodus from the present situation.

Yet both agree that radical politics must speak to and from the productive activity of our daily lives.

In their work, the content of communist praxis is determined by the antagonist interplay of the actual nature of the process of production and the rebellious subjectivities, demands and organisation of the proletariat in a particular period. Negri constructs a historical narrative of the modern anti-capitalist struggle around this thesis. He sees a progression of struggles from the professional worker to the mass worker to the social worker. Each one is a "figure" of struggle, an embodied amalgam of the capitalist rule and forms imposed upon them and also their own struggles for liberation; a figure that whilst linked by the histories of struggle is marked by its differences and specificities. Whilst Virno does not pose such a historical narrative (his work being both more cautious and more undefined and also contained in a smaller field of study), he also argues for the importance of understanding contemporary class compositions. His work argues for the reinvention of politics based on the capacities and creativities that are currently put to work by capital.

Negri writes that the multitude currently exists as "flesh" that through struggle can make itself into a "body." The imagery of flesh and body is a recurring feature of Negri's work, reflecting the influence of Spinoza and also the
focus on *immanence* (which is also of course a Spinozist theme). It reflects the desire to show how communism and capitalism both arise from the same substance: human creativity. Communism is the transformation of what already exists within the relationships of capital and labour. Struggle is the contestation over the form of the flesh: over whether creativity and cooperation will be put to work for capital or freed. Using a similar metaphor Negri writes with Hardt in *Multitude*:

From the socio-economic perspective, the multitude is the common subject of labor, that is, the real flesh of postmodern production, and at the same time the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global development. Capital wants to make the multitude into an organic unity, just like the state wants to make it into a people. This is where, through the struggles of labor, the real productive biopolitical figure of the multitude begins to emerge. When the flesh of the multitude is imprisoned and transformed into the body of global capital, it finds itself both within and against the process of capitalist globalisation. The biopolitical production of the multitude, however, tends to mobilize what it shares in common and what it produces in common against the imperial power of global capital. In time, developing its productive figure based on the common, the multitude can move through Empire and come out the other side, to express itself autonomously and rule itself.

In a sense both Negri and Virno see the multitude as something that exists in the sinews of postmodern global capitalism, and that a new politics can transform the contemporary forms of productive activity into the emancipation of the multitude.

To start to see how this flesh can be made a body is to realise the importance of the common. The common, which allows the multitude to function for capitalism, is also what allows the Many as a collection of singularities to struggle together. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri try to elucidate a republican praxis of the multitude by invoking a dialogue of two earlier republicans, Machiavelli and

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Spinoza, to work out a “materialist teleology” - that is a path of action that is embedded in and arises from the material conditions of the present but at the same time can go beyond capitalism. They write:

"Machiavelli proposes that the project of constructing a new society from below requires "arms" and "money" and insists that we must look for them outside, Spinoza responds: “Don’t we already possess them? Don’t the necessary weapons reside precisely within the creative and prophetic power of the multitude?” Perhaps we, too, locating ourselves within the revolutionary desire of postmodernity, can in turn respond: Don’t we already possess “arms” and “money”? The kind of money that Machiavelli insists is necessary may in fact reside in the productivity of the multitude, the immediate actor of biopolitical production and reproduction. The kind of arms in question may be contained in the potential of the multitude to sabotage and destroy with its own productive force the parasitical order of postmodern command. (Italics in original)"

Thus right now the multitude, as it works in capitalism, already has the capacity to realise itself as the multitude beyond capitalism. Machiavelli’s arms and money are reinterpreted to be something that is not guns and bullion, but the social cooperation of the common. The ability to both create new forms of life and defend and assert them against capitalism finds its origins in the same qualities. In the essay Constituent Republic Negri addresses Machiavelli’s demands. He locates arms specifically in the qualities of immaterial labour: “the post-Fordist labour form is becoming increasingly cooperative, independent and autonomous.” This is an independence and autonomy from capitalism that exists in the very organisational capacities that allow the possibility of production within capitalism: we work together more than ever and the organisation of work is contained within its activity. He continues:

This combination of autonomy and cooperation means that the entrepreneurial potentiality (potenza imprenditoriale) of productive labour is henceforth completely in the hands of the post-Fordist proletariat. The very development of productivity is what constitutes this enormous independence of the proletariat, as an intellectual and cooperative base, as economic entrepreneurship. The question is, does it also constitute it as political entrepreneurship, as political autonomy?
Whilst the general intellect provides the source of wealth for capitalism, Virno argues that it also provides the point of coherence for the multitude in motion. It is the axis point through which a vast constellation of singularities can pass through and by which their ability to function together be facilitated. He writes “[t]oday, a multitude of ‘social individuals’ – who grow prouder of their unrepeatable singularity the more they correlate to each other in a dense web of cooperative interaction – recognise themselves as the general intellect of society.” The difficulty though is “the thorniest of problems: how to organise a plurality of ‘social individuals’ that, at the moment, seems fragmented, constitutionally exposed to blackmail – in short unorganisable.” The multitude as the subject of post-Fordist capitalism is caught in hierarchies of difference. Thus often the singularities that compose the multitude aggressively face each other, paranoid and afraid of all those around them and estranged from their own massive generative abilities. The multitude needs new ways of acting; ways of acting that transform our differences and mass intellectuality into experiences of autonomy and self-realisation; ways of acting that allow the diverse singularities to grow in relationships with each other. This is not just a desire projected into the future but a question of how to “modify the relations of force within this social organization of time and space.” That is how to make our mass intellectuality, the riches of relations to one another become something else, something radically other than the wellspring of capital.

Negri and Virno elucidate a politics that arises from the autonomous realisation of the common: the ability for the multitude to create new lives and other worlds through the application of the very aspects of cooperation that capital tries so hard to capture and exploit. The common in post-Fordism, that is the signifier for its open and collaborative abilities, has an incredible capacity for self-organisation. But if this self-organisation is used every day to produce value for capital across the entirety of the social terrain, can the self-same common be used to realise a multitude against empire? What kinds of militancy, what kinds of praxis does this proposition lead to? The new praxis is the generation of new spaces of politics, ones that arise from the autonomous manifestation of the general intellect
outside the realms of state and wage-labour, in a way that constitutes new terrains, other lives, new realms: republic.

Exodus Towards Republic

Exodus is the core of the communist praxis put forward by both Negri and Virno. At its most simplistic, exodus is the idea that the multitude can overcome capitalism not by attacking it head–on and attempting to destroy it and then building a new world on beautiful ruins. Rather the multitude can create communism by defecting away from capitalism, reappropriating social creativity and directly generating democratic and non-state collectivities of self-rule. As Virno writes, exodus rejects a negative condition of struggle – that is, the negation of capitalism to affirm something that is not yet present. Rather Virno argues for the affirmation of a wealth that is already present by breaking the forms of its exploitation. Virno’s strategy, in his words: “...stands at the opposite pole to the desperate notion of ‘You have nothing to lose but your chains.’ It is postulated, rather, on the basis of a latent wealth, on an abundance of possibilities....”\textsuperscript{142}

Struggle is the affirmation of the already existing wealth of living labour.\textsuperscript{\textit{bxi}} Negri and Virno do also postulate the possibility of direct and antagonistic conflicts with the state, but such conflicts are subordinated to the creative and affirming practice of exodus. Virno summarises exodus as follows:

I use the term \textit{Exodus} here to define mass defection from the State, the alliance between general intellect and political Action, and a movement toward the public sphere of intellect. The term is not at all conceived as some defensive existential strategy – it is neither exiting on tiptoe through the back door nor a search for sheltering hideaways. Quite the contrary: what I mean by \textit{Exodus} is a full-fledged model of action, capable of confronting the challenges of modern politics....\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{\textit{bxi}} It is worth noting that Virno only quotes half of the ending of the \textit{Communist Manifesto}, and thus omits that after losing our chains, we have a “world to win”. Marx and Engels, \textit{Manifesto of the Communist Party}, 91.
In an essay on Lenin, Negri sees the nature of capital and the struggle against it as follows: “capitalist power is composed of two indistinguishable poles – state control and a social structure based on exploitation – and that it is the aim of revolution – when it is Communist – to attack and destroy both”. Yet with exodus Negri and Virno see this attack as not really an attack, and destruction as not really destruction. Perhaps this is influenced by the failure of the Movement of ’77. The Movement of ’77 engaged in a radical recreation of daily life that included an antagonistic conflict with the state. Whilst the Red Brigades conformed to a strategy of the clandestine armed group, autonomia attempted a different interpretation of the imperative of violent confrontation with the apparatuses of repression: where armed struggle was based within the sinews of the movement, not in separate organisational forms. The Italian state’s response was a strategy of tension that drew the movement into a civil war that it couldn’t win; resulting in the destruction of the movement and death or imprisonment for many militants. Neither Virno nor Negri shy away from the question of violence; Negri still talks of a need to create a “‘civil war’ against the Empire” for example. However it is clear that they see being drawn into a simple clash of arms with the state as a deadly game that destroys communism. Therefore Negri counsels that “[t]he forces of democracy must counter this violence of sovereignty but not as its polar opposite in symmetrical fashion.”

This asymmetrical struggle finds its form in exodus. Exodus poses the question of social opposition outside the binary of reform or revolution – rather a totally radical other way of being is posed as a possibility in the here and now. The idea of exodus poses the question of struggle not as for more of what is offered by capitalism (money, commodities, formal political recognition, etc); rather exodus suggests that the general intellect and our mass intellectuality can be pulled away

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from the forms it is currently bound up in and be realised as something else and other.

Virno argues that just as the general intellect can be the score (as previously shown) of the virtuosity that characterises labour in post-Fordism, so too can it allow the multitude to pull itself away from the "thick net of hierarchical relations" that capital deploys. It is the qualities of the general intellect, of living labour, which allow us to collectively and directly assume autonomy over creativity and social life. Exodus is the idea of a creative flight from capital and state. It is the refusal of work and sovereignty, of wage-labour and the state, through an affirmation of social creativity (labour) and the generation of autonomous forms of collectivity. This exodus is the direct generation of alternatives, a "non-State public sphere" that Virno calls Republic. Previous models of revolution often split the transformative moment – there is revolt, then liberation. Here exodus is the formation of Republic and Republic is the method of exodus. To quote Virno:

On one hand, general intellect can only affirm itself as an autonomous public sphere, thus avoiding the "transfer" of its own potential into the absolute power of Administration, if it cuts the linkage that binds it to the production of commodities and wage labor. On the other hand the subversion of capitalist relations of production henceforth develops only with the institution of a non-State public sphere, a political community that has as its hinge general intellect.149

Exodus then is not a retreat, a disappearance into the personal. For one the 'personal', a hidden space from capitalism no longer exists. Nor can exodus be simply flight to a physical territory outside of capitalism. The global nature of capital, the disappearance of genuine spaces of non-work, means that there is nowhere across the border that is not capitalist. Exodus is a creative process in

148 There is of course the very physical exodus of millions of people across national borders. These struggles are not simply ones of leaving a place; they are the profound generation of new forms of social life that contradict the division of the earth into nation-states as part of the global administration of capital. They do not find a new land outside of empire, but rather their movement works to bring one to life. The movements of immigrants without papers and their connections with many 'no border' struggles in the North are excellent examples of exodus. Likewise, the state responds to this with 'the camp', the permanent state of emergency which represents that pinnacle of empire's attempts to capture the affirmative lines of flight of the multitude.
which, in the here and now, we engage in attempts to build new formations with each other. Rather than seeing the struggle as a headlong confrontation with the state and capital to either reform or smash them, it is a move away from them: the result of which is their destruction or suppression. This difference is not one just of emphasis but implies a different temporality of struggle – rather than exercising our counter-power only in the future, we bring it into being now. If we cannot manifest our own organs of coordination over the questions that confront our lives now, we are left dependent on the state. We must try to either enter it, or pressure it into action. Virno continues:

Nothing is less passive than flight. The "exit" modifies the conditions within which conflict takes place, rather than presupposes it as an irremovable horizon; it changes the context within which a problem arises, rather than deals with the problem by choosing one or another of the alternative solutions already in offer. In short the "exit" can be seen as a free thinking inventiveness that changes the rules of the game and disorients the enemy.¹⁵⁰

In this sense exodus may be made in reference to, but does not specifically refer to, geographical movement. Exodus rather is a desertion of a mode of being; one that creates the social path and territories it exists on by fleeing. Since capitalism cannot simply let the multitude go, and since exodus happens on the very same physical space (something thrown into sharp relief for example by the establishment of a squatted social centre), exodus is combative.

Negri's work on exodus enriches Virno's concept by attempting to show and imagine how the process of exodus challenges the molecular social relations of capital in the process of transforming the entire social order. True to Negri's (perhaps unfair) critique of Virno as being too disembodied (and to his debt to Spinoza) Negri wants to show the fleshy paths of exodus. Together in Empire he and Hardt write of how exodus changes our lived, embodied experience:

Today's corporeal mutations constitute an anthropological exodus and represent an extraordinarily important, but still quite ambiguous, element of the configuration of republicanism "against" imperial civilization. The anthropological exodus is important
primarily because here is where the positive, constructive face of the mutation begins to appear: an ontological mutation in action, the concrete invention of a first new place in the non-place. This creative evolution does not merely occupy any existing place, but rather invents a new place; it is a desire that creates a new body; a metamorphosis that breaks all the naturalistic homologies of modernity.\textsuperscript{151}

Here exodus is seen as constituting radically embodied and lived processes that are the manifestation of elements of contemporary productive relations outside and against the constraints of capital. This emphasises the mutative, artificial, anti-humanist conception of politics that underscores Negri's work. Also it shows that in biopolitical production not only is the personal political but there is no divergence between the two – the entire social terrain is crucial for capital and for struggle. Exodus makes daily life a problem by drawing out the antagonisms of the biopolitical. But this also shows that Negri's vision of a politics of emancipation is not one in which liberated political spaces reign over the rest of life, but rather, due to the common, are intermeshed and embodied in the general flows and relations of social creativity. Rebellion, revolt, creation, the political and the body surge together in multiple lines of refusal that through their individual moments of contestation fuse together, but refuse homogenisation, and generate alternative modes of being.

Exodus then is more than the flight from formal political spaces. In biopolitical production it is the subtraction from and the production of entire ways of life. In \textit{Empire} Hardt and Negri refer to Benjamin, arguing that it is through exodus that the multitude become “New Barbarians” – that is a collectivity that is wholly incompatible with the Imperial order. The way the multitude moves, acts and thinks destabilises the patterns of territorial and social command of the global order:

Those who are against, while escaping from local and particular constraints of their human condition, must also continually attempt to construct a new body and a new life... The new barbarians destroy with an affirmative violence and trace new paths of life through their own material existence.\textsuperscript{152}
They continue: "[t]he infinite paths of the barbarians must form a new mode of life."153 This position is predated by Negri’s work with Guattari where they depict the core of the struggle against capitalism as the collective attempt to "[t]hink, live, experiment and struggle in another way..."154 Being barbarian means that the process of exodus is one that radically changes both the molecular and molar coordinates of society. Exodus then must mean profoundly transforming the way we are embodied, our relationship with our actual biological form and the control and identities that surround it. Hardt and Negri evoke both countercultural rebellions ("common aesthetic mutations of the body, such as piercings and tattoos, punk fashion and its various imitations") and "Donna Haraway’s cyborg fable" to start to imagine this.155 Perhaps in the past it was possible to see a division between the serious revolutionaries who worried that radical mutations in daily behaviour jeopardised the struggle and cultural and artistic rebels who privileged the direct renovation of their personal lives and realisation of creative desire over changing the entire edifice of capitalism. Here exodus sees both as one and the same. As we pull away our creativity from capital we are free to turn it onto ourselves in a celebratory, carnivalesque and artificial recreation of life. Doing this is inseparable from the construction of collective political forms. Here public political struggles and struggles around the ‘personal’ (a distinction that Negri would reject) mutually reinforce each other as part of the commonality and diversity of exodus – the profound reinvention of life.
Republic & Democracy

Exodus creates the collective relations that allow us to rule our own creativity and cooperation through radical democratic forms that are immanent to social life – something both Virno and Negri call 'Republic'. Republic is the rethinking of notions of democracy based on the revolutionary capacities of the multitude.

Democracy, Negri argues, needs to be thought of beyond either liberalism or socialism. In Multitude Hardt and Negri argue that it is the attempt to link democracy to representation in liberal or socialist forms that ultimately leads to the nullification of the democratic elements that might persist within them. Writing on different forms of liberal democracy they argue that representation works to subdue the desires of the vast majority of people. Commenting on the work of early liberal theorists Hardt and Negri write how representation was a way of holding back the class antagonisms. “Representation serves them as a kind of vaccine to protect against the dangers of absolute democracy: it gives the social body a small controlled dose of popular rule and thereby inoculates against the fearsome excess of the multitude.”

Hardt and Negri also reject socialist notions of democracy. Rather than seeing socialism as an other to capitalism, the failure of socialist democracy has a similar root:

Even in their most radical expressions, socialism and communism did not develop fundamentally different conceptions of representation and democracy, and as a result they repeated the founding nucleus of the bourgeois concept of sovereignty, trapped paradoxically in the need for the unity of the state.

Whilst socialist politics may have challenged the capitalist state, they both share a similar relationship to representation and sovereignty. This is due, it is argued in Multitude, to socialism being a theory and practice of managing capitalism rather
than its dissolution. Since socialism is the management of capital it works to subdue the revolt against work through repression, management and representation. The emancipatory creations of revolution such as the Soviet have to give way to the continual and effective growth of dead labour: that is, the continual recreation of the subordination of the working classes. Referencing Weber, Hardt and Negri argue:

Socialism, in every form, thus necessarily involves the management of capital - perhaps in a less privatist or individualist way, but always within the same relentless dynamic of the instrumental rationalization of life. Since the modern concept of representation necessarily corresponds to that dynamic of rationalization, socialism could not do without it. Neither could it substitute for it a form of labor representation based on trade unions or councils. In the framework of the management of capital, Weber concludes that contradiction between worker democracy and representative democracy could only be solved in favour of the latter.\(^{158}\)

For Negri democracy finds its rejuvenation as practice and as concept outside the state in social movements and struggles against the state in all its forms. Hardt and Negri argue:

All of the radical social movements since 1968 have challenged these corruptions of the concept of democracy that transform it into a form of rule imposed and controlled from above. Democracy, instead, they insist, can only arise from below. Perhaps the present crisis of the concept of democracy due to its new global scale can provide the occasion to return it to its older meaning as the rule of everyone by everyone, a democracy without qualifiers, without ifs or buts.\(^{159}\)

Democracy is a thing of living activity. Virno depicts Republic as the multiplicity of forms of collective autonomy in which the general intellect can manifest new ways outside and against the state and wage-labour. Importantly it does not stand above the multitudes' diversity and complex productive and generative powers, rather these run through the spaces of Republic. Virno writes: "[t]he non-state public sphere is a public sphere which conforms to the way of being of the multitude".\(^{160}\) It conforms to it in at least two ways. Republic is a manifestation of the "centrifugal force" of the multitude. It is a proliferation of formations across the social field (which it transforms) that "excludes not only the
continued existence, but also the reconstruction in any form of a unitary ‘political body.’” Virno envisions an incredible fecundity, creativity and flowering of self-organisation. Currently the very multiplicity of the multitude, the countless differences and singularities that make up our lives are over-coded by axioms that turn these differences against each other and imprison them in various hierarchies of identity. Republic is the transformation of differences, a creative and emancipatory process. This process will undoubtedly involve many rethinkings of identity, which currently under capitalism so deeply enchains patterns of behaviour.

The multitude is the basis of the non-representative nature of Republic. Republic is not just a rejection of representation because representation invariably means the repression of difference and once more the construction of a people. Rather the nature of the general intellect, the cooperation and productive wealth of multitude finds its autonomous realisation in direct and unrepresentable forms. Virno writes that Republic gives “political expression to the ‘acting-in-concert’ that, having as its network general intellect already enjoys a publicness...” That is it gives a political form to something that is already present in public life. The multitude already works together and cooperates all the time. However this cooperation is normalised and administrated by the ever-expansive forms of control and contained by the demands of capital. As we break from and leave the gravity of capital we find in our autonomous self-organisation a direct expression of our cooperation and creativity; a collective power with which to take up the adventure of living.

In 1996 Virno wrote that the “Republic of the ‘many’ consists precisely of...leagues, councils and soviets.” Around the same time he identified three different struggles that seemed to be in a limited way engaging in strategies of exodus. These were social centres, the Comitati di Base (the committees of the base – alternative workplace formations also known as Cobas), and the student Panther movement. Whilst they originated in different parts of society (community,
workplace, university) all attempted a praxis that was in defiance of the state, and aimed to disrupt political functions and pose questions about how emancipated forms of social cooperation could be generated in the here and now.\textsuperscript{164} Since then Virno has looked favourably on the alter-globalisation movements, and the Argentinean revolt of 2001.\textsuperscript{165} All these struggles have as their points of commonality autonomy, participation and direct action – which are manifestations of the common of the multitude. Commenting on the new struggles, he writes, "\textit{[t]he movement is the conflictual interface of the post-Fordist working process}".\textsuperscript{166} What these republican forms take as their strengths – complicated processes of cooperation, profound cultural and linguistic nuances, diversity of approach, flexibility, innovation – are exactly what capitalism seeks to intensify, control and exploit. The method of struggle is thus the development of collective bodies that resume control of social life and disarm and disorientate capitalism. Virno writes:

\begin{quote}
The Soviets of the Multitude interfere conflictually with the State's administrative apparatuses, with a view to eating away its prerogatives and absorbing its functions. They translate into republican praxis, in other words, into a care for common affairs, those same basic resources – knowledge, communication, a relationship with the "presence of others" – that are the order of the day in post-Fordist productions. They emancipate virtuosic cooperation from its present connection with waged labor, showing with positive actions how the one goes beyond the other.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

Whilst Virno and Negri deploy similar concepts, there are important differences in and between their work. Virno suggests what could be possible on the basis of the multitude; that is he works to identify the first steps of a republican exodus and leaves open the space of the future. It is a subversion of what exists, on the basis of what exists, that is generative and open: a sketch of what may be with what we have now. Negri's vision in more fully formed: he poses multitude against empire as if they are a force of similar size and power (if asymmetrical in their activity). Thus his image of democracy or republic is not just an opening but rather a fuller image: key to this is his work on constituent power.
Constituent power is the power to create democratic social forms: it is the activity of democratic construction. Constituent power is presented in Negri's work as a rich but problematic concept; the insurgent yet unfulfilled presence that underscores modernity. Constituent power is a crisis for capitalism, as there is a tension between the creative and generative capacities that animate society and the forms of rule that try to hold, block and stem them so capitalism can function: a tension between constituent and constituted power. Constituted power is the solidification of constituent power into structures of domination and control, particularly the state. Negri presents constituent power as both the flow of struggles that have accumulated in the present yet have been warded off from their fulfilment by the state-form (in both its 'really existing capitalist' and 'really existing socialist' forms); and a device to explore the specific and contingent possibilities of the multitude. On the latter point he writes with Hardt in Empire:

We can thus define the virtual power of labour as a power of self-valorization that exceeds itself, flows over onto the other, and, through this investment, constitutes an expansive commonality. The common actions of labor, intelligence, passion, and affect configure a constituent power.168

Constituent power, the power to generate new social forms, is according to Negri a "concept of a crisis."169 It is a crisis because to this historical point, constituent power is both the revolutionary force that creates new social forms, and something that has to be contained by the structures it creates. Negri argues that the dominant theories of constituent power see it as both "extraordinary" and "fixed": events such as the American War of Independence or the French Revolution are posed as specific moments where constituent power manifests – a break from the normality where new social forms are created and then dissipate.170 Constituent power appears in an extraordinary moment, creates new social worlds and then is resolved into its constituted forms; into constituted power. Negri rejects this and argues that constituent power is ever-present in the struggles of specific people for an increasingly democratic life and the generation of practices of participation and freedom. Lived constituent power buckles and strains and throws into disarray the orders that try to simultaneously claim it as a point of origin and efface it as radical content. Modernity, for Negri, is thus torn
between the rebellious social forces and democratic creativity that ended
feudalism, and the state forms and machinery of capture. In Empire the chapter
"Two Europes, Two Modernities" poses just this, that modernity is split between
democracy and its repression, between constituent power that is immanent to
living relations and the constituted forms that block it. This historical narrative
combines with a very specific reading of the possibilities of the present –
democracy is thus both the product of the long civil war of modernity and the
possibility of the multitude becoming an autonomous and open reality.

Whilst Negri creates a narrative of the continuity of democracy as the other
possibility that runs through modernity, Multitude also presents democracy as a
radical break from the politics of modernity. The possibilities of the multitude, of
the common and their autonomous supersession of capitalism demand a new
approach – ‘a new science.’ Hardt and Negri write:

A new science of global democracy would not simply restore our political vocabulary from
the corruptions it has suffered; it would also have to transform all the primary modern
political concepts. From the concept of the nation-state and free market to that of
socialism, from the notion of political representation to that of soviet and council forms of
delegation, and from human rights to the so-called rights of labour, all these have to be
rethought in the context of our contemporary conditions. This will have to be a science of
plurality and hybridity, a science of multiplicities, that can define how all the various
singularities express themselves fully in the multitude.

In a sense Negri’s deployment of constituent power is a continuation of the
operaismo conceptualisation of labour but deployed into the world of the political.
Or better yet it positions labour, in the broadest sense, as historically contingent
forms of social cooperation, as the basis for the development of modernity, a caged
force that offers the chance of the realisation of democracy beyond the state. Hardt
and Negri write:

On one hand, living labor is the constituent power of society. It presents itself as the
creative, vital locus, a dynamic factory of values and norms. At the same time, however
living labor presents a critique of any constituted power, of any fixed constitutional order.
In the production of new norms, living labor destabilises the dead structures of society, devouring all of the existing norms that come in its path.  

This reveals Hardt and Negri’s thinking about the nature of democracy. It is the substantive form that constituent power forms and moves towards. *Insurgencies* opens with the words: "[t]o speak of constituent power is to speak of democracy." Democracy then is not, for Negri, the practice of states and constitutions, indeed these forms are its limitation that contain and imprison it. Democracy rather is a thing of the body of the multitude, it is its heart, bones, nervous and immune systems, brain and muscles; worldly, immanent. Throughout Negri’s work we find a narrative of the transformation of modernity to post-modern in which the counter-position between labour and capital finds other parallels; constituent power against constituted power, potenza against potestas. Also the three become grouped together: labour/constituent power/potenza against capital/constituted power/potestas. Perhaps they express different elements of the same thing, or the same element but with different emphases; production/politics/philosophy. The former refer to the active and creative elements of human sociality, whilst the latter are the estranged and dead forms that work to restrain and exploit the former. Activity and creativity are for Negri the basis of labour and fundamentally immanent and democratic.

Negri’s wager is that the material conditions of the present are ones in which this contradiction of modernity can be solved. Like Virno, democracy is for Negri fundamentally anti-statist. It is the embodiment of political autonomy and activity in the cooperative flows of the multitude itself – positioned against any attempts at establishing a transcendental sovereign. Democracy (especially in *Multitude* where it comes to the fore as a signifier for the qualities and desires of the multitude in and formed by struggle) is in Negri’s work largely synonymous with communism. Not only is it used to indicate a post-capitalist society, where the state is destroyed and administration is just part of the daily process of living, but it also depicts current existing potentials. As Marx writes in *The German Ideology*:
Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.\textsuperscript{175}

Democracy as posed by Negri speaks to the movement of multitude as well as the politics that animate the multitude. Democracy is the movement, the politics and the emancipation of the multitude. Read together, Virno and Negri see democracy as the sum of a radical assemblage of practices that are immanent to social life, and democracy arises immanently from social life. Democracy overtly realises the cooperation of the multitude in political forms that collectively reappropriate creativity and are opposed to representation and sovereignty. And like the multitude itself democracy is not just of the many but is Many: it is a democracy that swarms outwards, amplifying and twisting together multiplicity and commonality.

\textbf{Disobedience & Force}

Any attempt to break from capitalist normality invariably comes into conflict with the disciplinary mechanism of the state. There is no way that capitalism will just let go of the people on whom it is dependent. In the society of control there is no space free from capital's system of punishment and reward. Any effort for emancipation invariably confronts the state. And violence confronts the multitude as a state of continual war. In the condition of empire war becomes, Hardt and Negri write, a "permanent social relationship".\textsuperscript{176} War does not stand at the edges of capitalist society but is crucial to the practice of biopower. "War has become a \textit{regime of biopower}, that is, a form of rule aimed not only at controlling the population but
also at producing and reproducing all aspects of social life." As the multitude confronts violence moving against it, it must also move against violence. This is not a call for pacifism but rather for violence against violence. Hardt and Negri write “[t]he exodus and emergence of democracy is thus a war against war”. We have to be careful when talking about violence; we have to be cautious of arrogant rhetoric that opens the possibility that politics of emancipation may collapse into a vortex of Terror. Rather what is needed is a violence that is suitable for and consistent with the content of emancipation.

Virno’s depiction of exodus is coupled with the idea of disobedience. Though sometimes they are presented separately they should be thought about together. In his essay Virtuosity and Revolution, exodus and disobedience are deeply intertwined. Virno uses disobedience to explore the possibility of an antagonistic relationship to the state. Speaking broadly the Left has thought of its relationship with to the state with either a paradigm of revolution or of reform. In the former state power is smashed or seized, in the latter it is either won or persuaded. What is common to both is that in their thinking of challenging sovereignty, they focus on the Sovereign. The Sovereign can be killed, replaced or pursued. The idea of disobedience turns away from attempting to attack, take or persuade the seat of power. Rather it suggests that the ruled refuse their position of being ruled and thus make sovereignty inoperative. Disobedience is the idea of how a refusal to conform to the patterns of ruler and ruled may subvert the relationship. Such a series of activities is possible because of exodus – that is, the refusal to be ruled is possible because of the creation of other forms of collective non-state democracy. Equally this Republic can only come into being in a real sense by breaking the power of capitalist command, especially that of the state, which reduces people to the position of subjects. Hardt and Negri use the literary figures of Melville’s Bartleby and Cootzee’s Michael K. to explore both the power of refusing to obey and the need for refusal to be tied to creation. Both are characters who show the power of simply refusing to comply with authority and thus undermining the social reality created by the dominant political coordinates. Yet both are ultimately hampered by their inability to create. Hardt and Negri quote Etienne de La Boetie:
Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place your hands upon the tyranny to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces.¹⁸⁰

This reflects a general long established understanding that authority rests on obedience and possibly also echoes old ideas from the Industrial Workers of the World: that since capital is a product of labour, labour’s withdrawal and non-compliance will cause capital to fall.¹⁹⁹ And just as the IWW spoke of the need to build “a new world in the shell of the old” so too Negri writes: “Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community”.¹⁸¹

Virno argues that disobedience has to be repositioned away from the liberal tradition of civil disobedience, and developed as radical disobedience. Civil disobedience aims to oppose specific laws that are “incoherent with or contradict other fundamental norms” and as such implies a “deeper loyalty to State command.”¹⁸² Whilst civil disobedience might involve violations of legality it is framed within the cosmos of the state; one acts to force the state to change course, often using as a reference some ideal which the state is meant to embody but has failed to upkeep. It is no coincidence that civil disobedience is associated with movements of civil or human rights – the latter often being enmeshed in a liberal democratic (and a thus statist) perspective on human relations.¹⁹⁹ Contra this “radical disobedience which concerns us here casts doubt on the State’s actual ability to control”.¹⁸³ Virno looks at a paradox in Hobbes: that obedience is both the “cause and effect of the existence of the State...”¹⁸⁴ The basis of the state is the condition that it produces. Here disobedience aims to both challenge the action that the state takes and remove the servility that is its product and producer:

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¹⁹⁹ These similarities reflect the constant inspiration the IWW have been for the operismo, autonomia and their descendants.
²⁰⁰ There exist a number of excellent critiques of the liberal nature of human rights discourse. The works of Giorgio Agamben have gained a particular prominence in recent years for making such arguments. I would also suggest the stellar, yet often overlooked, work of Wendy Brown for example see Wendy Brown, States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).
By breaking a particular law meant for dismantling socialized medicine or for stopping immigration, the multitude goes back on the covert presuppositions hidden behind every act of mandating law and taints its ability to remain in force. Radical disobedience also 'precedes civil laws,' since it is not limited to the breaking of these laws but also calls into question the very foundation of their validity.185

In Negri's early work violence against the state was an aggressive attack. He argued that rising out of the acts of self-valorisation there was an offensive directed against the forms of capitalist command. He writes of violence in struggle "[f]irst of all as an expression of proletarian counter-power, as a manifestation of a process of self-valorization; then, directed toward the outside, as a destructing and destabilising force."186 In his current work he flips this around: violence is what capital poses in the wake of the exodus of the multitude. It is an attempt to reign in multitude's autonomous initiatives and tendencies. In Negri's later work the force of revolt is not aimed at the capitalist society that stands and blocks communism, but is aimed behind the movement, at the world the multitude is leaving, largely as a rear guard action to protect the creation of freedom. In Multitude Hardt and Negri write:

The emerging forces of democracy today find themselves in a context of violence that they cannot simply ignore or wish away. Democracy today takes the form of a subtraction, a flight, an exodus from sovereignty, but, as we know well from the Bible story, the pharaoh does not let the Jews flee in peace. The ten plagues have to rain down on Egypt before he lets them leave; Aaron has to fight against the pharaoh's pursing army; and finally Moses has to part the Red Sea and crash it back on the pharaoh's forces before the exodus is successful.187

This understanding is also present in Virno's work. Looking at the question of violence and revolutionary transformation, Virno returns to the old concept of "ius resistentiae...[t]he right to resistance", a mediaeval term that designates something between self-defence and outright military revolt.188 It described the use of violence when "the community as a whole, or even individual citizens, see certain of their positive prerogatives altered by the central power..." What is
important is that it “involves the preservation of a transformation that has already happened...”\textsuperscript{189} This is the \textit{defence} of the freedoms of the multitude against the state. Virno rejects a negative condition of struggle – in that we negate capitalism to affirm something that is not yet present. Rather Virno argues for the affirmation of a wealth that is already present by breaking the forms of its exploitation.

Violence against the state as much as it defends these freedoms is only part of the emancipatory project for Virno. He writes: “[t]he struggle can carry its destructive nature to its [logical] end only in so far as it already assumes an other way of living, communicating and producing.”\textsuperscript{190} The multitude can only avoid civil war and still carry out its emancipation by limiting its violence whilst simultaneously deploying it. This limitation is premised on the defence and continuation of what the multitude has already achieved. Virno continues: “[v]iolence, if there is violence, is not directed toward tomorrows, but rather at prolonging what already exists, even if informally.”\textsuperscript{191} This helps us cut through the debates between violence and non-violence and also unashamedly and unabashedly articulate an image of struggle that can show the necessity of force yet also break from the militarised history of the past, the charnel house of failed (and successful) revolutions, and differentiate it from Terror.\textsuperscript{lxxi}

\begin{quotation}

The Right to Resistance is an \textit{unlimited} right.\textsuperscript{lxxii} As such Virno postulates that any act of violence and resistance is justified as long as it comes out of and is enriched by the freedoms that our exit from capitalism has generated. In the background there is still the fear that violence could tip over: that being drawn into a military confrontation with the ‘world that is’ would end up evaporating the freedoms of the Republic through a process of militarisation and brutalisation. Still the \textit{unlimited} right of resistance leaves room for, and demands, a plethora of antagonisms. For what impinges on the freedom of Republic, if not the totality of the capitalist social field? It leaves room for any amount of violence against police, against strike-breakers and fascist gangs. But the normalising nature of capitalism
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{lxxi} This is another cleavage between the post-autonomists and writers like Badiou and Žižek, the latter whom affirm the need for terror. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, \textit{Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate} ([cited January 6th 2008]); available from http://www.lacan.com/zizou.htm.

\textsuperscript{lxxii}Virno’s use of the notion of “rights” in this case seems incongruous with the radical nature of his work. This disjunction is not addressed.
is maintained in numerous everyday practices. A right of resistance would extend to the destruction of technologies of monitoring, a resistance to the invasion and recuperation of struggle by the mass media/culture industry, etc. As we noted before, market mechanisms – money – have a purely disciplinary function. Thus strategies associated with the autonomia and post-autonomia such as the self-reduction of prices for utilities, or the mass invasion of supermarkets and the free distribution of reappropriated goods, could be seen as a defence against the everyday tyranny of capital just as much as they can be seen in themselves as moments of exodus. All acts that are premised on the defence of social transformation and the wager that they will not lead to a vortex of brutalisation are sanctioned. Virno writes:

The salient point of "ius resistentiae", which constitutes its principal interest in terms of the question of legality or illegality, is the defence of an effective, tangible, "already" accomplished transformation of the forms of life. The large or small steps, small collapses or large avalanches, of the struggle against waged work allow for an unlimited right to resistance, whilst ruling out a theory of civil war.192

Negri tries to flesh out a fuller image of what such a violence and its relationship to struggle would look like but admits that we are still at a preliminary stage, stating that “[w]e need to invent new weapons for democracy today.”193 However he and Hardt scan across the history of struggle and pull together examples including everything from the Zapatistas to Brutus' tyrannicide of Caesar to "kiss-ins conducted by Queer Nation."194 Since the third example would not be considered violent by many it seems it is not the nature of the act that is important, but its relationship with politics. Hardt and Negri present three principles of the relationship of violence to the democracy of the multitude. Firstly as with the Zapatistas violence must be made subordinate to political struggles and structures. Hardt and Negri write: “[w]hereas the traditional Cuban model poses the military leader dressed in fatigues as the supreme political power, the Zapatistas insists that all the military activity must remain subordinate to the community.”195
“The second principle of the democratic use of violence” Hardt and Negri continue, “is that such violence is only used in defence.”196 However their definition of defence is not one of simple self-defence, but similar to Virno’s idea of the right to resistance (which they cite). It is a defence of collective freedoms and social life that may involve violent and aggressive action. Thus they celebrate Brutus’ pre-emptive action as a defence of the freedoms of the Roman Republic against the coming of Caesar’s tyranny.197 The defence of the freedoms of the multitude can take an aggressive and even fatal, mortal, form. That said Hardt and Negri do not show how such actions could escape the pitfalls of any other pre-emptive strike doctrine.

Thirdly, (and here Hardt and Negri give us no examples) the practice of force must conform to the democracy of the multitude it hopes to defend:

The third principle of the democratic use of violence has to do with democratic organization itself. If according to the first principle the use of violence is subordinated to political process and decision, and if that political process is democratic, organized in the horizontal, common formation of the multitude, then the use of violence too must be organised democratically. Wars waged by sovereign powers have always required the suspension of freedoms and democracy. The organized violence of its military requires strict, unquestioned authority. The democratic use of violence must be entirely different. There can be no separation between means and ends.198

On a simple level this would mean a refusal of the militarisation of struggle, of the development of hierarchical and regimented forces for fighting the state. This is despite that historically violent activity has been closely tied with conspiratorial and secretive groups. Any organisation of violence has to be not only subordinate to and defensive of the multitudes’ democracy but democratic in and of itself. But more deeply a democratic violence works to undermine the very possibility of militarised violence since militarised violence is anti-democratic, a weapon of restraint and coercion. As Hardt and Negri write “[i]t is not a matter of taking power and commanding the armies but destroying their very possibility.” They even allude to, but frustratingly do not define “[a] one-week global
biopolitical strike (that) would block any war”. Perhaps in their defence such things cannot be discovered in books but rather in the vitality and heat of struggle. And such real life and death experiments are currently underway: Oaxaca, Mexico being a clear example. Yet it is still not yet clear if such efforts can defeat the violence of the state, and it is on the outcome of such efforts that the fates of us all turn.

Promises & Limitations

At this point we can see the richness of Negri’s and Virno’s work. They look at the conditions of late-capitalism and turn them on their head, trying to show how they contain within them the possibility of revitalising communist praxis. They suggest that the only way to struggle in contemporary capitalism is through creating democratic collectivities that assert autonomy, undermine the state’s ability to rule and can potentially confront the violence of capital with emancipatory practices. Negri and Virno argue for the creation of non-state democracy and a refusal of sovereignty through exodus and disobedience.

In Virno’s work on the crisis of the political, other forms of activity, namely older radical and Left praxes, are seen as not only being undesirable but actually impossible. Negri on the other hand, in his typically more optimistic and deterministic fashion, sees any struggle as being compelled to take up such radical methods. Writing of the struggle against neo-liberal reforms in France in December 1995 he argued that even defensive and reformist demands are forced – both by the nature of late capitalism and the methods of struggle and subjectivities generated in the revolt – to go beyond these demands. Speaking of how the defensive struggle for the welfare state is compelled to reinvent itself he writes:

The authors also do not give clear criteria on how to differentiate democratic violence from the Rightist and reactionary mass violence that is prevalent in many parts of the globe.
For us the struggles mean that if a "French-style public service" is to continue to exist, it will pose itself in completely new terms, as a first experiment in a reconstruction of the public service within a democratic dynamic of reappropriation of administration, of democratic co-production of services.²⁰⁰

There are two problems with this. Firstly, is the creating of communist social relationship in struggle something specific to the contemporary period or a more general characteristic of the revolt of labour? And secondly, Negri continues one of Marx’s errors. Marx’s work too stressed how the struggle within capitalism by the proletariat is compelled to become the struggle against capitalism. Simply put, by coming together to fight we already begin to transform our social relationships and to resist capital; we already create communism. What is wrong with this is that it creates a kind of deterministic optimism that has trouble wrestling with why these revolts generally do not succeed and also with creating forms of critique against left-wing practices that reinscribe rebellion back into capitalism. Whilst we may create other social forms in struggle this does not guarantee their success. After the failures of the Twentieth Century all we can be sure of is that we cannot be sure of anything. Rather the success of communism rests on the chances taken, wagers made, specific activities taken in contingent circumstances by those in struggle: in short the activity of militants to actually make politics.²⁰¹ This can only be done on the ground, in the clash against capital.

Militancy

What do Negri and Virno offer us as suggestions for conscious activity? What does this mean for militancy? In particular should revolutionaries form organisations

²⁰¹ To quote Badiou, “a political possible must prove its possibility.”
and what is their relationship to the broader class forces and radical thought?

Negri argues that theoretical work such as his tries to find the tendencies in capitalism's development, especially the material basis for contestation, which provides the "ontological premise" which functions as the "basis for re-launching the theory of revolutionary organisation." Yet beyond a conception that political organisation must relate to the possibilities of a figure of class composition Negri is vague about what forms this would take; especially if a separate organisation and/or party is needed. Negri's trajectory is not so much a break with Lenin, but rather an evolution past Lenin, often still holding to the idea of a specialist group of militants, or at least some form of collectivity that could have the same effect. In a letter to Guattari he argues that: "What is needed is a radically democratic type of subversion where organisational forms have the impact of Leninism and the freedom of autonomy." A demand that whilst clearly breaking with the paradigm of democratic centralism still leaves room open for some kind of specific organisational forms. However in a recent essay on Lenin, Negri is ambivalent. Writing about what is needed to transform the flesh of the multitude into an autonomous body he notes:

In order to make the event real, what is required is a demiurge, or rather an external vanguard that can transform the flesh into a body, the body of the general intellect. Or perhaps, as other authors have suggested, might the becoming body of the general intellect not be determined by the word that general intellect itself articulates, in such a way that the general intellect becomes the demiurge of its own body?

Negri's ambiguous use of Lenin is at first even more confusing since what would seem to be the core of a Leninist project is either absent or rejected. There is no time spent arguing for the democratic centralist party, nor does Negri abide a belief in a division between the knowledge available to the party and that available to the broader proletariat. Rather Negri argues that in this historical period the general intellect as part of the substance of the multitude makes such a division superfluous and counterproductive. Negri, like a number of other contemporary

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This leads to another problematic relationship that Negri has with Lenin and Leninism. He does not condemn either but rather argues that they have been made irrelevant and counterproductive by changes in class composition. It is a worrying failure. Negri often condemns the still existing old Left in general but does not tackle the real historical failures that "weigh(s) like a nightmare on the
Left intellectuals, uses Lenin to signify the attempt to reinvigorate communist politics by breaking it from its conventions, reinventing it in relation to specific material situations and then radicalising these situations through direct subjective intervention. Lenin here stands for action.

However such a Leninism should be seen only as a supplement to Negri’s thesis or a troubling and nostalgic connection to operaismo’s original practices. Since the multitude as it works for capitalism already embodies autonomous intellectual cooperation the party, as imagined by Lenin, whether one likes it or not, is irrelevant. The flesh of the multitude already contains these capacities for organisation; they were produced in rebellion and are the core of its productivity. Militancy then is what transforms this organisation into the organisation of emancipation.

Negri locates militancy as being embedded in the life of the common: the activity of being militant is being both steeped in the common and also works to intensify the common. Negri uses the figures of the Industrial Workers of the World organiser and St. Francis of Assisi to explore this. Negri rejects the “sad, ascetic agent of the Third International”. Rather he champions the model of struggle typified by the “militant agitator of the Industrial Workers of the World”. The model of the militant here is one of the generation of solidarities: “[t]he Wobbly constructed associations among working people from below, through continuous agitation, and while organising them gave rise to utopian thought and revolutionary knowledge.” The model of the Wobbly then is of the activity of organisation embodied in the life of the class and not separate from it. The Wobbly does not bring consciousness but constructs what is already there in latent or repressed form: and does so in an open, horizontal and grassroots ways. This praxis is an engagement in the conflicts and antagonism of social struggle and the life of the proletariat. Interestingly the Wobbly militant is celebrated but there

is no valorisation of syndicalist organisations. The militancy Negri suggests is a break from the "organizational formulas of the old revolutionary working class": there is no attempt to call into being the party or the union or even the council.208 But it is a re-emphasis on the constitution of new social forms and collectivity:

Today the militant cannot even pretend to be a representative, even of the fundamental human needs of the exploited. Revolutionary political militancy today, on the contrary, must rediscover what has always been its proper form: not representational but constituent activity. Militancy today is a positive, constructive, and innovative activity. This is the form in which we and all those who revolt against the rule of capital recognise ourselves as militants today. Militants resist imperial command in a creative way. In other words, resistance is linked immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community.209

Militancy works in the here and now to manifest alternatives, and does so due to the imminent possibilities of life in global, postmodern capitalism. The challenge is not to bring organisation and politics to the class, but to manifest the political and organisational capacities that already exist in the multitude. To quote from Multitude: "[w]hat Lenin and the soviets proposed as the objective of the insurrectional activity of an elite vanguard, however, must be expressed today through the desire of the entire multitude."210 The work of the militant arises from the creative potentials that are the common and is a thoroughly creative activity.

Negri's work breaks from the confines of standard political discourse to invoke a deep and radical notion of love as the active substance of militancy. In St Francis of Assisi Negri finds an individual who expresses his politics within reference to the common, poverty and love. Empire finishes with this image of Saint Francis:

There is an ancient legend that might serve to illuminate the future life of communist militancy: that of Saint Francis of Assisi. Consider his work. To denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted the common condition and discovered there the ontological power of a new society. The communist militant does the same, identifying in the common condition of the multitude its enormous wealth.211
Negri’s invocation of love demands a space and seriousness that goes beyond what can be expressed here, but it must be commented on. In *Multitude* it finds an expression that directly links it to an insurgent politics. Negri does not make it clear how love finds political forms; just that it is crucial to the creativity and affirmative practices of struggle. *Multitude* finishes with the statement that the event, the moment of decisions in which the accumulation of struggles leap beyond, is the “real political act of love.”

Love is the generative activity, the process of creation that rises out of us as specific human beings engaged in dynamics of struggle: “love is the constitutive praxis of the common...” And for Negri love and poverty are fundamentally interlinked. He writes in *Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo* that “[w]ithout poverty there is no love.” This is not moralism. It is not a case of celebrating asceticism. In Negri’s work poverty is the condition of our cooperation under capitalism’s exploitation. As such our poverty is both the denial of the control of our own wealth and also the ontological home of communism. Love is the hinge that moves from poverty to communism – it is tightly bound, enmeshed with both (even though exodus is creative, displacing and unbinding). On poverty Negri writes:

Poverty and love are tightly interlinked. Not only because *eros* is the son of misery (and of wealth, in that tension between animality and virtue embodied in the classic centaur) – on the contrary, but because from the start it represents, ontologically, the location from which the power of the whole of the possible is generated. When, having experienced it, we located the power of poverty through the rupture that resistance opened and, at the same time, through the meaning it bestowed on the common, we – in that way – exposed it to a creative and indestructible relation with all the possible to-come.

In Virno’s work published in English we find no indication of a paradigm of militancy beyond the broad politics already presented. However there is a rough translation of an article from the Italian journal *Derive Approdi* entitled “Che te l’ho detto a fare” (translated as “What did I tell you”) and signed by the Immaterial
Workers of the World, which is largely attributed to Virno. This document has appeared in English on the internet and does provide us with a more polemical presentation of potential political activity in Italy and fits in, in a way, with Negri’s work (although Negri’s response and critique of it is also available online).\textsuperscript{lxvi}

This document is both an attempt to ground arguments about new class compositions and the capacities of labour in real activity; and also to open up the possibility of a meaningful revolutionary politics in seemingly non-revolutionary times. Interestingly it argues for a general social income, what it calls a “citizen’s income.” However what it makes explicit is that such a demand is in and of itself not particularly emancipatory. It argues that without locating such a demand in a broader, deeper and more radical series of struggles then the “fervent litany on the citizen’s income is equivalent to a discourse on a ‘more just society’. And discourse on a ‘more just society’ we know is often the alibi of apathy or of the sly winking of petty trade”.\textsuperscript{216}

The demand for a citizen’s income is seen as part of a raft of linked attempts that try to mobilise the autonomous and combative capacities that are linked to mass intellectuality. The two other twin planks include the formation of a “NONREPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY (sic) and the formation of a NON-STATE PUBLIC SPHERE”; and a relaunching and reinvention of “REVOLUTIONARY UNIONISM.” These initiatives try to grasp in practice “the indissoluble unity of unwaged and waged life, work and non-work, emerged social activity and submerged social activity.”\textsuperscript{217}

Non-representative democracy finds expression in “the Social Centre, the Commune, the Soviet”, which proliferate through society creating a radical

counter-administration to the state that is both federal and local. It is concretised counter-power. Like the Zapatista initiated La Otra Campana (which manifests in practice many of the qualities that this article argues for) it is from “below and to the Left”.

The authors imagine local and federal non-state democracy against the ethno-nationalist claims for regionalism. To quote: “Every aspect of a federalist re-articulation of powers and competencies can and must be forced in a Soviet sense; direct democracy, local self-government, revocable mandates, votes for immigrants and their eligibility for communal administration etc.”

The reinvention of revolutionary unionism, an “immaterial workers of the world” is tied into the formation of these spaces. Since production of surplus value happens across society, revolutionary unionism arises both within and without the workplace proper. (This is also referred to as biosyndicalism – life unionism.)

They argue the “grave limits” of the Cobas (autonomous base unions) is their “business-based, or rather territorial character” which causes an “inability to flow out from the stable and guaranteed sectors of employment (public services and big factories). (sic) And to insert itself in the fabric of the flexible, mobile, precarious proletariat. From this its progressive decline.” Such a reinvented revolutionary unionism would also find its power in the forms of non-representational non-state democracy. They write:

The social centres are, potentially, the CHAMBERS OF LABOUR of the archipelago of submersed, intermittent, flexible activity. A postfordist “chamber of labour” combines different and complimentary functions: a permanent RECEPTION CENTRE for clandestine immigration, an autonomous and alternative JOB CENTRE of mass intellectuality, data-base or ARCHIVE of information and knowledge; legal RED AID for questions of working rights; HOUSE OF MUTUAL AID.

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This new form of unionism would not struggle for a return to the supposed security of the past but rather attempt to manifest the capacities of labour in ways that defy capital's control. They continue:

The union pledges itself to elaborating a "statute of rights" of postfordist (sic) labour, that does not oppose "rigidity" to "flexibility" but aims to make of the latter a point of force, or the favourable material base of the institutions of counterpower of living labour. The "statute of rights" requires a long apprenticeship in the form of an INQUIRY, or, but (sic) it is the same, a grasp of the words of the mass.220

The suggestions made in the article are attempts to place the radical in the present, to show the possibility of acting on the basis of what exists today in a way that shifts the dominant social coordinates. Fighting for a citizen's income, building autonomous forms of counter-power would radically change our condition, and in doing so would open up the possibilities of more profound change. They write:

The grand politics, which has as its base the revolutionary syndicalism of the postfordist IWW has in the citizens income NOT yet a point of arrival, BUT of starting. That which really counts are the struggles, the forms of counterpower, the ability to take the initiative of immaterial labour, which can arise on the base of an even very timid supply of money to the unemployed.221

The more things seem possible the more things are possible. They finish the piece stating:

To take the initiative with pliability and lack of prejudice implies, however, the simultaneous construction of an appropriate "place", of a structure far more agile which could co-ordinate, deepen, empower political action. A FORUM FOR NON-REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND A CITIZENS INCOME is the order of the day. To tell the truth it is already late. To favour transversalism is certainly not to limit it. To anticipate a fragment of a non-state public sphere is therefore not a parody. To make visible a collection of analyses, opinions, proposals that, radical but not at all extremist, converge in the demand: CAN YOU IMAGINE REVOLUTION?222
There are two other very interesting elements to this article. One is that it overtly addresses the division within the multitude. As we can see above both Virno and Negri identify how capital might impose divisions and hierarchies on the multitude to hold it in place. In this sense they see such internal divisions as something that are pushed onto and are alien to the multitude’s actual conditions. Also they do not directly address how such things are to be countered except with a general faith in the capacities of the common to cohere the multitude.

Here the Immaterial Workers of the World argue that the “reservoir of postfordist labour is stretched between two trunks...” One is the “middle class”; the various different [forms of] symbolic, scientific, intellectual and cultural workers. The other is the “NEW POVERTY: the immigrants, the subaltern strata of the ‘tertiary sector’, the precarious workers without a safety net, off-the-cards workers.” They argue that a radical praxis must grasp both of these trunks, but that to do so necessitates the task of overt political construction:

It is necessary to determine, through the concrete elaboration of a platform of demands, the point of convergence and of reciprocal potentiality between the “middle class” and the “new poverty”, instead of dealing on the run alternatively with the hardships of the one and the tragedies of the other. But it is necessary to know that a spontaneous recomposition is not possible starting from material conditions. What is needed, in the immediate moment, is a POLITICAL PACT (with some inevitable split within the “middle class”). Or, more precisely, a profitable ALLIANCE.223

Thus in this document we can see the militancy as a series of tasks that will give the multitude form. It is not a question of building an organisation that leads the class but rather organisational efforts that a minority can start, premised on the spreading and generalisation of organisation amongst the multitude as a whole. It is thus a way of reaffirming a catalysing role for the militant (but in a specifically non-privileged and open way) and posing the possibility of activity and initiatives without the vanguardist split of party and class.
The other interesting element is that it directly addresses the relationship to the broader Left in Italy. It poses the importance and possibility of working with militants from Rifondazione Communista (one of the larger left remnants of the Communist Party of Italy). It argues that the organisation is “at a junction”:

... either the fetishization of the party form or getting used to living through the crisis with an inventive and experimental spirit; either to bare as a diminution the (quasi) extraparliamentary condition to which it has been reduced, or to take it as an opportunity to relaunch the social conflict. In synthesis: either the mythic-ritual cult of identity or investing itself (a part of itself, more or less) in a union action at the level of the times.224

Here the writers suggest that the militancy of antagonistic social forces would change the practise and orientations of those in the organised Left. If the projects of exodus began to gain traction then militants of other political tendencies would also be affected and new possibilities of recomposition of Left forces would be created. Even whilst they declare the social democratic project of a “reformist attempt at a ‘workers (sic) use of the state’” invalid, they see the possibility of sections of the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left) and the Greens being won to radical and experimental practices.225

This is quite the opposite from what is normally the stance, especially in Australia, of those to the left of the Left who often regard any engagement with social democracy as the beginnings of recuperation. There is a veritable enthusiasm and optimism in the article; a desire to “[b]et on the improbable. Proceed by trial and error” – that is a real mixture between the risk of the wager and the power of reflection and knowledge.226 Politics can be taken up in a way that tilts the earth on which everything stands, thus making the impossible possible.
The Event

Such a politics help us develop a mode of operating within the framework of the present and in a way that opens up wider emancipatory potentials. It challenges the very coordinates of how the complex series of cooperative and productive relations are experienced and the way the society of control keeps it all together. But revolutionary theory always includes at some level the idea of revolution: the moment of transformation that, whilst rooted in the present conditions, is excessive of it and genuinely poses the alternative of something profoundly different. Activity today is based on this wager of the event. In “Virtuosity and Revolution” Virno takes up the concept of the “Miracle” – that is an event that seems to defy the apparent laws of normality and is "awaited but unexpected.”

This event cannot be predicted by the militants who engage in struggle on the bet of its coming into being:

Rather, it is an exception that is especially surprising to the one who was awaiting it. It is an anomaly so potent that it completely disorients our conceptual compass, which, however, had precisely signalled the place of its insurgence. We have here a discrepancy between cause and effect, if which one can always grasp the cause, but the innovate effect is never lessened.

Thus whilst we struggle on the chance that our efforts may create a moment, an event, that ruptures the rule of capital, such a moment is also excessive of our actions.

Negri also looks to the event, to what he calls Kairos. To quote from Multitude:

When does the moment of rupture come? Earlier we spoke of political decision making in terms of networks of biopolitical determinations and an apparatus of cooperation of the singular wills, but here we have to recognise decision also as an event – not the linear accumulation of Chronos and the monotonous ticking of its clocks but the sudden expression of Kairos.
At the end of *Multitude* we find the repetition of a metaphor of the bow and the arrow. The bow is the conditions of the present; the arrow is rupture, Kairos. “The bow string shoots the arrow of a new temporality, inaugurating a new future.” Where does this leave action today? Hardt and Negri write, “the extraordinary accumulation of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a radical insurrectionary demand.”

### Conclusion

And at this point we hit the end of what is possible with theory. The idea of a radical change to communism, the abolition of capitalism, the generation of emancipation, can at its best only be grasped at the present as a possibility that arises from the antagonisms within the material conditions; maybe from this and an understanding of historical experience, we can suggest a few ways of acting. These ways of acting, this militancy, tilts between the antagonisms of the present and the possibilities hanging in a graspable future. Theory can only ever be a part of all of this. For all the power of Virno’s and Negri’s work, their intellectual archaeology of the present which shows the conflicts that rage under that ideological surfaces of global capitalism, they cannot determine the future. Rather this, as always, comes down to the question of real and specific humans making choices, forming projects, rolling the dice, and taking up the lived risks of the power of communism.
Chapter 9: A Critique of Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno

Introduction

Negri and Virno provide us with a powerful understanding of our condition that helps us imagine the possibilities for emancipation. For Negri and Virno because of the strength of the multitude, communism is a present possibility. Within contemporary capitalism the multitude already exists as "flesh" and through a politics based in its capacities it can transform itself into a "body". Here the multitude achieves autonomy and control of its complex efforts and creative powers. As we move from the multitude as a subject of capitalism to the multitude as multitude proper we transform the social world through mutually reinforcing relations of freedom. Yet there are limitations in their work. Does the multitude, as a concept, actually reflect the global composition of the proletariat? Also both theorists fail to deal with the notion of alienation. This prevents them from reckoning with the commodity and contributes to the noticeable absence of any understanding of the importance of ecology in their work.

Problems with the Multitude

The concept of the multitude is meant to free us from a number of the limits of previous revolutionary politics. It is meant to go beyond the restrictions of 'the people', and it is also meant to open up the spaces of social contestation beyond
the workplace proper. In part both Negri and Virno attempt to do this by showing how, in contemporary capitalism, the creation of value exceeds the workplace and subsumes all of social life. A diverse and complex multiplicity of forms of labour are put to work. The capabilities and competences of all these efforts are the general immaterial and intellectual wealth of living labour. This is the 'general intellect'. This general intellect lives in the broad social life of the proletariat. This is a relatively new development created by the revolts of labour in the 1960s and 1970s. This is the basis of the multitude both for and against capital.

However this is the Achilles heel of both Negri and Virno. Critics are quick to point out that by associating communist struggle with what is productive and new in contemporary capitalism, this makes the multitude very much a creature of the North. What is posited as the common of the multitude seems to fit most clearly to the forms of work in industries based on a high technical composition, yet which only involve a numerical minority of the world's population: information technology, sciences, the media etc.

Critics argue that by privileging intellectual and affective forms of labour Negri and Virno actually recreate what has been a terrible failure of Marxism: the privileging of technically advanced – read Western, or Northern – experiences over global and subaltern ones. George Caffentzis (of the MNC) argues that Negri ignores the vast majority of the world's population. He writes: "What can better account for Negri's methodological oblivion of the planetary proletariat is his adherence to one of the axioms of the(sic) Marxist-Leninism: the revolutionary subject in any era is synthesised from the most 'productive' elements of the class." Caffentzis' contention is that this has always been an error, and that often "the seeming weakest and least productive can be the most powerful in a struggle..."232 Caffentzis' critique is aimed at Labor of Dionysus. Here Hardt and Negri's identification of the new subject of struggle as a "cyborg" does seem to validate Caffentzis' objections.
Of course both Negri and Virno, in their different ways, also try to show how their ideas about affective and intellectual labour stretch out wider than knowledge workers in high tech industries. Virno argues that mass intellectuality is just that: mass. It is a quality of a vast diversity of forms of work. Negri writes with Hardt in *Multitude* about the importance of the poor and unwaged in the production of the common. However, Richard Pithouse, in an article about slum dweller movements, quickly, and critically, picks up on this:

The form of very metropolitan leftism that heralds a coming global redemption by immaterial labourers is more patronising than contemptuous and concludes, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s words, that: ‘To the extent that the poor are included in the process of social production ... they are potentially part of the multitude’. Computer programmers in Seattle are automatically part of the multitude but the global underclass can only gain this status to the extent that their ‘biopolitical production’ enters the lifeworld of those whose agency is taken for granted. The continuities with certain colonial modes of thought are clear.²³³

Negri’s and Virno’s positions are more complex and attentive then is often thought. But their model for the conditions of the multitude certainly fits the sections of the proletariat that live and work in technologically advanced parts of the globe. Now it is important to remember (as Negri argues in *Empire*) that these areas of the globe are part of a complex new geography that does not comply easily with simple North/South, West/everywhere-else binaries. Even industries that use computerised and cybernetic forms of labour are just as, if not more, likely to employ people in the metropolises of India and China then in the rust belts of the North America.

In a general sense the critics are correct: both Negri and Virno, in their different ways, are most attentive to what is new in capitalist production and ascribe these sections of labour a particular weight. Also by creating a historical narrative that only in the current period sees affective and immaterial labour as productive creates other problems. This implies that previously the factory did play the central role in the exploitation of value. As such this reinforces the
devaluing of non-paid labour. It means that there was a time, before the struggles of the mass workers and their allies destabilised the factory centred régime of accumulation, that such work was not really work at all. In Negri's and Virno's schemas it is only because of the extension of production that reproductive labour is worthwhile for struggle and capital. Non-waged labour is thus, in a conceptual sense, still subordinate to wage-labour. Here Holloway's critique that Negri's work relies on a periodisation of capitalism seems very accurate.

The flaw then is not that Negri and Virno simply over-privilege the North, the problem is that they privileged production. Their notions of biopolitical production and post-Fordism argue that value is produced outside of the workplace proper because production is excessive of the workplace proper. Production has become, to paraphrase Negri, the production of social life itself. It is a failure to appreciate that in times where we could see production as a limited sphere, other parts of social life – such as reproduction, consumption, exchange etc – were still fundamentally parts of capitalist society and thus sites of work, contestation and struggle. As Lotta Feminista have shown, even when there was a distinct division between factory and home, the home as the space for the (directly) unpaid labour of reproducing labour-power was crucial to capitalism. In this case the analysis of the MNC is superior to Negri's and Virno's positions, as the MNCs' idea of the commons has allowed them to see the power of the poor throughout capitalism's history, not only now with the development of biopolitical production/post-Fordism.

**Commodification & Alienation**

The stretching out of production to cover the whole social terrain also leaves little or no room for understanding exchange and/or consumption as distinct activities.
Negri and Virno fail to grasp that just as production spreads out and constitutes the social body so too does commodification. This means that the commodity as a concept is effaced in Negri's and Virno's work. Contemporary capitalism is not presented as the creation of commodities, nor more generally is capitalism understood as a commodity society. Rather, for Negri and Virno, it is a question of creativity, of labour, facing the power and control of capital and being compelled to recreate the social relations of society. But how can you grasp the social relationships of capitalism without an idea of the commodity?

The commodity is an essential part of a radical understanding of capitalism. Marx argues in *Capital* that the commodity form is the form through which human activity becomes estranged from itself and is lived through its alienated products. Marx writes:

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's (sic) own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.\(^{234}\)

It is a major failure not to see that real subsumption is also the vast expansion of the commodity across the society at the very same time that society enters into production. Perhaps the discrete line between consumption and production has dissipated but this does not mean that former has disappeared.

The absence of an understanding of the commodity-form means that both Negri and Virno lack a real understanding of alienation. As Holloway has already pointed out it creates numerous problems. It creates an understanding of our condition and our struggle that does not grasp how trapped and fractured we are by the processes of capital that form and encase our lives; that under capitalism
“man’s (sic) own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him.”

By not taking into account the commodity and alienation both Negri and Virno only produce a limited understanding of what ties the multitude to capitalism. In Negri’s and Virno’s work we find a narrative that says the creative power of the multitude is kept within capitalism by both the society of control and capitalism’s use of hierarchies of difference. Both are seen as impositions on the egalitarian and emancipatory differences and creativity of the multitude itself. What this fails to grasp, and this is crucial, is that multitude is held within capitalism by the multitudes’ own efforts. It is our own alienation that traps us within society with an immense weight. In some ways their error is the negative image of Holloway’s error. Like Holloway they fail to grasp communism as the “positive abolition” of capitalism. In their case this means understanding that communism is not just the affirmation of labour beyond capital’s control. The absence of the commodity in their theory means neither Negri nor Virno take into account what needs to be abolished. They fail to see how the revolt of the multitude is not just to free our creative capacities from capitalist forms but also from our own alienated creations. And this means the negation of those parts of us and our life-world which cannot be freed from capital, parts that we ourselves have built.

Just as Negri and Virno have investigated the rise of immaterial and affective labour, we need to start to grasp how commodification also takes on increasingly immaterial and affective forms. Such an investigation would look at how alienated creativity is not only embodied in a separate “thing” but also that commodification

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lxxviii We have already seen John Holloway’s critique of this element of the perspective of autonomy, their failure to understand how labour constitutes itself in alienated forms and this is what also must be rebelled against. For a similar and excellent critique of this position see Werner Bonefeld, “Human Practice and Perversion: Beyond Autonomy and Structure” in Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics, ed. Werner Bonefeld (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2003), 164.
can exist bound within the complex social relations of biopolitical production and/or post-Fordism.

But wait. Here is a problem. Marx's notion of alienation has always been that through our work we invest in 'things' social relations and 'human' qualities that then mediate our existence. In this sense, according to Marx, our labour under capitalism has *always* been immaterial and affective. Take, for instance, Marx's famous example of the commodity fetishism, a wooden table which "evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas". The production of commodities, and our experience of them, involves the very qualities that Negri and Virno see as specific to immaterial and performative work. This is because the commodity always has an immaterial aspect and it has always been performative. This does not negate Negri's and Virno's work, rather it presents a complicated problem that needs to be addressed. Without doing so their writings are deficient.

**How New is the Now?**

Here a whole raft of Negri and Virno's work can be called into question. Their periodisation of the present identifies many elements of modern capitalist society as being new, and novel, and it is here that communist potential is formed. But are these phenomena new? Notions of reproductive labour identify how affective and immaterial work has always been crucial to capitalism. If we interrogate Negri's argument about war, we could respond by arguing that capitalism has *always* used war against proletarian revolt and the potential for communism. Similarly, *over* associating communism with contemporary conditions of capitalism works to deny that communism has been a potential *throughout* capitalism's history. It is

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\textsuperscript{xxxix} Here Debord's work springs to mind, see Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. Also its updated application by the collective Retort would be useful, see Retort et al., *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London & New York: Verso, 2005).
very useful that Negri and Virno free us from a paradigm of class and struggle so we can confront capitalism as it is now. Yet the narrative they use (Negri more so than Virno) to do this reduces previous revolts to just steps towards the development of the multitude. Again Holloway’s critique of the presence of periodisation in Negri’s work is accurate. As too is the MNCs’ work which shows the power of proletarians, whatever their stage of ‘development’, to produce communism.

The solution of this problem is to acknowledge what is new and what is the not, to grasp the lines of continuity, and also to refuse to ascribe previous forms of rebellion a teleology that points to today.

Problems with Negri’s Politics

Negri also falters when he attempts to provide more concrete suggestions for a possible politics of the multitude. Empire finishes with an attempt to develop a general program that could help the multitude actualise emancipation. This takes the form of demands which are meant to reflect the current struggles of the multitude and also give them a richer form. At best I think they are meant to be read as suggestions for points of struggle. These demands are “global citizenship”: “[t]he general right to control its own movement is the multitude’s ultimate demand for global citizenship”; “a social wage and a guaranteed income for all”; and “the right to reappropriation.”

What is striking is the disproportionate nature of these demands. The demands are not equivalent in their achievability or compatibility with capitalism. A social wage, for example, is something that various post-social democratic forces see as being a relatively sane and achievable idea in the North. However the “right to reappropriation”, for example, which the authors argue is “really the multitude’s
right to self-control and autonomous self-production" is compatible only with communism. Also these demands reflect a bias towards the global North. There is a complete absence of demands that take up some of the more pressing concerns of the vast mass of the world, for instance access to drinking water, or the defence of communal land, or even basic medication. (Unless these are part of the catch-all demand of "the right to reappropriation"). The demands do not address any ecological concerns.

Beyond the flawed and disproportionate content of these demands, the very fact that they are demands is problematic. They remain part of the political cosmos of capitalism. The demand for global citizenship, still implies that there is something to be a citizen of; the borders may be open by the state remains. Who says we want an income as such? Isn’t communism the revolt against money, which as Negri has already informed us, has “becomes the artificial reality of a command which is despotic, external, empty, capricious and cruel”? Also that these demands are framed as demands, as demands for rights, also seems like a return to the worst of social democratic practice. For a demand for rights to be realised means the continuation of some sovereign apparatus that can grant rights. And to whom is the demand addressed? Demands are most often made to the state. Thus Negri’s suggestions can only be conceived as being premised on the continual existence of the state. This is the opposite orientation of the politics of exodus, where the multitude is meant to evacuate away from these political forms. This means that the strength in Negri’s work, the linking of the struggle of the multitude with the creation of new forms of non-state non-representative democracy, is tossed aside. What an error!

Perhaps this critique is ungenerous. Perhaps these demands are not aimed at the state, but are attempts to generate struggles: struggles that in their development would deepen social antagonism and weaken capitalism to the point that revolutionary movements would become unstoppable. Perhaps they are meant to function as an engine of communist accumulation: slogans to fight around
now, to cohere together the multitude, and to do so in a way that we experience how our capabilities could start to go beyond capitalism. Maybe these are being suggested as the preparatory ground for an event, for the developing of struggle in the hope that they generate enough momentum to lead to real ruptures. Or perhaps what is being developed here is a different temporality of struggle where the split between capitalism and liberation becomes slippery and communism is generated within capitalism. Do we see again the figure of the IWW building the new world in the shell of the old?

Even if we were to accept that the demands are meant to play this role, this does not take away from the limited and problematic nature of the demands themselves or of demands in general. Negri does not address or qualify the ambiguities in his suggestions and therefore they detract from the vitality and freshness of his politics.

The Absence of Ecology

As mentioned a weakness of Negri’s and Virno’s work is their failure to articulate an understanding of alienation, and thus explain the role of negation in struggle. This can be seen most strikingly in their seeming inability to articulate an ecological element as part of their analysis and politics. Few things so clearly and grotesquely express alienation better than the vast ecological destruction caused by global capitalism. Here the combined, collective creativity of humanity, which in a very simple yet profound way is biological, despoils the entire biological health of the planet. Pollution is alienation concretised. (Not to say anything of concrete itself!)
We find no mention of ecology in Virno’s work. It is more complicated in Negri’s. On the surface Negri seems to hold to Old Left ideas that what is wrong is the capitalist control of a piece of technology rather than the structure of production itself. But he actually goes further than this, rejecting the idea that we can conceive of something called nature outside of the activity and artificial creation of humanity. In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri write this on genetic modification:

This question of ownership seems to us the central issue in the current debates over genetically modified foods. Some have sounded the alarm that genetically modified Frankenfoods are endangering our health and disrupting the order of nature. They are opposed to experimenting with new plant varieties because they think that the authenticity of nature or the integrity of the seed must not be violated. To us this has the smell of a theological argument about purity. We maintain, in contrast, as we have argued at length already, that nature and life as a whole are always already artificial, and this is especially clear in the era of immaterial labor and biopolitical production. That does not mean, of course, that all changes are good. Like all monsters, genetically modified crops can be beneficial or harmful to society. The best safeguard is that experimentation be conducted democratically and openly, under common control, something that private ownership prevents. What we need most today in this regard are mobilizations that give us the power to intervene democratically in the scientific process.240

This passage correctly discards the binary division between humanity and nature and argues for knowledge to be freed from its statist and capitalist entrapments. Also we see the importance of hybridity, of “the monster” in emancipatory politics. This demonstrates again Hardt and Negri’s debt to Donna Haraway. Problematically though, their position reinscribes the modernist faith in technology. Whilst they do advocate democratic control of scientific processes,

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**bxx** In *Communists Like Us* written with Guattari there is a small reference to ecological politics and its radical potential. Written in the context of the Cold War they argue: “Green is born neither from the red of the socialist regimes nor from the black of the capitalist regimes. It is born from refusing poverty and oppression wherever it proliferates and from the urgent desire to be freed from the fear of capitalist control wherever it is imposed.” Guattari and Negri, *Communists Like Us: New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance*, 101. This rather unecological endorsement of ecology is arguably the result of Guattari’s influence rather than Negri’s. Ecology was at the time one of the areas of Guattari’s investigation. Cf. Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995). This presents his highly original placement of ecology in with themes of subjectivity and contemporary capitalism. Also Negri writes at the time of his exile in France and collaborations with Guattari, the latter was focused on building a “union between Reds and Greens”. Negri and Dufourmantelle, *Negri on Negri*, 47.

**bxxi** Though they only read this one way: that everything is artificial. Equally it can be be read that everything is natural.
they fail to create a critique that would actually expose how certain technological and productive processes are embodiments of capitalist power with an inescapable ecological cost. There is no taking into account that technologies may not be neutral, but rather might be marked by the process that created them. This position cannot even start to confront the very real ecological catastrophe we have created nor grasp how ecological struggles create hybridities, subjectivities and politics that are profoundly radical and emancipatory. It is a terrible error.

Possibly, and this is very troubling, this error is not just a product of oversight or commitment to a previous pattern of thought. Perhaps it lies in Negri’s (and also Virno’s) commitment to the radical potential of the general intellect and what that rests upon. Both authors argue that, contra Marx, the general intellect exists within living labour not machinery. However, the lived experience of the creation and application of the general intellect is enmeshed within a technological composition, namely digital and computerised technologies. These technologies are only possible because of the current global system of production which is responsible for the current condition of ecological devastation. Can the general intellect in its exodus from capitalism free itself from the poisoned soil it has been planted in? Or can it reproduce itself in new ways that involve a different technological composition that can maintain the dynamism and creativity of the present without its ecocidal effects? If Negri’s and Virno’s Republic cannot meet this challenge it is not a viable form for the thinking of contemporary radicalism.

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xxxii For an application of the perspective of autonomy to the question of technology, and an overview of how the perspective has seen the issue see Dyer-Witheford, Cyber-Marx: Cycles of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism.

xxxiii I am not suggesting by using the term ‘we’ that all humans bear an equal moral responsibility for the poor state of the world. It is crucial to take into account the divisions of power and wealth amongst the global population as we try to stop the horrendous exploitation of the planet. Ahistorical and context-less conceptions of a general ‘humanity’ work to mask the power relationship of capitalism and thus prevent us from addressing the root causes of our situation.

Personally I believe just as Negri and Virno went beyond Marx, so too we must go beyond them. The key to this is to return to an understanding of alienation and the idea that the affirmation of labour beyond capital integrally involves, at least in part, the negation of the life-world that capital has compelled it to create. We could perhaps take Negri's use of the “New Barbarians” but deploy it in ways that place a radical relation to the non-humans at its centre. That is, the new hybrid forms of life that the multitude creates in our exodus must generate different and other relations with the ecologies we exist within.

**Conclusion**

Negri’s and Virno’s work thus needs to be confronted with its absences and errors. The multitude, which is meant to free us from many of the previous limitations of conceptions of class by posing the possibility of a multiple subject, is still marked by a tendency to emphasise the experience of the global North as the experience of the entire globe. Their work on biopolitical production and post-Fordism fails to really take into account the commodity, and thus presents a limited understanding of labour. They do not grapple with how life in commodity society is life alienated. They thus make a similar but inverted mistake to Holloway and fail to grasp the need to both affirm *and* negate labour. This contributes to the absence of any serious engagement with ecological thought.

Negri and Virno do give us radical understandings of the antagonisms within the material conditions of capitalism, a new way to think about class, and the general framework of communist politics. Yet if we are to think of the multitude as the proletariat of the globe it must reflect the globe. We need to take into account the commodity form, and the need to negate the reification of our creativity. We
need also to face the challenges of ecology and try to develop ways that the general intellect, the common of the multitude, can exist against the ecocidal framework it currently resides in. The compelling vision of Republic must be changed and augmented by these challenges or it cannot truly face the crisis that we inhabit.
2 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 268.
4 Ibid., 111.
5 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 225.
6 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 358.
8 Sylvere Lotringer, "Foreword: We, the Multitude," in A Grammar of the Multitude, Paulo Virno (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 16.
9 Ibid., 16-17.
10 Negri and Dufourmantelle, Negri on Negri, 111.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 22.
16 Ibid., 42.
17 Ibid., 79.
18 Negri and Dufourmantelle, Negri on Negri, 112.
19 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 99.
20 Ibid., 101.
23 Ibid., 1020.
24 Ibid., 875.
25 Ibid., 1021.
28 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 209.
31 Ibid., 24.
32 Ibid., 28.
33 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 28.
36 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 28.
37 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 109.
38 Ibid., 148.
39 Antonio Negri and Alex Callinicos, Multitude or Working Class (cited 21st October 2007); available from http://www.generation-online.org/t/negriESF.htm.
40 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 141.
41 Ibid., 145.
42 Ibid.
43 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 102.
44 Ibid., 102-03.
47 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 103.
48 Marx, Grundrisse: Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft), 704-05.
49 Ibid., 706.
51 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 106.
53 Ibid.
54 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 193.
55 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 105.
56 Ibid., 102.
57 Ibid., 101.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 62.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 193.
64 Ibid.
65 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 52.
67 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 30.
68 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 109.
69 Ibid., 107.
70 Ibid., 112.
72 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 29.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 30.
75 Ibid., 289-90.
76 Ibid., 290.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 291.
79 Ibid., 290.
80 Ibid., 291.
81 Ibid.
83 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 292.
84 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 108.
85 Ibid., 110.
86 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 146.
87 Ibid.
89 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 42.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 349.
93 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 105-06.
94 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 349.
95 Ibid., 350.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 130.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 131.
100 Ibid., 132.
101 Ibid., 132-33.
102 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 68.
103 Virno, General Intellect.
104 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 83.
105 Joseph, Interview with Paulo Virno.
108 Deleuze, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*
111 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 331.
112 Ibid., 340.
113 Ibid., 345.
115 Ibid., 218.
120 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 393.
121 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 189.
122 Virno, "Do You Remember Counter Revolution?."
124 Ibid., 50.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 63.
128 Ibid., 51.
130 Joseph, Interview with Paulo Virno.
131 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 204.
140 Joseph, Interview with Paulo Virno.
141 Ibid.
142 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 199.
143 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 197.
149 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 196.
150 Ibid., 199.
152 Ibid., 214-15.
153 Ibid., 216.
155 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 216-18.
156 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 242.
157 Ibid., 252.
158 Ibid., 254.
159 Ibid., 237.
162 Ibid., 203.
163 Ibid.
164 Virno, "Do You Remember Counter Revolution?," 254.
165 Costa, Between Disobedience and Exodus: Interview with Paulo Virno.
166 Joseph, Interview with Paulo Virno.
167 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 203.
168 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 358.
170 Ibid., 13.
171 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 69-92
172 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 309.
175 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology Part One, 56-57.
176 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 12.
177 Ibid., 13.
178 Ibid., 342.
179 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution." 
180 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 204.
181 Ibid.
182 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 197.
184 Ibid., 70.
185 Ibid.
187 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 341-42.
189 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 206.
190 Virno, From Violence to Resistance.
191 Ibid.
192 Virno, From Violence to Resistance.
193 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 347.
194 Ibid., 341-47.
195 Ibid., 342.
196 Ibid., 343.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid., 345.
199 Ibid., 347.
203 Ibid., 167.
207 Ibid., 412.
208 Ibid., 413.
209 Ibid.
211 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 411.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Immaterial Workers of the World, *What Did I Tell You?*
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 209.
228 Ibid.
229 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 357.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid., 358.
232 Caffentzis, "The End of Work or the Renaissance of Slavery?," 129.
238 Ibid., 47.
239 Negri, "Constituent Republic," 249.
Conclusion

Here, at the end of this thesis, where does the work of John Holloway, the Midnight Notes Collective and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno leave us, and where does it offer to take us? Firstly what is noticeable about all three is the general sense of optimism, the constant belief in the power of the apparently powerless. All of them refute the depiction of our times as that of the unchallengeable victory of capitalism and the disappearance of rebellious social subjects. They revitalize the notion of class to meet the challenges of our condition. They present understandings and narratives of neoliberalism as primarily a reaction to the rebellious strength of the proletariat. All three tendencies do not merely assert an unchallenged or constant image of class – rather they willingly revisit and reinvent the notion of class to show its dynamic relevance and from here they put forward the potential of communism. This is what a materialist critique of the social order has to do – to show the living potential of free social relations; a potential that arises from the antagonisms that constitute the social order itself.

Theory and Politics from the Perspective of Autonomy

Holloway’s work acts like a powerful corrosive – all that is solid melts into air. His uncomfortable and challenging mixture of *operaismo* with Critical Theory (“Adorno meets Tronti”) breaks apart the concrete appearance of capitalist domination.¹ Holloway presents us an image of social reality where everything is split and torn by the internal antagonism between creativity and its alienation. The solid and positivist notion of class is rejected as being too tied to capitalist reality. Holloway repositions class struggle as the struggle *against* class – a dangerous
magma that seethes through capitalist society. The explosive and creative potential that capital tries to harness also contains the power to negate capitalism. The core to Holloway's work is "against": negation. It manifests in the "scream", the explosive "NO". This allows a critique of alienation and the commodity, which is otherwise scarce and/or submerged in much of the perspective of autonomy.

Holloway pits himself against all ideas of identity, seeing them as being limited and alienated forms of existence and largely incapable of sustaining genuinely revolutionary politics (or as Holloway often writes "anti-politics"). In a slightly too swift move he argues that the only radical component of identity politics is their rejection of previous forms of identity.

Holloway's work both advances and challenges the understandings of the perspective of autonomy. Holloway notes that too often the perspective posits the conflict between capital and labour as an "external" relation. Holloway on the other hand argues that it is an internal relationship: labour struggles from within the capital relationship to cease being reduced to labour. This makes the creation of communism hinge on the proletariat's rebellion against its very condition of being proletarian. In this sense it revives the radical and subversive core of the idea of the proletariat that we find in The German Ideology.

For Holloway this means that many of the previous strategies of the Left, especially those that operate around the idea of taking state power, are based on a dangerous illusion. They are built on the idea that society is solid, and that the proletariat needs to cement itself to challenge capitalism. Also, Holloway contests, a politics that is aimed towards the state is colonised by the logic of the state and thus of capitalist society. He argues that these misunderstandings lead to an inability to see what is truly subversive in the proletarian condition, and thus they fail to really challenge capitalism – with often bloody consequences.
But just as Holloway corrodes the solidity of capitalist appearances he also corrodes the ground that an emancipatory politics can emerge from. There is an ahistoricism to his work, and he struggles to get to anything beyond suggesting a general notion of radical democracy and anti-Leninism. He not only emphasises negation, he reduces all struggles to negation. Thus he does not grasp that communism is the "positive abolition" of capitalism, that in part our struggles are struggles to continue and endure, and he flattens the multiplicity of proletariat. These weaknesses are emphasised even more when we compare the actual politics of the Zapatistas – whom he celebrates – with Holloway's representation of them. The Zapatistas suggest a praxis that is far more attentive to context, embraces identity in complicated ways and is built around ideas of both negation and affirmation. Holloway does present a dynamic and subversive image of capitalism, reinvents a conception of class and proposes a general idea of struggle, but his development of politics is limited since his understanding of class struggle is also limited.

The Midnight Notes Collective also develops the perspective of autonomy in ways that challenge the orthodoxies of capital and class. They take the idea of primitive accumulation and transform it from its previous role as a signifier of the opening acts of capitalism into a tool of analysis that makes us rethink the entire narrative of capital's history and the nature of class and struggle. The MNC describe neoliberalism as the "New Enclosures" and simultaneously redefine the logics of the original enclosures. True to Tronti's 'Copernican inversion', MNC participant Silvia Federici argues that the original enclosures, the very opening of capitalism, were a reaction to the revolts of mediaeval peasantry. A stunning thesis in itself, the neoliberal "New Enclosures" are then seen as a capitalist counter-attack against the accumulated power of proletarian struggles. Just as the original enclosures dispossessed people from the commons of subsistence, so too capital dispossesses people from their previous sites of struggle which provided them with reservoirs of resistance and alternatives. The struggle of capital and labour is recast as one in which the proletariat makes the commons: the commons are places of, and are created by egalitarian social relations, which then provide a combative autonomy and can be the beginnings of the creation of communism. The
MNC see the violence and immiseration that capital unleashes as attempts to break this power and to force the creative capacity of the proletariat back into its regime of accumulation. The work of the MNC shows us potentials effaced by orthodox Marxism (and often the perspective of autonomy), and produces a powerful counter-narrative to capitalism and neoliberalism. Also it is the only one of the three tendencies that really tries to address the question of ecology in a meaningfully radical way. This general lack of an engagement with environmental concerns profoundly dams the whole perceptive of autonomy. To be relevant at all for the emancipation of people and planet any form of anti-capitalism must seriously take up 'green' questions. It succeeds in analysing a potential for the creation of new modes of living – but is limited in suggesting a way toward their creation.

The MNC also takes up the feminist variants of operaismo pioneered by Lotta Feminista. It pays close attention to the importance of unwaged reproductive labour and also the role that gender plays both in how capitalism exploits labour and as a necessary prior condition to the creation of the proletariat. Therefore the MNC create a radical inversion of some of operaismo's fundamentals. Operaismo, whilst breaking with most of orthodox Marxism still attaches a prime importance to those workers associated with the most technically advanced, and thus apparently productive, forms of labour. Such a paradigm privileged the roles of these workers for capitalism and placed them as the hegemonic force of rebellion and struggle. The MNC show the importance of the work of the unwaged (in kitchens, ghettos, prisons, barrios, fields and jungles); their importance to the functioning of capitalism means that they have the ability to challenge it. In this sense they critique Marxist orthodoxy, open up our fields of understanding, complement other similar arguments and present new possibilities about where and how communism can emerge. In their work the commons functions as a constant embodied possibility of an outside to capitalism: various different commons are always generated by struggle, and thus outsides are created from which new worlds can be formed. The struggles of the Zapatistas, their refusal of state power and the attempt to construct living autonomy and subsistence provides a powerful inspiration.
But the MNC falters. Their definition of the commons becomes increasingly slippery due to being over-stretched; they struggle to adequately and convincingly identify the commons in the North. Paradoxically whilst their work is inspired by the feminism of *Lotta Feminista* their position works against articulating a specific feminist praxis. The over-stretching of the commons leads to an inability to distinguish between the radical potential of proletarian autonomy and the compromises of social democracy and the welfare state. This then means that they struggle to actually articulate an *offensive* radical politics and begin to slide into defences of previous reforms of capitalism and sometimes put forward reformist and social-democratic positions. Also they become so supportive of *any* struggle they have difficulties (especially in latter works) critiquing the problematic ideologies that often encase these struggles. MNC participant p.m. presents a highly utopian depiction of how generating an *outside* can become a challenge to capitalism. This utopian vision also cannot create a viable conception of the necessary politics of antagonism that could actually challenge capitalism.

Of the three tendencies explored in this work it is the final tendency, that of Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno, that presents us with the most compelling vision of a potential politics. The power of these concepts is that they re-fire the radical imagination about the possibilities for struggle beyond the failings and wreckage of the Left of the 20th century. However it is limited in its development – we are not presented with a clear image of what form of organisation and activity militants will take. Rather a general image of the struggles of the multitude is suggested built around the concepts of “exodus” and “disobedience”. And Negri and Virno do not take into account concepts of alienation and fetishism and this reduced the depth of their critique of capitalism.

There are important differences between Negri’s and Virno’s work. Yet both use a concept of the multitude, a concept which they draw from what they see as being new about contemporary class compositions; what they see as being the
possibilities of struggle; and an engagement with Spinoza. Broadly, both stress that
the contemporary conditions, predicted in Marx's work on real subsumption, are
ones where the distinction between work and non-work dissipates. Social life as a
whole is put to work. In this condition labour becomes, or is typified by, its
immaterial and communicative aspects. This situation they see as coming about
due to capital trying to respond to the challenges and innovations of the revolts of
the 1960s and 70s. In such a situation old forms of politics and organising have
been superseded by the contemporary class composition. Many theorists of post-
Fordism see in it an end of class struggle because class struggle is for them defined
by the kinds of relationship that took place in the mass Fordist factory. Negri and
Virno on the other hand argue post-Fordism is all about class struggle: and that
class struggle needs to be rethought in post-Fordism.

In their work we find the reinvention of terms like "General Intellect" (for
example) to explain the way that the complex whole of social thought is both put to
work and yet is a force of social struggle. There is a tension in that intellectual
labour is largely seen as defining the overall process of value creation and
exploitation, yet both Negri and Virno break with the idea of a singular social
subject. Rather a multitude is possible. A multitude both as the diversity of how we
are all compelled to work in post-Fordism: as a constellation of different
singularities; and also a multitude as the way to think about the Many in struggle.
Whilst the idea of 'the people' is one of disparate entities coming together to form a
single whole, the multitude signifies a cooperative many. Rather than coming
together as a homogenous unity to face capital, the multitude works together and
maintains its active diversity. It does so because it has the common at its centre.
Despite their differences both Negri and Virno see this common to be the
immaterial and social qualities of the multitude. The common allows the multitude
to function both for and against capital. In this sense Negri's and Virno's work
focuses on taking, in part, what exists in capital and going beyond it.
It is not then surprising that their suggestions for struggle focus on *exodus*. Not a literal running away but rather ways of creating social life that leave the orbit of capital. This can be imagined as the direct creation of assemblies and collectives that pull creativity out of the nexus of the state and work. This is then coupled with *disobedience*. Disobedience describes asymmetrical conflicts with the state (and forms of social control) that aim not to take state power, but rather to disable its ability to maintain order and control. Whilst these terms are very broad they do inspire an incendiary and useful image of action. They suggest that to resist capitalism we should create myriad collective forms of non-representative direct democracy and then refuse to be ruled. The hope then is to escape the deadlock of having to choose either elections or civil war. Virno’s depiction of such a politics remains perhaps too open, whilst Negri tries too hard to force the point. He even creates a series of demands that seem both illogical and unappealing and weaken rather than strengthen his argument.

Yet the real weakness in both Negri and Virno is that there is little demonstrated understanding of alienation (unlike Holloway) and thus a failure to see that the revolt against capitalism must also be in part a revolt by labour against being labour and its congealed and concretised forms – not merely the capitalist control of labour. Perhaps Negri and Virno do see this but express it with a different emphasis. Perhaps they see that labour moving beyond the control of capital is actually labour radically changing its condition: creativity actually becoming autonomous and living on its own terms. Yet the failure to fully reckon with the commodity, its weight and power, is a real flaw. It means that they struggle to create a critique that can deal with the ecological destruction caused by the capitalist mode of production. They can only conceive of labour in a positive and affirmative way and thus cannot take into account how within capitalism labour is manifested in forms that lead to extreme ecological destruction. Here the contributions of the MNC are superior.
What is Possible?

So where has this brought us, and where does it leave us? It is an error to be too damning of the absences in any writer’s work. Surely writing can only ever be part of larger movements and bigger conversations. We must leave behind the paradigm of revolution that saw theory as something fully formed, emerging from the heads of geniuses, complete and coherent and just waiting for the grateful masses to take up. Any theoretical endeavour, no matter how ambitious, can only ever be part of the picture – and of course there is no simple picture out there with nice neat borders to grasp in full view anyway. It is not useful to attempt any kind of synthesis of the three positions in a hope that each will cover the flaws in the other until they make some kind of Unified Field Theory of the perspective of autonomy. Rather we can read across all three and pull out some common elements of their politics.

Firstly there is a commitment to anti-statism. Whilst the MNC are occasionally unclear about how they understand social democracy in some of their writings, all of the three tendencies reject the idea of seizing state power through bullet or ballot. This is not however, something they arrive at from an abstract ideological position. Rather they argue that taking state power is antithetical to the way the proletariat struggles. The antagonisms in the material conditions of capitalism cannot be manifested into communism through the state. Instead they move towards the creating of collective horizontal organisation that breaks out of the entire logic of capitalism. Secondly this leads all three to reject the idea of the Leninist party. Whilst Negri may have some affections and use for Lenin, and Caffentzis present a thread of continuity with Lenin even as he breaks with Leninism, none of them argue that a separate formal organisation is needed to bring consciousness to the masses. Rather all argue that the proletariat, however they imagine it, is its own liberator. Communism arises from self-activity and revolutionaries have no special place. Consciousness does not need to be brought to people from without, but is created through struggle from the bottom up.
Also all three reject a homogenised paradigm of class. Multiplicity is the key to all three tendencies. The prioritisation of the blue-collar factory worker is overthrown. Struggle can now emerge anywhere across the social terrain – all of it is part of the fight of creativity against exploitation. And all three tendencies want to stress the possible commonality of struggles but also their singularity. There is a proliferation of forms of resistance that cannot be simply reduced to each other, but neither are they just disconnected social movements resisting hegemony. Here is a possible reason why all three perspectives only give vague outlines of actual political forms: to genuinely accept multiplicity is to accept that different struggles will struggle differently. It is problematic to try to impose an organisational model from outside. Rather as the MNC suggest in relationship to their work on the Zapatistas, what is needed is to circulate experiences so something can then develop. But a distinction needs to be made between refusing to try to concoct a universal politics from the brilliance of your own intellect and refusing to make suggestions for militancy as a contingent intervention. At some point all you end up doing is holding yourself back by denying your own specific subjective power. One of the things that is so powerful about the struggle of the Zapatistas is that they have developed the ability to take initiative, to generate proposals and also to remain open and welcoming to the different struggles of others.

And whilst all three tendencies reject a homogenous view of class, they do provide some explanation for what holds the disparate experiences of labour together. For Holloway it is the scream, for the MNC the commons, and for Negri and Virno it is the common, or One, at the centre of the multitude. But it is here that all three make their greatest errors and actually start to reduce and efface the real differences that exist amongst the exploited of the globe. It is difficult territory, especially as across the world people experience differences solidifying into identities in the most violent and reactionary ways. The idea of the proletariat has

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A recent work composed of an interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos conducted with the collective El Kilombo Intergaláctico shows the thinking behind this; how the Zapatistas see the interrelationship of creativity, encounters, difference and rebellion. El Kilombo Intergaláctico, Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos.
always been one that sees us *unified* as we are exploited. And in this study we have seen three attempts to explain this unity in creative ways, ways that are mindful of the errors of the past. Yet still they attempt to show that within the condition of proletarianisation exits the objective conditions of solidarity. The diversity of experience of proletarianisation are glassed over, or at the least reduced to some extent because all three tendencies in part reduce the need for actual politics.

It is only Virno, as part of the ‘Immaterial Workers of the World’, in “Che te lo dico a fare” who argues for the need for a separate distinct political practice to realise both the solidarity and multiplicity of the multitude. This is reminiscent of Zapatistas’ concept of the word, of the task of political construction. Does the word express to each other our pre-existing unity due to our material conditions, or does the task of political construction facilitate a space where our experiences of exploitation and refusal can come together? At some level what matters is the rejection of a homogenous paradigm of class and the willingness to organise collectively and be engaged in the difficulties and challenges of multiplicity.

Finally all three argue for the creation of the future in the present. Communism is a question of the now, and a transitionary stage, such as socialism, is unnecessary and destructive. This means that they do not make a split between means and ends and they reject a stagest idea of transformation: two clear breaks with Orthodox Marxism and Leninism. Rather struggle is seen as the creation of alternative social relations in the here and now. Where there is some kind of distinction between struggles in the present and future emancipation, say over the role of violence, acts today must be consistent with the kinds of life we wish to create. The way that we transform society is by transforming society. This breaks with the politics of sacrifice and denial of much of the Left – that we suffer now for joy later. Again this cannot be seen as ideological or abstract utopianism. All three tendencies argue that this is because communist potential already exists – the basis is already here for other worlds; and this basis is our creativity and the cooperation of our labour. Holloway is particularly good at showing how those
who deny the creation of emancipatory forms of living in the name of being realistic about the necessary challenges it takes to actually fight capitalism, end up not really fighting capitalism at all: rather they challenge only the surface manifestation of domination. However, at times both the MNC and Negri allow a certain tactical support for social democracy to creep into their work; something that their own theory struggles to justify and is an error.

The perspective of autonomy as developed by these three tendencies shows the very basis of hope. They dispel the pall of defeat that came with the failure of really existing socialism and the rise of neoliberalism by showing that radical antagonisms continue. They rejuvenate and change our understanding of class in ways that make it fit the contemporary conditions; and also in ways that open its radical content to include a wider range of refusals and rebellions. And they show that not only is it possible to struggle, but that the forms of struggle that are possible are far more appealing than those we often felt compelled to use before. The horizons are open.

A Final Aporia

Throughout this entire thesis there is a question that hovers worryingly, a disagreement that threatens the optimism of the work. We have encountered narratives that see class struggle challenge capitalism, but never actually destroy it. The authors maintain a strange disconnection; they present a past in which the creativity of struggle has failed to create communism and its most concrete result has been the reconstruction of capitalism. Capitalism has harnessed the dynamism of revolt to further its domination. As Tronti writes “[c]apitalist power seeks to use the workers’ antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development.” Has it not been largely successful at this? Why are we to believe that now labour will
suddenly be able to go beyond its boundaries? The perspective of autonomy convincingly shows the rebellious and excessive nature of labour – yet how can it account for the failure to actually create communism? Are the struggles of labour ultimately similar to any other form of work: just grist to capital’s mill?

This is obviously a bigger problem within Marxist and revolutionary thought more generally, which positions itself in the tension between what is and what can be and shows the combustive disjunction between the two. This is what Benjamin invokes when he writes that the task of the historical materialist is to “blast open the continuum of history.”

Previous forms of radical thought (especially so-called scientific Marxism) tried to deal with this tension by either the *deus ex machina* of the capitalist crisis or by looking to an extra subjective element of the party/organisation. That is, due to some internal fault of capital we would be inevitably compelled towards a moment when capitalism must be overthrown. Or that a certain formation of militants could provide the extra momentum, that special something, that would catalyse the situation into an explosion. The strength of the perspective of autonomy is that it simultaneously rejects such determinist and vanguardist notions which submerged the radical agency of the vast majority of people by attributing the power to change society to either cold internal machineries or the special group of committed revolutionaries.

This opens a space. But none of the tendencies here convincingly fill it. Holloway and Negri are very optimistic, Virno perhaps more ambiguous and the MNC pepper their optimism with moments of despair. At best they just have a forceful insistence: *this time it will be different because it must be.* But despite their insistence no one can ever prove the future, the power of their reason cannot on its

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own guarantee what cannot be guaranteed. It is interesting that Holloway finishes *Change the World Without Taking Power* with an unfinished sentence: “[t]his book does not (yet?) have a happy”. An ending being both unknowable and perhaps inappropriate – perhaps revolution now is not about endings or finalities but openings and beginnings.

Rather there are possibilities. Communist potentials do exist in the very marrow of social life. And, as such, communism exists, liberation is possible. But all precedence is of degrees of failure. Yet even the failures of the struggle to achieve communism are arguably better than a world without struggle. The perspective of autonomy gives us hope, and challenges us to rethink how we struggle. It dispels any previous faith in saviours from on high, or the apparent power of the ‘correct’ ideology or leadership. It thus helps us challenge the modes of thinking that may have been part of the reason why previous revolts failed. Rather like the old refrain of the *Internationale* it says “producers free yourselves.”

This optimism is important, yet we also need to steel ourselves to face the disappointments of history and the despair of the present. We should look clearly at the horror of our condition: the extremes of the violence, immiseration, ecological destitution, exploitation and alienation of global capitalism. Concrete struggles and practices of militancy must be developed. As much as the perspective of autonomy shows us the tensions and antagonisms that constitutes our social world we need, all of us, to make a leap. We need to move from the theory to the practice of hope.

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For an excellent essay on thinking about the question of revolution free from determinism and finality see Wendy Brown’s piece “Feminism Unbound: Revolution, Mourning, Politics” in Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. 

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1 Holloway, *Adorno Meets Tronti*.
5 Tronti, *The Strategy of Refusal*.
Bibliography


account that what neoliberalism often destroyed was previous capitalist régimes of accumulation, namely social democracy, socialism and the states produced by national liberation struggles?

The MNC cite as an example of the enclosures in the USA that “[t]he post-WWII interclass deal that guaranteed real wage increases is now definitively over and the homeless are the shock(ed) troops of this fact.” Writing on the process in China they note that “[i]n China, the transition to a ‘free market economy’ has led to the displacement of one hundred million from their communally operated lands. Their urban counterparts are facing the loss of guaranteed jobs in factories and offices and the prospect of emigrating from one city to another to look for a wage.” In other words what is being enclosed here is the Keynesian welfare state ‘deal’ and the ‘deal’ of socialist state-capitalism.

It is important to note that the MNC collective do not overtly celebrate either. Commenting on the collapse of the three deals (Welfare State, Socialism, National Liberation), they write, that: “[w]e refuse to mourn them. For who first voided them but brother and sister proletarians around the planet who desired and demanded more, much more than what was settled for.” Previously we saw how the predecessor to the MNC, Zerowork, argued against socialism and social democracy. Zerowork argued that both were continuations of capitalism and were still based on the exploitation of labour. Proletarian self-activity is pitted against capitalism in all its forms – including socialist state-capitalism.

However, and this is where the MNC start to falter, the historical narrative of the 'New Enclosures' argues that enclosure is the “secret” of a vast diversity of historical phenomena, that accompanied and constituted the rise of neoliberalism, including “Glasnost”, that is the collapse of socialism. If social democracy, socialism, and nation liberation is what is being enclosed, does this not imply that
insurrection is figured in the broader approach of the MNC, it fades into the background of their work as the emphasis on the creation and defence of the commons becomes increasingly central. However it is difficult to imagine that it would be possible to stop a wave of enclosures or re-/establish any commons without comprehensive social insurrection that breaks down the power of the state and shatters the normality of daily life. *Capitalism always fights for its survival.* If capital maintains régimes of discipline these must be attacked and broken. This is even more pressing given that the proletariat has not developed a successful theory of insurrection. Rather the history of insurrection is either one of bloody defeat or of a victory that reproduces authoritarian modes of life. It is possible that the commons could be a tool to break out of this mode of activity. It is a useful concept to refuse that cleavage between means and ends. Commons – the creation of other ways of being – linked to insurrection, as both its fertile terrain and its product might help us rethink the relationship between the necessary destruction and violence that must be deployed against capital and anchor this relationship in a future that is worth destroying capital for. p.m. has attempted to rethink this, but ultimately this rethinking involves a retreat from the precipice, a refusal to face the tasks that must be done. The point of thinking of communism as the reaffirmation of an outside, of the commons, may have validity, but only if it can be imagined in a way that actually confronts the forces of enclosure. Revolution has to be on the agenda.

**Confusions over Social Democracy & Socialism**

A related problem is how the ill-advised conceptual stretching of the commons leads to confusion about the nature of social democracy and socialism – confusion that goes against the MNCs’ otherwise stated opposition to both as forms of capitalism. The argument of the “New Enclosures” is that that neoliberalism, as a reaction against proletarian struggle, seeks to reimpose and intensify capitalist accumulations through enclosing the commons globally. How do the MNC take into
If we take a more concrete example of trying to form the commons in the North, say the history of squatted and autonomous social centres, what comes to the fore is the conflictual relationship such efforts have with the state and broader capitalist society. People organised together, there were flurries of activity, and also mass collective violence against the police and property was carried out. Rather than simply arising from commons that were already there, such projects had to be posed antagonistically against the logics of commodification and alienation in the North. It is true that for a time many social centres may have found some kind of resentful and anomalous acceptance in the outer edges of the welfare state. Yet as this thesis was being written many of these centres were under attack. A recent “international call for decentralised days of action for squats and autonomous space” notes:

They (capitalism) are attacking long-standing autonomous spaces such as the Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen, Koepi and Rigaer Straße in Berlin, EKH in Vienna and Les Tanneries in Dijon, squatted social centres in London and Amsterdam, Ifanet in Thessaloniki, etc. In France, squats have become a priority target for the police after the anti-CPE movement and the wave of actions and riots that happened during the presidential elections period. In Germany, many autonomous spaces have been searched and attacked before the G8 summit. In Geneva and Barcelona, two old and big squatting “fortresses”, the authorities have decided to try to put an end to the movement.  

The creation and defence of a commons in the North, of an outside, necessitates a collective, militant practice of the offensive.

The MNC have not connected their ideas on the commons with the need to fight the capitalist state. In their historical work they pay attention to the virtues of historical insurrections and uprising, as they do in the “New Enclosures”. Yet they don’t offer up visions of how to realise mass and collective rebellions that can actually break with the state of normality. It is a question of emphasis. Whilst

xlvi For an interesting history of squatting and social centres in Western Europe, and a critical engagement with the perspective of autonomy, see George Katsiaficas, The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life (Edinburgh & Oakland: AK Press, 2006).
image: that there is ‘something’ in our everyday condition that is excessive to capitalism, some vital thing, which capital chases after. More concretely there are specific social formulations (the commons proper) that do exist as an exterior place of subsistence that capital desires to enclose. Yet the generalised formula Neill advances loses the specificity of these insights and collapses into a more confusing morass. This line of argument seems to run into some problems regarding other theorisations about the nature of reproduction. For what is this “everyday life” if it isn’t, at least in part reproductive labour? By seeing it as the nebula outside of capital Neill’s argument once again hides the work of reproduction at the very same time that he is trying to show the power of those who labour outside wage-labour/industrial production. Or perhaps this everyday is everywhere. Is it what goes on in the workplace between workers, the life on the street, in homes and schools, that somehow exists within yet without the command of capital? Neill does not make this clear, nor flesh out this conceptual framework. Either way this limits us from being able to articulate a feminist content to communist activity.

The description of relations of solidarity in the North as the commons creates difficulties in arguing for the kinds of militant activity that could create actually existing commons. p.m.’s suggestions for activity present a pleasant and convivial mode of trying to create spaces where people come together. Whilst the idea of creating collective spaces as part of the many processes that work to allow the self-organisation and recomposition of proletarian power is very credible, p.m. puts forward a very limited and inadequate vision for collective struggle – even if you subscribe to their idea of the benign and timely collapse of capital. p.m.’s rejection of the operaismo insight that struggle is the source of crisis for capital is, at least sometimes it seems, also a rejection of struggle itself. Also it is far from obvious that capitalism is collapsing in any meaningful way. The immiseration of millions and the decimation of the biosphere have not led to a melting away of capital’s social relationships, far from it; they are its product and reinforcement. Considering the horror of its existence, if capitalism was to melt away is there any hope that it would leave much for humans in its wake? Anything beyond total devastation?
experience of it is largely atomised and pushed from the public sphere then such forms of labour are those least likely to reside in a commons. Also there is a strange retreat from the critique of reproductive labour. If the commons are non-monetary exchanges that in part allow us to sustain life, how is this to be distinguished from reproductive labour?

The original arguments by Dalla Costa and Fortunati posit that despite being unpaid for and formally considered to be outside the processes of capitalism, reproductive labour is in fact included in capitalist production. It produces the crucial commodity, labour power, and is disciplined by internal divisions within the class and by state and ideological intervention. The struggle of women consigned to the home is a struggle both against elements of reproductive labour and also for their autonomy from capitalist processes (which would free and transform the elements of reproductive labour that remain desirable). Yet the notion of the commons pastes over these insights. How much of what is identified as the commons is actually reproductive labour? This is an unanswerable question as the MNC use the commons in such an open way it cannot be clearly identified. We are at an impasse. If something is the commons it is meant to provide an outside to capitalism that is both a refuge and a base for attack. Yet the work by Lotta Feminista presents such spaces in a more complicated way. As sites of reproductive labour they are split and divided antagonistic spaces. Struggles need to be waged within them. Here the MNC is blind to feminist strategy and ignores the previous insights of an understanding of reproductive labour.

This strange disavowal of reproductive labour is intensified by Neill’s depiction of resistances arising from a permanent everyday outside to capitalism: that life is a ‘nebula’ and capital is a ‘grid’. There is something powerful in this

Problems with the Politics of the Commons

This conceptual error then creates a series of political problems. By overstretching the concept of the commons the MNC efface the specific problems and dilemmas of different sections of the proletariat. This is a real shame as Federici's work was so effective in pointing out how the creation of hierarchies of difference within the proletariat is an a priori condition for the creation of a proletariat that can be put to work by capital. Also Neill's work on the Zapatistas presents them as a useful model of how different and distinct sections of the proletariat can struggle together. However their use of the commons reduces these insights. This is seen in a number of problematic absences and anomalies.

For example, we have already seen that the MNC's work pays special attention to the unwaged reproductive labour of women. However the MNC do not articulate a feminist conception of struggle nor have they fleshed out proposals for struggles in the home. Their book Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War carries a reprinted piece from 'Zerowork' that looks favourably on the self-reduction struggle of housewives in Italy in the 1970s, struggles where women collectively reduced the prices they paid for rent, energy and groceries. But since then there has not been a further elaboration of the forms of struggle that could confront the internally gendered nature of the proletariat or attack capital's contemporary exploitation of reproductive labour. This is particularly striking because Federici's work enriches our understanding of the importance of the labour of women for capital and exposes the problems of forms of class struggle that are blind to gender.

Could part of the problem be the concept of the commons? If the reproductive labour of women still largely takes place in the home and the
difference between autonomy of collective land, the forms of mutual aid in a slum and the forms of solidarity in a workplace (to list some examples). In the broadest sense in all three we can see the struggles between labour and capital, but how these struggles manifest, how people organise and what people fight for are radically different. To put it starkly collective land is something that is most often fought for and is quite clearly a common defended against enclosures; that is defended against the imposition of capitalist power. A workplace is already enclosed, already bound within capitalist power and the solidarities of struggle must be created and affirmed, not defended. This is one of the difficulties that have confronted militants trying to transpose Zapatista politics to the North. That rather than having something like the collective land of the eijidos to develop forms of autonomy from, we often have to work out how we can build a functioning form of collective autonomy so we can struggle for the creation of a commons.

What is happening here? I believe what the MNC try, but fail, to do is explain how the struggles of the proletariat create real and concrete solidarity. They want to express how struggle itself creates forms of social organisation that can become the basis for the radical transformation of society. The idea of the commons is used to posit the direct creation of use-values and autonomous social relations as a recurring feature through proletarian resistance. Also what the MNC admirably try to do is to show both the unity and the diversity of the proletariat. As they write, "[w]e experience the unity of capitalism in very different and at times apparently contradictory ways, but nonetheless the unity remains." The commons is an attempt to describe this diversity and unity in both how we work and how we struggle. But it errs on the side of unity, minimises the differences and thus is politically limited.
strike and the radicalisation that they went under during the strike were unimportant. Rather, that to call these relations a "commons" massively stretches the idea of the commons to be a theory of 'everything', something to describe all forms of proletarian struggle. The MNC do this rather than call attention to the elephant in the room: that the commons do not exist in any meaningful sense in the North. In the North people have been almost totally enclosed from any form of collective subsistence and commodification has extended across almost the entire totality of life. Perhaps there maybe a few isolated remnants. And yes, proletarians in struggle in the North may generate collective modes of subsistence (in the broadest sense): community gardens, free kitchens etc. Perhaps pre-capitalist commons may be an inspiration and arguably such projects could be called a commons after they have been constituted. It even makes sense to argue for the reestablishment of the commons, or to call for a 'new commons' as political position. But this is different from the error the MNC make.xlvi

The error of the MNC is to fit almost all struggles by capital and labour into the terms "enclosure" and "commons". Through the work of the MNC just as enclosure comes to depict a constant, a returning feature of the role of capital, the commons comes to signify a similar and opposite proletarian refusal. Struggle constructs in the here and now collective spaces through the practices of resistance (overt or not). However it means that the MNC are compelled to describe situations as containing the commons where the paradigm does not fit. Rather than wrestle with this problem, they deny it.

As vivid as the definition is, it actually effaces the differences between the commons as non-capitalist subsistence and the ensembles of collectivity created through resistance against capitalism. And thus it also effaces the specific difference between different sections of the proletariat. There is a crucial

xlvi Other authors have attempted to rework the notion of commons to fit in with the conditions in the global North – for example the idea of an 'undercommons'. An excellent site for the various experiments and debates around the commons is the journal The Commoner available online www.commoner.org.uk. The MNC have not, to date, made any such qualifications and thus generate the problems discussed here.
experience of the 1980s." He argues that “[t]he age of the guaranteed job is over. In its place, those workers who had enjoyed it are experiencing the New Enclosures”.158

But what are the commons being enclosed? In “The New Enclosures” the MNC write that here the commons is “a town surrounding a paper mill controlled by striking paperworkers like Jay, Maine” because it is a “staging point for proletarian attack or a logistical locus”.159 Here the commons is the ensemble of relationships of the life of people in the town that allows them to carry out their struggle in the workplace. Riker writes:

In Jay, in the midst of all these activities, the strike was having a profound effect on everyone. The experience of a long and protracted struggle radically transformed the community. In place of three separate towns, working separate shifts, the people in Jay were creating a lively community. A number of organizations were created during the strike including a food bank, a clothes bank, and a job bank. In addition, weekly meetings organized by the union became regular social events.160

Here, the commons would appear as something that arises because of the struggle, not something enclosed by it; the commons are what the proletariat establishes despite capitalism. On one hand this is not something particularly novel; it does after all conform to Marx’s notion of communism as the movement against capitalism in which new social relations are formed in struggle.161 However on the other hand this is quite a break with how the MNC more generally use the commons, and also with its more widespread understanding. If the commons exists in Jay, Maine only because people develop forms of collective solidarity through the struggle against the attacks of the company then we cannot say that this is actually a pre-existing commons that is being enclosed.

Other examples of the commons identify situations where the collective relationships between people provide at least some form of partial subsistence that provides a space to struggle and something to fight for. I do not mean to argue that for the people of Jay, Maine both the relations between people before the
The Conspicuous Absence of the Commons in the North

The commons is clearly a useful tool for analysing the forms of communal property holdings that typify many agricultural populations before capitalism and during periods of ‘formal subsumption’ – where capital imposes its rule on pre-capitalist forms of production.\textsuperscript{xiv} It could also be easily extended to include hunter-gatherer and nomadic peoples. But the MNC want to take this definition further, to include the gains of struggles of the proletariat in developed capitalism, and also the forms of autonomous social relations created by ‘commoners’. This seems very useful when describing the collective subsistence and mutual aid that keeps so many people alive across the globe. Politically it has a power, as it works to open and radicalise the concepts of proletarian struggle and it threads together disparate rebellions. These are important objectives considering the widespread disavowal of revolutionary and proletarian politics, and the actual experiences of fragmentation and defeat experienced under neoliberalism. But how valid is it? It is my contention that the MNC stretch the definition of the new enclosures too far; they try to include too wide a range of struggles within its conceptual framework. This both fails to be intellectually convincing and also generates a series of political problems. This becomes very clear when the MNC try to apply the idea of the commons to the global North.

One of the examples of the MNC trying to apply the concepts of commons and enclosure in the North is a protracted strike in Jay, Maine USA. David Riker, a MNC participant, summarises the conflict thus: “[t]he strike was organized against the company’s attempt to impose a new contract that would have cut jobs, reduced wages, ended the closed shop, and radically transformed existing working practices”.\textsuperscript{157} The author places this struggle in a context of the “wider class

Chapter 6: A Critique of the Midnight

Notes Collective

Introduction

The MNCs' work takes the notions of primitive accumulation and the enclosure of the commons, and expands them to understand the contemporary struggle of capital and labour. They do this to challenge and make us rethink our ideas of capitalism, struggle and communism. Responding to a real need they also generate for themselves problems and limitations. It seems that the hope of the MNC is to understand the diversity of the proletariat. They wish to move away from a position that privileges the confrontation in the factory in the metropolis, to a wider understanding. This understanding grounds itself in the activity and power of the most immiserated in the world. The MNC use the notion of the commons to argue that their very exclusion, or at least partial marginalisation, from wage-labour proper is a source of power for the poor. Not only are the poor and unwaged included in capitalist production, but the commons that sustains them presents the material possibilities of communism.

The concept of the commons has a number of theoretical and political problems. Using the commons to refer to the collective creation of the proletariat in rebellion is innovative. It emphasises the ability of ordinary people to directly create alternatives to capitalism. But the MNC use the concept in a way that becomes unconvincing, and ignores the very diversity of the proletariat that they wished to highlight. It also blunts their critique of social democracy and socialism, something that is intensified by their more recent support of Left nationalist governments.
A politics of the commons identifies the power that the pre- and non-capitalist social relationships have to both provide a space for resistance and the substance for creating communism. The MNCs' politics is based on the continuation of an outside to capitalism: one that we should constantly attempt to expand. Capitalism is a grid, and life is a nebula. It is in this nebula that the MNC see the hope of both resistance and communism. Communism is not to be put off till a later date but rather is to be constructed today from and in this 'outside' to capitalism, in the hope that such efforts will be able to subvert capital on a whole.

This schema is continued in the utopian work of p.m.. p.m. attempts, through imaginative writings, to argue how a similar politics of the commons can be created in the North. Thus the author tries to take into account both the apparent absence of collective and autonomous subsistence and a critique of the commodity. p.m.'s visions of the lager or bolo' bolo see the creation of collective and free modes of life as the prime tasks for the subversion of capitalism – this would involve generating modes of existence that are both more desirable and also allow us to free ourselves from the alienation of wage-labour and the humiliations of capitalist power. As such there are no special political tasks that are needed, rather efforts that would create the space for people to come together.

In the work of the MNC there is a general faith that struggle in itself will create communism. They do not argue for the need of a special organisation of militants and are also willing to see the positives in struggles that use ideologies that are divergent from the MNC's basic positions. It is my contention that whilst the commons does help us recognise the power of those so often rejected as powerless, it is a flawed notion that hampers the development of a more thorough politics.
p.m. then presents a rough plan for a five level structure from the local to the global, and again contradicts themself by writing: "[t]he road to the commons (and there can only be one, for all the different resources are interrelated) seems difficult, even unthinkable at the moment." Indeed the entire structure of capitalism works to militate against the common, enclosing it and working to keep it enclosed. Interestingly p.m.'s response to this challenge is to argue that what is needed to start the process of creating free communities that enable and are enabled by the commons is to attempt to create spaces of coming together, meeting, communication and the circulation of experience. p.m. then proposes that people establish public bars throughout the world (signified by golden balls hanging outside the doorway). p.m.'s politics end up in a position of pleasant optimism. It is no surprise that their most recent work, *Akiba: A Gnostic Novel*, is a science fiction novel in which the main characters suicide in order to "live" in a simulated utopia in cyber-reality.

Conclusion

By placing the ideas of "enclosure" and "commons" at the centre of their understanding of capitalism and struggle, the MNC develop a challenging rethinking of communist politics. They open up the concept of the proletariat to include in it the struggles of the rural poor and the unwaged more generally. Neill’s work, inspired by the Zapatistas, shows how many positions of the original *operaismo* contained assumptions about the nature of the proletariat that led it to focus on and valorise the struggles of the industrial workers in the North over others. Not only does such a position efface the struggles of the great many it also, according to Neill, maintains a vision of post-capitalism that is too tied to capitalist paradigms.
argues that the response to state violence or repression of creating new forms of life is to continue to create new forms of life – and thus try to escape the whole logic of confrontation.

In *The Golden Globes of the Planetary Commons* p.m. again ascribes the terminal crisis of capitalism to its own internal mechanisms (something I hope the rest of this work has refuted). Apparently “[t]he situation is already excellent and will get better. Of course there are minor problems, but they can easily be solved.”150 Here, due to the crisis in the availability of oil, and thus capital’s ability to maintain a global regime of accumulation, “[t]he global economy will collapse just in time to return to a simpler lifestyle that will be accessible to all the 6 billion inhabitants of the planet.”151 What is left is just the realisation of this lifestyle, a process that p.m. sees as luxurious and easy:

Everything will fall in place – there is no need for revolutions, pushy militancy, demos, meetings. We can lie back and watch it happen. The only thing we must do is not hinder this development and let it happen freely...The era of doing will be over. All the rats will have won, the race is over. Champagne for everybody!152

Elsewhere, contradictorily, p.m. does not actually agree with their own imagined serendipitous narrative of history and actually argues for the proactive re/creation of the commons. For the relations that allow the commons to exist are crucial. p.m. states: “[t]here is also no such thing as the commons – there are only its regulations.” That is egalitarian relations and agreements between people determine the existence of the commons, as much as the commons always generates egalitarian relations. Despite their above position of the relaxed inevitability of communism, p.m. writes:

The commons is not something natural and self-regulating, not comparable to ecotopes like the jungle, the prairie or the oceans. When you are a species of 6.5 billion wily bastards you have to be very careful about how you regulate access and rights of usage to it. A lot of democratic decision-making is needed to keep the commons going.153
What does this mean for the militant (indeed who is the militant?) in the here and now? p.m. argues that the creation of life around the commons is happening anyway, as a reaction against capitalist austerity. But it needs to be extended:

The crisis in Argentina (for example) has ignited manifold forms of neighborhood kitchens, barter systems, even 'non-profit' industry. All this happens without any preparations, not even as a strategy, but spontaneously. But what was born out of need in some places could become a conscious strategy of subversion and alternative forms of life in other places and would be even more powerful... If capital/state is planning to put some of us into camps (for terrorists), we'd better organise our own camps on our own terms.148

From here p.m. identifies some parameters for struggle both in relation to the state and to violence. On the first point p.m. argues that the "struggles of the imminent period of crises can't be about asking national capitals to reinvest, to create jobs or return to the 'good old times'"; rather it is one of the "appropriation of resources", the direct take over and re/creation of the means of living. On the second point p.m. acknowledges that the "experiences of the EZLN in Chiapas have shown that some military activity is sometimes necessary and possible as a means of self-defence, but only below the threshold of frontal attack and combined with symbolic action and solidarity on a planetary scale."149 This is a very hopeful position, and communism needs hope. But it could be an error to imagine the project of recreating social life through the appropriation of creativity and resources and not imagine having to have a terminal conflict with the state: and this would mean a real clash of forces. One of the virtues of the EZLN is their ability to contain the military element of their struggle so they can have the space to carry out social transformation and the creation of emancipatory modes of living. This means that they avoid the fate of groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) where it seems fighting the state becomes an end in itself. p.m. argues that what is necessary is a mutiny – a rebellion that will allow the lager to be built differently in a way that realises the common. This mutiny then seems to be almost exactly the same as defending or building the commons itself. p.m.
The lager is cheap in all aspects, for the 'variable capital' (workers) is stored right on top of the 'constant capital' (machines) and the synergetic combination of the two happens on the spot. Whereas suburbia is a form of symbolic subsistence of socially isolated families, the lager is a militarized, hierarchical, authoritarian form of community. The lager working class is brought together and pre-organised by capital itself. 144

The very intensity of the lager, the source of its productivity means that it is a "highly explosive 'social reactor' with all the characteristic risks of reactors." p.m. recognises that against capital's use of lagers to organise prisons, factories, refugees, armies and others, the lager can "become expensive (for capital) for a number of reasons: defections or 'softening' of supervisors, epidemics, flights, breakdowns of discipline, mutinies, 'hysteria', fires, tensions between the two sexes etc." 145 Despite the lager's position within capitalist social organisation and the internal social relations common to it, p.m. asserts that:

...the idea of communal life itself on a lager scale (500 to 1000 persons) is actually not unattractive, depending on the conditions and the way such as community is run. Considering the current density of the population of the planet, some form of communal or 'lager' life is in fact the only sustainable option. 146

Both suburbia and the lager not only fuel global capitalism but also rely on the structures of global capitalism for their survival. And since this economic situation is one that increasingly destroys the viability of the biosphere, the survival of these forms runs contrary to the survival of life in a broader sense – not just in the future but in the here and now with the very real misery that condemns, for example, 40,000 people to death through malnutrition on a daily basis. p.m. then argues that the "obvious solution" is "combining real subsistence and self-governed communal housing". That is the reforming of the lager around the re/establishment of the common, a process that would "contradict capitalist organization, in fact make it superfluous." 147 Thus p.m. is suggesting a radical praxis towards communism and against capitalism – the creation of entire different ways of life, which work to create liberated existences, break modes of discipline and cause capitalism to wither away.
work as a practical and ideological system to redirect desire back into the commodity form and work. And it does this by offering a vision of life that seems to transcend the actual disempowerment, alienation and atomisation of existence in late capitalism. p.m. argues that living in suburbia is living in a “near-paradise, in a state of bliss, in a virtual utopia, beyond, in non-capitalism”; that “it signifies subsistence, virtual independence, a sense of autonomy”.140 But this “near-paradise” is based on global hyper-exploitation and ecological devastation, and is vastly costly for capital.

Suburbia was created as a model of paradise – in reality it never worked on its own. Independently from its ecological lack of sustainability, suburbia actually went in (sic) crisis for internal reasons right from its start. In spite of all neoromantic (sic) Hollywood movies, the man on his lot was faced with instant desertion by his wife. The American male’s dream was dismantled as a trap of lies, deceptions and impossible ambitions by authors like Arthur Miller (Death of a Salesman), Edward Albee (Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf) right after WWII. The immense boredom of life between single houses and shopping malls pushes young people in drugs, random violence, gothic and neonazi cults and into acts of amok. At the end of the nineties suburbia wasn’t much more than a cynical joke (The Simpsons and other serials), a depressed real estate agent’s nightmare (Richard Ford, Independence Day, 1995) or the downfall of gated communities (T.C Boyle, Tortilla Curtain, 1996). So suburbia is clinically dead, but still here, still being maintained physically alive by all kinds of palliative therapies (communitarianism, Prozac, more police, security systems, the mobile phone etc). Paradise mustn’t die, although fewer people live there and enjoy it less and less.141

p.m. alleges that whilst suburbia was/is reality for the few and the dream for the many the dominant experience is the camp or “lager”- a German term that “is a synonym of ‘depot, storage’...The lager is the original way of keeping proletarians ready for work: the workhouse, the factory-cum-dormitory, prisons, plantations, orphans’ homes etc.”142 p.m. extends the lager/camp to include everything from the camp proper to high density housing in inner cities of the North (“...New York city is a refugee camp (or therapy ward) for all those that run away from suburbia.”)143 Lagers are sites that are both cheap for capital and manifest direct authoritarian control:
neighbourhoods" and build "]ll kinds of meeting points - bringing together all three types of workers (a reference to the three deals that MNC believed predated the new enclosures) on the basis of common interests..."136

p.m. focuses on the role the commons could play in anti-capitalist struggle in the North, and does so in such a way that the creation of the outside overshadows the attack against what is. At the core of p.m.'s praxis are suggestions to collectively move outside of capital through the creation of autonomous communities that can provide our subsistence and also, p.m. claims, a quality of life greater than that offered by commodity society. This is what p.m. (in more recent work) calls "The Big Offer": that the commons will both provide a way of reforming social life that is more desirable than the apparent prosperity of capitalism in the North and pull apart the system that condemns so many in the rest of the globe to misery.137 For whilst much of the focus of the MNC is on highlighting the power and struggles of those effaced by capitalist and leftist ideologies of technological progress alike, p.m. focuses on what could be an effective and attractive practice for those surrounded by commodities. This they contend is crucial due to the global structures of capitalism:

At this moment everyone on the planet is watching the people of the USA and wondering how they are reacting to the present global crisis. For the most 'dangerous' working class on this planet is the US working class. When its compliance with capital ends, US capital will collapse and thereafter, like dominoes all the secondary capitals.138

Here p.m. ascribes to the working class within the USA a pivotal role due to the USA's role in the global management of capitalism (this runs contrary to much of the other work by the MNC). This proletariat is the most dangerous because of the damage it can do to the US state and also due to US power, "[i]f it keeps on supporting it actively or passively, there can't be an end to the world's turmoil, destruction and misery."139 Capital attempts to secure the loyalty of this section of the class, p.m. alleges, through the promotion of a lifestyle of commodity consumption based around suburbia (obviously not extended to the entire population). Suburbia is the practical offer to strategic sections of the class, and functions globally as a lifestyle to dream for and aspire to. Its function then is to
circumstances at the moment.”\(^\text{131}\) As such p.m. tries to locate this imagining of other ways of being in the currently existing composition of capital and class. They continue: “[a] new start can only be based on available experiences. Rather than re-inventing the world, we’ll have to re-combine its already existing alternatives.”\(^\text{132}\)

p.m. tries to flesh out how the formation of communism can emerge from capitalism, how the outside can be built. Firstly p.m. confronts the question of negation, the need to destroy capitalism:

If we deal with the Machine, the first problem is obviously a negative one: How can we paralyse and eliminate the Machine’s control (i.e., the Machine itself) in such a way that bolo’bolo can unfold without being destroyed at the start? We can call this aspect of our strategy “deconstruction” or subversion. The Planetary Work Machine has got to be dismantled carefully, because we don’t want to perish with it.\(^\text{133}\)

This subversion is fundamentally constructive. p.m. argues that “[s]ubversion alone, though, will always be a failure, though with its help we might paralyse a certain sector of the Machine, destroy one of its capabilities. Finally, the Machine is always able to reconquer it and occupy it again.” Instead, “[c]onstruction has to be combined with subversion into one process: substruction.”\(^\text{134}\) Separated, p.m. sees either activity as actually just reinvesting our desires into capitalism - by creating disorders that capital manipulates in its management of the population, or by the formation of collective practices that are quickly reabsorbed into the exchange of commodities and the rule of work. Similar to Neill’s metaphor of life being the nebula and capital the grid, p.m. writes that “[l]ife as a whole still manages to slip away from the Machine’s basic pattern.”\(^\text{135}\) Substruction is the weaving together of all these different slippages into durable modes of living. Special attention is given in bolo’bolo to how this weaving can be a meeting of slippages that emerge across the great division of labour within the proletariat. Pre-empting the MNCs’ adoption of the term commons, p.m. articulates a vision that is copasetic with it. Substruction, p.m. envisions, is the creation of alternative institutions of living as part of the process of leaving capitalism. We could “attempt the organization of mutual help, of moneyless exchange, of services, of concrete cultural functions in
p.m.'s best known work is *bolo'bolo*, a pamphlet that is semi-legendary in underground and counter-cultural circles (and currently out of print). An abridged version of the first half of *bolo'bolo* was published in the 1984 edition of Midnight Notes entitled *Lemming Notes*, an issue of their publication attempting to deal with capital in the midst of reaction. Here we shall also focus on p.m.'s more recent works *The Next Mutiny on the Bounty* and *The Golden Globes of the Planetary Commons*. These latter works, like the latter work of the MNC generally, focus more on the concept of the commons. p.m.'s general prescription for praxis, put so simply at the beginning of *bolo'bolo*, is:

The name of the monster that we have let grow and that keeps our planet in its grip is: the Planetary Work Machine. If we want to transform our spaceship into an agreeable place again, we've got to dismantle this Machine, to repair the damage it has done and come to some basic agreements on a new start.130

Superficially p.m.'s work seems to hold much in common with many utopian writings, as much of it is about how to create alternatives in the here and now beyond capitalism and breaks with a narrative of revolution-in-the-future-liberation-after-that. Yet p.m. does not see this as carving out a special space or isolated moments of liberation that just let global capitalism keep turning. They are suggested as a praxis that will cause the overall supersession and subversion of capitalism. As such p.m. takes the idea of the commons seriously as something that can be taken up and used and accordingly fleshes it out.

Interestingly p.m. refuses the label of utopian and the claims to perfection that it marshals. Rather they describe their work as “pragmatic arrangements, using exactly the experiences of that ‘muddling through’ to which the majority of the inhabitants of the planet is being forced under unnecessarily bad

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xliii As well as the title of a book *bolo'bolo* is the term that p.m. uses to describe communism both as a movement and a post-capitalist community – displaying an attempt to sidestep the historical weight of language. Part of the charm of *bolo'bolo* is its imaginative use of language, the proliferation of new words for old and the various comic elements to it which, for sake of clarity and length, cannot be reproduced here with any justice.

xliv Interestingly the author is identified as “ibu” not p.m. Ibu is the word that p.m. uses to describe an individual in *Bolo'bolo*. 
response to the potential of state betrayal should be to “explicit(ly) support (them) to the degree (that) they practically oppose Neoliberalism and are responsive and even supportive of the movements.” Here the state is not seen as irredeemably caught up in the net of capitalism and fundamentally part of the social relations of class and power. The ability to use the state as a tool to resist neoliberalism is based on “many factors” though “the power of movements to ensure the governments do their bidding is among the most important.”128 What is noticeable here is what is left out. There is no comment on the content of the refusal of neoliberalism that is carried out by governments of those like Chavez. It is clear that even the best of these governments are only engaged in socialist and/or social democratic projects. The critique of work, the formation of the commons is not part of this agenda. Also the movements that would previously have been the focus of the work of the MNC like the Zapatistas are absent.

**Bolo’bolo**

It is amongst the utopian writings of p.m. that we find the clearest and most imaginative depiction of what a politics of the commons applied directly to conditions of the global North would look like. Like the others who partake in the MNC, elements of p.m.’s work contain their own idiosyncrasies and do not conform to a ‘line’. For example p.m. sometimes seems to attribute crisis to internal mechanisms within capital, thus breaking with the early operaismo contention that class struggle is the source of capital’s crisis. To quote from *The Next Mutiny on the Bounty*:

> In its intellectually pure form the industrial capitalist system could not have survived the 18th century. Its inbuilt mechanism of the “tendential decrease in the rate of profit” – the more you invest in machinery, the lower the pro rata returns on it – push it into structural collapse every 5 to 7 years.129
Enclosures thesis. However both its depiction of struggles and suggestions for action are not in accord with their theoretical schema.

The article describes a movement of struggles that is against the destruction of the commons and the intensification of state repression:

In these surging movements we are witnessing a rebellion of people throughout the Americas. They are rising up against their fate of being driven from their lands, targeted for repression and even death, forced into sweatshops paying starvation wages or finding no income at all. The millions who have been forced to migrate to the US and other nations face humiliation, repression, discrimination and super exploitation as second-class persons in apartheid systems constructed on immigration status. 125

Here are all the points of interest and contestation from The New Enclosures: the destruction of subsistence, and movements of peoples and labour in the context of increasing state repression. It would be consistent with the argument of the MNC that in this situation they propose the defence and re/formation of the commons. But they don’t. Rather they define the wave of struggle in relatively statist and socialist forms and argue for the legal recognition of undocumented workers within the US. The wave of struggle they talk about in Latin America is described as follows, “the people of Latin America in election after election are voting into power governments whose platforms and sometimes their practices, reject the economic policies that the US government, on behalf of corporations, has been supporting for decades.” 126 Later in the article they write that:

Across Latin America and in the Caribbean, a variety of movements and struggles are gaining strength. One form of the struggles has been the elections of new governments. Some that are supposed to represent and be responsive to working/low-income/indigenous people appear not to be so (e.g. Lula in Brazil); some seem now to be (Chavez in Venezuela); while other cases it is too early to tell (Evo Morales in Bolivia; Preval in Haiti). 127

Whilst the ambiguities trying to use the state as a tool for social change are displayed, the state itself is not rejected. Rather here the MNC advise that the
and even of limited effect on existing relations of production. A careful study would however reveal the opposite of these features.122

Here is an image of capitalism built on constant opposition, an image that gels with ‘ordinary rebelliousness’ that makes up a constant theme of this work. This intertwines with the commons as the wellspring of hope, opposition and creativity that the MNC see as the basis for the possibility of a world radically other. But what do the MNC suggest as ways of acting to advance and develop struggles? We can look at their suggestions from articles written as interventions in particular struggles and the radical and utopian suggestions of p.m..

Some Political Suggestions, Some Political Problems

Looking at the statements produced by the MNC in regards to specific struggles and movements, there seems to be a distance between the theoretical apparatus they have constructed and the content of the statements themselves. Take for example their latest intervention (at time of writing), Migration, Movements, Wages and War in the Americas: Reasons for Unity on May Day 2006 – and After. Admittedly it does not represent a closed position but rather “comes at the start of our investigations of these multiple movements, and early in the unfolding of these struggles, and represents therefore simply a partial first draft.”123 In this document we don’t find any of the language of the New Enclosures, but the general overall analysis of the situation of global capitalism carries deep points of continuity. The essay tries to connect to the wave of struggles moving through the Americas (both North and South). It focuses on the boycotts and strikes of Mayday 2006 in which mainly Latino workers and communities inside the US took action against a “congressional bill that would criminalize them simply for being in the US without proper papers, and criminalize US citizens who provide them with assistance.”124 The article presents an analysis of neoliberalism that is in line with the New
is, the entire 'high wages for higher productivity' deal offered by capital was assaulted by demands for a greater quality of life (ranging from access to more wealth to the breaking of the disciplinary regimes that underscored society) and a freedom from work. It was a revolt against work in the broadest sense. The Left and socialism, they argue, could not grasp this, responding to the crisis with a defence of work. Since for the Left the crisis is seen as the product of capitalism's internal flaws and since part of this is unemployment, the defence of the working class (here positioned as hard-working and innocent victims) meant a defence of wage-labour. Zerowork argued, but do not fully explore, that "socialism clashes with the working class demands against work." It is possible to surmise that this argument is based on the standard ultraleft critique: socialism is like a self-managed prison, workers enforce their own alienation as workers.

The critique of socialism is intensified by the MNCs' celebrations of the struggles of the proletariat that take place autonomously from left-wing organisations and trade unions. This is consistent with the early innovations of operaismo and autonomia. The MNC place a specific focus on the unofficial activities of the proletariat covertly in the workplace and/or outside the sanction of official structures. The MNCs' approach to understanding struggles is not one (especially in Australia or the Anglophone world more generally) that we would expect of the Left. That is, there is very little space given to deconstructions of the ideological positions of those who would lead the movements – including those who group themselves as anarchists. Rather the content of actual proletarian struggle is the focus. (But unlike much of the ultraleft there is no inverse Leninism here – none of the wholesale rejection of any form of organisational activity that is not 'The Revolution' itself.) An article on Nigeria describes the following as its focus of analysis:

Covert forms of resistance are those actions employed by workers, mostly at an individual level and in small groups, to "get even" with employers or resist exploitation. They are informal or "underground" and constitute part of "the everyday forms of consciousness and action" of the proletariat. At first glance they look unorganized, infrequent, irrational.

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xiii There is not a clear distinction made by the MNC between socialism as a broad concept and the experience of 'real existing socialism.'
Interestingly Neill suggests the reader should look at more formal organisations but he does not advise how to create them. Instead we need a process of "identifying forms of immediate political organization that do not reproduce the capitalist division of labour." Apart from this there is a suggestion for loose and open networks that allow the proliferation of experience, theory and reflection. Again we see a common trait to the post-autonomia: a refusal to see revolutionaries as special, or if they are special it is because they try to go further towards what is shared in the condition of being proletarian.

Critique of Socialism

The communism of the common, put forward here by Neill, is strikingly non-socialist. The theory of the MNC contains certain ambivalences towards socialism. This ambivalence is around whether the collapse of 'real existing socialism' is a precondition or a result of the new enclosures; and if 'real existing socialism' was 'enclosed' does that mean that it contains in part the commons? This last point stands at odds with the professed anti-statism of the MNC. We can find the rejection of socialism in one of the early documents of Zerowork which the MNC reprinted in Midnight Oil. It is worth retracing the argument made by Zerowork for it fills in some of the background of how the MNC think about socialism and the assertion of the autonomy of the proletariat.

Zerowork argued that socialism had been superseded by actual class struggle. The crisis of the mid 1970s (against which neoliberalism was a counter-revolution) was caused by struggles that were breaking all the deals of capitalism. They write "[t]he intensity and dimensions of these struggles demonstrated that the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the class recomposed itself and expressed its political autonomy from capital."120 That
produce the knowledge gleaned from bourgeois science that can then be introduced via the party to the class as the spark to go beyond trade union consciousness.\textsuperscript{xii} Any model of struggle that sees the necessity of bringing ideology, whatever its content, to struggles is rejected for a process of producing theory immersed within, participating in and listening to struggles – coupled of course with the study of capitalism and its developments. Neill then proposes eight tasks which essentially are about the circulation of experiences and reflection on different struggles.

It is worth noting at this juncture an essay by MNC participant George Caffentzis entitled “Lenin on the Production of Revolution”.\textsuperscript{116} On the whole it rejects Lenin’s model of party and militant, noting that \textit{What is to be Done} “is hardly a good model for anti-globalization organization in general. It is too riddled with the elitism and suspicion of democratic procedures that have been pointed out ad nauseam during the Cold War.”\textsuperscript{117} Yet Caffentzis’s work is not a \textit{total} break with Lenin. Instead he insists that there “is another face to \textit{What is to be Done}? – the communicative model of revolutionary organising.”\textsuperscript{118} He argues that part of Lenin’s conception of an organisation of professional revolutionaries was to build a semi-clandestine structure that could effectively disseminate information and experiences of struggle – the very kind of communication that the Tsarist state and secret police were attempting to suppress. Whilst Caffentzis rejects the party-form, he argues that communicating the experiences of struggles throughout the proletariat is essential. Especially in the context of globalisation, where capitalist production exceeds the nation state, now more than ever different struggles need to circulate across borders to generate necessary bonds of solidarity. “For the key to understanding class struggle now is not rooted in the nation state; organisations that can circulate and communicate struggles world-wide are crucial for anti-capitalist politics of social transformation.”\textsuperscript{119} Neill continues this argument about circulation and communication, though with no reference to Lenin.

\textsuperscript{xii} Cf. Lenin, \textit{What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement}
Neill is quick to pre-empt criticisms and admits that these struggles by themselves can quickly become recuperated or crumble under the general pressures of capitalist society.

If struggles against capital are in themselves insufficient for creating something new, attempting to create the new while ignoring the world capitalist system will merely produce new commodities or pools of labour for capital. That is, the working class must simultaneously attack capital and create its own society/societies.\textsuperscript{113}

The commons then are not just places to exist in outside of capital, but places to attack from. He continues that "[c]apital cannot be defeated without both opposition and creation." Yet there is no singular hegemonic part of the class, no central node. The struggle faces a number of polarities: between revolt against capital that emerges from struggles within it, and deliberate attempts to construct an outside, and between taking over the means of production "which implies capitalism as the precondition of communism" and "revolution as the negation of most of those means of production as necessarily destructive to human and other life..."\textsuperscript{114} Such juxtapositions do show the current dilemmas of communism, dilemmas that perhaps can only be solved in actual struggles.

But what is present beyond these generalities and what is suggested or implied as a mode of action? Whilst Neill cautions against copying the Zapatistas, the lesson he takes from them is of 'creating new proletarian combinations' that are open to diversities of composition and take up the challenges of constructing structures of autonomy and confronting the rule of capital and state. Neill suggest tasks for militants to help create revolutionary theory and to do so immersed in struggles. "If theory is to be an element of struggle, it must live in the interplay between analyzing struggles and analyzing capital." This involves an immersion in, and openness to, struggles; consideration of all kinds of strategy and a practice of "listening to the particulars of struggles to hear both the anti-capitalism and post-capitalism that might exist (commons-ism or communism), for pushing to make all kinds of new circuits of struggle."\textsuperscript{115} The role of militant as the missionary of ideology is overthrown. This is clearly a rejection of the Leninist stance where the professional revolutionary stands outside the pull of daily class struggles to
Neill argues that this outside is actually crucial for capitalism to exist. It is the presence of an outside world of everyday life which allows workers the space to negotiate to sell themselves. This in turn allows their capacities to be realised as labour-power and thus create capital and capitalism. If capitalism succeeded in dominating the entirety of the social field, and reduced life to a functionalist machine (the argument goes), capital would actually no longer be capital but rather some relation of pure domination that is imagined in science fiction. Thus the continual existence of the nebula beyond the grid is "the fundamental source of power against capital as well as the basic source of capital itself." 

This grid/nebula analysis leads to a re-theorisation of struggle around the extension of the common. Life and vitality become the cores of anti-capitalist struggle. Neill reaffirms anti-capitalist struggle as the "class struggle to cease to be proletarian." He argues that the struggle against capitalism in the here and now should attempt to re/build commons – that is:

An alternative strategy to expecting the working class to throw up its post-capitalist possibilities in the heat of anti-capitalist battle is the rather deliberate constructing of alternative institutions or relationships within the larger current society, sometimes in the hope of living outside of capital, sometimes in the hope of creating better social arrangements within capital."

Thus the MNC look closely at struggles in the global North that are often seen as marginal to class struggle proper. They spend a good deal of time looking at how squatting works as a practice that resists proletarianisation by removing the need to pay for housing, and also creates communist forms of social life. It is seen as part of a commons that are resisting enclosure. Special attention is given to the squats in the Lower East Side of New York and their connection with a multiplicity of other struggles."
struggle by the party. The ability to do this rests, in part, on the continuation of subsistence practices amongst those who work the land, which Neill calls "indigenous communism." It is the continuation of the commons that grants the Zapatistas so much power to both challenge capitalism and build with others a new life for themselves. Many would see this as a fatal challenge to Marx and Marxism. However Neill argues that Marx had already investigated the possibility of communism developing from pre-capitalist forms in The Ethnographic Note Books.106 Marx and Engels had also written in the "Preface to The Russian Edition of 1882" of the Communist Manifesto in the context of revolution throughout Europe that "the present Russian common ownership of land (obshchina) may serve as a starting point for a communist development".107

However there is a problem. If it is the spaces outside capitalism, the continuation of the commons, that are a source of power, what does this mean for those of us who live in conditions where the real subsumption of social life is far more evident? This is linked to the theoretical weaknesses in the foundations of the idea of the commons, which becomes shakier as they are extended to more and more situations and forms of rebellions. The way that Neill tries to resolve this is to argue for the ongoing continuation of an outside throughout capitalism that allows the possibility of the generation of new commons. It is described like this:

We might envision capital as a power grid overlaid on a vast nebula, with the working class as that nebula. Workers are captured by and in some ways denied by the grid, the multifold structures and processes of accumulation. That is the sphere of exploitation. However, the nebula is life: capital must draw on it and cannot survive without it, but the workers have life and can survive without the grid. This is the sphere of everyday life, however corrupted and influenced by capital which seeks to control it and tap into its energy and creativity. But no matter how controlling, capital cannot be everyday life, which thus remains a great reservoir of energy against capital. This is in some ways more visible when, as with the Zapatistas, everyday life incorporates social structures and relations that pre-date capital and have visible anti-capitalist potential. But such potential is everywhere – though being everywhere is no guarantee it will be mobilized against capital.108
the dream of a different type of society?"\textsuperscript{102} Here it is not the actual composition which is of primary importance – but the effects of the struggle. Part of the overturning of the hierarchy of older ideas of class composition is not to enforce another, but to show the potential of those who are ignored and thus open the possibilities for everyone.

In the Zapatistas Neill finds an approach that expresses the trajectory of the work of the MNC – a way to deal with the differences and singularities within the proletariat that allows each moment of rebellion to speak in a rebel chorus with others. Neill highlights the power to both oppose capitalism and create post-capitalism in those struggles that are seen as taking place in areas previously described as ‘backward’ – it refuses the teleology of industrial development.

Neill draws out two threads of Zapatista practice which he sees as offering important political contributions. Whilst seeing the Zapatistas as a “methodological mix” (and for Neill this is good) what the “EZLN has asserted foremost is a radical participatory democracy.”\textsuperscript{103} This radical participatory democracy both poses ways of organising the different parts of class struggle and the emancipation of social relationships in the here and now. This breaks with Alquati’s reduction of both struggle and liberation to the node of the factory. Neil argues that “[t]he Zapatistas do have a strategy of revolution” and it is one where “different sections will reach agreements and act on them, initiating a chain of events” that would both destabilise the Mexican state (the then regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party) and open the political terrain for further struggle; “the revolution to initiate the revolution.”\textsuperscript{104} This description seems a fairly accurate one, and the latest stage of struggle by the EZLN, La Otra Campana seems to conform to this.\textsuperscript{105} Thus no section plays vanguard; rather the communication of struggles creates revolution. And revolution is conceived in a way that breaks with two more usual and problematic elements; a temporality that postpones liberation till ‘after the revolution’, and the necessity of the party. The struggle is the direct creation of alternative social forms in the present, and a refusal of the mediation of
To the schema of Alquati and *operaismo*, struggles like that of the Zapatistas have little or no power. In contrast, Neill argues that they are powerful and for exactly the same reason: their relation to class composition of global capitalism. Neill sees in the Zapatistas an approach that “critiques vanguardism and provides a strategy to begin reconstructing society out of the fragments of the division of labour.”\textsuperscript{99} It is in reference to this that he attempts to rethink class composition and in the process flesh out some of the MNC’s insights on struggle. Class composition remains useful because it is an attempt to search for the “the material and social bases of anti-capitalism and post-capitalism...”\textsuperscript{100} It grounds revolutionary praxis in the antagonisms that constitute capitalist society.

Neill argues that the continuation of pre-capitalist substance and collective practices, a commons, allows the Zapatistas the possibility in the here and now to directly create alternative post-capitalist social relations as a fundamental part of their resistance to capitalism. As Neill writes “[T]his discussion poses a clear challenge to “workerism” including the original class composition analysis, which in its own way appears to reproduce the Stalinist ‘stages of history’ argument, as it assumes in effect that capitalism is the necessary precursor to communism...”\textsuperscript{101} Neill’s argument, and that of the MNC generally, that pre-capitalist social relationships pose the potential of directly creating communism, is not the same as the romanticisation of the peasant that is common to much of a western New Left position, nor does it concur with the historical narrative, militarism and statism of Mao. Peasant life is not romanticised. Neill works to identify the potentials that exist for autonomy and rebellion amongst those who work the land. They live and struggle at the intersection of the implementation of capitalist forms and the continuation of other practices. Neill identifies the importance of agricultural production and the enclosure of the subsistence agricultural commons to contemporary capitalism – and thus the power of those who work and struggle on the land. Neill quotes Holloway (a delicious intersection) who writes “[a]nyway, which does more ‘damage to capital’ - a prolonged strike by industrial workers or a rebellion in the jungles of Mexico which stirs up again the idea of revolution and
understanding reduces our vision of what we can replace capitalism with. It imposes a singular unified image of communism – one that emerges in line with the apparent struggles of this “vanguard”. This vision is deeply limited: “such a society may owe more to capitalism than to anti-capitalism, precisely because its model is the capitalist factory.”

Neill points out that Alquati’s work, unlike Orthodox Marxism, isn’t based on simple and mechanical understandings. Rather Alquati argues that there is a network of struggles. Neill summarises:

A network is the unity of struggles in both their vertical and horizontal articulations. The vertical articulation locates the point within the capitalist circuit of production/reproduction at which the struggle occurs; the horizontal articulation describes the spatial distribution and linkages. This combined vertical-horizontal articulation of struggles pivots around decisive points of interconnection.

These nodes can then be placed, for Alquati, in a strategic hierarchy. This hierarchy is not based on technical composition, but on political struggle. The class is recomposed through the circulation of struggles and becomes powerful and homogenous. Alquati sees “factory workers working in the centres of power and command of international capital” as the “apex of international struggle”. These are nodal point where struggles coalesce, find their most advanced expression and set the level and form of resistance for the class as a whole.

Neill argues that the effect is still the effacing of much of proletarian experience. Alquati’s answer to the diversity within the proletariat is to argue for its homogenisation behind a certain section. The elevation of the struggles of the mass worker to the nodal point in the network of proletarian recomposition, due to their supposed political content, leads to the subordination of other sites of struggle. It places them in a dependent position or sees them as limited, as either fighting for reforms, or having to wait for capitalism to be more mature before they can pose the question of communism.
for. Neill’s critique is positioned against the work of Romano Alquati, specifically his *The Network of Struggles in Italy.*

Neill’s critique of Alquati owes a fidelity to the original insights of *operaismo* but it is a fidelity that leads him to challenge their conclusions. He argues that to answer the question “[h]ow can the planetary working class stop the capitalist machine” we must understand “the nature and shape of the working class, in order to overcome capital and create new societies.” Thus class composition is integral to the formation of anti-capitalist praxis, but Neill, continuing the line(s) of investigation of the MNC, sees the approach of Alquati specifically, and *operaismo* more generally, as stunted by a paradigm that concentrates on certain sections of the class over others. The debate (proletariat or peasantry, core or periphery etc) here is obviously not a new one. It constitutes many of the rifts of revolutionary thought. What is new is that the MNC take the approaches of *operaismo* and *autonomia* to areas of work and struggle previously ignored by the tradition. By doing this they unearth problems in *operaismo’s* foundations and critique many of its original presuppositions.

*Operaismo,* Neill argues, attempted to find a vanguard section of the class (which is very different from the notion of the vanguard *party*) in the mass workers of large-scale industrial production. He summarises their argument as follows: “A class vanguard gathers the rest of the class around as a focus of demands and struggles because other social sectors, such as schools and medical care, are modelled on the factory.” The result, Neill contends, is a stunting of both the possibilities of struggle and our vision of post-capitalism. It overestimates the importance of this vanguard section and silences the strengths and specific demands of other parts of the proletariat – parts whose militancy defy their relegation to a position of political subordination. Neill also argues that such an

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*x* Like many of the original partisans of *operaismo* Alquati’s work is largely unknown (in English) outside of a few radical circles and largely untranslated. Interestingly Neill himself did not have access to Alquati’s entire article; rather it is based on “typescript in English of notes summarizing the piece (unknown note-taker).” The depiction of Alquati’s position is on the whole taken verbatim from these notes. Neill, "Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas," 140.
that symbol of 20th century revolution, the hammer and sickle. They remark that “the whole problem of twentieth century anti-capitalism is to be found in the enigma of the hammer and sickle.”91 The hammer being workers in advanced industrial production, the sickle being those who work the land. Whilst they are presented as if they are united in struggle, the hammer was often ascribed dominance, even when the revolt was happening in the countryside.xxxviii The MNC argue that this paradigm can be found in operaismo’s conceptualisation of class composition and their prioritising of the hegemony of the mass worker in large factories. The MNC argue that this hegemony is based on an illusion of power. Part of the importance of the Zapatistas for the MNC is that they “remind us” that “the land is the source of a tremendous revolutionary power and those who wield the sickle often instigate revolutionary change even in the stratosphere of high-tech production, because they have the capacity to subsist without capital’s mediation.”92 That is, it is their seeming condition of powerlessness, their apparent consignment to the margins of capitalism, which can be the very source of their power. They are not celebrated by the MNC for being peasants as such (and this detail is crucial) but rather because of the continuation of common that exists as a site of (and because of) resistance.

The reformulation of class composition in light of a loose paradigm built around the commons and developed in relation to struggles, especially that of the Zapatistas, is seen most clearly in “Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas” by Monty Neill.xxxix Neill looks at the classic operaismo theory of class composition and its implications for struggle in reference to the struggle of the Zapatistas and the defence/construction of the commons.93 By doing this he profoundly critiques the vanguardist notions he finds in operaismo. This opens up new ways of understanding who struggles, what is struggle and what is struggled

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xxxviii Of course there is an entire Maoist tradition of Peoples’ War that does not conform to this paradigm.

xxxi Which is a reworked part of a broader document called Towards the New Commons that was “prepared for the second Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism and for Humanity, 1997.” Monty Neill, “Rethinking Class Composition Analysis in Light of the Zapatistas,” in The Aurora of the Zapatistas: Local & Global Struggles of the Fourth World War ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY Autonomedia, 2001), 138.
designating them as “part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.” Here is the important break that the MNC make. They see the poor and unwaged as having incredible power to resist capitalism. Caffentzis continues:

But the world does not wait on capital. The ‘extremely poor’ (in Sachs’ terminology) necessarily have created non-monetary reproductive systems that have demonstrated the power of communal relations to resist enclosures and provide subsistence in ways that the Scottish highlanders could never have imagined. On the basis of these systems the wageless are beginning to set off new political earthquakes (especially in South America). Or in face of increasing demonetarization, their reliance on communal relations is creating a situation where they stop being credible potential competitors on the international labour market (especially in Africa).

The self-activity of the wageless then throws the world of work into trouble. Indeed if we scan across the revolts of South America: the indigenous campesin@s of Chiapas, the landless peasants of the MST, the coca growers of Bolivia, the piqueter@s of Argentina, and the poor in the slums of Caracas - those newly wageless and those deeply impoverished seem to be often the animating forces behind the movements. It is often some form of commons, of collective subsistence, that both motivates and powers these struggles.

Hammer and/or Sickle; Zapatistas, Class Composition, Organisation

Part of the contention of MNC’s work is that often class unity means subordination of sections of the class under the section that is seen as being most productive. This is most often industrial work, either because industrial labour is seen as being more important to capital; or because it is seen as more clearly embodying the proletarian condition and thus communist subjectivity. In the introduction of Auroras of the Zapatistas the MNC deconstruct this paradigm by deconstructing
A core part of this work is to valorise the struggles of the unwaged. In “Dr Sachs, Live8 and Neoliberalism’s Plan B”, Caffentzis presents a stinging attack on Sachs’ *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*. Caffentzis argues that, under the veil of good intentions, Sach’s work aims at managing poverty to save capitalism from the poor rather than freeing the poor from poverty. Caffentzis presents the wageless as possessing a source of autonomy and resistance to capitalism arising from their very condition of being unwaged. For Caffentzis the wageless exist as a product of capitalism. They are something necessary to its global functioning, as they are used to guarantee the overall global increase in available labour and the expansion of capitalism. Yet the wageless maintain a continual connection to pre-capitalist commons and/or the formation of new ones; and associated insurrectionary activity to defend and extend these commons threatens capital on the whole. On the first point he writes:

Consequently, capitalism has carefully produced wagelessness, but capitalism remains ambivalently anxious about the wageless, for capitalism, as Prospero said of Caliban, cannot do without them. After all, the existence of the vast continent of the wageless is the basic disciplinary threat to be used against the waged workers of the world. On the one side, they are to be the ‘horrific’ image of what could happen to a waged working class, if it refuses to accept the dictates of neoliberal capitalism and, on the other side, they are to be a standing ‘reserve army’ in case capital decides to pick some subset of them for ‘development’. Finally of course, the wageless, especially women, are the basic reproducers of the waged working class.

The wageless are thus created and put into motion by capital in very crucial ways. They are not only what is left over in shanty towns after the commons has been enclosed, labouring in various forms of agricultural production or eking out an existing on the edges and peripheries of capitalism. Their existence is an integral part of how the conditions of labour, globally, are reproduced. Of course much of Marxist thought has argued that the ‘reserve army of labour’ plays a crucial role in the functioning of capitalism. However they simultaneously deny the power these immiserated masses have in challenging capitalism – often rather

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xxxvi A tangent here, but one worth exploring at another time, is that perhaps part of the development and deployment of such great repression against undocumented migrants could be due to their fleeing destabilizing the ability of capital to use the wageless and poor.
Class Struggle

MNC's deployment of the ideas of the proletariat and the working class (they never make a clear distinction) radicalises the terms and increases their relevance. To quote: 

"[i]t is important that we redefine 'the working class' in this way so that we can comprehend the anti-capitalist thrust of what appear to be non-working class struggles and demands."  

And it is struggle that is crucial. The pre-MNC collective 'Zerowork' argued that "the working class is defined by its struggle against capital."  

Class then is not simply a signifier for a seemingly objective analysis of the technical composition of work, power and wealth in society. Class is a political term.

When this is combined with an understanding that capitalism exploits labour generally – not just wage-labour – then a range of struggles, 'social movements', fit under the MNC conception of class and class struggle. They continue that:

A recategorization of the working class allows us to see the diversity of agents behind a distinctly anti-capitalist project. If capitalism is all-pervasive, the struggle against it must operate on many fronts. Instead of evacuating the working class content of various "social movements", we must attempt to deepen this content.

However, posing all these struggles as “working class” does not, in the MNCs’ view, instantly resolve how these different components can struggle together. In a general sense “recomposition involves the increasing power and unity of the working class”, but this does not specifically show how this unity is achieved. As Federici’s historical work showed that the formation of the proletariat rests on the formation of hierarchies of difference within the proletariat there is a growing concern that unity can be used to submerge the specific autonomous of different elements and struggles to an abstract image of the class.
MNC to revisit ideas of class composition and focus on those often seen as the most marginalised and rejected as those who have the most to offer struggle.

The MNC write in "The New Enclosures" that "every struggle against enclosure and for the commons inevitably becomes a call for jubilee". Jubilee, writes Linebaugh, has its origins in Judaic law. Jubilee is often presented as a practice within a society that attempted to address the worst elements of inequity through the cancelling of debts or the freeing of slaves every 50 years, for example. To quote: "[a] prevailing view is that jubilee was an anti-accumulation device, similar to the potlatch or the carnival, that actually preserved accumulation." But Linebaugh stresses there are other meanings to this term. Jubilee reflects part of the radical, egalitarian and revolutionary elements of Hebrew society. Elements which resurfaced in radical Christian practices during the struggles within and against the early colonial capitalist project: that is, as part of the struggles against the Old Enclosures. He cites the work of José Miranda as evidence of the continuation of Jubilee as part of contemporary liberation theology. Jubilee becomes a fundamentally revolutionary idea – not just the struggle against inequity but one that poses the possibility of fundamental change and liberation. For the MNC struggles around the commons connect to society-wide transformation; they are not just defensive but generative of communism. The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is repositioned as the defence and re/foundation of the commons. It is the part of the proletarian condition that is seemingly outside or on the edges of capitalism (the existing commons or the commons to come) that is the basis of the proletarian ability to transform society. This then is a profound rethinking of the concept of the proletariat.


**Chapter 5: Jubilee, the Political Practice of the Commons**

Introduction

What do the MNC then impart to us about struggle? Particularly, how do they imagine struggle and thus what lessons can we learn to both increase and to help ignite forms of anti-capitalism, rebellion and the generation of communism? *The New Enclosures* in its reformulation of our understanding of capitalism allows for both a critique of some approaches to anti-capitalism and presents the possibility of others. There is no clear line or central position. Rather there are a number of tendencies that arise from an engagement with various struggles and are shaped by this interaction. Like so much of the perspective of autonomy they are deeply influenced by the EZLN/Zapatistas. Also there seems to be a diversity of political emphasis, based on the task of an individual piece of writing. For example Silvia Federici and Massimo De Angelis' piece on the war in Yugoslavia finishes with a call for anti-war struggles to connect to the anti-debt and anti-globalisation ones, putting forward a relatively reformist slogan: "[t]he alternative to war is often simpler that (sic) our arrogant governments think: just put the money where your mouth is and fund human rights!" But p.m.'s work on the other hand, for example *bolo'bolo*, presents fantastical and humorous utopias, But if there is a common point at which those in the MNC meet it would be this: just as capitalism moves to enclose the commons, the commons is the basis for anti-capitalist resistance. *Communism then is the accumulation of an 'outside' to capital*. As noted in "The New Enclosures", they see the basics of new proletarian resistance to the enclosures as struggles that "simultaneously reappropriate and hold places from capital while opening spaces for proletarian movement." This focus on the commons leads the

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xxxv p.m. is a pseudonym of a participant in the MNC.
homogenous proletariat is dispensed with and so too the kinds of politics that rest upon this concept and the historical determinism that hold it up. What is positioned in the centre of this is the commons. Unpacked to refer generally to the collective relations created by the proletariat, it is posed as a point of contestation; both as the target of capital's enclosures that seeks to expand commodification and intensify the subordination of labour; and as a wellspring of resistance and refuge for the proletariat. This wellspring opens up the possibility of communism. From these theorisations what kind of politics can and do the MNC develop?
has been the explosion of the service (reproduction) sector.” Federici argues that: “cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, even problem solving and companionship, have been increasingly ‘taken out of the home’ and organized on a massified industrial basis.” So too the affective and emotional work of reproductive labour has been commodified in the explosion of the “recreation and entertainment industry which are picking up the traditionally female task of making one’s family happy and relaxed.” Added to this is the growth of commodities and services around care – health, sexual, mental. Federici concludes, “[i]n fact, as wives and mothers have ‘gone on strike’, many of their previously invisible services have become saleable commodities around which entire industries are built”. This is very similar to the general argument of the perspective of autonomy that proletarian struggles drive the changes in capitalism. The rebellion of reproductive labour pushed capital to reorganise too.

Such feminist work shows clearly the importance of directly unpaid reproductive labour, the ability for reproductive labourers to resist and challenge capitalism. It also reveals how capitalism needs state-intervention and divisions within the proletariat to maintain reproductive labour.

**Conclusion**

Here we can see how the MNC view and describe capitalism. Gone are any ideas of a stable capitalist normality, rather capitalism appears to be caught in a series of violent spasms and spiralling authoritarianism. The division between state and market melt away as the attempts to enclose the commons, to proletarianise the population and to generate private property require the growth of the state. Wage-labour appears as just one form of the capitalist work. Also as the proletariat is created, divisions within the proletariat are manifested. Thus the paradigm of a
The importance of reproductive labour reveals that it is also a site of contestation, revolt and autonomy that offers up possibilities of communism that capital must attempt to manage, repress and/or recuperate. Silvia Federici’s essay *The Restructuring of Social Reproduction in the United States in the 1970s* argues that women’s revolts against reproductive labour led to society-wide changes. Federici argues that the revolt against housework in the USA began in part “through the welfare struggles of the mid 1960s”, where: “[w]elfare mothers, for example, denounced the absurdity of the government policy that recognizes childcare as work only when it involves the children of others, thus paying the foster parent more than the welfare mother, while devising programs to ‘put the welfare mother to work’.” This was joined with a larger phenomenon: as part of women’s liberation struggles women left reproductive labour to enter into wage-labour directly. This seems somewhat paradoxical, the fleeing from one form of labour to another. But Federici argues this movement must be seen as a “strategy” which worked to subvert the domination and restriction women experienced in the family and the various compulsions and controls that surrounded reproductive labour. By breaking with and refusing the organisation of reproductive labour, women increased their individual and collective autonomy and this then required capitalism to reorganise. Federici cites the begrudging legal recognition of women’s right to be free from domestic and sexual violence in the home. She see this as a result of women’s struggles against what were often part of how the régime of reproductive labour (which always had an emotional, affective and sexual component) was reformulated due to the mass and collective, overt and covert rebellion of women. She also notes a growing “desexualization of housework”, involving a move towards it being shared by men and women, mixed with a growing proliferation of family and relationship forms outside of the nuclear heterosexual paradigm. However she does add that the continuing vast difference between wages for work more commonly done by men and that which has been feminised means that vast pressures remain.

Part of capital’s response to the demand for wages for housework was that it increasingly commodified reproductive labour. “Finally, the clearest evidence that women have used the power of the wage to reduce their unpaid labour in the home
allow reproductive labour to take place. Fortunati remarks that the state plays a firmer role in the normalisation of reproduction than production. She writes that:

Within *production* the state only needs to function as the expression and instrument of collective capital’s control, as there is already a direct relation between the individual male worker and the single capitalist. However, within *reproduction* – where the relation between the individual female houseworker and the single capitalist is indirect – the state must also act as the direct manager and organizer of reproduction.72

Numerous tactics and strategies are therefore applied to assure the coherence and conformity of reproductive labour: from seemingly benign moments such as compulsory schooling (for example) to the intervention of social workers into families that are seen to be deviant. We could also think of the recurring moral panics over single mothers or the debates over abortion. As Fortunati writes:

To control the quantitative aspects of the production of labor-powers, and to regulate the numbers to meet capital’s requirements, the state posits itself as the owner of the means of production of this commodity – the womb – expropriating women, leaving them in possession but without ownership. *Law on contraception and abortion* should therefore be seen in this light, and understood in all their strategic importance to capital in material production of the commodity labor-power.73

Here it is possible to see a predecessor to Virno’s work on *biopower* (see chapter 7): that the regulation and management of life is related to capital’s parasitical reliance on labour-power and thus the need to control the bodies that contain this potential. Fortunati focuses such an understanding so clearly on the sphere of reproduction and thus highlights what in liberal theory is seen as private and excluded from the public realm is in fact a necessity for the activities of production/circulation/consumption. Fortunati’s work appears to be somewhat clumsy as the tools it uses, the familiar Marxist concepts of state and ideology, don’t carry the subtleties that many post-structuralist ones do. Thus the description of the mechanism for the enforcement of discipline and control of reproductive labour could do with revitalisation.
The power difference which arose between waged man and non-waged women under capitalism cannot be compared to the power difference of male/female relationships under slavery or under feudal serfdom. The qualitative leap introduced by capital is reflected in the depth of the division between men and women. The man becomes part of the waged-work relations, the capitalist relation *par excellence*, and was formally defined as the women's master. The woman, at the formal level came to be excluded from any direct relationship with capital, and was defined as being in a relationship of service with the man. Given this situation, not only did the man's social power become much greater than the woman's, but the relationship between, by definition came to be based on conflicting, antagonistic interests. The division of power is clearly reflected by the power stratification and hierarchy within the proletariat.\(^7\)

Reproduction is not, however, disciplined solely by the male worker/family patriarch. For one thing Fortunati's analysis sees the male proletarian as a contradictory figure, as an intermediary of capitalism in the home, but generally also in contestation with capitalism. This is quite different from English language radical feminism that would see the bonds of patriarchy overwhelm class antagonism, though it shares links with other Marxist-Feminist positions. (Indeed Fortunati does not seem to argue that patriarchy exists, rather that capitalism is premised on a *patriarchal* or *sexist* division of labour.) Also all the elements of family, father/husband, mother/wife, children have to be produced and deployed and ideologically interpolated and invested in its structure. She asserts that continual state intervention is necessary to create and maintain the capitalist family and the overall coherence of reproduction. Whilst in liberal theory state/public sphere and family/private sphere appear clearly separate (perhaps antithetical), here there is a deep interlocking of the state and the family. This insight might be particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century where the family seems to be simultaneously collapsing (divorce rates, widespread rejections of traditional sexual morality, growth of unmarried cohabitation etc) yet the family as an object and subject of political discourse and governmentality intensifies. Indeed the state is needed to try to reinforce reproductive labour, because capital *cannot directly do so because the house worker is unwaged*: they do not come into direct contact with a "boss". Capital's direct power is blunted by the very conditions that
and functioning worker, and the production of subjectivities that can and will work. Thus struggle in these terrains would threaten the smooth functioning of the capitalist system by subverting the creation of labour-power for capital. In a 2002 conference reflecting on the history of operaismo, Dalla Costa summarised the work of Lotta Femminista: “[w]e revealed that production originated fundamentally from two poles, the factory and the house, and that the woman, exactly because she produced capitalism’s fundamental commodity, possessed a fundamental level of social power: she could refuse to produce.”

In The Arcane of Reproduction Fortunati looks specifically at housework and at prostitution which at the time of writing 1981, were changing in light of the struggles of the previous decade yet on the whole were realms of labour still carried out by women. She argues that reproductive labour which is both material and immaterial is the reproduction of labour-power through the reproduction of the working class. It is a complex process but is largely focused on the family. Whilst housework and prostitution appear to be a relationship between male worker and female worker (within the dominant coordinates of capitalist society) they are the production of a commodity for capitalist society and thus in fact a relationship between “capital and the female worker mediated by the male worker.”

This means that reproductive labour is different to wage work, more hidden; harder to grasp than wage-labour even though it is no less central to capitalism. It also means that in the carrying out of reproductive labour a hierarchy around the wage is generated, a division within the class that means simple slogans of unity become impossible. In the reproduction of labour-power (and thus capitalist society) men and women are posed against each other, the latter subordinated to the former even though both objectively have an interest against capital. (Note: Fortunati argues that whilst non-heterosexual relationships contain a radical potential they also tend to conform to the family pattern and do not in themselves represent a way out of capitalist relations of reproduction).
reproducing labour-power and analyzed its structure both within the home and in socialized forms of schools, hospitals and so on.65

The target of Lotta Feminista’s critique is the nuclear family of the 1960s and 1970s. They look at this in the context of the Fordist factory and the Keynesian state. Thus their work seems, understandably, dated as the nature of the family in relation to the other circuits of capital and power is in the 21st century has shifted. A more contemporary mapping of reproductive labour/gender/capital is, for example, the work of the Madrid collective Precarias a la Deriva whose essay A Very Careful Strike was published in The Commoner in 2006 alongside the work of Silvia Federici.66 However the work of Lotta Feminista is still useful to understand the nature of reproductive labour even if it has to be grasped with qualifiers due to the changes in the organisation of reproduction – changes caused by the society-wide rebellion that their work was part of.

Lotta Feminista’s challenge is an analytical and political one. They argue that reproductive labour such as housework or prostitution only appears to be outside of the creation of value. The first may appear as a natural task, part of women’s lot and relatively menial in the scheme of things, the second as a simple transaction between male worker and female sex worker (to speak in generalities). As such they are commonly thought of as both natural and inescapable and not a real terrain of struggle. As Fortunati writes:

While the first (wage-labour) appears as the creation of value, the second, reproduction appears as the creation of non-value. Commodity production is thus posited as the fundamental point of capitalist production, and the laws that govern it as the laws that characterize capitalism itself. Reproduction now becomes posited as “natural” production.67

But this is just appearances. Both forms of reproductive labour produce the central capitalist commodity – labour power – through the creation of a healthy
In order for there to be an average rate of profit throughout the capitalist system, branches of industry that employ very little labor but a lot of machinery must be able to have the right to call on a pool of value that high labor, low-tech branches create. If there were no such branches or no such right, then the average rate of profit would be so low in the high-tech, low-labor industries that all investment would stop and the system would terminate. Consequently, "New Enclosures" in the country side must accompany the rise of "automatic processes" in industry, the computer requires the sweat shop, the cyborg's existence is premised on the slave.64

A quick scan across the globe exposes the restriction on movement in Special Economic Zones, the violence of diamond mining, the labour camps in Dubai, and on and on. Exceptions to the 'normality' of the apparent freedom of wage-labour are, in fact, the normality of actually existing capitalism.

The Work of Women

The MNCs' understanding of the importance of non-waged labour arises, in part, from engagement with Italian feminists Lotta Feminista, such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. xxiv Harry Cleaver in his broad summary of the perspective of autonomy describes the work of Lotta Feminista:

On the theoretical level they vastly expanded Tronti's work on the nonfactory part of the working class. They focused on the key role of the wage in hiding not only the unpaid part of the working day in the factory but also unpaid work outside it. They drew on Marx's work on the reserve army and the wage, yet they went beyond it in seeing the reproduction of labour power as within capitalist planning. They brought out the way the wage divides the class hierarchically into waged (factory) and unwaged (housewives, students, peasants, etc) sectors such that the latter groups appear to be outside the working class simply because they are not paid a wage. They pushed forward the analysis of the work of

use of concepts. Focusing on the capitalist counter-offensive against the mass and diverse wave of struggles that reached a high point in the early 1970s, Caffentzis looks at the return of slavery within the borders of the US. He argues that “[i]t is now possible that at the dawn of the new millennium there were 8 to 10 million adults – which would constitute about 7% of the ‘economically active population’ in a slave-like status.”62 This is not slavery as it is often imagined – it is a not a return to cotton plantations. Rather it is the proliferation of work in conditions that cannot be called free and are often outside formal wage-labour. Caffentzis cites developments in prisons, welfare and immigration as intensifying this slave-like status. A large section of the proletariat face, through an intensively authoritarian neoliberal state, a situation in which the liberal freedoms of wage-labour, the ability to negotiate its sale, do not even apply or are deeply hindered by the various state forces. Those in prisons cannot escape it, welfare is used as a disciplinary apparatus to force those on it to accept any kind of work, and without legal status millions work undocumented and in constant threat of deportation. Caffentzis writes:

Prisoners, single mothers, and undocumented workers are all entering into a new legal status: that of waged workers who cannot legally negotiate their wages. In other words, millions of adults in the territorial U.S. are finding themselves in situations reminiscent of the 19th century, with its plantation slavery in the South, coolie workers in the West and indentured servants in the East of the U.S. This revival of slavery constitutes a major defeat for the U.S. proletariat, for how can one launch a major wage struggle knowing that there are millions of people in slave-like situations undercutting wages? Slaves, not computers are the somber basis of U.S. capital’s “bright prospects” in the winter of 1998.63

Caffentzis makes similar arguments in a critique of Rifkin and Negri. Those who see capitalism heading towards a high-tech jobless future (Rifkin) or see communism incubating within the cyber-labour of the North (Negri) fail to realise capitalism’s need for low-tech labour-intensive work, work done in conditions of violence and immiseration. xxxiii Working from Marx, Caffentzis argues:

xxxiii This is Caffentzis image of Rifkin and Negri and as evidenced from the following chapters, it is, I believe, at least an inaccurate reading of Negri.
New Enclosures thesis is that it focuses on peoples and struggles both in history and the present that would have been excluded for the dominant understanding of the proletariat. Also it pushes open the notion of work. The New Enclosures reinforce work (labour for capital generally) at the same time they might actually be producing unemployment (reduction of wage-labour). Both work and the working class refer to something larger than wage-labour and those that perform it. The MNC write:

> At Midnight Notes, we pose the reality and centrality of working class struggle. The struggle over the control of the means of production and subsistence substantially explains contemporary history. By the term working class we mean both those people who have to sell their labour power to survive and those who ensure that the labor power is in fact there to sell; in other words, those who reproduce the working class. Marxists and non-Marxists commonly understand the working class as comprising only those who are paid a wage. Yet today, as in the past, much of the labour performed in society is done outside the institutional framework of waged labor. Slave labor, which greatly defined four centuries of capitalist life, is the most obvious example of unwaged labor directly integrated into the accumulation process (e.g. producing the cotton for worker's clothes thereby cheapening the worker's means of subsistence).61

This expansion of the concept of the working class has at least two elements. One is a focus on reproductive labour and the crucial role it plays in the functioning of capitalism. The other is an attentiveness to capitalism's counter-attacks on proletarian revolt through the destruction of wage-labour and the imposition of various supposedly irregular or non-capitalist forms such as unemployment or slavery. Here MNC challenge the understanding that wage-labour is the norm of work under capitalism.

We see this in the essay *From Capitalist Crisis to Proletarian Slavery: Introduction to the Class Struggle in the US 1973-1998* written by MNC participant George Caffentzis. Caffentzis puts forward a narrative very similar to that of the *New Enclosures* but without the terminology the latter uses – which surely problematises the relationship of the MNC and its participants to the creation and
rather than being outside of the normality of capitalism, is actually often how capitalism works best to enforce the rules and norms of work – even when it tips towards genocidal or apocalyptic possibilities.

Work Beyond Wage-Labour

How does this work by the MNC change or challenge our ideas about class, class struggle and capitalism? At its most simple the vision of capitalism put forward by the MNC widens the spheres of struggle, and dismantles any idea of capitalist stability. Crisis and violence are the recurring conditions of capitalism, as the imposition of work is a task of oppression, restriction and horror.

Again like the other two threads of the perspective of autonomy presented here the MNC challenge what we think work is and thus what we think the working class is. For the MNC the daily lived and embodied struggles over survival (the contestation of daily life) is the place of origin for all revolutionary theoretical explorations. The work of the MNC is directly positioned against those tendencies amongst academic anti-capitalism that increasingly move into the realms of language, culture and communication to try to understand the tensions underscoring and animating society. They write: “but just as capitalism has not transcended the blood and dirt of the world, and spiralled off into some pure world of signs and symbols where profit is nothing more than a rhetorical gesture, our analysis too must remain rooted in our struggles for survival.” Of course this may not seem unique. It may appear to be another Marxist response to post-modernists and post-structuralism by insisting on a return to the economic as the site of the truth of capitalism and a reestablishment of the base/superstructure division. Whilst the MNC affirm the crucial centrality of class as a concept they are also pushing the standard Marxist lexicon open. Indeed what is so striking about the
against the entire oil proletariat. It was a pretext that allowed the mass expulsion of the most disobedient populations and sections of the oil industry.xxxii

The war was not just intended to decimate the Iraqi working class and enforce an extreme form of austerity in Iraq, it was also intended as an attack on the oil producing working class, especially migrant and non-citizen laborers. Observe what the war on Iraq accomplished: Kuwait expelled most the Palestinians working there and the Palestinians population is soon expected to decline to 40,000 – from a pre-war population of roughly 400,000; Saudi Arabia expelled around one million Yemeni workers, and over a million Egyptian workers were displaced from Iraq and Kuwait. All of these displacements are now allowing the various Persian Gulf countries to implement what they now call "rationalizations of the workforce." 58

The MNC contend that capital’s strategy for global expansion and decomposition of opposition – enclosure – relied on oil prices increasing but with the share of profits going directly into wages or into a social wage decreasing. In a situation where states were authoritarian but brittle (the Gulf states for example) and where the technological composition of production of oil was easily open to sabotage, even the smallest possible resistances could threaten this strategy. They continue:

The three groups of workers explicitly targeted in the war were the Iraqis, the Palestinians and the Yemenis: three of the most educated and politicized groups of workers in the region, the three vanguards, so to speak, of the workers within the Mideast social factory.59

The image of capitalism developed here is one in which war is not about a conquest of territories alone, nor the creation of peripheral colonies, but about decomposing class power and imposing particular régimes of accumulation. War,
the Gulf War were the Iraqi proletariat – the force whose recalcitrance and autonomy were preventing the imposition of austerity. The bombing of cities and infrastructure and the massacre of retreating Iraqi soldiers did not weaken the grip of the Ba’athist police state. Rather it worked to destroy social bonds and kill those who fled their role as soldiers (and took their arms with them) and who could prove to be a force for revolution against all the capitalists in the area. Indeed the Iraqi proletariat responded to the aftermath of the war with revolution – particularly the formation of workers’ councils in the South and the North of the nation. The Coalition forces stood by as these revolts were decimated by the Ba’athists. Thus facing the violence from all around, the Iraqi proletariat was broken to a point of accepting the most extreme forms of enclosure. The MNC argue that the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the war, sanctions which would result in 1 million deaths, made Iraqi a “paradigm of austerity.”

MNC summarise their position:

The war was not an attack on Iraq as a nation-state, it was an attack on the Iraqi working class and a defense of an Iraqi police state (even though the police state has been weakened and is entirely dependent upon the whim of the US government, it remains in place and functioning). One motivation for the war was the desire to destroy the basis of working class power in Iraq and fundamentally alter the relationship between capital and labor. Before the war, many Iraqi workers had a kind of informal and tacit social contract with the Iraqi government. But the US achieved what the Ba’th (sic) Party was unable to do alone: annul the social contract and render the workers free to starve and the state and private capital free to accumulate.

The decomposition was not just focused within the borders of Iraq. MNC note how the entire region was militarised and the entire system of guest workers on the oil-fields and in oil-producing states terrorised – largely through deportations. The war was used as justification for intensifying the discipline

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xxxi This narrative does not pay attention to the importance of Kurdish national or Shiite religious identity in the revolt. It is consistent with Marxist analysis that prioritises class explanations. However it is at odds with those parts of the MNCs’ work that stress the importance of divisions within the proletariat.
those of the late 1970s and 80s. Oil prices could not just be automatically hiked up, massive new investment programs begun and the oil proletariat reorganized. There were already mass uprisings throughout the MidEast and any attempt to act against the interests of the oil producing proletariat (both waged and unwaged) would have meant an even more serious and widespread insurrection in a most vital branch of production. The only solution for capital was to establish the preconditions of uncompromising terror before launching any major changes in the oil industry. What we are witnessing in the Mideast is a familiar pattern under capitalism: the forcible and violent decomposition of the working class.53

The MNC argue that the Ba’athist state had maintained its power through a classic national socialist strategy of “guns and butter”: militarism and authoritarianism but also a comprehensive welfare system and state employment opportunities.54 Whilst a police state and nationalist aggression worked in part to maintain the party’s rule, much of the population could also be incorporated into the dominant structures – paid for with oil money. Thus the stability that allowed oil to be produced could only be bought by redistributing substantial amounts of the oil profits. Attempts to break from this to implement general social austerity were met with substantial opposition. Thus: “[t]he Iraqi government could not impose austerity nor privatization without committing political suicide.”55 The MNC argue that the motivations for Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait were an attempt to break this deadlock by grabbing a larger share of the oil reserves and freeing itself from its debts to the Kuwaiti government.xxx

All the régimes that officially fought the war survived – but the conditions of the entire oil proletariat in the region were made increasingly horrific and miserable. This horror and misery was not just a byproduct of the avarice of the ruling class and a desire for a possession of oil, but rather the very tools used to decompose knots of proletarian strength. The MNC argue that the main victims of

xxx Kuwait being a country whose own wealth was built on guest labour: from the oil fields to the nursery. MNC provide a description of the composition of the Gulf proletariat in the essay To Saudi With Love: Working Class composition in the Mid East; a working class that is comprised largely of immigrant workers (from Muslim nations) and faces such restrictions and unfreedoms that the MNC point out that “even the Financial Times characterized the labor system in the Gulf as indentured servitude.” Midnight Notes Collective, “To Saudi with Love: Working Class Composition in the Mid East.,” in Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992 ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 28.
profitable. Yet the statist régimes that would be receiving this new investment had to be hardened to reject any demand by the proletarians in and around their oil fields for a share of the new wealth they would be producing. Moreover, the proletarians themselves would have to be terrorized into accepting a life of extreme poverty. 51

They argue that the Gulf War used Iraq as a practical example to convince oil-producing states of the necessity of adhering to the New Enclosures. It showed in practice how to decompose the oil proletariat and its networks and formations of struggle and resistance through direct militarisation.

To summarise the narrative, MNC argue that the energy crisis in the mid 1970s was a crucial part of the capitalist counter-offensive against struggles that had destroyed the political stability of the Keynesian deal and anti-colonial resistances that were threatening the world-system. Yet by the end of the 1980s, debt and austerity – those pillars of the New Enclosures – were generating resistance, especially amongst oil-producing proletariat. This is what the MNC call the 'international intifadah'. 52 This refers to a wave of uprisings and riots against a decade of IMF imposed austerity; a wave of struggle that threatened the viability of continual oil production and often resulted either in coups or concessions as attempts to return stability. These proletarian upsurges unsettled the mechanism for the global planning of capitalism and made specific states worried about their viability. The interests of parts of the ruling class were at odds with those of the global capitalist system as a whole. The ruling classes of oil-producing nations were more inclined to grant concessions to help maintain their own stability than act in the interests of global capital. However both the former and latter’s troubles arose from the rebellions of labour on a whole and those of the oil proletariat specifically. War then was a necessity to realise the enclosures. They write:

By the late 1980s, the decade of deep austerity and widespread war was met by this international intifadah. But as the wave of insurgency was surging across the planet, capital was planning oil price increases and a restructuring of the oil industry, particularly in the “low-cost” (high profit) regions such as the Gulf. For this to succeed, there would have to be a quantum leap in repression to thwart the possibility of revolutionary explosions similar to
Gulf War and the so-called ‘War and Terror’ and its relation to global strategies for capitalist accumulation, the MNC write:

However, increasing the immediate profits of the oil companies, though important, is not the consideration that makes Iraq the first object of the new Bush policy. Oil and natural gas are basic commodities for the running of the world’s industrial apparatus, from plastics to chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, and energy for cars and electric power plants. Whoever controls the commodity, its price and the profits it generates, has a powerful impact on the whole capitalist system.49

The war over oil, the bloody struggle over a tool to plan the global economy, is linked into the necessity of constructing a plan of accumulation (régimes of power, capitalist investments, patterns of work etc) that can decompose the sites of proletarian initiative and increase capital’s control of the social terrain: in short the motivations and practices of enclosures. They write:

The Gulf War emerged out of the intersection of two basic tendencies of capitalism in the late 1980s: the “New Enclosures” and “recolonization of land and natural givens of the planet... and the decisive demise of various forms of state-led capitalist development (sometimes called socialist and/or fascist) from the Soviet Union to South Africa50.

The MNC argue that the Gulf War (and the New World Order it signalled the start of) was a method of disciplining the proletariat and recalcitrant members of the ruling class to accept the application of the New Enclosures. In the previous global régime of oil production, oil-producing states often used income from oil to create certain deals with the working class to generate security, whilst the working class had come to expect a certain share of the immense wealth that their labour produced. MNC write:

The war and its aftermath centered around the commodity that has been the fulcrum of class relations internationally in the post-WWII period: petroleum. In this new era of recolonization, the oil commodity posed a paradox to capitalist development: if the oil fields of the Persian Gulf nations, the Soviet Union, Mexico, Angola and the other countries that had decolonized Western capital between the 1920 and 1970s were to be recolonized or “enclosed” then a whole new wave (sic) investment must be injected to make them
against the New Enclosures that simultaneously reappropriate and hold places from capital while opening spaces for proletarian movement.44

Oil, War, Work

The MNCs' reconceptualisation of capitalism and class struggle is also carried out through their analysis of the Gulf War. Here again the image of capitalism is shifted away from that of the apparent stability of the liberal democratic state and continual wage-labour. Here again capitalism is shown to use violence, repression and pauperisation as tools to break the insubordination of labour. Here again class and class struggle is rethought and expanded. Benjamin's maxim that, "[t]he history of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule", is presented with vigour.45

Just after publishing their New Enclosures thesis, the bloody events of the 1991 Gulf War refocused the MNCs' attention on petroleum production and its political economy – something that they had already been attentive to. The MNCs' collective position on oil can be summarised in two strands; the first is that "energy frees capital from labour."46 Through industrialisation and mechanisation, capitalism seeks to escape the potentials of the revolt of labour and maximise the exploitation of labour-power. A study of this is traced out by MNC participant George Caffentzis in The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse.47 Secondly oil works as a commodity "whose buying and selling greatly controls the global level of prices, wages and profits."48 Thus oil is a tool of capitalist planning on a global level; the rates and flows of oil and who has the hand on the tiller are crucial for the determination of capitalist strategy for the whole of the earth. The conflicts over oil are not just about control over who has access to a commodity that produces a sizeable profit but also over who has the power to determine (in part) the direction of the system of commodity production. Commenting on the current
makes a moral criticism of the industry on the whole. Such criticism, they argue, ignores the class confrontations between workers and capital that splits the industry.xviii

The introduction to the New Enclosures continues this critique as a general critique of ecological struggles:

The contemporary ecology movement, however, has not learned the secret of its predecessor's "strange victories." The peculiar dialectic between rioting petroleum junkies and anti-nuke struggles in 1979-80 never developed into a truly proletarian movement that could have gone beyond merely managing the environmental consequences of capitalist accumulation.43

Previously under the Keynesian deal both workers' wages and the social wage were premised on ever increasing production. This increasing commodity production was able to recuperate elements of proletarian desire (MNC do not provide a comprehensive explanation of where this desire comes from) into efforts that led to increasing industrialisation and degradation of the earth. However with the end of this deal, capitalism continues to increasingly despoil the planet but without, or with a vastly lessened, bribe.xxix Thus more sections of the proletariat could be won over from capital's efforts. They argue that ecological struggles that took up daily conditions, and struggles over quality of life, as well as ecological devastation could become revolutionary. The MNC write:

Such a shift in the direction of the ecology movement would be one part of a larger process which would transform the New Enclosures into a definitive occasion of proletarian unification and capitalist catastrophe. In practice this means the creation of individuals and organizations that can both think and act globally and locally which is exactly what the struggles around the New Enclosures do. The root result is actualized in the struggles

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xviii Such a critique does ignore similar critiques and other efforts emerging from within green circles.

xxix Here the MNC fail to take into account the function of credit in supplanting the wage as the mechanism for increasing this desire. The exponential growth of credit has been used to increase consumption beyond the limits of the wage and heighten the fervour of commodity fetishism.
enclosure of the commons, the attack on the reproduction, the continual despoiling of the earth has been so often so bravely and fiercely contested. However ecological struggle is often limited to a certain class composition – both in the participants of the movements and in its blindness to the concerns of a proletariat lower down the hierarchy of the division of labour. They write:

In the looming shadow of these bleak capitalist prospects and with the collapse of socialism, the “greens” have come forward with a perspective calling on human aspirations transcending the market. From Earthfirst!’s “Think like a mountain” to “Greenpeace’s “Nuclear-free seas” the ecological movements seems to have been a major force in confronting the New Enclosures in the 1980s. “Green” militants have sabotaged deforestation, blown up power lines, aborted nuclear tests and in general have played the “Luddites” of the New Enclosures, while “Green” parties in Europe attracted the support of many (who in previous periods would have joined the socialists or communists) by voicing political and ideological resistance to the grossest consequences of capitalist development. The “Greens” (along with their animal liberation allies) have brought some outlaw guts and angelic passion to the struggles of the last decade. But their class composition has limited their efforts up to now.41

This is explored in greater depth in the Midnight Notes pamphlet Strange Victories: The Anti-Nuclear Movement in the US and Europe. This pamphlet presents an analysis of the anti-nuclear movement and argues that this movement is simultaneously restricted to a small section of the proletariat yet ideologically projects a universal solution by speaking in the name of ‘humanity.’xxvii The pamphlet argues that by speaking for and on behalf of humanity as a whole, the anti-nuclear movement remains stuck within the boundaries of the forms of labour of those that make it up – largely intellectual and cultural workers. They become “anti-planners”, developing other modes of designing how capitalism would function – often with a focus on low-energy and high intensive work and thus continuing a vision of the world in which most workers are excluded from self-determination and ignoring that the struggle against capitalism is not one for its better management but its abolition.42 Also the pamphlet argues that the anti-nuclear movement’s ideology contributes to it failing to make connections with both the workers in nuclear power plants and the demands around energy of those who live in the cities. The MNC critiques the green movement by arguing that it

xxvii There is a possible correlation between the MNCs’ critique of elements of green politics and Marx and Engel’s critique of utopian and feudal socialists.
effect of the New Enclosures is the difficulty to fight in the spaces where previously the proletariat had been powerful. Whilst these struggles have been limited, the MNC optimistically argue that the experiences of enclosures, resistance and contestation have led to radical possibilities:

First the New Enclosures have led an enormous increase and intensification of proletarian knowledge of international class composition. For example, the average West African farmer in the 1980s knows about the deals that can go down in Brooklyn, London and Venice. Second, the New Enclosures have forced an internationalism of proletarian action, since the proletariat has never been so compelled to overcome its regionalism and nationalism, as people are losing not just the plot of land but their stake in their countries. Third the very extremity of the debt crisis and the need to organise reproduction outside of the money relation has often forced workers to develop their autonomy by imposing the task of creating a whole system of production and reproduction outside of the standard operating procedures of capitalist society.40

This last point is crucial – it suggests that in the defence of the commons, not only is the proletariat globally forced to transform itself, develop a global relation and forsake the nation state, but that to struggle and survive it creates “a whole system of production and reproduction outside of the standard operating procedures of capitalist society.” That is, the struggle to defend the commons generates new commons! Though in this piece of writing, like in much of the MNCs’ work, commons whilst a crucial term remains open and undefined.xxxvi Here we get a sense that it is not something that is just found – a piece of land, an empty house. But it is something produced by those who use it. As much as the commons sustains the commoners, it is the relationship of commoners to each other, their ability to be commoners, which makes a commons. It is thus a thing of struggle and antagonism.

Whilst the MNC dismiss Orthodox Marxism as being inattentive to the struggles around the commons they look with some favour on ‘green’ – that is environmentalist – resistance. It has been amongst environmentalism where the

xxxvi This open and undefined use of the commons could in fact reflect the open and undefined nature of the commons.
Capital has long dreamed of sending us to work in space, where nothing would be left to us except our work-machine and rarified and repressive work relations (see "Mormons in Space" Computer Space Notes, Midnight Notes #5). But the fact is that the earth is becoming a space station and millions are already living on space-colony conditions: no oxygen to breath, limited social/physical conditions, a desexualized life, difficulty of communication, lack of sun and green....even the voices of migrating birds are missing.\(^{38}\)

**Resistance to Enclosure**

The point of the MNCs' detailing of these developments is neither to catalogue a stream of horrors nor to merely understand the changes to capitalism. They want to show how an understanding of the changes to capitalism can help us understand the possibilities of the *next wave* of struggles. Whilst the New Enclosures may have broken apart the previous terrains of struggle, they have not extinguished struggle itself. Sometimes the enclosures are truly experienced as apocalypses – the destruction of a way of life, the increased uncertainty of survival or for many, death. Yet they have not been uncontested. MNCs' analysis not only attempts to explain the changes as capital's reaction to proletarian struggle, but also attempts to understand the possibilities for rebellion.

Interestingly the MNC do not generally look to the factory floor to chart the experiences and possibilities of resistance to capital during the New Enclosures but instead to what they call the Land War; meaning the multiple rebellions stretching from peasants defending communal land to squatters in the North opposing financial speculators.\(^{39}\) (However both in the introduction and in a later article of the "New Enclosures" issue of Midnight Notes the industrial struggle of Jay Maine is referred to.) Perhaps the emphasis on struggles outside the workplace proper is for two reasons. Firstly, the important task of highlighting the often forgotten spheres of life where the class war is waged; and also to show how an
In the realm of reproduction we may find the kinds of social relations that allow us to survive in capitalism and also to start moving towards emancipatory politics. Thus the fifth aspect of the New Enclosures is the enclosure of all that allows life to continue – in a way that works to intensify the reproduction of labour, even as it may make many lives difficult and some impossible. Capitalism may reproduce the proletarian condition generally through the extermination of some proletarians specifically. Thus:

The highly advertised disappearance of the rain forests, the much commented upon hole in the ozone layer, the widely lamented pollution of air, sea and beach, along with the obvious shrinking of our living spaces, are all part of the enclosure of the earthly commons... You do not need to be a science fiction freak to feel that we are guinea pigs in a capitalist experiment in nonevolutionary species change. Human proletarians are not alone in this speed-up and shrink down. Animals, from protozoa to cows, are being engineered and patented to eat oil spills, produce more eggs per hour, secrete more hormones. Increasingly land is no longer valued for how much food it can grow or what kind of buildings it can support but for how much radioactive waste it can 'safely' store. Thus a tired earthly commons, the gift of billions of years of laborless transformation, meets tired human bodies.37

The MNCs' work on reproduction is one of the few moments where ecology is seriously thought about by the perspective of autonomy. Otherwise ecology is often ignored or unaccounted for. The other prominent example would be Mariarosa Dalla Costa, whose recent work has tried to explore connection between ecology, the indigenous, rural labour, feminism and anti-capitalism.xxiv The MNC argue here that the destruction of the environment is firmly linked to capital's desire to dispossess labour of any space for autonomous or rebellious reproduction and to intensify the conditions under which labour labours. They remark that capital's ideal environment is one of total control, the space station:

The fifth point perhaps needs more elaboration. MNC are deeply influenced by Italian feminist writers such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati and their work on reproduction, which often means the labour that is necessary to reproduce labour – starting with housework and looking at many other forms of unpaid labour. These are forms of labour most often previously thought peripheral to capital. The MNC use the idea of reproduction and reproductive labour in an open way to refer to manifold forms of work, often unpaid and not recognised as work per se, that create the abilities and conditions for individuals to work. For example in an essay on the anti-nuclear movement, the MNC comment about the lives of intellectual workers in areas of New England of the USA:

By the term reproduction we mean all the work that has to be done in order to keep us in shape so that we are able to work: eating, clothing, relaxation, medical care, emotional ‘services’, discipline, education, entertainment, cleaning, procreation, etc. Sometimes what we call ‘life’ is, in reality, only reproduction for capitalist exploitation.35

Reproduction refers to a complex collection of activities that allows our continual survival. It is the labour that reproduces labour: both the labour of work for capital and the labour of resistance to capital. What the MNC are arguing here is that for labour-power to be realisable, certain kinds of daily practices are necessary so that people have the health, ability and motivation to work. Obviously the forms of work vary from situation to situation. Part of the argument of the New Enclosures is that capital is willing to inflict a high level of immiseration including violence, impoverishment and starvation, to discipline people. The above example is about workers in creative and intellectual industries. The MNCs’ contention is that many of the practices that these workers engaged in rejected the normality of corporate society yet were actually the very activities that allowed such workers the capacities to create value for capitalism. The “retreat to the country side and the alternative life-styles are forms of struggle by intellectual workers against capitalism.” Yet since “there is no such thing as ‘outside of capital’ in capitalist society: from a long-term perspective the, 'back-to-the-land' intellectuals are just testing out new capitalist possibilities of dealing with certain problems of cheap production.”36
Thus, once again, as at the dawn of capitalism, the physiognomy of the world proletariat is that of the pauper, the vagabond, the criminal, the panhandler, the street peddler, the refugee sweatshop worker, the mercenary, the rioter.\textsuperscript{33}

The MNC then work to trace the processes and forms of the New Enclosures and the corresponding developments of resistance that have arisen against them. How do the New Enclosures work? How do they break up previous spaces of resistance and impose new, intensified burdens of labour and commodify an expanding range of activities? The New Enclosures, they argue, work at five levels: first, the continued destruction of "communal control of subsistence"; second, "seizure of land for debt"; third, they "make mobile and migrant labor the dominant form of labor"; fourth, they "require(d) the collapse of socialism..."; and fifth is an "attack on our reproduction."\textsuperscript{34} All this is a combination of straightforward dispossession, the recuperation of proletarian struggle and/or initiative and the generation of new spaces of exploitation.

The first three aspects of the New Enclosures (so depressingly similar to enclosures of old) are easy to grasp – they represent the fundamentals of many of the basics of the stratagems laid out by the IMF and other partisans of the market and so-called 'development'. They are the breaking of whatever remains of collective subsistence, the privatisation of land, and the destruction of various forms of social bonds; the transfer of more and more property into the circulation of the market and the proletarianisation (or intensification) of those driven from the land. A proletarianised population that is then set into motion right across the globe.

The fourth point, the collapse of socialism, is more ambiguous and as we shall see in the next two chapters the MNC maintain a contradictory relationship to the Left, social democracy and socialism.
into disarray the previous régime of global and national organisation of capitalism because it was becoming ungovernable. The New Enclosures are the global intensification and reinforcing of capitalist social relations. The MNC write:

Under the logic of capitalist accumulation in this period, for every factory in a free-trade zone in China privatized and sold to a New York commercial bank, or for every acre enclosed by a World Bank development project in Africa or Asia as part of a "debt for equity" swap, a corresponding enclosure must occur in the US and Western Europe. Thus when communal land in Nigeria is expropriated or when the policy of free housing is abolished in China, there must be a matching expropriation in the US be it the end of a "good paying" factory job in Youngstown, the destruction of a working class community in Jay, Maine or the imposition of martial law in New York City's parks. With each contradiction of "communal rights" in the Third World or of "socialist rights" in the Soviet Union and China, comes a subtraction of our seemingly sacred "social rights" in the US. Indeed, this subtraction has gone on so thoroughly in the 1980s that even the definitions of what it means to be human is being revised by both capital and the proletariat. 32

This counter-attack leads to the uprooting, impoverishment and criminalisation of millions across the globe. Here the MNC argue that the reinforcement of the subordination of labour was often realised by the reduction of wage-labour. For example mass unemployment technically reduces the number of people in wage-labour. However it may also immiserate people and break their willingness to struggle. The old sites of proletarian power such as the mass factory may be shut down and moved to another area or country. Thus whilst people are out of work, their subjection to the general capitalist rule of the wage is intensified. Capitalist counter-offensive, which is an attempt to increase the proletariats' subservience to work, often functions by changing how they work. The MNC want to emphasise the importance of marginalised, unwaged and impoverished forms of labour. They write:

These New Enclosures, therefore, name the large-scale reorganization of the accumulation process which has been underway since the mid-1970s. The main objective of this process has been to uproot workers from the terrain on which their organizational power has been built, so that, like the African slaves transplanted to the Americas, they are forced to work and fight in a strange environment where the forms of resistance possible at home are no longer available.
that actually called into question many of the fundamentals of capitalist society.
The MNC summarise this argument as follows:

At the end of World War II capital (in its Western and Eastern modes) offered a variety of slogans to the world proletariat: from "collective bargaining" and "racial integration" in the US, to the family "social wage" in the USSR, to "colonial emancipation" in Asia and Africa. An enormous struggle ensued to determine the content of these slogans; but between 1965 and 1975, proletarian initiatives transcended the limits of capital's historic possibilities. From the Watts riot to the "Prague Spring" to Italy's "hot autumn" to the last US helicopter escaping from the fall of Saigon, the profit picture internationally turned sour and capital was facing euthanasia. Consequently all deals were off and capital went on the attack everywhere.  

The MNC describe a largely unified and coherent global response by capital that attempted to decompose the power of the rebellions, defeat opposition and impose a new régime of accumulation. They write:

The "debt crisis", "homelessness" and the collapse of "socialism" are frequently treated as different phenomena by both the media and left journals. For us at Midnight they but deceptively name aspects of a single unified process: the New Enclosures, which must operate throughout the planet in differing, divisive guises while being totally interdependent.  

This interdependence is key; for the MNC the assault on the three deals is not just a repetition of the same process all over the globe. The New Enclosures are only possible in one place because the New Enclosures are also happening everywhere else. The MNC asserts that the successes of specific moments of the capitalist counter-offensive were contingent on and constitutive of a global phenomenon. Also each deal, that of the First, Second and/or Third Worlds could only be broken because they were all being broken.

The enclosures work to decompose proletarian resistance and power. They break apart the spatial relations and régimes of power on which the proletariat have learnt to understand, struggle within and potentially overcome. Capital threw
The Enclosures, however, are not a one time process exhausted at the dawn of capitalism. They are a regular return on the path of accumulation and a structural component of class struggle. Any leap in proletarian power demands a dynamic response: both the extended appropriation of new resources and new labor power and the extension of capitalist relations, or else capitalism is threatened with extinction. Thus, Enclosure is one process that unifies proletarians throughout capital's history, for despite our differences we all have entered capitalism through the same door: the loss of our land and of the rights attached to it, whether this loss has taken place in Front Mill, England, in southern Italy, in the Andes, on the Niger Delta, or in the Lower East Side of New York. 29

The MNCs’ development of these concepts is tied to presenting a narrative of the rise and fall of the organisation of global capital around Fordism, Keynesianism and the Welfare/Warfare state. Enclosures are the “secret” of neoliberalism, its motivating rationale. Consistent with autonomism they depict the rebellions and revolts of the proletariat as the force that caused the crises that pushed capital towards these changes.

The New Enclosures are seen as “The Apocalypse of the Trinity of Deals”. The MNC argue that in the wake of the Second World War, capitalism attempted three ‘deals’ to try to ensure class peace and its viability and stability. These deals included things such as the Welfare State, political freedoms, union rights etc. These were attempts to grant concessions so proletarian demands would stay broadly inside the framework of capitalism. Even if workers went on strike for more wages, they perhaps would not try to abolish wages, and wage-labour, all together. Different but related deals are developed in the First, Second and Third Worlds. This is of course a simplification of complex processes of confrontations, demands and appeasements. The MNC argue that it is not the case that these deals extinguished or satisfied the root causes of class struggle, but that they were able to be placed in a certain manageable framework. It was the rebellion against these deals, the breaking of them by the working class that compelled capital’s shift to enclosure. That is the by the late 1960’s the masses across the globe were refusing to play by the rules of the deals, and were expressing and struggling for demands
This ‘madness’ has political implications – especially a praxis that sees the struggles around the commons as subordinate to those of the industrial proletariat proper. In the “New Enclosures” they argue that such a perspective was at the time of writing dominant in “third world” variants of Marxism. These variants were in crisis in 1990 and are probably more so now. Part of their crisis, argue the MNC, is and was their subscription to Marxism’s teleology which leads them to often oppose the commons:

“Third world” Marxists accept the notion of the progressivity of original accumulation. Consequently, even though they officially fight against the New Enclosures, they envision their own party and state as carrying out their own Enclosures on their own people even more efficiently and “progressively” than the capitalists could do. They interpret communal ownership of land and local market exchanges as being marks of “petty bourgeois” characteristics they must extirpate.

This creates a direct conflict between the revolutionaries and those they would liberate. Also the forms that these revolutionaries pose as progressive alternatives, “state plantations (Mozambique) or capitalist farms (Zimbabwe)” for example, are capitalist forms. As we see so often national liberation struggles, despite their allegedly socialist objectives, work to further establish capitalism, by transforming land holdings, proletarianising the population and intensifying the role of the commodity and the market. The political consequences of Marx’s error, taken up by many Left organisations and parties when in power, are disastrous.

The New Enclosures

As noted the MNC reject the idea that the enclosure of the commons is a unique historical event that precedes the normality of capitalism proper. Rather they contend that it is a constant feature of capitalist counter-revolution against different waves of proletarian refusal. They argue:
model of the Enclosures. In each of these examples we are not confronted with a number of isolated, petty producers but a staging point for proletarian attack or logistical locus.  

The commons then are not just residual places of pre-capitalist forms of social relations that must be overcome by capital for the basis for communism to be created. The MNC contend that through capitalism's history the commons exist as a wellspring of resistance against capitalism and for the direct creation of communism. What is radical about the commons are the kinds of social relationships they sustain, and the kinds of social relationships that sustain them. The commons as a concept functions both as a signifier for the non- and anti-capitalist forms of collective subsistence and the interlinked relations of collective autonomy. For the MNC the commons are a reoccurring part of struggle. They provide both a point of origin for struggle and also a goal. In the Many Headed Hydra MNC participant Peter Linebaugh, with Marcus Rediker, see the waves of struggles that arose after the Old Enclosures, and before industrialisation, that swept across the Atlantic as all part of the “struggle for the commons.”  

P. m. (a MNC participant and author of bolo’bolo) sees the commons as something produced by collective practices arguing: “[t]here is also no such thing as the commons – they are only its regulations” and that, “[a] lot of communication, information, and bargaining and democratic decision-making are needed to keep the commons going.”

The MNC continue that it is a serious mistake to then consign any forms of commons to the dustbin of history for the sake of a linear historical narrative:  

It is plain madness to accept the demise of such villages, tracts of land, neighborhoods and towns as necessary and ultimately progressive sacrifices to the destruction of capitalism and the development of truly “universal” proletarians. Universal or not, real, living proletarians (that do not live on air) must put their feet some place, must rest some place, must retreat some place. For class war does not happen on an abstract board toting up profit and loss, it is a war that needs a terrain.
colonies of the New World. Despite the image of the development of capitalism put forward by liberal ideologues, in which wage-labour was joyfully taken up, force was necessary to compel people to work. Of course the critique of the 'freedom' of wage-labour has long been part of many different Marxists accounts. What Federici's work does is to place the active refusal of 'the lower orders' at the centre of our understanding of capitalism's historical origins. The workers on either side of the Atlantic were not passive victims: on the contrary, they deployed numerous forms of revolt and refusal.21

The second break the MNC make with Orthodox Marxism's narrative of the primitive enclosures is over the questions of the commons. Classically Marxism has seen capitalism as a necessary stage of development that creates the conditions necessary for communism. Such a teleological view sees the enclosures as unfortunate but necessary. For the MNC the commons were, and are, the substance of communism. Thus they cannot be seen as just some pre-capitalist relic to be brushed aside so capitalism can develop and thus till the soil for the development of communism.

The progressivism of Marxism has suffered harsh critiques from many sides: critiques that expose how orthodox Marxism is tied to a certain form of Enlightenment rationalism that contains a positivist and deterministic view of history. They have also shown the colonial and patriarchal foundations of such thinking. If the tropes of commons and enclosures are to be used as radical tools against the conditions of the present, then this has to be rethought – both in its application today and in its original context. The MNC write:

The problem with this analysis is simple: the New Enclosures (and probably many of the Old) are not aimed only at petty private producers and their property. They also aim to destroy communal land and space that forms an energy well of proletarian power. A Quiche Indian village in the Guatemalan hills, a tract of communally operated land in the Niger Delta, an urban neighborhood like Tepito in Mexico City, a town surrounding a paper mill controlled by striking paperworkers like Jay, Maine, do not fit into the classic Marxist
division, often manifested by state violence, religious ideology and reactionary populist participation. The subordination of reproductive labour and the intensification of gender divisions were prerequisites to creating the working class.

Thus against the dominant orthodox Marxist progressive reading of primitive accumulation that fits it within a deterministic telos Federici posits four points, which are worth quoting in full:

I. The expropriation of European workers from their means of subsistence, and the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans to the mines and plantations of the "New World" were not the only means by which a world proletariat was formed and "accumulated".

II. This process required the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force. Most of all, it required the destruction of the power of women which, in Europe and America, was achieved through the extermination of the "witches".

III. Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender as well as "race" and age, become constitutive of class rule and formation of the modern proletariat.

IV. We cannot, therefore, identify capitalist accumulation with the liberation of the worker, female or male, as many Marxists (among others) have done, or see the advent of capitalism as a moment of historical progress. On the contrary, capitalism has created more brutal and insidious forms of enslavement, as it has planted into the body of the proletariat deep divisions that have served to intensify and conceal exploitation. It is in great part because of these imposed divisions – especially those between women and men – that capitalist accumulation continues to devastate life in every corner of the planet.19

Federici catalogues the violence, pauperisation and extreme exploitation that was unleashed to accumulate wealth and labour on both sides of the Atlantic.20 The most apocalyptic part of this process was undertaking in the
practical) decriminalisation of rape against poor women and the proliferation of state-sponsored and sanctioned brothels and prostitution. Both were mass phenomena that attempted to hold and destroy insurgency and also create the social framework for capitalist development; in part through the growth of the state, the interpolation of men into patriarchal practices and ideologies and the deepening of the de-valorisation of women and their labours. She writes:

It is difficult retrospectively to tell how far playing the “sex card” helped the state to discipline and divide the medieval proletariat. What is certain is that this sexual “new deal” was part of a broader process which, in response to the intensification of social conflict, led to the centralization of the state, as the only agent capable of confronting the generalization of the struggle and safeguarding the class relation.

Federici argues that the oppression of women and the disciplining of the body were crucial to the origin of capitalism, and not merely products of it. Federici argues that due to the violence, disorder and immiseration of capitalism’s origins it was essential to its survival to normalise reproduction. This rested on the creation of certain forms of patriarchal divisions within the proletariat that would make it more useful and manageable. Thus women’s labour underwent a campaign of violent devaluation as it was driven from its productive role in the peasant economy and pushed out of urban professions, as prostitution (contra the above) became increasingly criminalised and so on. This is similar to what Maria Mies calls “housewifeization” – the pushing of women into a newly created territory of the home, exiled from the recognised circuits of (formal and overt) productivity and transformed into what appears ideologically as a natural good. Federici’s work details the massive (violent and ideological) campaigns necessary to achieve this and that they produced an intensified rift of gender within the class.

To guarantee the existence and availability of labour-power a proletariat had to be created and recreated which involved the formation of deeply gendered

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经历四
Federici is not making an argument here against legalised prostitution, but rather how at a particular moment in was used by the state to ensure the rule of capital by intensifying divisions within the proletariat.
master.” These are that “[t]he real wage increased by 100%, prices declined by 33%, rents also declined, the length of the working-day decreased, and a tendency appeared towards local self-sufficiency.”

This is the context of capitalism’s development. Federici argues that “the mounting class conflict brought about a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and the nobility, without which proletarian revolts may have not been defeated.” The liberal and orthodox Marxist view of the bourgeoisie sees them as partisans of democracy and freedom against feudal privilege. Federici sees collusion between the merchants and the old order. This was the basis of the development of increased state power and capitalist social relationships:

For in the peasants and the democratic weavers and cobbler of its cities, the bourgeois recognized an enemy far more dangerous than the nobility – one that made it worthwhile for the burghers even to sacrifice their cherished political autonomy. Thus, it was the urban bourgeois, after two centuries of struggles waged in order to gain full sovereignty within the walls of its communes, who re instituted the power of the nobility, by voluntarily submitting to the rule of the Prince, the first step on the road to the absolute state.

It was not enough to stop a revolution. The ruling powers had launch a new régime of accumulation. “It was in response to this crisis that the European ruling class launched the global offensive” that had at its basis “the relentless attempts to appropriate new sources of wealth, expand its economic basis, and bring new workers under its command”.

Unsurprisingly the counter-revolution was marked by direct violence and repression. For example Federici points outs that after the Peasant War of 1525 “[a] hundred thousand rebels were massacred in retaliation.” The counter-revolution also involved a sexual politics, with a direct encouragement of misogyny to divide the working class population and direct the anger and energy of young men into violence against poor women. This took place through the overt (or
A history of women and reproduction in the 'transition to capitalism' must begin with the struggles that the medieval proletariat – small peasants, artisans, day laborers – waged against feudal power in all its forms. Only if we evoke these struggles, with their rich cargo of demands, social and political aspirations, and antagonistic practices, can we understand the role that women had in the crisis of feudalism and why their power had to be destroyed for capitalism to develop, as it was by the three-century-long persecution of witches.  

Federici details manifold struggles of the peasants against feudal authority; struggles which often manifested in revolutionary-religious movements. These heresies and millenarianisms attacked the overall structures of power as well as attempting a radical recreation of social life – all of which happened in the context of the Black Death and the corresponding labour crisis. Although the most overt attempts for power by the peasant revolts – such as the formation of New Jerusalem in Munster – were repressed, the peasants won numerous concessions and freedoms from the feudal order and achieved a great deal of autonomy which imperilled the dominance of the ruling class.

The 'scandal' of high wages the workers demanded was only matched, in the eyes of the employers, by the new arrogance they displayed – their refusal to work, or to continue to work after having satisfied their needs (which they now could do more quickly because of their higher wages); their stubborn determination to hire themselves out only for limited tasks, rather than for prolonged periods of time; their demands for other perks beside their wages; and their ostentatious clothing which, according to the complaints of contemporary social critics made them indistinguishable from the lords.

Federici argues that “for a broad section of the western European peasantry, and for urban workers, the 15th century was a period of unprecedented power.” The mixture of rebellion and the labour shortage (caused by the Black Death) meant that serfdom was crumbling and workers were now demanding higher wages and refusing work beyond that which met their desires.

This rise in autonomy was part of a general disintegration of the feudal economy. Federici identifies “some basic estimates indicating that between 1350 and 1500 a major shift occurred in the power-relation between workers and
production – capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production are impossible."6

The orthodox, and arguably Marx's, view of primitive accumulation is that it is a unique and specific moment that opens up the development of capitalism. Once the population is dispossessed and property rights enforced, primitive accumulation ends and we are into the normal operation of capitalism – the exploitation of surplus-value in the factory. Class struggle continues but in a different terrain, or for Orthodox Marxism, class struggle is now on its proper terrain and begins properly. Primitive accumulation is often seen as a necessary horror, something violent and bloody, but since it establishes capitalism it thus establishes the potential for communism. In the linear historical narrative of orthodox Marxism it is an unfortunate but necessary stage.

The MNC radically break from this narrative. The MNC do not see primitive accumulation as a single and unique event that contains capitalism's origin but as a constant returning feature often forced by the resistance of the proletariat. This in turn leads to and is premised on an expansion of the concept of the proletariat and of its struggle.

There are two parts to this break. Firstly they dispute the causality behind primitive accumulation. They see it as a reaction against the insurgencies and rebellions of the feudal working classes rather than springing from capitalism's own motivations and dynamics. Rather "[t]he Old Enclosures were a counter-revolutionary process..."7 This thesis has been developed largely by MNC participant Silvia Federici, especially in her work *Caliban and The Witch*. It starts with an attempt to flesh out the claim that capitalism arose as a *counter-revolution* to the explosion of class struggles within and against feudalism. A particular focus of her work is the history of gender and reproductive labour within this conflict. Federici writes:
and all the guarantees of existence offered by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.³

Marx writes about primitive accumulation in the first volume of *Capital*. At least two arguments are made here. One is a critique of capitalism’s self-image of its own origins: that capitalism’s original accumulation of wealth is due to the hard work of capitalists and the vitality of the market. Marx summarises and mocks capitalism’s mythology as follows:

Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living....Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour have up to now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work.⁴

Against this mythology Marx argues that the origins of capitalism was the violent destruction of what came before it, and the dispossession of the population: “[i]n actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force played the greatest part.”⁵ However, the violence of primitive accumulation cannot just be explained through the avarice of the early capitalists, their lusts for the wealth of Mexico and so on. Capitalism is a social relationship, not merely an accumulation of wealth. For capitalism to exist certain kinds of populations need to be created. It needs a proletariat: those who are compelled to sell their labour. Primitive accumulation was not just about the transfer of ‘resources’ into the circulation of the bourgeois market (though of course the colonial plunder of the world was crucial) but the dispossession of people from their subsistence so they would be compelled into the bitter ‘freedom’ of wage-labour. Commenting on E. G. Wakefield’s study of the unfortunate case of Mr. Peel, in which an English capitalist finds it hard going in Western Australia as he is deserted by his employees as they head off to try to escape the enslavement of wage-labour, Marx writes: “[s]o long, therefore, as the worker can accumulate for himself (sic) – and this he can do so long as remains in possession of his means of
**Primitive Accumulation(s)**

In 1991 The Midnight Notes Collective published an issue of their journal *Midnight Notes* entitled “New Enclosures”. Defying the apparent jubilation at the end of the Cold War and pushing aside the focus on the novelty and uniqueness of this period, MNC argued that despite appearances it was class struggle, capitalism and enclosure that typified the period. The introduction opened with the following paragraph:

> **Glasnost, End of the Cold War, United Europe, We are the World, Save the Amazon Rainforest**...these are the typical phrases of the day. They suggest an age of historic openness, globalism, and the breakdown of political and economic barriers. In the midst of this expansiveness, however, Midnight Notes poses the issue of “The New Enclosures”. For a corrosive secret is hidden in the gleaming idols of globalism, the end of the blocs and the Gaian ecological consciousness: the last decade has seen the largest Enclosure of the worldly Common in history. Our articles reveal this secret in detail, as well as the importance of Enclosures, both Old and New in the planetary struggle of class.²

What they were attempting to do was to look at the changes unfolding across the globe from the perspective of class struggle, and in a way that allowed them to *rethink* the possibility of class struggle. The do so from the starting point of workers’ self-activity and thus it is a consistent application of the perspective of autonomy. They locate the causality for these transformations in proletarian struggle. They did this by rethinking and radicalising the concept of “enclosure” and “commons” which they had taken from a challenging reading of the Marxist idea of “primitive accumulation”. The MNC start their introduction with a partial quotation from this section of *Capital*, on the subject of primitive accumulation, which is worth reproducing here:

> ...the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for the bourgeois historians. But on the other hand these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production...
more unorthodox titles of contemporary radicalism. Also some projects authored by Midnight Notes are signed as "Midnight Notes and Friends" or have been developed with other projects such as the Gulf Information Group. In *Auroras of the Zapatistas* (which like *Midnight Oil* is an edited volume) six of the sixteen pieces are written by authors who are not stated members of the collective.

Whilst there seems to be a broad commonality around the MNC, there is not a 'line,' nor does there seem to be a desire for one. As such, a study of the MNC cannot be based on reading of a central canon, for there is none. Over more than twenty years there have been a number of issues that have come into focus in the work of MNC. They are deeply influenced by the writings on reproductive labour - that is the work of reproducing labour - by the autonomist feminists of *Lotta Feminista* such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. They regularly examine the themes of energy and war. But what is most interesting for this study is the deployment of the tropes "Commons" and "Enclosures" as conceptual tools to understand capitalism, class conflict and resistance and the way that this reworks the possibilities of revolutionary politics. These tropes are irregularly applied by the MNC in their writings: sometimes they take centre stage, other times they are in the background. A deliberate study of them does bring to light the general paradigm, keeping in mind the above qualifications.

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The second tendency of autonomism for our study is that of the Midnight Notes Collective (MNC). Put simply the MNC focus on the importance and continuation of an outside to capital from which struggles draw sustenance and communism may be formed. The MNC provide a powerful counterpoint to the work of both Holloway and Virno and Negri, although of course there are also many confluences as well. The MNC have not however received similar attention in academic circles to writers such as Negri; they remain part of a militant discourse largely outside of the university even though many of its participants are academics. Starting in 1979 they have irregularly published a journal, each issue themed around various issues, flashpoints, tensions and resistances in capitalism. Two books have also been published under their collective editorship: Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992 and Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles of the Fourth World War. The MNC have also published a number of short interventions into specific debates and struggles, letters in journals etc. On top of this individual members publish under their own names, and collaborate with people outside the formal membership of the collective. Various participants have appeared in other journals with a generally similar politics – such as Common Sense and The Commoner. A number of their titles have been published by Autonomedia: home of many of the
151 Ibid., 174.
154 Subcomandante Marcos and The Zapatistas, "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," in *The Other Campaign / La Otra Campana*, Subcommandante Marcos and The Zapatistas (San Francisco: City Lights, 2006), 65.
155 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 114.
102 Holloway, "Is the Zapatista Struggle an Anti-Capitalist Struggle."
104 Holloway, The Concept of Power and the Zapatistas.
107 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
109 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
111 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
120 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
129 Holloway, Dignity's Revolt.
131 Holloway, Dignity's Revolt.
132 Holloway, Zapatismo and the Social Sciences.
133 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
134 Holloway, Dignity's Revolt.
136 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
138 Holloway, "Is the Zapatista Struggle an Anti-Capitalist Struggle."
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
145 Ibid.: 43.
146 The Zapatistas, Zapatistas Encuentro: Documents from the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), 23.
147 Ibid., 24-25.
49 Ibid., 28.
50 Ibid., 29-30.
51 Ibid., 36.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 37.
55 Ibid., 73.
56 Ibid., 57.
57 Ibid., 60.
58 Ibid., 63.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 74.
61 Holloway, Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today, 63-64.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 102.
64 Ibid., 151.
65 Ibid., 102.
66 Ibid., 156-57.
68 Holloway, Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today, 156.
69 Holloway, Ordinary People, That Is, Rebels.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 159-61.
73 Ibid., 178.
74 Ibid., 177.
75 Ibid., 179.
76 Ibid., 180.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 181.
80 Ibid., 163-64.
81 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 183.
85 Ibid., 185.
86 Ibid., 203.
88 Ibid.
90 Holloway, Our Place, Our Time.
91 Holloway, Class Struggle Is Asymmetrical.
93 Holloway, "Twelve Theses on Changing the World without Taking Power."
95 Holloway, "Is the Zapatista Struggle an Anti-Capitalist Struggle."
98 Ibid., 3.
99 Ibid., 15.

2 Ibid.


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.


9 Ibid., 161.

10 Ibid., 162.

11 Ibid., 163.

12 Holloway, *Adorno Meets Tronti*.


15 Ibid., 170.

16 Holloway, *Time to Revolt - Reflections on Empire*.

17 Holloway, *Adorno Meets Tronti*.


19 Ibid., 88.

20 Ibid., 89.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 140.

23 Ibid., 140-41.

24 Ibid., 118 - 39.

25 Ibid., 142.

26 Ibid., 143.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 143-44.


31 Ibid., 144.

32 Ibid., 157.

33 Ibid., 147.


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 145.


41 Ibid., 50.

42 Ibid., 51.


44 Clark, "Class Struggle and the Working Class: The Problem of Commodity Fetishism," 58.


46 Ibid., 62.

47 Ibid., 64.
to eat the apple that will come.” If we take the apple as a metaphor for emancipation then the leadership of the Zapatistas works to create the conditions in which all are leaders in their own liberation and the special role of the militant is no longer needed – or special. True to form Durito mocks the Zapatistas and especially their spokesperson Marcos. The story (narrated and penned by Marcos) continues that “we Zapatistas are like the kid next door. If anything, we’re uglier, says Durito, while watching from the corner of his eye as I take off my ski mask.”

Behind the mask of political initiative, the Zapatistas are, in the best way, ordinary.

**Conclusion**

Finally then we can acknowledge both the importance of Holloway work and its limitations. It would be an error to doubt the seriousness of Holloway’s commitment to creating a relevant communist theory or to deny the power of his writing. He reopens old categories in an attempt to create a liberating understanding of our condition. But he fails to grasp the interplay of negation and affirmation, of creation and destruction and thus his work is insufficient in and of itself to really grasp that which is subversive in our condition. Holloway’s refusal of the state, his critique of the failures of the Left and his emancipatory vision for politics, his emphasis on the need to be asymmetrical to capitalist social relations, are all important and timely. Yet the universalism in his work prevents him from advocating a form of militancy and politics that could actually deal with the deep inequities, splits and fractures that keep us tied to capital.
relationship between local and global, particular and universal. There are many voices, not just one scream.

Finally, whilst Holloway’s work simply denies any space for political activity that sees itself as being separate from the class as a whole, the Zapatistas have a more complicated view. In their written theory we do see a detailing of a complex relationship between organisations, militants and the broader population. On one hand they do see themselves as ordinary people and as rebels and thus reject the crippling practices of Leninism. Yet on the other hand they acknowledge that in their struggle there are differences of authority and leadership amongst them – especially due to the EZLN being a guerrilla army. Their response to this is not to valorise this division as a necessity for liberation; something that is typical to the guerrilla foco strategy, where the military leadership of the guerrillas present themselves as liberators of the people. Nor do they simply deny it. Rather they make it explicit, then problematise and destabilise it. The Zapatistas do not deny leadership, instead their maxim mandar obedeciendo (“leading by obeying”, sometimes translating as “rule by obeying”) turns it on its head and opens the door to rethinking the meaning of political action. The most obvious example of this is Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos himself – his persona is an ironic repositioning of the iconic guerrilla hero such as Che. Marcos’s wearing of the balaclava functions (complementing its more specific function as a mask mentioned above) by creating a symbol that is open, which anyone can take up – anyone can wear the balaclava. The Zapatistas’ approach to political militancy can be seen as a specialised activity that works to create the conditions in which it is no longer a specialised activity. It does not simply deny that a division between militant and class might exist. Another Durito story explores this division: “Durito says that the Zapatistas’ problem is this: to plant the seed and guard its growth. Durito says that problem for everyone else is to struggle to be free to choose how

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xii We could speculate that there may be continuities between “leading by obeying” and the older Maoist instruction “to serve the people.” In my investigations there exist no thorough studies of the politics of the EZLN precursor the FLN – beyond them being a Marxist-Leninist group with radical left nationalist politics common to their time. This could involve an engagement with Maoism. There does seem to be a certain residual Maoist trace in their practice.
universal 'No', but through an ongoing and open process of communication and creation. Being denied a voice becomes a condition which provides them the cover to organise. When the Zapatistas do announce themselves to the world at the start of the insurrection they do so with the defiant 'No', that of 'Ya Basta!' (translated as either "Enough!" or "Enough is Enough!"). Unlike Holloway's 'No' the Zapatista's is not so much a statement of negation, but rather of affirmation posed against the power of capital. They continue in the Sixth Declaration that "when the rich were throwing their New Year's Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over. And we left a message to everyone that we are here, that they have to take notice of us."155

Admittedly there are elements in Zapatista discourse that do emphasise negation. Take for example one of the Don Durito stories. Here rebellion is described as a butterfly launching out across an ocean to find an island constructed by other rebellions (the story itself functions as a utopian critique of the promise of a distant utopia) that "the butterfly is saying NO! No to logic! No to prudence. No to immobility. No to conformism."156

The point is not to throw doubt on the seriousness of the Zapatista revolt for Holloway's thinking, or to only raise that problematic question of the relationship between theory and social struggles. Showing the differences between the Zapatistas and Holloway provides us a route to critique Holloway. For the Zapatistas negation is just an element of emancipatory politics that takes its place with affirmative forms of political construction. This latter element is crucial; for unlike Holloway the Zapatistas pay close attention to the differences in the struggles of different sections of humanity – in relation to how to make effective solidarities and also how various struggles might want to defend certain elements of their singularity in opposition to capitalism. The Zapatistas seriously pose the

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* A series of satirical stories where written by Marco where the main character is a beetle called don Durito de la Lacandona Cf. Subcomandante Marcos, Conversations with Durito: Stories of the Zapatistas and Neoliberalism (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2005).
communities to meet needs and generate decent lives. Against the repression of the state they attempt to extend their struggle through alliances, networks and cooperation. The Good Government Juntas and La Otra Campana are the latest incarnation of both. For example they write: “Power uses the word to impose his empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves. Power uses silence to hide his crimes. We use silence to listen to one another, to touch one another, to know one another.” The formation of political alliances is then the “echo” of rebel voice, of the speaking of the word. The Zapatista use of this metaphor articulates how specific struggles, differences and singularities can meet in ways that develop interrelated solidarities in the struggle against capitalism. This is the “echo of this rebel voice transforming itself and renewing itself in other voices.” They continue that this is:

...an echo that turns itself into many voices, into a network of voices that, before the deafness of the Power, opts to speak to itself, knowing itself to be one and many, acknowledging itself to be equal in its desire to listen and be listened to, recognizing itself as diverse in the tones and levels of voices forming it.

We see the complicated and evocative use of metaphor in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle: a document that contains both self-reflection on the Zapatistas’ development and also the announcement of the new political perspective that is La Otra Campana. In this version of their history the Zapatistas do not start with the scream but with silence. They write:

In the beginning there were not many of us, just a few, going this way and that, talking with and listening to other people like us. We did that for many years, and we did it in secret, without making a stir. In other words, we joined forces in silence. We remained like that for about 10 years, and then we had grown, and then we were many thousands.

The starting point for the Zapatistas is not the scream of negation but painstaking political construction. Their collectivity does not arrive as a manifestation of a

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ix Holloway does also use the idea of the echo of rebellion in “Dignity’s Revolt” – the piece of writing that is the most discordant with his other writing and the focus on “the scream”. Holloway, Dignity’s Revolt.
simply by the promise of various rebellions meeting in the council. It is only part of an answer. Despite his previous claims to reject determinism and promises of final victory, Holloway still owes too much to a Marxism of the past – one that hopes in its analysis to reveal a basis that is the guarantee of success. Rather we can only wager on hope and the possibilities of our own creativity.

Once again these deficiencies become starkly apparent when we counterpoise Holloway’s work with the political statements of the Zapatistas themselves. As we have already seen the Zapatistas have a more sophisticated approach to universalism – their revolt is the revolt of a humanity composed of minorities. As such from the very beginning it takes seriously both the divisions that exist within the global population exploited by capital and also works to articulate a vision in a way that allows for a genuine multiplicity of struggles that enriches the collectivity of revolt. The writings of the Zapatistas, their poetic and political innovation all deserve thorough analysis. Here we can only look briefly at their writings to see if Holloway’s politics of the scream resonates with their political discourse.

Zapatista writings contain a complicated discourse that uses the metaphorical political concepts of “silence” and “the word”. These are used to explain a nuanced interlinking of their condition, methods of struggle and aspirations. Silence often means the condition of oppression, of being effaced or lacking the power to determine social reality and a tactic of hiding from the eye of power. The word becomes a mixture of communication, political construction and weapon of struggle. For example a compendium of Zapatista documents is entitled, Our Word is our Weapon. The word seems to describe constituent power, a term from Negri we shall explore in later chapters.\textsuperscript{vii} The Zapatista strategy of resistance seems to be twofold: against the continuous deprivations and misery of neoliberalism they work to create practical living autonomy in Zapatista

\textsuperscript{vii} For a brilliant study of Zapatista practice and thought that uses Negri’s idea of constituent power (as well as Badiou’s work on the Event) see Mentinis, Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What It Means for Radical Politics.
Limitations of Holloway's Politics

What Holloway suggests as meaningful revolutionary activity largely consists of demolishing other modes of praxis – mainly by denying their status as being revolutionary. Beyond this his suggestions seem to be either relentless questioning or as a partisan for the council. Both are crucial elements of communist activity, but they are not enough. Holloway's thinking is actually deeply deficient. This deficiency is, again, due in part to the universalism in Holloway's work and his failure to take into account the actual composition of the proletariat. His failures to grasp the complex subversive relation of labour, to truly understand both the multiplicity of revolt and the hierarchies of difference within the proletariat, and his complete rejection of identity, means he cannot really suggest an effective, emancipatory communist politics.

Holloway gives the same general model for all struggles: the council. More profoundly the council is only viable because he sees all revolts as reducible to the same: the scream. The council works in Holloway's writings because our revolts, despite their various overt differences, all express a basic unitary core. Now this of course is not incorrect but it's just not enough. Revolution is possible because in many ways capitalism has united us through proletarianisation. Revolution is also possible because rebellion gives us the means to transform our relationships with each other. And the process of revolt does involve the collective coming together. But also capitalism has generated divisions amongst us just as much as it has united us, and whilst Holloway acknowledges these divisions he does not accord them sufficient weight. It may be that our revolts open the potential to break, dissolve or subvert these divisions – but this does not make them disappear. Rather to effectively craft solidarities, creativities and disobediences in the present across all the actual existing multiplicities and differences involves a more difficult project. The hierarchies of power within the proletariat need to be taken into account. The divisions of gender for example, cannot be radicalised or subverted.
the Indian communities that constitute the Zapatista movement; as well as the symbolic-political role discussed above, and the practical role of hiding from the state. Mihalis Mentinis argues that the Zapatista practice of masking, both the balaclavas worn by prominent figures like Marcos and the red bandanas or paliacate, can only be understood in reference to the "indigenous social imaginary." Mentinis argues that covering one's face arises from and in reference to Mayan cosmology: how the religious tendencies, especially around nagualism (a Mayan cultural-religious conception and practice), that tend towards social conservatism, can be redeployed for revolutionary and collective struggle. "The collective masking is thus the symbolic means by which nagualism and the project of autonomy come together." Masking amongst the Zapatistas functions because it is deeply tied to the lived practices of specific Indian identities. It is potent evidence of Holloway's mistake in refusing to understand the specifics of a situation, and to grasp how identity can be both subverted and reaffirmed as part of anti-capitalist struggle, not simply negated or asserted as a non-identity. The Zapatista struggle cannot simply be thought of as being radical because it refuses or goes beyond identity; for so much of it is only possible in reference to very specific, complicated and contested local cultural and identity formations. The ability of this struggle to pose a broader universal politics suggests that Holloway's schema cannot even adequately grasp a struggle that he celebrates and moves to the centre of his work.

Holloway's ahistorical approach, his refusal to think about singular and concrete situations means that he produces a grand theory for all circumstances; even if this theory overtly claims to be attentive to multiplicity and autonomy. At the same time as it gives some struggles voice it effaces others by reducing them all to the same basic substance. And this leads to a real deficiency in being able to construct a politics that can grasp difference.
The mask then is not just a move against identity: it is the space where multiple minority experiences find themselves and each other.\textsuperscript{vi} And these are minorities in a very Deleuzian sense – not necessarily just numerical minorities but rather those who don’t fit into the various logics of power that are in play.\textsuperscript{148} In this sense I would argue that the Zapatistas are beyond Holloway. They argue that a universality, ’humanity’, exists behind the mask, and then populate this ‘humanity’ with minorities. This construction of humanity as the intermeshing of minorities undercuts the homogenising tendencies of humanism. They reinvigorate the idea of humanity so it can answer both to the past and the future.

Also the Zapatistas argue that liberating struggle, the struggle of humanity against neoliberalism, functions through asserting these identities, or at the least trying to prevent neoliberalism from erasing them. In the novel \textit{The Uncomfortable Dead}, written by Subcomandante Marcos and Paco Iganacio Taibo II (a novel which can also be seen as an important political statement by the Zapatistas), the Zapatista character ‘the Russian’ defines “Evil”, in part, as follows:

Betraying the memory of our honoured dead. Denying what we are. Losing our memory. Selling our dignity. Feeling shame for being Indian, or black, or Chicano, or Muslim, or yellow, or white, or red, or gay, or lesbian, or transsexual, or skinny, or fat, or tall, or short. Forgetting our history. Forgetting ourselves.\textsuperscript{149}

Unlike Holloway’s work, this is clearly an argument for the radical assertion of identity, if not \textit{identity politics} as it is understood in the North. The Zapatistas depiction of a rebellious and ordinary humanity composed of minorities is an important political innovation. It is very different from Holloway’s over-emphasis of \textit{negation}.

Secondly, indigenous and Mexican identity is crucial to how the Zapatistas function as a collective political endeavour. For example the practice of masking has specific meaning from within the indigenous ethnic and religious traditions of

\textsuperscript{vi} There are similarities here with notions of “queer”, itself a radical claim that developed beyond the limits of previous identity-based approaches to struggles around sexuality.
account the structural practices that work to hold people within the world of capitalism then the worth of it is reduced.

**The Limitations of Holloway’s Critique of Identity**

Holloway’s *overemphasis* on negation is compounded by his dismissal of identity. These failings become particularly apparent when we compare Holloway with the Zapatistas.

Despite Holloway’s claim, the Zapatistas have a far more complex conception of identity than simply a refusal of it. In an opening statement at the First International Encounter For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism they define themselves, their struggle and the relationship to humanity as “[t]he voice that arms itself to be heard, the face that hides itself to be seen, the name that hides itself to be named”.146 This concurs with Holloway’s depiction as an assertion of a non-identity. However the Zapatistas also make explicit that behind the mask is a general humanity, a general humanity that suffers and struggles. They write: “[b]ehind this (the black mask), we are the same forgotten men and women, the same excluded, the same untraveled, the same persecuted, the same as you. Behind this, we are you.” Yet this general humanity, that is both the Zapatistas who address us and we who listen, is then composed of minorities, minorities that are clearly identified and also hidden by the power of capitalism:

> Behind our mask is the face of all excluded women, of all the forgotten native people, of all the persecuted homosexuals, of all the despised youth, of all the beaten migrants, of all those imprisoned for their words and thoughts, of all the humiliated workers, of all those dead from neglect, of all the simple and ordinary men and women who don’t count who aren’t seen who are nameless, who have no tomorrow.147
unacknowledged. He is forced to revert to a universalism to hold his work together. Such universalism nullifies his claims to respect difference and multiplicity. Rather there is a constant reductionism in his work: all revolts end up being the same: it is all “the scream”.

Holloway’s reduction of all struggles to the same starting point, the scream, negation, means he is also confronted by another problem. He struggles to take into account not only how our revolts may be different but how differences work to split the proletariat against itself and how this may be addressed. Holloway argues that the tensions of labour’s revolt against being labour are experienced by “nearly everybody”. But could there also not be other splits in this “nearly everybody” which means “against-ness” is not “more present”, or is submerged or sublimated by other social fractures? Holloway makes no allowances for the ways that certain sections of the global proletariat are recruited into a defence of capitalism – the power of nationalism, white-skin privilege, the labour aristocracy etc. Or the ways the real divisions of race, gender, nation, etc function. Ignoring these forces and histories blunts us from the political projects, ideological deconstructions, social subversions and organisational creations that are needed to realise functional solidarities and the generation of real social alternatives.

Holloway may argue that we are all divided subjects but he does not go far enough. When confronted with the different divisions and hierarchies that exist within the proletariat Holloway’s response is always the same trump card: the scream. He does not see the different ways that we are divided and how such divisions are then placed into a hierarchy. The virtue of Holloway’s position is it sees the potential for rebellion. Holloway chooses to see the possibility of the revolt-against despite present appearances to the contrary. He sees that behind the seeming solidity of capitalist society there exists countless refusals – refusals that compose society itself. But to see this, to refuse the camera obscura of the commodity, takes a subjective choice. But if this subjective choice cannot take into
with aspects one may desire to refuse and others that one may cherish. This is seen clearly in the essay *A Very Careful Strike* written by the collective Precarias a la Deriva. Here the collective looks at how the work of "care", which has traditionally been the labour of women in the home, is now, in contemporary conditions, deployed outside the home in the realms of wage-labour and the public sphere more generally. When our work is the work of looking after each other, of producing webs of interpersonal relations, attending to our physical and emotional health and so on, then it becomes obvious that we cannot think of the subversive quality of our labour as only negative, or our struggle as only negation. Rather Precarias a la Deriva see struggle as a gestalt of intermeshed complex interactions which try to autonomously realise caring labour outside of capitalist control and simultaneously revolt against that which is abhorrent and needs to be abolished. They write of the "caring strike":

The strike appears to us as an everyday and multiple practice: there will be those who propose transforming public space, converting spaces of consumption into places of encounter and play preparing a "reclaim the streets," those who suggest organizing a work stoppage in the hospital when the work conditions don't allow the nurses to take care of themselves as they deserve, those who decide to turn off their alarm clocks, call in sick and give herself a day off as a present, and those who prefer to join others in order to say "that's enough" to the clients that refuse to wear condoms... there will be those who oppose the deportation of miners from the "refuge" centers (sic) where they work, those who dare - like the March 11th Victims' Association (la asociación de afectados 11M) - to bring care to political debate proposing measures and refusing utilizations of the situation by political parties, those who throw the apron out the window and ask why so much cleaning? And those who join forces in order to demand that they be cared for as quadriplegics and not as "poor things" to be pitied, as people without economic resources and not as stupid people, as immigrants without papers and not as potential delinquents, as autonomous persons and not as institutionalized dependents. There will be those who...

Here the caring strike takes into account numerous different specific rebellions. Each rebellion approaches the question of revolt of and/or against their labour from within their own subject position. It also allows each revolt to have its own rhythm and direction. Holloway does not do this. The specific nature of contingent revolts gets lost and overtaken by a larger narrative of negation. What becomes apparent is that for his theory to function, something lurks behind it
On a theoretical level Holloway stumbles when he reduces the subversive nature of labour to its ability to negate itself as labour, that is as a category of capitalism. I believe the mistake here is actually to not really grasp the contradictory nature of labour under capital. Holloway sees this contradiction as one between what we do for capitalism and how we refuse it. This leaves him little scope to see how perhaps the same tasks, the same activity, that produces a use-value and an exchange-value within capitalism (and here I am talking in the most imprecise, broadest sense) also may create things of worth beyond capitalism. One may build a house (for example) and in that work suffer the rigours of alienation, participate in reifying their own creativity and that of their workmates into an estranged product, all under the watchful and ever-present tyranny of the boss and the larger logics of the market and the commodity. Yet at the same time this process of work may be physically and emotionally rewarding, the company and process of collective creation stimulating and so on. And we can see that this occurs across capitalism. Our real solidarities that we experience are produced both by our labour and also how we rebel against it.

Holloway attempts to address this in “Two Temporalities of Struggle”, where he argues that after our one unifying ‘No’ come the many ‘Yeses’ of creation. This fails to take into account how it may be our ‘Yes’ that precedes our ‘No.’ Sometimes it is our desires for creation that drive us to revolt, and as we shall see below, it can be that the tasks of political creation come before the actions of revolt. Perhaps the mistake is to even create a paradigm that sees some kind of split between ‘Nos’ and ‘Yeses’. Rather could not it be that our attempts to fundamentally change social relations always have these elements bound up within each other. It is an error to argue that one must precede the other.

A more nuanced understanding of the subversive quality of labour is found strikingly in the work carried out by feminists on the questions of reproductive labour. Here there is particular care to grasp how the work of ‘love’ is entwined
The Subversive Quality of Labour

As inspiring as Holloway's work is it is deeply flawed. It is my contention that Holloway fails to really grasp the subversive quality of labour, to really understand what it is in our condition that opens the door to the possibility of communism. The radical contention of his work, that the subversive quality of the proletariat is its ability to negate itself and the world of capital is potent and important. It provides Holloway (and others like Marx, Debord, etc) with the theoretical tools to show the possibilities of freedom. However it can only ever be part of our understanding of our social world, and only part of communist politics (or anti-politics if you prefer).

Marx writes that "[c]ommunism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man (sic)"¹⁴³ This notion of positive abolition is far more complicated than just negation. Rather it is negation and affirmation together, the destruction of some forms of our alienation and the reappropriation of our own creativity that exists bound up within reified forms.

On a simple level a communist praxis can only ever be the activity of real existing people: people that are immersed in a broader social world. As much as this broader context is, as Holloway argues, composed of antagonism and contestation, our subversive relationship to it is not simple one of negation. We are often compelled to resist capitalism by our affinities, affections and attachments. Again, on a simple level, communist politics is the space in which our everyday antagonisms manifest in forms that become excessive to the boundaries of capitalism. It is composed by what we experience as joyous and desire to protect in our lives as we find it, as well as what humiliates us, fills us with rage and thus what we want to abolish.
Chapter 3: A Critique of Holloway

Introduction

Holloway’s work, with his radicalisation of our understanding of class, capitalism and revolution, is very valuable. However, his schema ultimately falters in its ability to suggest a viable form of militancy. Holloway’s work over-emphasises negation until all struggles are reduced to it. He often ignores the context and singularity of struggles. So too the difficult work of creating and affirming political agency and rebellious solidarities is discarded for an easy answer. When we compare Holloway’s conception of struggle with that of the Zapatistas (in both word and deed) – who he cites as a pivotal inspiration – we find him sorely lacking.

The real flaw in Holloway’s work is the reduction of everything to “the scream”. This is the universalism that allows his theory to function: all revolts are seen to be motivated by the same eruption of negation. All social activity is seen through this lens, explained the same way and given the same prescription. Holloway, who wants to pose a theory of autonomy and multiplicity, can only do so because he believes each multiple to actually be fundamentally the same as all others. This is because for him all revolts are moments of the against, all voices enunciate with the same scream. The revolt against, the negation of what is, is a crucial element in struggle, but only an element. A more nuanced, open and multilayered approach is needed.
for ways forward. Yet much as he advances a theory based on *negation* he also reduces the complexity of struggle to *only* negation.
and stability of daily life (an appearance that the Left, for the most part, reproduced); an appearance which arises from the reification of our abilities. He pulls apart the categories of political thought to present the tangled messy antagonisms that are the basis of a praxis of hope, a praxis of anti-power which is grounded in the possibilities of the here and now. But this hope is a hope that is based in uncertainty, in tension, in fluidity. Holloway clearly rejects the state as a model of struggle but he does not pose clear alternatives. "What does revolution mean?" asks Holloway, "It is a question, can only be a question." 142

Conclusion

Holloway's work is an important addition to radical theory and takes the pioneering work of operaismo in directions that its original protagonists would have struggled to imagine. In times such as ours his work provides us with courage and hope. His work certainly tries to meet the challenge detailed in the introduction – to show how the material conditions of capitalism contain the potential for other, more desirable, modes of social life. Central to his project is an attempt to transform the solidity and apparent dominance of capitalist power into terrains of contestation and struggle. He wants to show that even after the defeat of the Leninist and Social Democratic Left, and the failures of various smaller more radical perspectives (anarchism, council communism, the New Left, etc) to become ongoing mass movements, the possibilities for communism and emancipation still exist. To do this he elaborates a theory based around the idea of the "scream", of the constant struggle of labour's negation of itself as labour. This involves a rejection of a solid, sociological idea of class, and identity more broadly. He advocates a political practice based on the formation of radically democratic councils as the starting point for the transformation of society. In doing this he challenges many of the certainties and shibboleths of the Left, arguing that they do not go far enough in breaking with capitalist social relations. He regularly references the Zapatistas as an inspiration for both his analysis and his suggestions
continues to haunt the balance sheet, also becomes the start of trying to live beyond capital, and a response to capital’s threats.

“But how do we survive without our exploiters, when they control access to the richness of human doing?” Holloway asks. “That is the great challenge. How do we strengthen the fissures so that they are not just isolated pockets of poverty but a real alternative form of doing that allows us to say to capital “well yes, go away then, if that is what you are always threatening to do?” Capital’s attempts to flee from us often manifests with a violence and brutality which is terrifying. But when the strike committee forms, when the faculty is occupied, when the empty building is squatted, when we chain ourselves together in front of bulldozers – that is, when we manifest together and against, we are confronted with the challenge of what lies beyond this. As Holloway states:

But this is not enough. We cannot eat democratic discussions, we cannot drink comradeship. It is no good if, after the democratic discussion in the asamblea barrial or frente zapatista in the evening, we have to sell our capacity to do (labour power) to capital the next day and participate actively in the process of separation that capital means. Yet here too the energy of the struggle carries us forward, from talking to doing.

The rupture with capital, since it is the manifestation of our collectivities exploding against this condition, begins to generate alternatives. Looking at Argentina he writes:

The asambles barriales in Argentina are increasingly moving from discussing and protesting against the government to taking their lives in their own hands and occupying clinics that have been abandoned, houses that are empty, banks that have fled, in order to provide better health care, and to provide places for people to live and centres for people to meet and discuss. When factories close, the workers are not just protesting but occupying them and using them to produce things that are needed.

But Holloway is not presenting this as a final answer. His elucidation of praxis is an imagining of the combustive potential in daily life and the liberatory potential of collective action. His work moves to pull apart the apparent limitations
and we must break the fracturing of our activity to come together collectively. It is here where *preguntando caminamos* takes form:

The council as a form of collective self-determination is the form that follows from the perception that we are ordinary, therefore rebellious. The council is the collective process of self-analysis which makes possible the distillation of a revolutionary We. The difference between the party approach and the council approach is not just a matter of organization, but of a whole theoretical construction. In the council approach there is no model to be applied. It is inevitably a question of making the path by walking on it. There is an openness about this approach, simply because the movement is a process of self-determination. Communism is the movement of self-determination against the command of capital. This means there are no certainties, no clear path to be followed, no model…

It is also important to point out that this assertion of the council is quite different from other positions focused on workers self-management. Holloway does not posit the council as the form that can take over the means of production or generate a collective ownership of property – because both these elements of the social field rest on the fracturing and reification of our creativity. To quote:

> Our struggle, then, is not the struggle to make ours the property of the means of production, but to dissolve both property and the means of production: to recover or, better, create the conscious and confident sociality of the flow of doing. Capital rules by fetishising, by alienating the done from the doing and the doer and saying 'This done is a thing and it is mine.' Expropriating the expropriator cannot then be seen as a reseizure of a thing, but rather as the dissolution of the thing-ness of the done, its (re)integration into the social flow of doing.

The importance and ambiguity of the council form is also highlighted by what Holloway portrays as capital’s reaction to our revolt. Since capital tries to flee from us, to run away from the labour that it cannot escape (and thus its flight is increasingly violent, despairing and desperate), we must take up the challenge of what life would be like without it. “The more the march of dignity advances, the more capital flees.” The council, the manifestation of our negation of this world, the manifestation of the persistent nightmare of capitalism, the spectre that
into question: theory can no longer be seen as being brought from outside, but it is obviously the product of everyday practice.\textsuperscript{134}

For Holloway, this is since our condition is fractious and rebellious. Revolution is the eruption of our everyday conditions. Holloway writes: "[c]ommunism is the movement of that which exists in the mode of being denied".\textsuperscript{135} Communism erupts from the tensions of our existence. The revolutionary process is the expansive asking of questions because this is how we manifest what is hidden, what is repressed but also what is the substance of both capital and its negation. This means that revolution (and thus communism) exists now in the present. But this existence is split, it is a presence, a possibility. The question becomes how these potentials can be realised in a way that destroys capitalism and creates communism.

In Holloway's work there is the assertion of a generally councilist model: that the basic form of the construction of communism is some kind of (anti-)workers' council. Firstly it is important to note that Holloway's councilism does not advocate a particular model of council; rather he is a partisan of the open, mass, horizontal coming together of those in struggle. This could be the Soviet of 1905 or the general assemblies of occupied universities that erupted through France at the end of March 2006; or any of the other countless smaller strike councils, collective meetings, squatted social centres and so on. Possibly and tentatively it could be seen embryonically in any gathering where dissatisfactions are expressed, similar to a micro-politics or infra-politics. For Holloway it is in any of the moments in which people come together to question, to refuse, to rebuild, to weave solidarity, that is 'the council'.

The council provides the space in which the antagonistic and rebellious currents in our condition can cohere, ask questions and explode. It is the place that allows the rupture with the surface appearance of capitalist society, and it itself is a rupture. We must come together to collectively break the fracturing of our activity
Borrowing from the Zapatistas Holloway typifies this praxis as “[p]reguntando caminamos” – walking we ask questions.\textsuperscript{132} This Zapatista maxim poses the question both to those who ask it and those who hear it – which we could take as analogous to the division of revolutionary and class – in a way that either destabilises both, or denies their separation. His instruction is that those who would define themselves as revolutionaries should not enter into struggle with a preformed program but rather they should be porous to the contradictions and creativity of rebellion; to grasp praxis as praxis, as the constant interplay of thought and action. Thus revolution, the eruption of our ordinary rebelliousness, is fecund: we constantly generate more thought, more questions, more desires, more insights and more doubts. The question is also aimed outwards. Political practice generally (the practice of power-over) places thought, most often as ideology, above the swirl of society; revolutionary activity is seen as winning people to this position. \textit{Preguntando caminamos} refigures revolutionary struggle. To rebel one does not try to win others to a solid position but rather works with others to produce moments of collective questioning. “The problem is not to bring consciousness from outside, but to draw out the knowledge that is already present, albeit in repressed and contradictory form.”\textsuperscript{133} The rebel reaches out, tries to generalise rebellion and contribute to a proliferation of knowledges, communication and language (perhaps this is similar to what Haraway calls \textit{heteroglossia}).\textsuperscript{v} To ask a question implies that we listen to the answer, and that listening rather than being a passive response of those who are being commanded is an active part of the negation of commodity society. Again returning to the Zapatistas Holloway writes:

And they learnt to listen...Above all, learning to listen meant turning everything upside down. The long revolutionary tradition of talking is not just a bad habit. It has a long-established theoretical basis in the concepts of Marxism-Leninism. The tradition of talking derives, on the one hand, from the idea that theory (‘class consciousness’) must be brought to the masses by the party and, on the other, from the idea that capitalism must be analysed from above, from the movement of capital rather than from the movement of anti-capitalist struggle. When the emphasis shifts to listening, both of these theoretical suppositions are undermined. The whole relation between theory and practice is thrown

relevant to life in Edinburgh, Athens, Tokyo, Los Angeles or Johannesburg as it is to the struggles of the peoples of the Lacandon Jungle.¹²⁹

Dignity is also used in the book *Change the World Without Taking Power*. To quote: "...dignity: the rebellion that is in all of us, the struggle for a humanity that is denied us, the struggle against the crippling of humanity that we are. Dignity is an intensely lived experience that fills the detail of our everyday lives."¹³⁰ Dignity is like the scream: it is a metaphor for the struggle against capital, something that is ordinary and communist. The politics that "Dignity’s Revolt" asserts is very similar. Yet its negative nature is more ambiguous, indeed it is something one struggles for, something asserted, something positive. For example, "Dignity is and is not: it is the struggle against its own negation."¹³¹ Here both the affirmative and negative nature of dignity is asserted, and more problematically capital is defined as that which negates. I think this tortuous metaphysics is the results of Holloway’s error – his overstating of negation, of the scream. He tries to make what is a crucial and often forgotten element of communism – labour’s revolt against being labour – into the keystone of everything. It can’t be, it isn’t. His theoretical twisting and turning is a result of being pulled hither and thither to try to complete an impossible task.

**Communist Praxis**

But what does Holloway suggest that we could *actually do* to embody and affirm a way of life worth living? What is the nature of the future that we build in the present? Holloway’s critique of an objective conception of knowledge means that in his work there is no postulation of a perfect utopia, nor is there a clear path to it. Rather there is desire for, and an incitement to engage in, utopian projects and struggles that are open-ended and immersed in the antagonisms of capitalist society. It is from here that we find limited suggestions for conscious communist activity.
Holloway's negation is the assertion of that which has been alienated. If this is the case surely one could ask why does the assertion require negation, and does negation proceed affirmation? Does the No come before the Yes? We will examine this below in the case of the Zapatistas, but generally, facing the necessity of building an effective challenge to capitalism, it is unclear that the first temporality is that of negation. The formation of collectivities that can animate and are animated by communist praxis may equally begin with a 'yes' – a positive construction of relations between comrades around the desire for another form of social existence. And alternatively, struggle may begin with a 'no' and a 'yes' (or 'Nos' and 'Yeses') simultaneously. This is not to say such a collectivity is not built from negation or that negation is unimportant. Rather, that the causal relationship of Holloway's schema seems unjustifiable and unhelpful: negation may be just an element of communist activity.

Holloway in some of his work does attempt to grapple with the problem of how the scream can lead to communism, how negation can lead to generation, through the concept of "dignity". This is the only concept that he takes directly from the Zapatistas. It does not solve the problem but rather shows the difficulties his schema presents.

In many ways dignity is a competing, not a complementary, attempt to explain the source and nature of rebellion to the scream. His most detailed description of dignity pre-dates his work on the scream – the 1996 article "Dignity's Revolt". Here he writes:

Dignity, the refusal to accept humiliation and dehumanisation, the refusal to conform: dignity is the core of the Zapatista revolution of revolution. The idea of dignity has not been invented by the Zapatistas, but they have given it a prominence that it has never before possessed in revolutionary thought. When the Zapatistas rose, they planted the flag of dignity not just in the centre of the uprising in Chiapas, but in the centre of oppositional thought. Dignity is not peculiar to the indigenous peoples of the southeast of Mexico: the struggle to convert 'dignity and rebellion into freedom and dignity' (an odd but important formulation) is the struggle of (and for) human existence in an oppressive society, as
This has direct practical consequences. The practice of the Left is often justified by the split between struggle now, liberation later. All kinds of internal and external disciplines, the restriction of rebellious desires, violence against enemies, etc, can be justified through a conception of time and struggle that sees a split between the practical and bloody work of struggle now, and the utopia later. Also Holloway's work breaks open the time of the present, it dissolves the solidity of capitalist time. Any moment can burst into mass collective revolt. These are great social explosions like Mai68 or the more recent revolts in France (both at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006) where: "[a]t their best, such events are flashes against fetishism, festivals of the non-subordinate, carnivals of the oppressed, explosions of the pleasure principle, intimations of the nunc stans.”

The different temporalities of struggle are inexplicitly bound to a way of being, a way of acting, to practice; just as different practices that oppose capitalism create different temporalities. The focus on the state (which is a focus based on a wider view of the political and philosophical nature of the world we live) generates a sense of the potentials (or lack thereof) in the present and a narrative of social struggle. As too does Holloway's conception of class, of being in-against-and-beyond. It means that our actions now, in the present, must be consistent with the way we want to live: we move from rupture to generation. This is Holloway's use of the alterglobalisation maxim: "One No, Many Yeses".

Dignity

This maxim presents us with a problem. Where does the "yes" come from? If Holloway's theory is centred on negation how does this lead to creation? Or to put it differently, how is it to account for the negation of negation, from the move from the abolition of capital to the generation of communism, if all there is the scream?
capitalism does not have any duration independent of us. If capitalism exists today, it is not because it was created one hundred or two hundred years ago, but because we (the workers of the world, in the broadest sense) created it today. If we do not create it tomorrow it will not exist.124

Thus the first temporality is that refusal of “¡Ya Basta! Enough! A temporality of impatience and intensity and revolution here-and-now, because capitalism is unbearable, because we cannot go on creating our own destruction.”125 This temporality of refusal is a present one, a time that lives now, and now and also now. This is because all the categories of capitalism are split: creativity is caught, fractured and alienated. Yet this fracture is also the fissure of refusal and anti-power. So in all the moments of capitalism, life is struggle, is refusal, is the scream – which is of course Holloway’s starting point – revolution is present.

The second temporality is the one of generating new liberated social relations. And this is posed as an open journey. For the temporality of the traditional Left, communism is the end point – we will reach a utopia. For Holloway communism is a beginning, a start and adventure that stretches out from our refusal in the now. He describes the relation of these two temporalities of revolution:

First: do not wait, refuse now, tear a hole, a fissure in the texture of capitalist domination now, today. And secondly, starting from these refusals, these fissures and simultaneously work with them, build an alternative world, a different way of doing things, a different sort of social relations between people. Here it cannot be a sudden change, but a long and patient struggle in which hope lies not in the next election or the storming of the Winter Palace but in overcoming our isolation and coming together with other projects, other refusals, pushing in the same direction.126

Both these temporalities place communism as a present project(s) and a present reality, not a “living despite capitalism, but living in-against-and beyond capitalism.” This is an “interstitial conception of revolution” a “commun-ism.”127
into open processes that break the power of capital and establish collective and autonomous ways of organising our existences.

**Two Temporalities of Struggle**

The open-ended nature of the Zapatista movement is summed up in the idea that it is revolution, not a Revolution ("with small letters, to avoid polemics with the many vanguards and safeguards of THE REVOLUTION"). It is a revolution, because the claim to dignity in a society built upon the negation of dignity can only be met through a radical transformation of society. But it is not a Revolution in the sense of having some grand plan, in the sense of a movement designed to bring about the Great Event which will change the world. Its claim to be revolutionary lies not in the preparation for the future Event but in the present inversion of this perspective, in the consistent insistence on seeing the world in terms of that which is incompatible with the world as it is: human dignity. Revolution refers to present existence, not its future instrumentality.122

Holloway depicts the daily life of capitalism as being filled with tension. For him it is our condition of being split and antagonistic that is the basis for affirming a radically different conception of revolutionary activity, of revolution and of being in the world. Reality is shown to be broken, contradictory and explosive. This leads to Holloway positing a new temporality of struggle.

Actually for Holloway there are two new temporalities: one of negation, one of affirmation - “two steps...they are simultaneous”.123 This is the breaking of the present order of things and the journey into tomorrow; we don’t have to wait for either the maturing of objective conditions or the ripening of subjective forces of politics. Revolt, the break into communism, is ever-present. To quote:

The traditional left operates with a capitalist concept of time. In this concept, capitalism is a continuum, it has duration, it will be there until the day of revolution comes. It is this duration, this continuum that we have to break. How? By refusing. By understanding that
non-rebels at the same time. Their rebelliousness is repressed. Their subjectivity is contained at the moment but not inherently limited. On the contrary: if they are rebels, then their subjectivity is overflowing, bursting through the limits which contain it, potentially infinite.\textsuperscript{120}

This position implies a number of perspectives on struggle. On one hand an individual could look at Holloway's argument and come to the opposite position: that ordinary people are non-rebels. One could emphasise all the parts of human activity that reconstitute the world of capital. As we have already seen Holloway rejects the idea that knowledge is objective; rather it is caught up in the antagonism of capitalism. Theorists are presented with a choice. To emphasise the compromises, the repressions and conformities of daily life is to leave the realm of revolutionary theory. Holloway presents it like this:

\textit{Theodor Adorn (sic), German, Jewish, communist returned from exile at the end of the war saying, 'After Auschwitz one has to ask if it is possible to go on living.' Ernst Bloch, German, Jewish, communist, returned from exile at the end of the war saying 'Now is the time to learn to hope.'\textsuperscript{121}}

What is personified in Adorno and Bloch is embodied in our condition: the split between submission and insubordination. This is our torn and fractured nature due to the social relations of capitalism – the intertwining of our rebellion and defeat in the substance of the daily life of capitalism. To place Adorno here, Bloch there, is an abstraction – we may not experience it so clear-cut. But the radical (anti-)politics of Holloway is based on how we can amplify our internal Bloch through collective processes of refusal and autonomy and escape our internal Adorno that thrives on our atomisation and defeat. The possibility of hope is the possibility of revolution that has its origins in the fissures and contestations that constitute our ordinary lives.

Revolutionary struggle is the drawing out of these tensions into cascading flows of acts and organisation, and the linking of individual moments of refusal
Ordinary People are Rebels

Where does Holloway suggest we go from here? It is not uncommon that the practices of the ultraleft, especially since the demise of council communism in the 1920s, amount to little more than a relentless criticism of capitalism and of the manifold failings of the Left. It has been less successful at developing a real communist practice, and what is communism if not a practice? From the above critiques we can extract a core idea that communism is the practice of negation based in the everyday antagonisms of class society with a temporality that sees the possibility for rupture now; with communism being both a living possibility and also an open unending journey. Revolutionary activity is the amplification of these negations.

One of the virtues of Holloway's transformation of class is that it leads to a rejuvenation of the paradigm of revolution; a rejuvenation that strikes a chord with many elements of recent struggles. Holloway's work implies a way of looking and acting in the world, one that prioritises the immanent and imminent possibility of struggles, autonomous and open political forms, and a narrative of revolution that starts with negation as the necessary first step. What we must remember is that despite the often-abstract language Holloway uses, all this is meant to be embodied, lived, fleshy. He depicts a society of struggle carried out by real living humans. These conflicts and antagonisms happen in our daily lives. This leads Holloway to an ultimately optimistic position. His rejection of a defined and limited idea of class then places the possibility of communist activity in everyday struggle. He quotes the Zapatista maxim that they are ordinary people and "ordinary people are rebels." Holloway is not saying that everywhere people are in open insurrection but rather:

To say that the people we see in the street are rebels even though they are not at this moment rebelling is to see them as contradictory and self-divided. They are rebels and
already free: an attractive and stimulating idea, but a fiction, a fiction that easily leads on to other fictions, to the construction of a whole fictional world.\textsuperscript{115}

Such an understanding, Holloway argues, also leads to a historical \textit{periodisation}: a belief that capitalism has a history of different stages of political development. The perspective of autonomy does often write a historical narrative of capitalism based on different forms of class composition. "Again, there has at times been a tendency to rigidify the concept of class composition, to generalise from the experiences of a particular group of workers and project it as a model for judging all class struggle."\textsuperscript{116} What is wrong with this, Holloway argues, is that it leads to a model of struggle based on reinforcing what exists rather than destroying it. Negri tries to take what is already in existence and extend it, rather than undermine all the elements of social existence. Negri's politics is the autonomous affirmation of labour against capital, Holloway looks to labour's autonomous negation of itself as labour. Holloway critiques the example of the anti-capitalist militant Hardt and Negri provide at the end of \textit{Empire}, Francis of Assisi:

The idea of Saint Francis of Assisi as the example of communist militancy is the repugnant culmination of positive thought. For over a hundred years communism has suffered the nightmare of the Pure Subject: the Party, the working class hero, the unsullied militant. To resurrect the image of the Pure Subject, just when it seemed at last to have died the indecent death that it merited, is not just a joke, it is grotesque. We hate capitalism and fight against it, but that does not make us into the embodiment of good fighting against evil. On the contrary, we hate it not just because we adopt the common condition of the multitude, but because it tears us apart, because it penetrates us, because it turns us against ourselves, because it maims us. Communism is not the struggle of the Pure Subject, but the struggle of the maimed and schizophrenic. Unless we start from there, there is no hope. \textsuperscript{117}

Rather than Saint Francis, Holloway looks to "Mephistopheles, the spirit who always negates" as the point of reference, for it is "negation that is the substance of hope".\textsuperscript{118} But how can a spirit of negation be a point of reference for an effective and possible communist politics?
Critique of Negri

Though Holloway's criticism of Leninism has much in common with other autonomists there are nevertheless significant differences between him and others. Of special interest to this study is Holloway's critique of Negri. This is very important for there is not a lot of direct debate between the three orientations that constitute our thesis, even though in English they often appear side by side in the same volumes.\(^iv\) Also Holloway's critique avoids the vitriol and rancour most often associated with a rivalry between 'Marxist intellectuals'.

Negri is someone Holloway is (relatively) politically and theoretically close to, and as such the differences are expressed very sharply. Holloway sees a certain similarity in his work with Negri, arguing that Negri's work "responds to a desperate need"; faced with the failures of the past "Negri refuses to give up thinking and rethinking revolution: this is the great attraction of his work."\(^{113}\) As already noted Holloway sees the struggles and existence of labour and capital as bound up in an internal tension. As such the revolt of labour is one of a divided non-subject against its very constitution – the scream against. His critique of Negri is a continuation of his critique of much of the perspective of autonomy having an affirmative understanding of class: it is a critique of its political implications. Holloway's argument is that an affirmative understanding of class, or in Negri's case the multitude, "separates existence from constitution."\(^{114}\) For Negri the multitude is seen as largely an already autonomous force, one that pushes against the power that capital tries to use to contain it. Struggle, for Negri then, is the affirmation of capabilities already in clear existence. Holloway argues that:

To treat the subject as positive is attractive but it is inevitably a fiction. In a world that dehumanises us, the only way in which we can exist as humans is negatively, by struggling against our dehumanisation. To understand the subject as positively autonomous (rather than as potentially autonomous) is rather like a prisoner in a cell imagining that she is

of disciplined organisational structures under central leadership that can arm the proletariat and disarm capitalism. This arming is the transfer of state power from the latter to the former. There is no point dreaming of communism if you can’t first defeat capitalism. Thus there is a clear separation between struggle and utopia. This then creates a certain temporality of struggle that does not see communism as an immanent and imminent possibility of labour, but rather the end product of Leninist politics. Holloway describes this element of the Leninist narrative as follows:

There is a gap between the capacities of the working class and the social revolution which is necessary. This gap can be filled only by constructing a series of mediating steps, of which the two most important are building the party and taking control of the state. Thus, revolution is conceived in terms of a number of essential steps: limited working class - construction of the party - taking state power - implementing social revolution.\(^\text{111}\)

Holloway argues "[t]he orthodox Marxist tradition, most clearly the Leninist tradition conceives revolution as an instrumentality, as a means to an end."\(^\text{112}\) This is the paradigm of the Revolution: the mythic storming of the winter palace, the moment when one world ends and another begins. The Marxist-Leninist model which internalises the practices of power-over, sees revolution as a gateway between the today that must be overcome and the utopia that is tomorrow. Revolution is only a tool; something one builds (the party, the union etc), an army, a force. Liberation can only be grasped in the future. Holloway’s critique is that such a perspective, which defers communism for the sake of the struggle today, permanently defers communism. That the acceptance of a certain necessity due to a limited understanding of the possibilities of the present helps build a kind of practice that reinforces current social relationships. As we shall see below Holloway’s rejection of Leninism means a different temporality of revolution and a different conception of meaningful activity for the revolutionary.
understanding of class then creates a mode of being revolutionary which Holloway sees as being deeply flawed. It supposes a particular access to knowledge and its production and dissemination. Thus it calls into being a particular kind of group relationship, one who’s internal and external dynamics are both inescapably linked. Such groups seek to win the leadership in a battle of ideas that is waged through stern and remorseless polemics. Continuing his critique of this paradigm and the associated praxis he writes:

A central issue is consciousness. The limited subject does not have a revolutionary consciousness, so it is necessary to bring consciousness to the workers. This involves a politics of explaining, of talking. Revolution is understood in prosaic terms. This tends to lead to a certain style of writing, in which the aim is to hammer a point home, to win points against anyone who may differ, rather than to discuss and express doubts, to shush rather than to listen. Built into the very concept of revolution is an idea of authority, leadership, hierarchy which dovetails easily with state and power.109

Holloway extends this critique by arguing that the very conceptualisation of knowledge that the Leninist model advances is fatuous. As Holloway has previously argued he sees the nature of capitalism as contestation, struggle and tension. The Leninist model (which Holloway argues is an extension of Engels’ idea of a scientific socialism) rather believes that an objective understanding, an outside view of capitalism, is possible. This effaces the centrality of struggle to capitalism’s composition and as such the possibilities of communism; it builds a division between the worker who does not know and the privileged revolutionary who does. But why should the party be believed? The Leninist model of the party forgets that “knowledge is a social relation” and as such it shrinks the understanding of capitalism.110 In contrast to this Holloway argues that there is no objective knowledge that the party can take hold of because knowledge is part of struggle – it too is constantly contested. Not only is the Leninist claim elitist, it is implausible.

Of course a defence that Leninism marshals is that it takes fighting capitalism seriously. If you want to counter capitalism you need to build the kinds
Critique of Leninism

Holloway reserves a particular vehemence for Orthodox Marxism, especially its Marxist-Leninist variant. Of course much of Holloway’s critique of the state-centred nature of the Left can be carried over to Leninism. But Leninism also comes under a more specific attack. His critique of Leninism is that it is based on an incorrect understanding of class. It sees the working class as being predefined, clearly delineated and fundamentally subordinate to capital. This is the opposite to how Holloway depicts the proletariat – as the undefinable insubordination to capital:

Lenin’s workers are limited, self-contained. They struggle, but they struggle up to a certain point. They are contained within their role in society, they are defined. They can go beyond their limits only if taken by the hand by people from outside, by professional revolutionaries.¹⁰⁷

This then creates a very limited model of working class struggle on which the Leninist conception of the professional revolutionary is based. The limitations of the proletariat, their subordination, mean that their struggle is also limited and needs an extra non-proletarian element for them to achieve emancipation. What the revolutionary brings is knowledge. To quote Lenin: “[w]e have said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It could only be brought to them from without.” And that the “…working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness…”¹⁰⁸ It would be fair to say such an approach is widespread throughout various tendencies of Marxist-Leninism, including its Trotskyist and Maoist developments: that an exterior supplement in the form of the party is necessary to go beyond the seemingly impossible limitations such a perspective sees in the proletariat.

This split between the class and the party in Holloway’s view works to reinforce particularly non-communist modes of operating. By defining the working class as being limited and subordinated to capital it is only a small step to seeing it simultaneously subordinated to its self-appointed leadership. Such an
This diagnosis seems to carry a lot of validity to it: the state-centred approaches to social revolution or even reform have seemingly failed to break from many of the practices of capital. Even in their most benign forms 'really existing socialism' and social democracy have only built forms of state capitalism. Also rhetorically it counters the apparent appeal of state centred approaches: their claims to viability come at the cost of their radicality. As such Holloway is highly sceptical of the apparent successes of the electoral Left in South and Latin America, such as the governments of Chavez (Venezuela) and Morales (Bolivia). He counsels that social movements should be wary of the promise of such governments. He sees their rise as a reaction to the rise of general struggles, and their success perhaps threatens these struggles themselves. In an interview he states:

...they are also a response to the rise of social struggles, a very complex and contradictory response. In all cases, they represent the attempt to satisfy the struggle, to give it a state form, which means of course to de-fuse the struggle and channel it into forms of organisation compatible with the reproduction of capital. 105

Here in Holloway's critique of state-centred approaches to social change we see most clearly the affinity that Holloway's communist vision has with anarchism. However for Holloway anarchism is still too focused on the state: even if its focus is one of destruction. He wants to shift our horizon elsewhere, where "the old distinctions between reform, revolution and anarchism no longer seem relevant because the question of who controls the state is not the focus of attention." 106 As perceptive as this critique is it doesn't necessarily follow that the failure of the state-centred Left means the viability of anti-statist approaches. Even if an anti-statist approach wants to refuse the values of capitalism, can it refuse its bullets? Is the scream enough?
Even those who seek the destruction of the capitalist state, for whom the state is not something to be taken over but smashed and replaced with a workers state, still end up internalising the social relations of capitalism:

Whether the winning of state power is seen as being the exclusive path for changing society or just as a focus for action, there is inevitably a channelling of revolt...What was initially negative (the rejection of capitalism) is converted into something positive (institution building, power-building). The induction into the conquest of power inevitably becomes an induction into power itself. The initiates lean the language, logic and calculations of power; they learn to wield the categories of a social science which has been entirely shaped by its obsession with power.¹⁰³

The state then functions according to the practices of power-over. Perhaps it is this that makes the state so appealing. In a society where power-over is understood as the only form of power then the more power-over a struggle or movement can accumulate surely the better it is placed to challenge the rule of capital? Holloway argues that this is illusory: the power of the state comes at the cost of communism. The failure of the Left cannot be only understood as a series of "betrayals". This would mean that the reasons that socialism failed were due to various contingent and subjective actions of pivotal revolutionaries – Bolsheviks corrupted by power, weak trade union leaders etc. Rather it is the very engagement with the state – whether the revolutionary state or the social democratic one – that leads to defeat. And a state-centred strategy is part of the political cosmos that the limited idea of class and a stagiest view of social transformation make up. And engagement with the state leads to a production of certain kinds of subjectivities and a certain kind of conception of the human.

The fixation on the state has tended to destroy the movements pushing for radical change. If states are embedded in a global web of capitalism, that means that they tend to reproduce capitalist social relations through the way that they operate. States function in such a way as to reproduce the capitalist status quo. In their relation to us, and in our relation to them, there is a filtering out of anything that is not compatible with the reproduction of capitalist social relations. This may be a violent filtering, as in the repression of revolutionary or subversive activity, but it is also a less perceptible filtering, a sidelining or suppression of passions, loves, hates, anger, laughter, dancing. The state divides the public from the private and, in so doing, imposes a division upon us, separates our public, serious side from our private, frivolous, irrelevant side. The state fragments us, alienates us from ourselves.¹⁰⁴
not see the ‘economic’ determining the ‘political’ but the very split between the two is how they interrelate as elements of capitalist society.

Holloway did not simply aid the popularisation of Staatsableitung but contributed theoretically too. Pre-empting his work on ‘the scream’, Holloway argued, again with Picciotto, that the causal origin of the capitalist fetishism of social relations into the state-form (amongst others), and the particular nature of a state in a specific society, lies in the rebellion of the working class. They write “the state must be understood as a particular form of the manifestation of the crisis of the capital relation.” 100 This is the struggle of labour. They write:

The reproduction of social relations in fetishised form, i.e. in a ‘fantastic form’ which conceals their reality as relations of class domination, is an essential part of the reproduction of that domination. The autonomisation of the state must be seen as part of this fetishisation, as part of the process through which reproduction imposes the dead hand of capitalist ‘reality’, a false reality of fantastic forms, upon the struggles of the working class. 101

The implication of this analysis is that on entering into the realm of the state one is compelled to accept its modes of functioning. Despite the promises of power the state offers (so appealing in terrible times), it compels people to submit to its construction and positioning of subject and society. Holloway argues:

The state imposes upon us hierarchical social relations that we do not want; the state says we must be realistic and accept capitalist logic and the calculations of power when we are clear that we do not accept that logic and those calculations. The state says that it will solve our problems, that we are not capable of it, it reduces us to victims, denies our subjectivity. The state is a form of reconciling our struggles with capitalist domination. The path of the state is not the path of dignity. 102
The state then is not a neutral tool that can be wielded by the proletariat. It is formed and enmeshed into the fracturing of human activity that constitutes capitalist society. To attempt to step onto it, into it, to grab it, produces subjectivities and organisational forms that also then reproduce the fracturing and stratifications that are the normality of capital. He writes:

The state is capital, a form of capital. The state is a specifically capitalist form of social relations. The state is so tightly bound into the global web of capitalist social relations that there is no way that an anti-capitalist sociality can be constructed through the state, no matter which party occupies the government.  

Holloway’s conception of the state, as being a product of the capitalist fetishism of social relations, has been influenced by the West German Staatsableitung or ‘state derivation’ debate. (The name arises because “the state derivation approach sought to ‘derive’ the state, logically and historically, from the categories developed by Marx in Capital.”) Holloway, along with Sol Picciotto, edited a volume entitled State and Capital, which was instrumental in introducing this debate to an Anglophone audience. In the introduction to this volume Holloway and Picciotto, critique the two dominant Marxist thinkers influencing thinking on the state within the UK at the time, Miliband and Poulantzas, as well as the debate between them. Despite the differences between these two authors, Holloway and Picciotto argue that both Miliband and Poulantzas see “the political as an autonomous object of study”. Both accepted the split between the political and the economic but differed over how they relate, specifically how the state functions in capitalism. Against this the core element of Staatsableitung is a position “which emphasises simultaneously the unifying totality of capitalist-social relations and the historically conditioned fragmentation of those relations into fetishised forms...” Thus the apparent separation of the state from the economy, does not signify a real autonomy. Rather this separation is how capital fetishes social relations. It is important to emphasise that such a view does
Holloway develops his ideas for praxis in part by connecting it with his understandings of capitalism and in part using these understandings to critique much of what has constituted the Left. This starts with a critique of the idea that the state can be a tool for social change and a space of social contestation. Holloway’s work undermines any split between means and ends. He argues that the means of using the state profoundly changes the ends of social struggle. Even if a radical struggle can occupy the place of the state, this comes, Holloway contends, at the unacceptable cost of the actual ability to profoundly change society, due to the nature of power in the state. Holloway argues that any attempt to orientate revolutionary struggle towards the state invariably leads to a statist paradigm that colonises and transforms struggles. To quote:

The reason that the state cannot be used to bring about radical change in society is that the state itself is a form of social relations that is embedded in the totality of capitalist social relations. The very existence of the state as an instance separated from society means that, whatever the contents of its policies, it takes part actively in the process of separating people from control of their own lives. Capitalism is simply that: the separating of people from their own doing. A politics that is oriented towards the state inevitably reproduces within itself the same process of separating: separating leaders from led, serious political activity from frivolous personal activity. A politics oriented towards the state, far from bringing about a radical change in society, leads to the progressive subordination of opposition to the logic of capitalism.93

The reason for this is despite the ideological image of the state being an independent body from ‘the market’ it is inseparably caught up in and reinforces the general social relations of capitalism. As Holloway writes:

The difficulty which revolutionary governments have experienced in wielding the state in the interests of the working class suggests that the embedding of the state in the web of capitalist social relations is far stronger and more subtle than the notion of instrumentality would suggest. The mistake of Marxist revolutionary movements has been, not to deny the capitalist nature of the state, but to misunderstand the degree of integration of the state in to the network of capitalist social relations.94
challenge the mode of life enough to generate new ones. In this sense Holloway argues that demands for ‘realism’ are nothing more than demands to not resist capital.

Holloway sees in the Zapatistas a struggle that has broken with the defeatism of post-socialist realism. For Holloway part of what is so radical in Zapatista practice is that it embodies this asymmetry. He writes that “[t]he great joy of the Zapatista movement is that they have shown that in the darkest days of defeat new struggles arise, and that new struggles mean new ways of thinking and new forms of doing things that are experimental, creative, asymmetrical.” 91 What Holloway often champions in the Zapatista struggle is that they are “absurd” – they do not conform to the reality of capitalist normality. 92 But this absurdity is for Holloway a sign of the actual ability of this struggle to radically challenge capital and create a better form of human society. Its absurdity is symptomatic of both its refusal to keep within capitalist boundaries and also its embodiment of the material reality of anti-power; it is absurd because it is a practice of that which constitutes but is denied by capital. The argument runs as follows: capital is constituted by the fracturing of human doing, a fracturing that is never completed and always contested. Whilst capitalism appears stable and dominant it is composed of forces that can destroy it. A revolt is absurd not just in that it does not tally with the values of capitalist society’s self-image but in that it is also a manifestation of the refusal that is in the substratum of capitalism. In breaking out of the internal tension of conflict that makes up the class struggle, it pushes to the fore that which has been denied: hence it is absurd. It is the world turned upside down.
the existence of politics, which is part of the separation of human activity that constitutes class society. He argues:

Our struggle is and must be asymmetrical to the struggle of capital (I have said this before, but it is worth repeating). This does indeed mean thinking of our struggle as an anti-politics, simply because the very existence of the political is a constitutive moment of the capital relation.

Communism then is posed beyond the boundary of what is considered normally as politics; it challenges what constitutes the capital relation, not just the dominance of capitalist powers. Normally politics is reduced to being only the specialist activity of the few as part of class society. In Holloway's schema often the cause of the failure of revolutionary practice is the way it conforms to and copies capitalist modes of understanding, values and practices. He continues:

By every means possible, by brutality, by seduction, by bribery, they try to make us to be like them, to act like them. That is what the real enemy is, not just them but becoming like them. How many revolutions have ended like that in the past, with the revolutionary leaders becoming new rulers! How many revolutionary movements have become bogged down in the violent meaninglessness of one army confronting another, all thoughts of human emancipation long since lost! If we become like them, we have lost.

As we shall see much of Holloway's critique of state-centred approaches to anti-capitalism, especially Marxist-Leninism, is that it is often highly symmetrical to capitalist practice, it operates on similar premises. Holloway argues that such politics are not radical enough, not communist enough. They do not profoundly

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Politics can also be posed (as Rancière does for example) as the contestation of the normality of capitalist society – the overflowing space which is made up of and becomes the stage for numerous claims and assertions. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Cocoran (London & New York: Verso, 2006). Also whilst the communist claim to oppose the totality of capitalist existence opens up an incredible emancipatory potential (here we can remember Lefebvre's maxim "Change Life, Change Society"), is there not a danger that trying to oppose capitalism as a totality means trying to imagine a total response, so much so that it becomes increasingly difficult to fight real, specific struggles? (Perhaps it is not enough to pose communism as being asymmetrical but rather subtracted from all the rationales of capital?)
do not talk like them, we do not look like them, we are not even comprehensible to them.\textsuperscript{87} We don't just struggle for a different future; we struggle in a profoundly different way for a different future. This can be seen as a continuation of Holloway's argument that anti-power is posed asymmetrically to power-over, the struggle of labour against being labour is posed asymmetrically to capital's attempt to fracture human doing. This asymmetry then is both for Holloway the grounding of communist practice in the condition of labour and the basis from which to develop a powerful challenge to capital. To be communist is to be profoundly different from capital, and that means a communist politics that breaks with the practices and values of how politics is most often understood. This difference between communist struggle and capitalist society is one that goes across the spectrum of society. Holloway continues:

Against their sexual dimorphism our polymorphous perversity. Against their definitions our overflowing. Against their prose our poetry. Against their nouns our verbs. Against their pomposity our laughter. Against their arrogance, our knowledge that they depend on us. Against their permanence our understanding that we make them and if we do not make them tomorrow, they will not exist tomorrow. Against their command our insubordination. Against their control, our world that they cannot control, that they will never be able to control.\textsuperscript{88}

This suggests that a communist practice is far beyond the territory that is often thought of as politics – rather it is a challenge on and across all the elements of life. Communism is posed against the breaking of activity into different bordered spheres such as the public and the private, economic and politics, etc. As such Holloway rejects the idea of communism being about politics – instead he uses the label "anti-politics". This does not seem to be only a rhetorical gesture aimed at drawing a line between the corruption of dominant politics and the virtue of communism, but rather a crucial point of analysis. Not only is communism different in practice from what usually constitutes politics, but it is also opposed to
Chapter 2: One No, Many Yeses: The Political Practice of Anti-Power

Introduction

Can the scream create communism? Holloway's depiction of capitalism and class struggle certainly destabilises both the certainties of capital and many of the categories of the Left. He transforms the understanding of class struggle into a series of explosive tensions. What does such an analysis suggest we do against capitalism? What kind of politics does it suggest, and are such a politics either possible or viable? Fittingly Holloway's suggestions for praxis begin with an opposition to the classic Leftist strategy of taking possession of the state (either by electoral or insurrectionary means) and an opposition to Marxist-Leninism and, also, Antonio Negri. From here he elucidates a vision that draws on the Zapatistas and attempts to see revolution as the immanent and imminent magnification of the everyday 'screams' into the creation of another society.

Asymmetry

The core quality of Holloway's suggestions for possible and effective communist practices it is that they must be asymmetrical to the dominant political practices of capitalism. In a speech at a concert during the 2007 anti-G8 mobilisations in Rostock Holloway said: "[a]symmetry, then, is the key to our struggle. No symmetry. Above all, no symmetry. Our weapon is that we do not act like them, we
Conclusion

The rejection of a deterministic theory of crisis is a return to agency. The dominant narrative of scientific socialism, that crisis arises from the objective economic laws and contradictions, is overturned. For Holloway crisis is not a one-off event, a moment of potential and disruption noticeably different from the smooth normality of capitalism. Crisis is an ever-present opportunity, an extension of the general 'dis-articulation' that is the substance of capitalism in all its everyday moments. The revolt of the working class comes first, and is the magma of the dominant order. But of course the working class for Holloway is not the 'working class'. Rebellion is the revolt against being classed, the refusal of separation and reification; it is a tendency that cuts through all our lives. In this sense the crisis of capitalism is the proletariat; but only if we understand that the nature of the proletariat is the crisis of capitalism. And this tendency is one based on activity: we are the crisis because we act. Holloway's work then is to uncover a potential, a possibility, but this does not determine its outcome. Yet it is still the generation of hope. A hope that arises not from what we are but what we are not, what we refuse to be. The crisis is not an army, but a multiplicity of forces, of negations. As Holloway points out:

And yet, there is nothing predetermined about the crisis. We are the crisis, we-who-scream, in the streets, in the countryside, in the factories, in the offices, in our houses; we, the insubordinate and non-subordinate who say No!, we who say Enough!, enough of your stupid power games, enough of your stupid exploitation, enough of your idiotic playing at soldiers and bosses; we who do not exploit and do not want to exploit, we who do not have power and do not want to have power, we who still want to live lives that we consider human, we who are without face and without voice: we are the crisis of capitalism.86

But it is not enough to be the crisis of capitalism. We must become the creators of communism. And to do this we need to act collectively. What then, from his understanding of struggle, class and capital does Holloway propose we do?
The key to the dis-articulation of the class relation is its mediation through money, or the exchange of commodities....The dis-articulation of the relation of exploitation/domination brings with it a dis-articulation of all social relations. The existence of labour power as a commodity implies a generalisation of commodity relations in society, the mediation of social relations in general through the exchanges of commodities, through money.\textsuperscript{84}

In contrast to many theorists of the commodity, for Holloway the disappearance of non-commodified forms does not mean the victory of domination. The horror of commodification should not be underestimated. However, whether it is the alienation of apparent prosperity, the violence of the sweatshop, the immiseration of the slum etc, these horrors should not be mistaken as the rise of stability. For Holloway things are in the process of fetishisation but never fetishised. And capital can never escape. As Holloway writes: [t]he power of labour has been contained, but only at a terrible price.\textsuperscript{85} This terrible price is that the containment of labour can only ever be partial and incomplete; insubordination pervades the forms of capital. The fetishised categories of daily life rise out of capital’s inability to leave behind labour, labour that is both insubordinate and the real substance of capital. Thus the fetishised categories are plagued by an incurable sickness in their marrow: the ever presence of rebellion.

Holloway’s image of capitalism is seemingly so counter-intuitive and goes against the grain of both liberal and revolutionary thought. He wants to show an image of capitalism that is explosive, fraught, and tense. At any moment it can combust. But this does not solve the crisis. It does not guarantee the inevitability of capitalism’s supersession by communism. Rather it shows that capitalism is driven by its contradictions, and these contradictions are our refusals and thus we, in our lives today – no matter how split, how fractured, how alienated – pose the real possibilities of manifesting another way of being, of anti-power, of communism.
Capitalism, as the product of alienated labour flees from what it is constituted of. It wishes to transform into an ether of money, a perpetual motion machine of wealth generation. Capital flees but it cannot escape. It convulses in madness. Labour through the creative activity of humans can burst its chains; push out against the forms it is trapped in. Holloway argues it is only the struggle of labour against being labour that has any real agency – it can be insubordinate. Capital cannot; it can only flee (but not escape) from insubordination.

Capital is dependent on labour in a way which labour is not dependent upon capital. Capital, without labour ceases to exist: labour, without capital, becomes practical creativity, creative practice, humanity.81

Still it is capitalism that rules. How can this be if it is so weak? It is this internal mutual repulsion that generates the manifold crises of capital. It means that all the categories that proliferate under capitalism, all the moments of its rule, are built around this explosive tension, for it is this tension that is capitalist society. “The insubordination of labour is thus the axis on which the constitution of capital as capital turns.”82 Constitution is the pivotal word here. Holloway argues that capital’s response to insubordination is “dis-articulation.” Capital moves, it flees, and this fleeing is found in the constant proliferation of mediated forms, most obviously money. As capital grows, oozes, flies and mutates, trying to free itself from the struggle in-against-and-beyond it, more and more social relations are dis-articulated. Dis-articulation is the breaking of fixed, direct, site-specific relations and their extension and their replacement with relations characterised by “restlessness, mobility, liquidity, flux, fluidity, and constant flight.”83 This is the sad freedom so championed by liberalism – the disruption of previous personal bonds and their replacement by a liberty that demands greater subordination not to people but to reified things. Or better yet subordination to the endless process of reification, to things that are as tyrannical as they are unstable. This dis-articulation is seen so clearly in the constant monetarisation/commodification of human activity. Holloway writes:
was not a return to the old relation: they were no longer tied to one particular master, but were free to move to leave one master and go work for another. The transformation from feudalism to capitalism involved the de-personalisation, dis-articulation or liquefaction of the relations of domination. The relation of exploitation was not abolished by the dissolution of ties of personal bondage, but it underwent a fundamental change in form. The particular bond that tied the serf to one particular master was dissolved and replaced by a mobile, fluid, disarticulated relation of subordination to the capitalist class. The flight of insubordination enters into the very definition of the new class relation.79

The subordination that we now face under capitalism is crucially different from that under feudalism. The latter was fixed, rigid, related to a specific lord in a specific hierarchy. It was not free of conflict; it was not the peaceful organic village where people knew their place. Under capitalism we face a situation that is dynamic, where capitalism works not so much by fixing us to a place but by movement, through flux. Rather than our tithe to the lord simply accumulating in warehouses, or spent on armaments and luxuries, the money we create races around the globe, breaking open some territories, holding and closing others. For some workers this experience is still mind-numbingly static: reduced to an industrial process, like a place in an assembly line. But the assembly line itself moves. Workers in China may burn to death locked in dormitories above their workplaces, they may be trapped, but they are trapped in a torrent of movement, of money, of wealth, of capital. To quote Holloway: “Capital Moves”. But this movement arises from the same reason the lord fled the peasant: it is a flight from rebellion, one that originated out of the pores of feudalism and is the machine powering the global empire now. Holloway writes:

On the other side of society, the erstwhile lords who converted their wealth into money found too that freedom was not all they had imagined, for they were still dependent on exploitation, and therefore on the subordination of the exploited, the workers, their former serfs. Flight from insubordination is no solution for lords turned capitalist, for the expansion of their wealth depends on the subordination of labour... Whatever the form of class domination, labour remains the sole constitutive power... The relation however has changed, for capital’s flight from insubordination is central to the struggle to impose subordination (as, for example, in the ever-present threat of factory closure or bankruptcy). The flight from insubordination has become a defining feature of the new class relation.80
The transformation from feudalism to capitalism was thus a movement of liberation on both sides of the class divide. Both sides fled from the other: the serfs from the lords (as stressed by liberal theory), but also the lords from the serfs, through the movement of their monetised wealth. Both sides fled from a relation of domination which had proved inadequate as a form of domination. Both sides fled to freedom.77

This flight, this dual explosion of the old order was not symmetrical: "[o]n the one side, the flight of insubordination, on the other side the flight from insubordination: viewed from either side, it was the insubordination of labour that was the driving force of the new mobility of the class relation, the mutual flight of serf and lord."78 On one side the exoduses to the cities, the Peasant War and the heretical cults were all explosions against the restrictions of feudalism – the bonds of tradition, place and dependency. The flight from this insubordination was a flight towards the monetarisation of exploitation: from tithe to the commodity. A flight towards the New World and a flight away from the populations in rebellion and the forms of life which provided reservoirs of resistance; whether they were steeped in ancient tradition or the new practices and freedoms of the town. The language of flight, of repulsion should not stop us from realising the bloody nature of these trajectories – the antagonism exploded with full violent force. These flights both produced new freedoms and new antagonisms.

The mutual repulsions of and from insubordination that ripped apart feudalism are not over. The flight of serfs from the specific bonded and contingent exploitation of the lord led to the freedom of wage-labour, that is, the freedom from the direct exploitation of one lord to a state of dependency which leads to exploitation by a succession of/or multiple capitalists and to exploitation by capitalist society generally. And for the ruling class, a new dependency on labour developed; one in which the capacity for exploitation and the generation of value grew, but so too did dangers of insubordination. As Holloway writes:

The flight to-and-from the insubordination of labour, the mutual repulsion of the two classes did not, of course, dissolve the class relation. For both serf and lord, the flight to freedom came up against the reassertion of the bond of mutual dependence... However this
It is this deeper internal antagonism which for Holloway defines capitalism and thus why communism is such a rich possibility. But Holloway also wants to show how the trajectory of capitalism’s development has been based around the material reality of anti-power due to its dependence on labour that refuses to just be labour.

In all class societies all those who appear to rule are dependent on the cooperative and creative activity of those who appear to be ruled. Yet it takes different forms in different forms of class society and thus Holloway asks: "[w]hat is peculiar in the relation of dependence of capital upon labour that makes capitalism inherently unstable?" To answer this question he returns to the opening chapters of capitalism, to primitive accumulation. Holloway’s depiction of primitive accumulation does not see it as simply a singular and unique event, as a one-off. Rather the origin of capitalism shows in stark relief the same practises that characterise capitalism generally – but they appear more vivid than when they have been normalised and naturalised. Holloway juxtaposes the relationship between feudalism and capitalism, suggesting that the differences in dynamics still define capitalism today. Feudalism was a system under which the “relation of domination was a personal one: a serf was bound to a particular lord, a lord limited to exploiting the serfs that he inherited or could otherwise subjugate.” Subjugation was thus often a site-specific, contextualised and contingent tension. Holloway dovetails in some ways with Federici’s (a participant in the Midnight Notes Collective) work. Federici maintains that capitalism was a reaction to the revolts of the working classes of feudalism, who made that particular system of exploitation untenable. This establishes a particular causal narrative: peasants revolt, nobles transform. Holloway reaffirms that the moment of transition involved both the movement of the exploiters and exploited against the constraints of feudalism. Whilst Holloway sees capitalism as internal tension, feudalism is positioned as a system in which there are distinct, exterior classes. His explanation of the process of transition helps explain this difference.
ways that disobedience is normalised within the patterns of power. Thus Holloway has to go further to show the effect and potency of anti-power.

Holloway wants to show how this anti-power that lives in the everyday generates crisis. A folly of orthodox Marxism, of scientific socialism, was its belief that it could demonstrate the *inevitability* of capitalism's downfall due to internal economic dynamics. This is unsatisfactory for Holloway for it works to "deify the economy (or history or the forces of production), to create a force outside human agency that will be our saviour."\(^7\) This then makes humanity dependent on another force; subordinate to an exteriority. Instead he attempts to demonstrate a materiality to anti-power that opens up the potentials for self-activity and a (or many) form(s) of communist praxis. The dissolving of social antagonism from an external opposition of two separate but related forces into an internal antagonism means the dissolution of both the certainty of class and the concrete appearance of domination. It shows capitalism to be incredibly fragile, dependent on those it subordinates. Anti-power does not just exist marked and formed by its struggles against capital but so too is capital riven with assertions of autonomy. Holloway's reconception of class struggle as a constant insubordination against the processes that constitute class, which happens across the society, means that all the moments of capitalism are contested and explosive:

Fetishism is a two-faced process. It points not just to the penetration of opposition by power, but also to the penetration of power by opposition. To say that money, for example, is the thing-ification of social relations means equally that the antagonism of social relations enters into the 'thing' which money presents itself as being. To talk of money as disciplining social relations is equally to talk of social relations as subverting money. If power penetrates its negation, anti-power, it is equally true (and possibly more interesting) that anti-power penetrates its antithesis power.\(^7\)

This means that throughout the daily life of capitalist society – which is an accumulation of processes of fetishisation – exists from within opposition to fetishisation. As much as capitalism composes the social field so too does opposition to capitalism: even if it often exists in unspoken and covert forms. As much as power-over constitutes our lives so too does anti-power.
show that behind the reified image exist a mass of tensions and struggles that is
the ordinary home of anti-power. "On the surface they have an identity, but under
the aspect of identity is the force of non-identity." Revolution is not the asserting
of an alternative power of a distinct oppressed group but rather a manifestation of
anti-power that exists across the social field. As such the ontology of anti-power is
located in our daily lives:

Anti-power does not exist only in the overt, visible struggles of those who are
insubordinate, the world of the 'Left'. It exists also - problematically, contradictorily (but
then the world of the Left is no less problematic or contradictory) - in the everyday
frustrations of all of us, the everyday struggle to maintain our dignity in the face of power,
the everyday struggle to retain or regain control over our lives. Anti-power is in the dignity
of everyday existence. Anti-power is in the relations that we form all the time, relations of
love, friendship, comradeship, community, cooperation.71

None of these qualities exist as purities: they are caught up in, produced and
reified by capitalism. Yet at the same time these relations push, rebel and mutate:
they exist “in-against-and-beyond”. Yes it is messy, this vision of human life and
resistance, where there are no are spaces that are outside capitalism where a
coherent emancipatory project can launch its fury on the world. But this messiness
is also a volatility, a potentiality. It means that at any time the surface of capitalist
society has bubbles of anti-power rising up through it. Holloway writes there is a
"substratum of negativity", many layers of rejection, of 'NO'; of the scream. He
continues:

This substratum of negativity is the stuff that social volcanoes are made of. This layer of
inarticulate non-subordination, without face, without voice, so often despised by the ‘Left’,
is the materiality of anti-power, the basis of hope.72

It is not enough to identify the presence of anti-power: just because rebellion
exists does not mean that it can or will find forms that will lead to the overthrow of
capital and the generation of communism. Much of the critical and theoretical
work of the last half a century has focused on capital’s abilities to recuperate
struggles. Writers as diverse as Marcuse and Foucault have worked to show the
Holloway tries to meet this challenge by showing that the alternatives to capitalism are actually existing potentials; that his radicalisation of class does not further diminish the possibilities of struggle but rather opens the idea that communism is imminently possible. To do this, Holloway argues that in the daily life of capitalist society, anti-power is already a material reality. Not only is the process of class a contested one, but it is contested in a way that makes revolution, the complete overturning of capitalism a question of the now. Holloway develops a narrative of capitalism’s past and present as being one that reveals the power of communism. For Holloway anti-power is not only ubiquitous; it is the actual motor force behind capitalist society. (Here he posits most clearly his combination of ‘Tronti and Adorno’.) For Holloway the task is to show how crisis still exists in capitalism, and how it leads to the hope of communism.

Holloway claims that anti-power is ubiquitous, meaning that rebellion is everywhere: that it is ordinary. The Zapatista claim “that ordinary people are rebels” is for Holloway particularly pertinent. Yet this claim seems counter-intuitive, as it is denied by the surface appearance of capitalism. For Holloway since capital is the alienation and reification of creativity, the transformation of power-to into power-over, the conditions (capitalist production) that produce anti-power simultaneously efface its visibility. To see the presence of anti-power, the scream, one must look from, and engage in anti-power itself. It cannot be approached from a neutral and objective position as such a position does not exist. As such, a theory of anti-power needs to take a certain subjective position:

The first problem in talking of anti-power is its invisibility. It is invisible not because it is imaginary, but because our concepts for seeing the world are concepts of power (of identity, of the indicative). To see anti-power, we need different concepts (of non-identity, of the Not Yet, of the subjunctive).

Thus to see the ordinariness of rebellion, that ordinary people are rebels "we must look at them with infrared eyes, seeing something in them that is not visible on the outside." The other side to Holloway’s critique of identity is an attempt to
This reading of the mask and balaclava in Zapatista practice certainly has some currency. There is plenty in the writings of the Zapatistas that problematises identity—specifically Zapatista writing often rejects both an undifferentiated humanism and the limits of concrete identity politics. But as I shall argue later closer comparison between Holloway and the Zapatistas’ thinking shows the deficiencies of the former. Indeed it will be through juxtaposing the two that we will see a more complex approach to identity in the Zapatistas’ own theory and practice and thus the weakness in Holloway’s.

The Material Basis of Anti-Power

Since Holloway wants to revitalise concepts of class as part of a communist project it is not enough that he merely critiques the ideas that we have inherited. The onus is on him to show how his reconceptualisations present an understanding of the material conditions that open up the possibilities of action and subversion. This is not easy for him. Holloway’s rejection of a clear proletarian subject raises difficulties. Whilst it destabilises the idea of a clear and restricted proletarian subject that monopolises struggle, it also runs the risk of dissipating the possibility of revolutionary force into the ether. Indeed the challenge that is often thrown at utopian and ultraleftist currents is that while they expand the liberating vision of anti-capitalism they undermine the ability to achieve it. The trump cards of Leninism and social democracy were their apparent successes. The dismal ‘failure’ of these ‘victories’, their inability to advance genuine anti-capitalism, has not removed the charge of more revolutionary currents being an ‘infantile disorder’. If anything the collapse of the apparently more realistic alternatives to capitalism in the face of the neoliberalism and its proclamations of infallibility and inevitability have heightened this challenge.
which to say 'I am white' in those same societies clearly does not: despite its affirmative, identitarian form, it is a negative, anti-identitarian statement. 62

What is this ‘negative, anti-identitarian’ charge? Holloway argues that in some statements that seem to affirm identity actually, in a problematic and contradictory way, negate it. They negate by asserting a ‘radical excess’: they say that "we are indigenous-but-more-than that, we are women-but-more-than-that."63 As such it is an act of “negating the negation of dignity”: a refusal of what identity reduces people to. By saying that “we are more”, they refuse the boundaries of identity: thus refusing identity. Holloway’s thinking on identity rests on his debt to Adorno and a notion of negative dialects. A debt he acknowledges. He writes, quoting Adorno:

It appears that we are, but we are not. That, at its most fundamental, is the driving force of hope, the force that corrodes and transforms that which is. We are the force of non-identity existing under the fetishised aspect of identity: ‘Contradiction is the non-identity under the aspect of identity’...64

As such Holloway’s critique of identity argues that radical affirmations of identity are only radical in so much as they destabilise identity. There is nothing, for him, emancipatory or valid in the claims of ‘cultural nationalism’, the subaltern or radical essentialisms. Holloway cautions that “[a] struggle that does not move against identification as such blends easily with the shifting patterns of capitalist domination.”65

It is in the Zapatistas that Holloway finds an instructive example. For whilst they struggle as the indigenous, this identity is open and unstable, a practical experiment in a non-identity. Commenting on the iconic image of the Zapatista – the balaclava – he notes the tensions at work: “...we cover our face so that we can be seen, our struggle is the struggle of those without face (sic).” And,

Hence the importance of the Zapatista balaclava, which says not just ‘We are the indigenous struggling for our identity to be recognised’, but, much more profoundly, ‘Ours is the struggle of non-identity, ours is the struggle of the invisible, of those without voice and face’66
years have taken the shape of struggles of and for identity: anti-racisms, national liberation, feminism, struggles around sexuality, etc. That is they often do not challenge identity on a whole, but rather a certain social regime of identities and argue that more identities to be included, some widened and the hierarchies between them dissolved and so on; or such struggles postulate that some identities cannot be contained within the framework of the system and thus their affirmation represents a real rupture with society as it currently is. This is a crucially important concern for this thesis, as I hope to articulate radical notions of class that are open to the very struggles that go on under the rubric of identity, struggles that orthodox understandings of class often efface. How does Holloway deal with this? Firstly he does critique what is commonly called 'identity politics'. He rejects forming a politics on the basis of identity as nothing more than a reinforcing of the practices of capitalism. He argues that:

The barrier between what one is and what one is not, between collective self and collective other cannot therefore be seen as fixed or absolute. It is only if one takes identity as one's standpoint, only if one starts from the acceptance of the rupture of doing, that labels such as 'black', 'Jewish', 'Irish', and so on, take on the character of something fixed. The idea of an 'identity' politics which takes such labels as given inevitably contributes to the fixation of identities. The appeal to being, to identity, to what one is, always involves the consolidation of identity, the strengthening, therefore, of the fracturing of doing, in short, the reinforcement of capital.  

Yet this does not mean that struggles around gender, sexuality, race etc – the struggles that are often the common terrain of identity politics – are valueless. It is important to remember that Holloway's conceptualisation of fetishism sees fetishism as always internally contested, that it is constituted by antagonism. This is also the case with identity; it too is contested from within. But Holloway positions this to argue that sometimes struggles that seem to be struggles of and for identity are actually subversive because they, in practice, work to subvert identity. He elaborates as follows:

The distinction lies rather in the fact that there are many situations in which an apparently affirmative, identitarian statement carries a negative, anti-identitarian charge. To say 'I am black' in a society characterised by discrimination against blacks is to challenge in a way

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8 For a recent example of this see Critchley's argument around how an indigenous identity can lead to a radical political subject. Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 105-08.
objects. Holloway writes: "[t]he individual stands apart from the collectivity. He is separated from his species-being or species-life, as the young Marx puts it."\(^{57}\)

But of course people still exists in relation with each other and that around them; we do exist in a capitalist society. But these relations are composed of things, of identities, which then become grouped together. This grouping Holloway argues "is no longer the communal braiding of doing", that is the collectivity of free association, but rather a "lumping together of particulars into the same bag, much as potatoes in a sack."\(^{58}\) People are grouped together on the basis of the processes of social fracture and fetishism. Holloway continues "doing might be part of the process of classification, but it is a dead doing."\(^{59}\) Classified and identified as part of fetishism, humans start to see themselves as separate from their creativity, individualised from each other, then re-grouped on the basis of reified categories, such as gender, nation, race, occupation, possessions, and so on.

Of course we need to go one step further. In the context of capitalism obviously such identities are not all considered equal, but are rather positioned in hierarchies and set against each other in relation to, and part of, the process of exploitation and accumulation. Thus not only are we broken from each other, so 'I' becomes 'not you', but rather the 'I' is violently opposed to the 'not you' – sometimes even trying to realise the latter's extermination. Thus Holloway writes:

And absolute reification is absolute death. Identity negates possibility, denies openness to other life. Identity kills, both metaphorically and very, very literally. Over all our reflections on identity stands the terrible warning of Adorno: 'Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death'\(^{60}\)

Here we face a dilemma. On one hand it is easy to agree with how our lives are lacerated by identity and see its role in various forms of violent oppressions and segregations. But on the other hand does not this line of critique actually reduce our ability to struggle? Especially since so many struggles of the last forty
Fetishism & Identity

In thought and practice, the warm interweaving of doing, the loves and hates and longings which constitute us, become shattered into so many identities, so many cold atoms of existence, standing each one on its own. Power-over, that which makes our scream echo hollowly, that which makes radical change difficult to conceive, lies in this shattering, in identification.

We experience the antagonisms of fetishism and anti-fetishism on a deeply personal level, indeed Holloway argues that fetishisation contributes to our very conception of the self through the creation of identity. Thus the critique of identity as fetishisation is a core part of his analysis and politics. It is difficult territory. In part it expresses, most painfully and troublingly, how capitalism affects daily life and creates certain forms of subjectivity, consciousness and intimate patterns of existence. His claims can seem so radical as to be outrageous, but it does not mean that on those grounds alone it should be dismissed. However I do think that Holloway’s handling of identity creates a number of real problems.

Holloway argues that fetishism, that is “[t]he separation of doing from done (and its subordination to the done) establishes the reign of is-ness or identity.” Capitalist society imposes certain modes of being, certain ways that those estranged from both their creativity and creation view themselves. For Holloway identity is produced because the social flow of doing is sundered. He continues “[f]rom the perspective of doing it is clear that everything is movement: the world is and is not, things are and are not, I am and am not.” Fetishisation, that is the sundering and reification of doing, splits us, our relationship with the world, and how we view ourselves. We move from a more contradictory, shifting and multifaceted relationship with existence to one that appears to be clear, well defined. Everything in the world becomes something: an object that is discrete and bordered from the social cooperation that created it. People themselves appear as
struggle of capital is for class. Those reduced to labour is against class. They have fundamentally different objectives and thus demand different ways of struggling: "[o]n one side is the struggle to re-braid our lives on the basis of the mutual recognition of our participation in the collective flow of doing; on the other side is the attempt to impose and reimpose the fragmentation of that flow, the denial of our doing."\textsuperscript{53} As such all efforts against power-over exist in an antagonistic way: as "anti-power" that is opposed both to power-over in method and objective. "Power-to, if it does not submerge itself in power-over, can exist, overtly or latently, only as power-against, as anti-power."\textsuperscript{54}

Anti-power thus is the assertion of a different way of doing against the forms that it currently takes. It is simultaneously the conception of breaking the normality of capitalist society and posing and affirming other ways of social organisation and social relations. Anti-power asserts the linked nature of how we refuse capitalism and build alternatives. Direct attempts to rupture the normality of capitalist society also involve the formation of alternative ways to coordinate our creativity: strikes, riots, graffiti, etc. Equally attempts to affirm cooperative and egalitarian ways of producing use-values invariably come into conflict with the pressure of the commodity form and the market. It is this creative against-ness, this radical negativity, which Holloway sees as the very magma of class struggle. Thus, as we shall see, a politics of identity is, for Holloway, an error.
power of the separation of doing from done, the division of humans into identities,
the generation of borders and the application of all types of measures and
quantifications to existence.

Power-over is the breaking of the social flow of doing. Those who exert power over the
doing of others deny the subjectivity of those others, deny their part in the social flow of
doing, exclude them from history. Power-over breaks mutual recognition: those over
whom power is exercised are not recognised (and those who exercise power are not
recognised by anyone whom they recognise as worthy of giving recognition). The doing of
the doers is deprived of social validation: we and our doing become invisible. History
becomes the history of the powerful, of those who tell others what to do. The flow of doing
becomes an antagonistic process in which the doing of most is denied, in which the doing of
most is appropriated by the few. The flow of doing becomes a broken process.50

What comes out of this is that, on one hand, we feel powerless. Whilst the social
world around us is generated by our efforts, the more we generate the less power
we feel we have; the more our lives become subsumed the greater our seeming
powerlessness and the greater the society seems to careen out of control. The
more capital develops, that is the more it breaks us from one another and from our
individual (which is to say social) and collective capacities, the more alone and
adrift our condition. But on the other hand, as noted above, fetishism is never
closed. Power-over is fraught and tense with refusals, old and new connections and
desires amongst those it is dependent on. “Power-to exists as power-over, but the
power-to is subjected to and in rebellion against power-over, and power-over is
nothing but, and therefore absolutely dependent upon, the metamorphosis of
power-to.”51

We are proletarianised as much as our creative capacities are estranged
from us into fetishised forms: as much as our power-to becomes power-over.
Equally liberation is the freeing of our capacities to be active, self-realising and
self-generating in relations of autonomy and cooperation. And as part of the class
struggle power-over and power-to confront each other as internal tensions and
intermixed antagonisms. This conflict constitutes daily life in capitalist society. But
the conflict between power-to and power-over is asymmetrical - it is not a matter
of “power against power, of like against like.”52 This is due to the fact that the
From Power to Anti-Power

Holloway’s conception of class struggle and communism rests on the concept of anti-power. To understand anti-power it is useful to grasp the distinction between potentia and potestas: that is the difference between “power-to” and “power-over”.48 ‘Power-to’ is just that, the ability to do something, to have an effect on the world around us: sing a song, build a house, cook cakes or kiss a lover. This power-to is not a pure realm of isolated agency but is always enmeshed in the general social life of a society, as much as the individual too is always part of a society. As Holloway says:

Power-to, therefore, is never individual: it is always social. It cannot be thought of as existing in some pure, unsullied state, for its existence will always be part of the way in which sociality is constituted, the way in which doing is organised. Doing (and power-to-do) is always part of the social flow, but that flow is constituted in different ways.49

In the context of class society, which involves the fracture of the social flow of doing and the fetishisation of human creativity, power-to becomes radically transformed. When our creativity is taken from our control, invested in practices that destroy autonomy, what develops is “power-over.” Power-over is the way human creativity which is a collective, open, social process becomes a force that limits its very flow, fixes doing into social patterns that crush and estrange the doer and elevates her alienated product; which in capitalism is capital, the commodity form and the society of capital and the commodity form. The formation, maintenance and rule of capitalist society are produced by the activity of those it dominates. Power-over is the power of state, capital, commodity, gender etc – the
capitalist commodity producers", and thus only describes the relationship that capitalists have to the commodity and to each other. The relationship of workers to capital, Clarke argues, is of a more general kind of fetishism, that of "pure mystification". Specifically, he argues that the way the wage appears in capitalist society obscures the reality of the exploitation of labour. He continues, "[t]he illusion of the wage form is the illusion that the labourer has been paid in full for her contribution to production." This is different from Marx's classic depiction of commodity fetishism where "the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's(sic) own labour as objective products of the labour themselves". Thus for Clarke, Holloway's understanding of class as fetishism is spurious.

Throughout the essay Clarke argues for a relatively orthodox model of class struggle: he focuses on the central role of organised labour in the work-place proper. In relation to the role of theory he writes:

Intellectuals have the training and the resources that enable them to penetrate the mysteries of the fetishism of the commodity, to produce knowledge of the workings of the capitalist system and so to inform the practice and programmes of the labour movement, whether this be in developing spontaneous local struggles or in confronting capital with a working class alternative on a global scale.

Holloway's response is brief but illuminating. He argues "[a]ll of Simon's comments are directed towards narrowing the scope of Marxism and the understanding of class struggle." A restrictive notion of fetishism leads to a restrictive notion of class and thus of class struggle. Holloway rejects Clarke's depiction of Marx's conception of fetishism as containing a "distinction between commodity fetishism and the more general theory of fetishism" as being "quite foreign to Marx's method". He reaffirms an understanding of class that sees it as the society wide fight against fetishism, and the incendiary quality that such an understanding gives communist thought.

The more we see struggle as an aspect of everyday life, the more radical our concept of struggle has to become. Our struggle is the struggle of that which does not even appear in
against the activity we do, an attempt to break out of patterns focused on our own labour, where is the bourgeoisie? As much as the idea of the proletariat has been one of virtue, the bourgeoisie exist in orthodox theory as a figure of degeneration, corruption, decadence - a pestilent force that has expended its historic virtue.1 Holloway argues that whilst the whole of humanity is caught up in these tense and antagonistic social relations, we do not all participate in them equally.

...there are clearly differences in the way in which class antagonism traverses us, differences in the degree to which it is possible for us to repress that antagonism. For those who benefit materially from the process of classification (accumulation), it is relatively easy to repress anything which points against or beyond classification, to live within the bounds of fetishism. It is those whose lives are overturned by accumulation (the indigenous of Chiapas, university teachers, coal miners, nearly everybody) in whom the element of against-ness will be more present. 37

Thus there is no specific form of labour that is seen as being revolutionary. What is revolutionary is a condition of tension, an explosive possibility that is presented in all human activity that is caught in the process of being classed, and thus is open to the resistance against class.

Of course such a notion of class has come under critique. A particular example of this is the exchange between Holloway and Simon Clark in The Labour Debate.38 In the first essay in this exchange, “Class and Classification: Against, In and Beyond Labour”, Holloway presents a short and lively version of his understandings of class and fetishism: highlighting that fetishism takes places across society, is always internally contested, and that class struggle is the society wide struggle against being reduced to class – that is against fetishisation. Holloway also draws out how this means that theory is also caught up in the process of fetishism and rebellion.39 Clarke responds by arguing that Holloway vastly misreads Marx’s notion of fetishism. Clarke argues that Marx’s work on commodity fetishism does not depict the nature of social relations in total but rather is a critique of capitalist forms of knowledge. He writes that “the theory of commodity fetishism is applicable in a capitalist society to the relations between

1 At least in popular revolutionary ideology the bourgeoisie is presented this way; Marx is far more ambivalent ascribing them a liberating and democratic role against the restrictions of feudalism.
and doing in general is part of the fragmentation of doing that results from the separation of doing and done. The fact that the de-subjectification of the subject appears simply as the separation of the workers from the means of production is already an expression of the fetishisation of social relations. The separation of the worker from the means of production (in the classic sense) is part of, generates and is supported by, a more general process of de-subjectifying the subject, a more general abstracting of labour.35

Whilst often we might actually make a physical thing – a book for example – it is the social relationship that is the crucial nature of capitalism; a social relationship produced by the total sum of labour. Also most importantly whilst the ideological promise of wage-labour is freedom from work through the accumulation of personal wealth in the form of wages, this very same labour reinforces the specific personal proletarianisation of the worker by further estranging their own vital and creative abilities and the production of a world of things, a world of commodities and reification. Holloway is quick to point out that the process of separation that takes place in the workplace is based on a prior separation: a fracturing of human activity that defines one kind of doing as work and hides another. As such wage-labour is just a moment in the general reification of life, of being made labour, that constitutes the cosmos of life in capitalism. Wage-labour is only possible because of “a more general abstracting of labour”.36 Thus any rebellion on the social field that destabilises the separation and reification of subject and object threatens capitalism. Therefore it is impossible to create a hierarchy of the importance of struggle – no section of rebellion is ever hegemonic over others. Such an analysis ensures the autonomy of rebellion. For whilst we need each other to genuinely end capital, no section of struggle has to be subservient to another since no section contains more potential than any other. For any revolt that destabilises the world of reification and throws up a fracture opens the potential of many more fractures.

The apparent challenge created by advancing a theory based on social relations that tear across and through humanity is that it not only dissipates the working class, but also the class enemy. If the revolt against capitalism is a revolt
society. Thus Holloway leaves behind the image of class struggle as two opposing forces facing each other across society. Rather it is the conglomerate of struggles that pull society apart.

Yet surely an idea of working class has to actually focus on work? Even if we take a radical critique of labour, one that focuses on alienation and reification, is not this a process that has its true home in manufacturing, or at least the official world of wage-labour? Holloway does argue that the role of production plays a central role in the reproduction and alienation of labour. However production itself fits in a broader context of separation and reification. What is important for Holloway is what can overcome capitalism, and since for Holloway this can come from any element of capitalism there is no need to develop a hierarchy of struggle. Holloway writes:

The central site for the separation of doing and done is production. The production of the commodity is the production of the separation of subject and object. Capitalist production is the production by the workers of surplus value, a surplus which, although produced by the workers, is appropriated by the capitalist. By producing a surplus as surplus value, the workers are producing their own separation from the object produced. They are in other words, producing classes, producing their own classification as wage labour...33

This conforms to elements of Marx's work. Indeed one of the rich veins of Marx's project is the unveiling of how the labour of the proletariat is the production of their own estrangement in the world they make up and create. As Marx writes: "...the more the worker expends himself (sic) in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he comes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself."34 As such the activities of wage-labour reproduce the conditions of being labour – of being a fractured being that is further estranged from the social flow of doing, the more their activity works to commodify said flow. It is important to remember that whilst both Holloway's and Marx's language seems to fit with the image of manufacturing labour, that all work is the work of objectification. Holloway writes:

The notion of the separation of the worker from the means of production directs our minds to a particular type of creative activity, but in fact this very distinction between production
power of struggles to dissolve the normality of capital’s appearance – the more struggles that become visible the more other struggles can be seen. Whilst often a great rebellion will seem like a bolt from the blue, a rupture of the normality of capitalism, it also reveals that the normality of capitalism is not ‘normal’ – that there are countless defiances that circulate before, during and after the moment of revolt. These incremental struggles are myriad: a grumbled ‘no’, a defiant piece of clothing, sabotage; countless moments that are irreducible and incomparable. So rather than a pivotal group at the heart of industrial production who are the true owners of struggle, and all others onlookers, class struggle now means any of the multiple resistances against the reification of human doing. All those that were excluded from the category of proletariat, and thus from the struggle, can now enter.

Holloway’s analysis widens the terrain of struggles by positioning them as struggles against the condition of being classed. All rebellion comes, for Holloway, not from the fact that we are proletarianised, made into the working class, but that we are and simultaneously are not working class: “...that we-are-and-are-not working class, that we exist against-and-beyond being working class...”31 We are workers inasmuch as we participate in the reification of our activity. We are not inasmuch as we rebel, as much as we generate and affirm ourselves as other out of and through the negation of capital.

We take part in the class struggle on both sides. We class-ify ourselves in so far as we produce capital, in so far as we respect money, in so far as we participate, through our practice, our theory, our language (our defining the working class), in the separation of subject and object. We simultaneously struggle against out class-ification in so far as we are human. We exist against-in-and-beyond capital, and against-in-and-beyond ourselves. Humanity, as it exists, is schizoid, volcanic: everyone is torn apart by the class antagonism.

Here we leap from the apparent clarity of class into a world of tensions, blockages, ruptures and flows. “That which is oppressed and resists is not only a who but a what.”32 It is aspects of all of us that both tear through our condition and are present, constitutive of and posed against the elements that make up capitalist
All social practice is an unceasing antagonism between the subjection of practice to the fetishised, perverted, defining forms of capitalism and the attempt to live against-and-beyond those forms. There can thus be no question of the existence of non-class forms of struggle. Class struggle, then is the unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between alienation and dis-alienation, between definition and anti-definition, between fetishism and de-fetishism. 28

Since the fracturing of object from subject, the alienation and reification of human activity, is something that happens from the molar to the molecular, this definition works to include in revolutionary thought rebellious activity that has been dismissed by orthodox revolutionary traditions. Holloway’s perspective makes no hierarchies between areas of contestation, recognising the validity of each, their commonality and yet also their autonomy and divergence. Holloway’s work is deeply influenced by the struggle of the Zapatistas, and in an essay he takes a cue from their lexicon by identifying the rejection of capital, the revolt against fracture as “dignity” – and this dignity is to be found in a multiplicity of struggles.

Fissures: these are the thousand answers to the question of revolution. Everywhere there are fissures. The struggles of dignity tear open the fabric of capitalist domination. When people stand up against the construction of the airport in Atenco, when they oppose the construction of the highway in Tepeaca, when they stand up against the Plan Puebla Panama, when the students of the UNAM oppose the introduction of fees, when workers go on strike to resist the introduction of faster rhythms of work, they are saying “No, here capital does not rule!” Each No is a flame of dignity, a crack in the rule of capital. Each No is a running away, a flight from the rule of capital. 29

Still all these struggles are overt, and open collective struggles – these are ones that register on the cultural apparatus – they are recorded, debated, attacked: they are. But Holloway also wants to bring forth struggles that are invisible: “[a]ll rebellious movements are movements against invisibility.” 30 This invisibility is caused by the ideological and spectacular appearance of capital, yet is often reinforced by Orthodox Marxism. Capital often appears as if it is its own creation, and that society is a product of its vitality. Rather, Holloway argues, capital is vampiric. It is based on the reification of the power of the other of labour. And labour is rebellious and inventive and everywhere we look with this in mind, more and more moments of initiative and disobedience become visible. This is the
This is linked to Holloway’s idea of fetishisation detailed above. There is never a point where the process of class is finished; it is always ongoing and contested. It is this methodology that Holloway applies to an understanding of class. To quote: “...the existence of classes and their constitution cannot be separated: to say that classes exist is to say that they are in the process of being constituted.” Thus we cannot talk of the proletariat as if they are a clearly defined group – a bounded and singular identity. The proletariat as a solid subject does not exist – rather it is constantly being imposed, rebuilt. Holloway writes:

The constitution of class can be seen as the separation of subject and object. Capitalism is the daily repeated violent separation of the object from the subject, the daily snatching of the object-creation-product from the subject-creator-producer, the daily seizure from the doer not only of her done but her act of doing, her creativity, her subjectivity, her humanity. The violence of this separation is not characteristic just of the earlier period of capitalism: it is the core of capitalism. To put it in other words, ‘primitive accumulation’ is not just a feature of a bygone period, it is central to the existence of capitalism.

This is an analysis that transforms both the conventional idea of what is class and what is class struggle. Classically the proletariat is seen as something that ‘exists’ and struggles against elements outside of it to achieve emancipation, and then through its seizure of society it can engage in a transformative project that dissipates its existence into a condition of liberation. In Holloway’s work the idea of what is struggle and who struggles shifts. The class struggle is the struggle against class, against being reduced to class. Being classed means suffering the fracturing of human doing, caught in processes of alienation, of investing in the world that is built through our individual and cooperative efforts yet stifles our autonomy.

Holloway sees class struggle as something that is inherent to all the moments of capitalist society – it is an ongoing battle on multiple fronts with multiple tactics carried out under numerous signs, and with various ideas.
Furthermore the orthodox and paradigmatic definition of class leads to exclusions; exclusions of people but also of antagonisms and struggles. The apparent promise of presenting class as a clear and identifiable social group is that such a definition should make our social world easy to understand. But as we shall see below Holloway understands identity to be a fetishisation, and as such a category that is constantly being made and resisted, always in process. So too, the apparently simple process of showing a clearly defined working class becomes the messier and far more troubled process of defining the working class, of trying to impose a rigid understanding on a mass of living contradictions. As such the certainty gives way to a series of questions and aporias. Who then belongs to the working class? Is it simply the industrial proletariat and those engaged in wage-labour? What then happens to other struggles – feminism, ecological, in the asylums etc? Either the struggles are denied any worth (derided as middle class distractions) or they are collapsed into the labour movement and denied their vitality and power, or the definition of working class is seen as useless, outdated and as such must be junked and new social subjects unearthed. Indeed throughout the history of the classic labour movement there has often been the exclusion, or a direct repression, of struggles that focused on the liberation of the individual, gender, art, race, desire etc as diversions from the factory floor and the class war. And this exclusion/repression often worked by simultaneously defining these struggles and those who struggle as non-proletarian: students, women, dangerous lumpen elements, middle class dilettantes and so on. If class is to be a radical and relevant conception it has to be freed from its previous usages. The classic labour movement is defeated; socialism is in ruins, antagonists against capital flare up in new spaces or strangely old ones. As we enter the 21st century and as the composition of class and antagonism changes either the idea of class is rejected or it forms a reef on which theory is shipwrecked.

Holloway’s repositioning of class works by rejecting the idea that classes confront each other as pre-formed entities existing in an exterior tension. Rather class is a process; and class struggles are posed against the process of class formation. To quote: “Class, like state, like money, like capital, must be understood as process. Capitalism is the ever renewed generation of class, the ever-renewed
From here a clearly identified social class is posed and with it a series of radical and practical steps advocated to overthrow capitalism. Holloway continues:

> In this approach, the working class, however defined, is defined on the basis of its subordination to capital: it is because it is subordinated to capital (as wage workers, or producers of surplus value) that it is defined as working class. Indeed it is only because the working class is assumed to be pre-subordinate that the question of definition can even be posed. 23

The conceptualisation of working class as clearly defined means it is conceived on the basis of its subordination, its powerlessness and lack of agency. The understanding of class as a clear identity, a clear condition, leads to, in Holloway’s mind, a positivist political position. This position creates both a clear set of tasks to do, and a hierarchy of struggles and correct agents of struggle. Once the class is shown as a pre-existing base, the task of revolutionaries is then to pose the questions of organisation and activity that connect to this base. Many of the debates between revolutionary tendencies have been around these issues: what kind of organisation, what kind of struggle, what tactics of revolt, etc. Class exists in these dialogues as a foundation that provides both the truth of the revolutionary project and the force to achieve it. The process of revolution is the affirmation of the proletariat as class – through the usurpation of the ruling class and its organs of power and the development of proletarian class rule – the Soviet, the anarcho-syndicalist union, etc. Yet since the existence of class is seen as being so solid, so firm, Holloway insists it denies the potential for genuine transformation. Critiquing orthodox Marxism, the Marxism of ‘scientific socialism’ where the paradigm of class as pre-existing, clear and fixed is so rigorously expressed, he argues that such a stance denies the radical potential of labour. It ascribes the ontology of revolution and the crisis of capitalism to the objective laws of capitalist development on one hand, and also sees the revolutionary as a special subjective actor that labour needs to catalyse the struggle on the other. 24 Holloway’s rethinking of class aids the development of an idea of revolution that is based on the self-activity of the vast majority.
contestation – this is the ‘madness of capitalism’. The madness of either the violence and paranoia that is employed in attempts to impose the categories of capital, or the madness of liberation, the insanity of being unreconciled against the order that exists, an insanity of demanding the viability of autonomy despite its appearance of impossibility.

Class Struggle & the Struggle Against Class

Crucial to Holloway’s reinvention of revolutionary theory is a radicalisation of class; this involves a critique of how class is positioned within Marxist orthodoxy. This radicalisation of class takes the intertwined insights from operaismo and critical theory. He sees class struggle as the everyday and ordinary struggle against the process of fetishisation that attempts to fix people into a class. It is a rethinking of class not as a solid identity but as a series of tensions; and an attempt to show how the anti-power of struggle has a material reality. It is important to remember that a definition of class for this line of analysis cannot be separated from struggle – class is not an objective category on which class struggle stands. Rather class struggle is what class is. Thus Holloway’s analysis of class is not sociological but rather a theoretical study of the subjectivity and subjectification of class struggle.

Holloway poses a different way to think about how class is generated and how it can be resisted. He starts with a critique of the dominant ideas of class: “[m]ost discussions of the working class are based on the assumption that fetishised forms are pre-constituted.”22 Class is considered to be something that pre-exists before struggle. Classes are seen as clear, cemented social categories that exist as an underlying reality to social conflict, even if they are obscured by hegemonic capitalist ideologies. This makes class struggle an exterior relationship – pre-formed classes face off against each other over the battlefield of society.
fetishism rules normal, everyday life, while anti-fetishism resides elsewhere, on the margins.19

Often the theorists who focus on themes of fetishisation and reification create a radical pessimism that soon gives way to pessimism proper. “If fetishism were an accomplished fact, if capitalism were characterised by the total objectification of the subject, then there is no way that we, as ordinary people, could criticise fetishism”.20 ‘Hard fetishism’ is supposed to weaken the apparent strength capitalism projects across itself. Yet it works in practice to reinforce capital’s appearance of stability: it makes it appear rigid, stable and strong. There are moments of contestation – in capitalism’s origins, when it tries to impose itself on a new territory or when it confronts an overt and militant social movement – but its daily practices are uncontested, closed. The result of this is that the ability to criticise and resist capitalism disappears. How can those of us whose lives are subsumed by capitalism resist?

Holloway however advances an understanding of fetishism that breaks from this, and it is on this basis that he theorises the antagonism of those who suffer and resist proletarianisation. Taking a perspective influenced by Ernst Bloch, Holloway argues that fetishism is a process always in conflict, that it is always contested. Holloway’s argument is that since there is resistance and autonomy that means that fetishism is never total, it is incomplete. This is the central pivot of Holloway’s writing, that the starting point is our rejection, our negativity, and our scream: YA BASTA! To quote: “[T]he concept of alienation, or fetishism, in other words, implies its opposite: not as (sic) essential non-alienated ‘home’ deep in our hearts, but as resistance, refusal, rejection of alienation in our daily practice.”21 This rejection of the solidity of capitalist categories implies also a rejection of the temporality that is associated with such solidity. There is not a one-off moment of enclosure – but a constant contested struggle; both wrapped around each other. It also means that struggle is not outside what is fetishised, but within it, yet its negativity and its refusal offers the possibly of breaking out. Fetishism, refusal and revolution are thus spun together across the social terrain in open-ended and multiple points of
from which there is little or no escape. Against this Holloway wants to apply the optimism of *operaismo* and an understanding of the hope of revolt.

Holloway does this by rejecting what he sees as the "hard fetishism" in the work of theorists such as Adorno and Lukacs. Hard fetishism as an approach sees fetishisation as a process that is essentially closed; once something is fetishised it is largely trapped in the social process of that fetishisation. It thus creates a certain temporality where the possibility for critique and negation is moved to the extraordinary moments and events of capitalism's history – either in its beginnings or its rare crises. Therefore critique or opposition must come from somewhere else, somewhere outside and to the future. To quote: "[t]hus, for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism involved a struggle to impose value relations, but it is assumed that once the transition has been accomplished, value is a stable form of stable relations." To continue:

Similarly with all other categories: if the reification of social relations is understood as stable, then all the forms of existence of those social relations (and their interrelation) will also be understood as stable, and their development will be understood as an unfolding of a closed logic. Thus money, capital, the state and so on may be understood as reified forms of social relations, but they are not seen as forms of active reification. These categories are understood as 'closed' categories, in the sense of developing according to a self-contained logic.18

Looking at the work of Lukacs, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, Holloway sees that in their work a concept of hard fetishism means that only special sections of the population – such as political formations that have access to either a privileged exteriority or the marginalised and excluded – can develop critical practices that then can be generalised across society.

For all the differences between these authors, the important point for our argument is that the understanding of fetishism as established fact (the emphasis on the all-pervasive character of fetishism in modern capitalism) leads to the conclusion that the only possible source of anti-fetishism lies outside the ordinary - whether it be the Party (Lukacs), the privileged intellectuals (Horkheimer and Adorno), or the 'substratum of the outcasts and the outsiders' (Marcuse). Fetishism implies anti-fetishism, but the two are separated:
The above means the conception of class composition becomes a problem. For class composition implies a certain solidity and stability. It is, to quote Holloway, a "way of characterising a period of capitalism."\textsuperscript{14} Holloway argues that this characterisation means that except in moments of turmoil the balance of class forces assumes a form of stability.\textsuperscript{15} Also class composition as methodology reads a certain composition to ascertain the appropriate strategies of subversion. Thus it often prioritises certain forms of labour, and ascribes to them pivotal positions and power. (We shall encounter two different attempts at this in the following chapters.) Holloway rather, by posing the struggle of labour as that of against being labour, sees a "contradictory, desperately self-antagonistic subject."\textsuperscript{16} No form of labour is prioritised as \textit{all} forms of labour are seen as divided, contradictory and open to subversion. The other side to this is a tendency to ahistoricism and universalism in his work. Thus Holloway takes the initial impulse of Tronti's 'Copernican inversion', but has to retell it to fit in with his conception of struggle in capitalist society.

Holloway's attempt to radicalise the perspective of autonomy through a \textit{negative} concept of struggle shows the influence of critical theory. It is from writers like Adorno that Holloway takes his ideas of negation. It is with Adorno's help that Holloway develops an understanding of labour's struggle as a struggle against what it has been made into:

\begin{quote}
We are part of an antagonistic entirety in which the "subject [is] the subject's foe". Dialectics exists because we are in the wrong place, in the wrong sort of society: "dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction." The dialectical we is the contradictory we who live in-and-against capitalist society, a non-identitarian class we.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Yet Holloway also radically challenges writers like Adorno. Holloway's objection to critical theory is its tendency to theoretically deny or reduce the spaces from which real rebellion can develop. Those familiar with Adorno will recognise the tendency in his work to present a captivating image of capitalism
In the next chapter we shall look at how Holloway specifically disagrees with Negri over questions of political practice. Here we shall look at how Holloway disagrees with the classic operaismo about how labour is conceptualised. Holloway wants to keep the core thesis – that the struggle of labour is the motor force of capitalism; but he wants to radicalise what is meant by labour. Rather than just seeing labour as a positive and creative force that generates both wealth and opposition, he posits its struggle as labour abolishing its condition of being labour; thus its struggle is negation. For Holloway the work of operaismo typified labour's struggle as affirmation, capital's reaction as negation.

In orthodox Marxist theory, capital is the positive subject of capitalist development. In autonomist theory, the working class becomes the positive subject: that is why the positive concepts of class composition and class re-composition are on the side of the working class, while the negative concept of decomposition is placed on the side of capital.11 Holloway firmly rejects such a schema. He argues that all it does is reverse the underpinnings of orthodox Marxism rather than making a genuine radical break with it, which simply repeats the initial error. He writes:

The autonomist project of operaismo was ambiguous precisely because it did not go far enough, because it did not question the identitarian concept of the working class as an identifiable group of people. It turns the capital-labour relation on its head, but to be consistent, it should have turned the whole world on its head, putting non-identity at the centre of the way we breathe and the way we think.12

For Holloway the problem with starting with the working class as a positive subject “presupposes a prior constitution of the working class.”13 In other words labour exists as force, as a potentially autonomous subject, that can push itself out of capitalism pretty much as it is. It leaves no room for the radical critique of labour as being labour – which as we shall see is central to Holloway's understanding of communism.
deeply radical politics that breaks with the defeats, compromises and statism of so much of the historical experience of those whom have seemingly opposed capitalism.

For the perspective of autonomy, proletarian struggle is the motor-force of capitalism. Holloway agrees with this position but argues that the formulations of Tronti and Negri et al do not sufficiently radicalise the categories of capital to explain the general explosive dynamism of the power of labour’s rebellion. Following Tronti’s *Lenin in England*, the perspective of autonomy applies a “complete reversal of the traditional Marxist approach, seeing working-class struggle as determining capitalist development...” The original autonomist analysis starts from the refusals of workers on the factory floor and then blossoms outwards. As Holloway summarises, the *operaismo* paradigm sees capitalism developing in reaction to the labour’s revolts:

Taking as its focus first the struggles in the factories, the autonomist analysis shows how all the organisational and technical innovations introduced by management can be understood as a response designed to overcome the force of insubordination on the part of workers. Labour’s insubordination can thus be seen as the driving force of capital.

Through the constant tussle of resistance on the factory floor, and the constant attempts to reimpose control, class and struggle take on a certain “composition”. That is a certain way of working (levels of technology, patterns of cooperation, certain divisions of labour etc) is produced in these ongoing conflicts. The constant innovation that typifies capitalism is driven by struggle. Holloway writes:

By analogy with Marx’s idea that capital at any point is characterised by a certain technical and value composition, depending on the relation between constant capital (that part of the capital represented by machinery and raw materials) and variable capital (that part of the capital which corresponds to wages), the autonomists developed the concept of class composition to denote the relation between labour and capital at any moment.

Yet as mentioned in the introduction a new composition does not destroy struggle, rather it just changes the shape of the contestation on which capital and labour oppose each other.
as a constant opposition to capitalism, is the cornerstone of the perspective of autonomy's cosmology. Here politics is the practice of cohering the already present refusals and struggles into the abolition of capitalism – not the entry of struggle into an otherwise stable or self-reproducing system. This reaches diamond point sharpness in Holloway's work: capitalism is defined as being composed of constant, internal struggles, tensions, refusals and negations that open up the possibility of communist praxis. However, in both his analysis of capitalism and his suggested politics there seems to be two serious flaws: firstly, can negation really build communism? And secondly, despite his attempts to value multiplicity and autonomy, his theorisation is based on a universalism that denies the specificity, contingency and uniqueness of different struggles – rather it absorbs them under a catchall framework.

**Theoretical Inheritance**

Holloway's work is a radicalisation of the perspective of autonomy through an engagement with the Frankfurt School and vice versa. He writes:

> The development of the autonomist project (the drive towards social self-determination) requires critical theory (just as, indeed, the development of critical theory requires the autonomist project – and not the social-democratic ruminations of Habermas, for example). 6

He suggests that both Tronti and Adorno, who seem so very opposed, needed each other: even if putting them together is a "creative violence". 7 From autonomism he takes the struggle of labour as the central element in the nature of, and the key to understanding capitalism. From the Frankfurt School he takes the conception of struggle(s) as struggle against a constituted identity. Holloway combines these positions to argue that the struggle of labour is the dynamic force in capitalist society and that this force is a *negative* one. From here Holloway creates an understanding of struggle within capitalism in a way that opens the possibility of a
that constitute the social relations of capital. Both the struggle against capitalism, and the very nature of those who struggle, is negative: the assertion of an against. He begins his “Twelve Theses on Changing the World without taking Power” with “[t]he starting point is negativity”. This is both a more general statement about the nature of struggle and a specific definition of his own perspective on the work of theory.

Holloway’s work rejects any pretence of a neutral analysis of capital; rather it is self-consciously partisan and is framed in the same scream of “NO” that he ascribes as the basis of communist praxis. He writes “I take my stance in the printing house of hell.” This is an allusion to William Blake, that “the devils print ‘in the infernal method, using corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.’” Holloway continues: “[t]heory, then, is part of the struggle to destroy capitalism. The starting point of theory is a scream against capitalism. The theoretical challenge is to elaborate that scream...” Yet Holloway’s method is not an embracing of a brash nihilism, but rather that negation is the point from which a better form of human existence can emerge. Negation, especially that of the reified and fetishised forms of capitalist existence, opens up other possibilities. Holloway writes:

The negative, corrosive, infernal movement of theory is at the same time the theoretical emancipation of human doing. The melting away of the apparent (fetishised) surfaces is immediately and directly the displaying of the infinite which was hid (the creative power of social doing).

Already with Holloway’s work we see very clearly that the structure that I have chosen for this thesis, the division between the analysis of capitalism and the politics necessary to overcome it can only be grasped as an artificial abstraction to ease comprehension. For in autonomist methodology it is an error to separate an analysis of capitalism and the politics that oppose it, since it is the conflicts in the material conditions of capitalism that give rise to communist praxis. Indeed labour,
Section 1: John Holloway: Against Capital

Chapter 1: In the Beginning is the Scream. The Theory of John Holloway

Introduction

We start from the scream, not from the word. Faced with the mutilation of human lives by capitalism, a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: NO.1

Our first engagement with a contemporary manifestation of the perspective of autonomy is the work of John Holloway. John Holloway’s work provides a radical, ambitious and challenging repositioning of Marx, and a critical engagement with both operaismo/autonomia and the Frankfurt School – especially Adorno. The main work of his we shall be dealing with is Change the World Without Taking Power, complemented with a comprehensive look at accompanying articles and interviews. Holloway’s work is breathtaking in its ambition: it attempts to open up a deeply radical and libertarian version of communism and of communist praxis. The struggles of the EZLN, of the ‘movement of movements’ and of Horizontalism in Argentina play a pivotal role in his work, though the accuracy of his depictions of these struggles is sometimes questionable. His analysis of both the nature of capital and the struggle against it is posed against the vast majority of previous Left positions, especially those of state-centred Leninism and Social Democracy. The core of his work is negation, the breaking of all the fetishised and reified forms
1 Andy Gill, "Capital (It Fails Us Now)," Another Day/Another Dollar, Gang of Four (EMI/Warner Bros, 1982).
10 Tronti, Lenin in England.
13 Ibid.
17 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology Part One, 94-95.
19 Ibid., 98.
20 Ibid., 98-99.
real movement' that destroys" that present state. In other words communist analysis tries to develop understandings of the present state of things that can then aid the creation of collective politics. I have attempted to follow this methodology in this thesis. Hence the first chapter on each tendency will present their analysis of the contemporary composition and antagonisms of capitalism, and the second the potential politics that arises from this. The third will present my critical responses to both.

As for anarchism, there is a general ambivalence towards it amongst all three tendencies. Holloway is willing to acknowledge the similarities of his position to anarchism, whilst Negri emphasises the differences. However in the English speaking, global North outside of the university it is most often only amongst anarchist circles that you will find any ongoing discussion of the perspective of autonomy. The communism of the perspective of autonomy is, in content, deeply similar to the content of what many people call anarchy. Is there a substantial difference? If there is, it is on the question of materialism. Speaking crudely communists (as noted above) see communism arising from specific and concrete historical conditions – anarchists either ascribe it to some essential human nature or to the correctness of its ideology. Debord acerbically writes that anarchism is an "ideology of pure freedom". That is, it exists as a series of wonderful ideas to which people must be won and transformed – ideas that exist seemingly exterior to the historical conditions of our lives. Debord here is characteristically too savage and he downplays the pluralism and intellectual freedom that exists within anarchism. Yet the core of his critique is an accurate description of the failings of much of anarchism. Anarchism has and does delineate a space where many brilliant ideas and utopian dreams develop and take flight – but it is often ungrounded and absorbed in its own ideology. Against this, communist critique (at its best) rigorously tries to free itself from ideology, to be rather a series of tools to be taken up in the struggles, deeply concerned with contradiction, and engaged in the real, existing material conditions.
of oppression, the vow to end the State..." Badiou is quick to locate these invariants in actual, real struggles:

From Spartacus to Mao (not the Mao of the State, who also exists, but the rebellious extreme, complicated Mao), from the Greek democratic insurrections to the worldwide decade 1966-1976, it is and has been, in this sense, a question of communism. It will always be a question of communism, even if the word, soiled, is replaced by some other designation of the concept that it covers, the philosophical and thus eternal concept of rebellious subjectivity.  

As the edifices of the Soviet Union have crumbled the various other still rebellious voices of communism have found more space to put forward their unorthodox critiques and visions: all of which contain a great deal of variety in thought and inspiration. But what many share with the quote from Badiou, who as a post-Maoist represents a very different (and once again in English largely unexamined) line of communist thinking from the ones presented in this work, is the idea that communism emerges from the struggles of real people in the present. A clear description of this position is made in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.

This means that communism cannot be thought of as just a nice alternative. Rather it already exists, at least as a potential, in the lived actual conditions of society. To practice communism then is to practice a material critique of the material conditions: to see, show and make the possibilities of the present radically different. Hardt and Negri write that “[t]here are two closely related elements of the communist theoretical practice proposed by this quote from Marx.” These are the “analysis of the ‘present state of things’”, and grasping what Marx calls “the

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ix One of the best English language resources for anti-statist and non-Leninist communist writings is *libcom.org*

x For a study of Badiou’s politics see Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
structures of a society. There exist many powerful communist critiques of the party-state, and the perspective of autonomy is one of them. The authors presented in this thesis are all attempting to revive communism as a tool to understand both our struggles and the potential future they create. But this cannot be done by simply wishing away the legacy of Stalinism – rather the authors, in their different ways, try to grapple with the failures of ‘really existing socialism’ and develop an understanding of the present, a politics of struggle, and a vision of the future that is founded on the possibilities of freedom.

But if communism is not the reign of the party-state then what is it? For if communism means anything, if there is anything to it, it is an opposition to the complex and bound-together forms of domination and control that constitute capitalism – the freeing of human potential through the self-activity of the oppressed. Of course there is a great variety of visions of what emancipation looks like amongst communists – part of the task of this thesis is to see how different authors take up the challenge of envisioning other worlds. Of course there is also the tendency of many communists to refuse to make blueprints of the future – rather they critique the present and try to aid the development of struggles. Such a position trusts the creativity of the multitude in struggle to create the forms of its freedom. In words communism can only be described in the broadest of terms, but it is lived in the most vibrant of ways.

Marx envisioned communism as the profound transformation of social life through the activity and struggle of millions, “the alteration of men (sic) on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution”. A revolution not only to destroy the old order; but also as a series of processes that will change those who carry out the revolution – so they can free themselves from “all the muck of ages.” Badiou writes that there are certain “communist invariants”, certain core elements of the communist position. He lists these to include: “[e]galitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to break with the compromises of the service of goods, the deposing of egotism, the intolerance
the various authors’ engagement with these understandings that allows them to construct vital and lively analyses of capitalism and also helps us imagine potential communist politics and activity.

Communism?

In the following pages — perhaps to the surprise or dismay of some of our readers — we will speak not only of labor, exploitation and capitalism, but also of class conflict, proletarian struggles, and even communist futures. Do dinosaurs still walk the earth?!

Throughout this thesis the term communism is used to signify both the movement against capitalism and the post-capitalist condition of emancipation. This may seem anachronistic, naive, obscene and/or callous. To the dominant understanding of our times communism is nothing more than either a tragic delusion or the pure expression of totalitarianism. Communism, we are told, equals Year Zero. Also does not the current ascendency of anarchism as the hegemonic ideology in anti-capitalism in the North make it unnecessary to use a term so covered in blood and filth? Especially since communism is equated with state control, the overt anti-authoritarianism and anti-statism of anarchism seems to mean that it is not only ‘cleaner’, it also responds directly to the bitter failings of the 20th century. I use communism in this study simply because all three tendencies still describe their own positions as communist, and also because I believe communism as a concept, maintains an ethical, philosophical and political potency.

Communism will probably remain for many only the name of a crime; but we must also acknowledge that it has existed and continues to exist as a name for collective emancipation. The sharpest critiques of Stalinism have, and are, often made by those who maintain a fidelity to communism and who use materialist understandings to expose the links and discontinuities between ideologies and
from its de facto subordination to the class of worker-producers." That is, capital's drive to increase its exploitation is part of its struggle against its dependency, against its existence as a creation of a force (labour-power) that it attempts to control. The autonomist claim, which is revisited throughout this work, is that the attempts by capital to increase its exploitation ultimately only increase its dependency.

This leads to the second claim by the perspective of autonomy that runs through the three tendencies we shall look at: that it is the struggle of labour that drives capitalism. Tronti writes that "[c]apitalist power seeks to use the workers (sic) antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development." The struggle of workers against capital is often taken up by capital to reinvent and reinvigorate itself. But since the struggle against capital is often the struggle against work, capital's attempts to break our revolts and recuperate our demands often involve the profound reinvention of how we labour. This is explored in the idea of class composition, as Dyer-Witheford summarises:

Class composition is in constant change. If workers resisting capital compose themselves as a collectivity, capital must strive to decompose or break up this threatening cohesion. It does this by constant revolutionizing of the means of production – by recurrent restructurings, involving organisational changes and technological innovations that divide, deskill, or eliminate dangerous groups of workers. But since capital is a system that depends on its power to organise labour through the wage, it cannot entirely destroy its antagonist. Each capitalist restructuring must recruit new and different types of labor, and thus yield the possibility of working-class recomposition involving different strata of workers with fresh capacities of resistance and counterinitiative.

Whilst John Holloway, The Midnight Notes Collective, and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno all take the perspective of autonomy in very different directions, what it gives each of them is the ability to attempt to come to terms with the vast changes in the organisation of capitalism over the last 30+ years. Rather than holding to a static and largely sociological understanding of class they create depictions of struggle, dynamism and change. What I put forward here is that it is
then be one that emphasises the power of capital as victor and the hopelessness of the victim (whatever the rhetorical power of such a moral claim). Rather the perspective of autonomy sees labour as potentially and in practice autonomous from capital and capital as fundamentally reactive to the struggles of labour. Labour is autonomous in the sense that it struggles to exist in many ways ‘before’ capital – labour is not dependent on capital for its existence as a social force. And labour is autonomous in the way it fights and what it fights for. It struggles by declaring, and for, its autonomy. Nick Dyer-Witheford, who also quotes the above passage, draws these conclusions from Tronti’s position:

Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is in fact the active subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends. Capital attempts to incorporate labor as an object, a component in its cycle of value extraction, so much labor power. But this inclusion is always partial, never fully achieved. Laboring subjects resist capital’s reduction.11

Such an argument is counter-intuitive to both liberal and revolutionary commonsense. How can labour come first? Surely any kind of radical history sees the proletariat as a product: the problem child of the bourgeoisies’ destruction of pre-capitalist social forms and the imposition of the wage-relationship. Tronti’s response is that the existence of capital is premised on the existence of something to be exploited into capital – capital cannot just appear from thin air:

If the conditions of capital are in the hands of the workers’, if there is no active life in capital without the living activity of labour power, if capital is already, at its birth, a consequence (sic) of productive labour, if there is no capitalist society without the workers (sic) articulation, in other words if there is no social relationship with out (sic) a class relationship, and there is no class relationship without the working class, then one can conclude that the capitalist class, from its birth, is in fact subordinate to the working class.12

Capitals’ exploitation of labour is not a sign of its strength, but rather its weakness, its dependence on those it rules over. Thus to say capitalism is vampiric is not a moral condemnation but rather a precise diagnosis of its conditions – it is the dead reified stuff that is taken from the activity, the very life-blood, of the living. Tronti writes, “[e]xploitation is born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape
rethinking its foundations in the context of new situations. All these texts are recommended in order to orientate oneself to the fundamentals of this perspective.

The authors presented here differ in many ways from each other as well as from the original work carried out in Italy by the operaismo in the 1960s; yet their work shares core positions. These positions are presented here, but are argued for more substantially throughout the thesis. The first, and possibly the most important, is often described as the “Copernican inversion” of Marxism made by Mario Tronti in Lenin In England. Here Tronti makes the argument that Marxism on the whole has viewed capitalism from the wrong perspective, and this perspective has to be turned upside down. Too often the depiction of capitalist societies sees the dominance of capital and the subordination of the working class. Thus, except for moments of crisis when capitalism, due to its own internal processes, stumbles or when the class is armed by an exterior political force, the proletariat is largely trapped within the power of capitalist society. This view of capital’s power reflects both the ideological dominance of capital and a common emotional and subjective experience of the conditions of living within capitalist society and ideology. Tronti argues that this has to be turned over and that capitalism must be grasped from the perspective of the struggle of labour:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital’s own reproduction must be tuned.

Struggle comes first. Just as capital is made from the substance of the work of labour, the political life in capitalist society is made from the struggles of labour – in a similarly reified and inverted form. Our understanding of capitalism cannot

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viii Here ideology can be used in the sense that Žižek uses it – not as a veil that covers reality but as a social fantasy that constitutes part of our reality. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London & New York: Verso, 1999).
speaking world. There are no easily available translations of the vast majority of the early work of *operaismo*. Even Negri, who must now be seen as an international figure of politics and philosophy, was relatively unknown and ignored before the publication of *Empire*. He might have been talked about in relation to the turmoil of 1977, but he was not taken seriously as a political thinker except by a small handful of ultraleft radicals. The more recent attention given to Negri often has the very counterproductive result of reducing the complexity of *operaismo, autonomia* and what comes after them, to his work alone. In this way the creative tensions and dynamism of a movement can be reduced to one person who can then be normalised into the role of the philosopher and inserted politely into the rotating selection of theorists that serve an institutionalised realm of thought broken from the muddy conflicts in society. Whilst obviously this thesis is a thing of the university, I hope it engages with theory in ways that connect with the concerns of broader living politics.

Currently there exist some excellent writings on the perspective of autonomy. For example there is the indispensible history of *operaismo* entitled *Storming Heaven* written by Steve Wright. For a short introduction to the basics of the perspective the introduction to *Reading Capital Politically* by Harry Cleaver is invaluable, and Nick Dyer-Witheford’s book *Cyber-Marx* both provides an introduction to the ideas and sets them to work to produce a radical understanding of contemporary capitalism, labour and the digital economy. The introduction to Negri’s *Politics of Subversion* written by Yann Boulier also provides an interesting history of the context of Negri’s work. Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt provide us with *Radical Thought in Italy*, a collection of relatively contemporary (early to mid 1990s) writings from Italy that show how the perspective of autonomy was

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vi Parts of chapters and short works by authors such as Tronti, Bologna and Panizeri are available on the internet on radical websites (see for example libcom.org), and the journals *Telos* and *Radical America* published articles by Tronti in the 1970s. Yet there are no complete published translations of their works. There has been some small, yet growing interest in Mario Tronti as a response to a growing sense of disenchantment with Negri – Tronti has taken a very different journey from *operaismo* to today.

vii Here the terms “small”, “ultraleft” and “radical” are not used pejoratively – indeed it is often such publications like *Aufheben* from the UK that have kept alive a practice of critical heterodox communist thinking in a time of general political defeat. Such publications have been especially good for actually putting theory to work. Cf. *Aufheben* ([cited 14th April 2008]); available from http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/.
tendency in on older, Leninist sense. Rather each voice journeys in a certain
direction, makes certain arguments, and suggests certain ways forward. They have
been chosen as subjects of study and comparison because they all have something
very interesting and novel to say. Also, with the exception of Antonio Negri, there
exist, to my knowledge, no sustained studies undertaken in English on their work.
They have also been chosen because each of them illuminates a broader position
about the overturning of capitalism. Holloway’s work largely focuses on negation,
on being against capitalism. The Midnight Notes Collective on building and
defending an outside. Negri and Virno focus on the necessity of going beyond
capitalism. Hence the title: ‘Against, outside and beyond’. Each author or group is
given three chapters; the first in which I analyse their understandings of capitalism
and the second their suggestions for political practice. In the third chapter I
present my own critiques.

The Perspective of Autonomy

Our new approach starts from the proposition that, at both national and international level,
it is the specific, present, political situation of the working class that both necessitates and
directs the given forms of capital’s development. From this beginning we must now move
forward to a new understanding of the entire world network of social relations.∗ But what is this “perspective of autonomy”? Often called Autonomist Marxism,
here the term “perspective of autonomy” is chosen largely for aesthetic reasons: it
sounds better.∗ Also it emphasises that what holds this increasingly diverse affinity
of writers together is a certain way of looking at the world, a certain radical
perspective. It views capitalism from the position of labour’s immanent ability to
act autonomously – to take control of itself and thus society. Historically it formed
out of the Italian experience of operaismo (workerism) and autonomia
(autonomism) from the 1960s and 1970s. It was largely ignored in the English-

∗ The term is used by Dyer-Witheford, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Cyber-Marx: Cycles of Struggle in High-
overturning of the dominant order. Obviously this finds an incandescent depiction in Marx’s idea of the proletariat. In the *German Ideology* the proletariat is seen not merely as the subject of exploitation, but as those who through their condition of exploitation are formed as a radical substance that can realise the emancipation of all through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Their power arises despite and because of their apparent powerlessness:

Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces and in the thus postulated development of a totality of capacities. ³

However, the paradigm of class that constituted the old revolutionary project has come asunder. It has been broken from many sides: the structural changes to capitalism, the incorporation and management of social democracy and the radical claims and challenges of other social struggles. The apparent universalism of the industrial proletariat created a privileged site and methodology of struggle that marginalised the marginalised. It often functioned as a reified image that was used against novel, inspiring and daring struggles and revolts against capitalism – especially those on the campuses, from the kitchens, out of the ghettos and in the peripheries. The official labour movement dragged the working class into the butchery of the First World War and then into class peace and compromise. Finally the restructuring of post-Fordism has seen the mass factory broken apart and new and strange organisations of labour created in complex arrangements across the globe.

In this thesis I present different voices that radically rework the idea of class and attempt to revive its emancipatory potential – and do so in ways that make it refreshing and strange. Each voice – John Holloway, the Midnight Notes Collective and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno – is, in the broadest sense, part a tendency of ‘the perspective of autonomy’ or ‘Autonomist Marxism’. Obviously I use the word ‘tendency’ very loosely (can an individual be a tendency?): they do not constitute a
commonsense into a variant of liberalism, we are soon left with no real critique at all. Of course one may easily object to the vicious brutality and stupidity of neo-conservatives but that is far from actually critiquing capitalism let alone arguing for a militant and emancipatory politics.

Often when one is outraged by the latest horror or banality of capitalism part of our objection is to its seemingly overwhelming power to shape and compel our existence. The underside of this objection is our own subjective feeling of powerlessness. Take for example this insight into the role of capital in shaping our lives made by Wendy Brown:

Yet if capitalism has all but disappeared as a subject and object of political theory (notwithstanding routine drive-by references to "globalization"), capitalism is and remains our life form. Understood not just as a mode of production, distribution, or exchange but as an unparalleled maker of history, capital arguably remains the dominant force in the organization of collective human existence, conditioning every element of social, political, cultural, intellectual, emotional, and kin life. Indeed, what for Marx constituted the basis for a critique of capital deeper than its exploitation and denigration of labor, deeper than the disparities between wealth and poverty it organized, is that capital is a larger, more creative and more nearly total form of power than anything else in human history, yet it fundamentally escapes human control.²

Brown’s position, which potently describes the power of capital, also describes our impotence. Any theory that wants to abolish capitalism has to invert the image so perfectly described by Brown. It has to show not the power of capitalism but its weakness, not our hopelessness but our fecundity. It rests on arguing that the subjective experience of powerlessness does not constitute our objective reality: that there is something more.

Historically the revolutionary idea of class fulfilled this function. Not class as a simple socio-economic category for the marking of inequalities but class as the idea that within the conditions of exploitation exist the forces and agents for the

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to be saved by humanitarian intervention so they can be transformed into orderly liberal citizens.ii

Those who still hold criticisms and reservations about capitalism (and who have no desire to revive a mythic past/future of organic religious or ethnic wholeness) are then offered one of two choices. They can maintain the robustness of their critique but dispense with the methods to realise it; or they can engage in the realism of liberalism in the hope of ameliorating certain injustices.iii Of course the dominant ideological solution to the problems of liberal capitalist democracy is more liberal capitalist democracy. Whether the issue is ecological destruction, poverty, authoritarianism, whatever, we get the same solution: a solution to be taken up in orchestrated ‘colour’ revolutions or imposed through sanctions and soldiers (with or without blue helmets; with or without cluster bombs or food aid). The attempts at amelioration soon give way under the pressures of commonsense and the very weight of capitalist society. Thus the solution to the global AIDS crisis is not free medication for the poor, a largely un-radical demand, but rather to use credit cards promoted by Bono and Oprah. The benevolence of capitalists is the replacement for even mild and reformist critiques of capitalism.

Those who keep their critiques may keep their honour. Yet when it comes to a substantive challenge, an antagonistic politics that can confront the reality of capitalism there is a stunning silence – or wise warnings about the inherent totalitarianism of all meta-narratives, especially those built around notions of revolution.iv And thus with a step into social democracy, transformed by

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iv This is the common political position of much of what is called post-modernism and amongst English language Cultural Studies. Žižek argues that “today’s critical theory, in the guise of ‘cultural studies’, is performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible: in the predominant form of postmodern ‘cultural criticism’, the very mention of capitalism as a world
The central task of this thesis is to see how three related tendencies of what we call here the perspective of autonomy can aid in the development of emancipatory anti-capitalist politics. This thesis then rests on the claim that overcoming capitalism is both desirable and possible. As such its core premise is out of joint with the prevailing commonsense of the day. Today the accepted position in relation to the viability of capitalism is one of two variations. Firstly that capitalism, especially in its liberal democratic mode, is taken as the only and best of all possible worlds; so much so that the very word capitalism begins to disappear from our vocabulary – as if simply stating its name would create the idea that there are other possible systems or forms of social organisation. The second variation may express a critiqué of how things are, but excludes the possibility that there is anything we can really do about it. Both the possibility of other societies and the very existences of subjects and struggles that can create them are dismissed. Apparently such hopes disappeared somewhere between the Gulag and the Shopping Mall. We are told that any alternatives to capitalism have proven to be worse than what they tried to replace and the very social forces that were meant to bring them into being have dissipated: either by the successes and opulence of the commodity economy or the immiseration it creates. When the wretched of the earth do appear on the screens of the 'spectacle' (or as objects of study) they either carry banners not of the Internationale but of the atavistic claims of communalisms, identity and religion or else they appear only as victims

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1 For example: "Marco Cicala, a Leftist Italian journalist, told me about his recent weird experience: when, in an article, he once used the word "capitalism," the editor asked him if the use of this term is really necessary - could he not replace it by a synonymous one, like "economy"? What better proof of the total triumph of capitalism than the virtual disappearance of the very term in the last 2 or 3 decades?" Slavoj Žižek, Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses (2007 [cited 15th January 2008]); available from http://www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm.
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This thesis is a critical engagement with the work of John Holloway, the Midnight Notes Collective and Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno. All these authors are part of 'the perspective of autonomy', a heterodox tendency of communist thought that aims to understand capitalism from the point of view of labour’s rebellious self-activity. These authors can be broken into three more specific tendencies: against (John Holloway), outside (the Midnight Notes Collective), and beyond (Antonio Negri and Paulo Virno). Here I present the analysis and politics of each, as well as critical reflections on their limitations and failings. Each tendency provides refreshing understandings of capitalism and struggle, which helps us revive a communist understanding of our condition. Yet in all three tendencies we see the recurring error of trying to stretch their insights too far: as an explanation for ‘everything’ and in the hope of providing an objective basis for proletarian solidarity. This limits their ability to suggest paths forward for the creation of militant forms of activity. It is the hope that this study will help the development of better understandings of capitalism, class and struggle and contribute to the development of emancipatory politics.
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I am thankful for the opportunity provided to me by the Australian National University, and deeply grateful and honoured by the Graduate School Scholarship that allowed me to take up full time research.

During the time of writing this thesis countless struggles have taken place across the globe, some close to home, some further away. I have endeavoured to make this work porous to and receptive of these struggles. During the time of writing this thesis militants across the globe have faced repression, imprisonment and death for resisting capitalism. It is these people, these struggles, we, the multitude; it is us and our lives, who are the real subject of this thesis.

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I declare that the material contained in this thesis is entirely my own work, conducted under the supervision of Dr David West, except where due and accurate acknowledgement of another source has been made.

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