

# The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorization to Self-Valorization\*

by  
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Different theories provide insights into various aspects of the social relationships of capitalism from different points of view. In Marxian terms, the usefulness of any particular theory depends upon understanding the particular *class perspective* from which it grasps those relationships. A given theory may express any of several different capitalist or working class points of view. We do not have to agree with a theory to understand with which aspects of the class relation it is preoccupied, how it approaches them and, therefore, the ways we may find it useful. In this essay my principal concern is an examination of the usefulness of some recent work --both within and without Marxian theory-- on the positive content of working class struggle, that is to say on the various ways in which people have sought to move beyond mere resistance to capitalism toward the self-construction of alternative ways of being. As a methodological prelude to that examination I discuss first, the issue of class perspective as applied to economic theory and second, the question of the inversion of class perspective within Marxian theory with an example taken from post-WWII Italian Marxism.

## Theory and Class Perspective

For example, the class perspective of neoclassical economic theory is fairly obvious. It has been developed to maximize its usefulness to the managers and apologists of capitalism for the purposes of prediction, manipulation and legitimization. Once we recognize this, it makes it easy to understand both the preoccupation of neoclassical microeconomic theory with markets, with the decision making of firms, consumers and workers as well as the particular way the theory deals with those aspects of capitalism. The neoclassical theory of the firm has been elaborated specifically to provide not only an understanding of the processes and results of profit making behavior, but also guidelines for the maximization of profit, e.g., the equation of marginal costs and marginal revenues or the setting of factor prices equal to their marginal productivity. At the same time, the theory is constructed in such a way as to legitimate such behavior by hiding the antagonistic class relations of exploitation such behavior involves. Once we understand the purposes and methods of such a theory, we can use it to provide us with an understanding of the business and ideological practices of both the bourgeoisie and their economists. Those involved in workers' struggles against capitalism can study such theory to understand how the opposition thinks, plans and justifies its actions to others. Given that the managers of capital and their economists are, as a rule, quite serious in their attempts to maintain and extend their control, studying such neoclassical theory facilitates understanding their goals, methods and strategies --the grasp of which can help workers calculate their own actions in the class struggle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This working class approach to bourgeois theory is quite different from that practiced by most Marxists. Traditionally Marxists either have dismissed mainstream theory as purely apologetic or have criticized various moments of that theory, pointing out their internal inconsistencies or their failure to grasp some essentially aspect of

Marxian theory and its categories also provide a conceptual apparatus for understanding the social relationships within capitalism. That apparatus has proved to be useful for those involved in the struggle against capitalist society because it not only expresses, with greater clarity than any other critical theory, the precise mechanisms of domination, but also renders those mechanisms transparent, and thus easier to confront and deal with. For example, whereas neoclassical firm theory confines the concept of exploitation to a special case (that of marginal productivity exceeding the wage) Marxian theory shows how all reproducible relationships between capitalists and workers involve antagonism and exploitation, and then goes on to detail the specific mechanisms through which that exploitation is organized (the structure of the wage, the division of labor, absolute and relative surplus value and so on).

Capitalist managers, of course, are well aware of all the concrete phenomena associated with these mechanisms of exploitation --they know that they can improve profits by holding down time or piece wages, by organizing production in such a way as to pit workers against each other, by increasing the length of the working day or by raising productivity while limiting wage growth-- but neoclassical theory, unlike Marxian theory, hides the antagonism of these relationships while preserving their essence and hence the serviceability of the theory. For example, the equation of the wage with marginal productivity is not presented as a rule of the thumb that guarantees the exploitative extraction of relative surplus value, but as merely a technical condition of efficiency required to maximize profits.

The theory of relative surplus value and the theory of optimal factor pricing thus express two different class perspectives on exactly the same phenomenon. Neoclassical theory provides a decision making tool to managers while doing so in a way that camouflages, even to them, the antagonisms which make that tool a weapon of domination. Marxism, on the other hand, provides workers with a conceptual framework which allows them to penetrate the camouflage, to recognize the mechanism of domination and thus to think clearly about strategies for opposing or undermining it.

### **The Inversion of Class Perspective *within* Marxist Theory**

A great deal of Marxian theory, however, precisely in so far as it specifies the mechanisms of domination in a such a transparent manner, remains underdeveloped by forgetting to carry through two kinds of analysis: first, an inversion of class perspective of a slightly different kind than the one discussed above and second, an analysis of the struggles against domination.

The kind of inversion of class perspective that I have in mind is the sort that Marx employed in his analyses of surplus value. From the point of view of capital, surplus value exists primarily as "profit", that is to say in relation to capitalist investment. Capitalists are primarily interested in surplus value, i.e., judge its adequacy, not so much in terms of the absolute amount of it but in relation to the amount of investment required to produce it, i.e., the rate of profit,  $s/(c+v)$ . If the rate of profit is less than that in another sphere of activity, capitalists will tend to shift their investment, even if their current surplus value is large in absolute terms.

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the world. Ironically, such well intended approaches have had two unfortunate side effects. First, by inducing contempt for mainstream theory the attention of those struggling against capitalism is diverted away from the serious study of that theory as a key to the capitalist strategies being wielded against them. Second, by identifying logical lapses and critical oversights in the theory, such critiques can only help mainstream theorists improve the rigor and usefulness of their formulations --to the detriment of those in whose interests the critics seek to act!

From the point of view of the working class, however, the essential issues of surplus value are elsewhere. First, the absolute amount of surplus labor time being extracted from them is of great importance because it measures one part of the lifetime they give up to capital. Second, for workers the relevant measure of the relative size of surplus value is not the rate of profit but the rate of exploitation:  $s/v$ , where the time given up to capital is compared to the time expended in meeting their own needs. This working class perspective on surplus value is hidden behind the capitalist preoccupation with profit, both in the world of business and in the world of bourgeois economics. Both these Marxian ways of conceptualizing surplus value express, in a general way, a working class perspective. Yet, the concept of surplus value and the concept of surplus value as profit, clearly express different and opposed preoccupations and class interests.

When we think about working class struggle against surplus value, whether the struggle to shorten the working day (which cuts absolute surplus value) or the struggle to increase the value of labor power (which cuts relative surplus value) we think, first and foremost, about a drop in the rate of exploitation. When we think about capitalist efforts to expand surplus value, we know that they think first and foremost about a rise in the rate of profit. Thus, we can see in these two moments of Marxian theory a kind of inversion of class perspective within an overall theoretical approach which seeks to understand capitalism from the point of view of the working class.

At the most general level of his theory of capitalist society, Marx rarely failed to develop both sides of his analysis --although a great many Marxists have. He almost always retained his fundamental vision of capitalism as a society of antagonistic class struggle in which two class subjects confronted each other and the effort to dominate was always met by resistance and the struggle for liberation. From the *Communist Manifesto* through the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* to his later writings, it is easy to find repeated expressions of the antagonistic opposition between a temporarily dominant capitalist subject and a struggling, potentially victorious working class subject. This opposition was at the heart of his theory of revolution and liberation, of the possibilities of moving beyond capitalism, and it is frequently expressed in the details of his theory. Sometimes, however, in working out his theoretical understanding of these relations of domination and struggle, Marx, as so many Marxists who have followed him, became so preoccupied with understanding and laying out the mechanisms of domination that he failed to develop, at a theoretical level, the kind of duality of perspective embodied in surplus value and surplus value as profit. Where such elaboration is missing it has often proved both enlightening and useful to work it out.

The second, and related, failure of Marx's writings occurred where the historical analysis of domination was not complemented by the analysis of the struggles those mechanisms were designed to dominate. Therefore, a not inconsiderable body of his writing appears at best to be lopsidedly preoccupied with the machinations of capitalists rather than with the struggles of those workers for whom Marx was elaborating his theory. One example of such lopsidedness should suffice to illustrate the point. In the analysis of primitive accumulation in *Capital*, Marx's discussion of the expropriation of the means of production (chapter 27) and of the bloody legislation against the expropriated (chapter 28) dwells at length on the severity of the measures employed to achieve these ends, but barely touches on the struggles by which people resisted those measures. Yet only an analysis of the bases and depth of that resistance can both explain

the severity and the pattern of the measures employed and suggest lessons for more contemporary conflicts of a similar nature.<sup>2</sup>

The obvious counter-example from *Capital*, one which shows how Marx did treat such conflicts in ways that analyzed both sides is his discussion in chapter 10 on the struggles over the lengthening and shortening of the working day. Here, his analysis is more fully developed both at the theoretical level and in the analysis of history. The battles over the length of the working day are analyzed both in terms of workers' attempts to reduce their exploitation and capital's attempts to expand or defend their profits.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this discussion stands almost alone in the balance it shows, at both the theoretical and historical levels, between the capitalists' efforts to dominate and the working class' struggles against that domination. As a result, those who have understood Marxian theory as a weapon to be wielded by workers in their struggle with capital --as neoclassical economic theory is a weapon in the hands of the capitalists-- have been faced with the need to complete Marx's analysis by working out the theoretical implications for Marxian theory (and history) of this second kind of inversion of class perspective on specific issues in order to fully grasp the theoretical and political implications of his analysis for working class struggle.

### **From the "Composition of Capital" to "Class Composition"**

One of the best examples of such an inversion was that carried out by Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti and others of the Italian New Left in the early 1960s with respect to Marx's concepts of technological change and the composition of capital. As laid out in detail in Volume I of *Capital*, Marx's theory of technological change recast capital's own understanding --as expressed for example in Adam Smith's analysis of the division of labor in terms of efficiency-- using his own labor theory of value to focus on a key mechanism of domination: the use of fixed capital for the domination of living labor. The central concepts of Marx's theory were three: the technical composition of capital, the value composition of capital and the organic composition of capital.<sup>4</sup> The technical composition of capital denoted the particular material configuration of plant, machinery, raw materials and labor involved in a production process. An "increase" in the technical composition of capital occurred when any productivity raising reorganization of that process involved the increased use of fixed capital (by a given labor force). The usual neoclassical economic counterpart to this representation of such a change is a rise in the capital/labor ratio.<sup>5</sup> A change in this technical composition of capital appears as a merely technical concept denoting a reconfiguration of production.

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<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, a variety of Marxist historians have made major contributions to filling in the missing side to this story, but we have yet to see any systematic attempt to explore the other side of primitive accumulation theoretically. For a beginning at such an attempt see the discussion of disvalorization below.

<sup>3</sup> This is the case even though the full discussion of surplus value as "profit" was relegated to the first part of Volume III of *Capital*. The account in Volume I not only traces the actions of the capitalists but also their arguments (e.g., Senior's about the dangers to business profits of any shortening of the working day).

<sup>4</sup> Although Marx discusses these concepts at many different points, his clearest exposition of the differences and relations among them can be found in the opening pages of chapter 25 of Volume I of *Capital* and in Volume III of that same work.

<sup>5</sup> This is the proper counterpart only in the abstract. All empirical efforts to actually measure the capital/labor ratio involve methods of aggregation --usually at market prices-- which make this concept more akin to the value composition of capital discussed in the next paragraph.

To discuss such a change in value terms Marx introduced the complementary concepts of the "value" and the "organic" compositions of capital. In both cases the plant, machinery and raw materials are aggregated by their value and appear as constant capital and the labor employed is aggregated by its value and appears as variable capital. In both cases the ratio of the two can be expressed by  $c/v$ . The distinction between the value and organic compositions lies simply in Marx's desire to distinguish between changes in  $c/v$  which are due to changes in the value of constant or variable capital unrelated to changes in the technical composition and those which are due solely to changes in the technical composition. Thus,  $c/v$  is called the "value" composition when no reference to the technical composition is necessary or desired, but is called the "organic" composition when such a reference is required or desired. Thus the value composition ( $c/v$ ) may rise simply because of, say, a drop in the value of labor power due to good weather and an unusually productive harvest that reduces the value of bread. Marx designates as a rise in the organic composition of capital, on the other hand, only a rise in  $c/v$  that results from the introduction of new plant or machinery that raises labor productivity.<sup>6</sup> This concept becomes central to Marx's analysis not only of technological change but also of its long-term consequences, of what he sees as a tendency of capital to substitute controllable machinery for less controllable workers. That analysis concerns the tendency for a rise in the organic composition of capital to lead to the displacement of workers, a rise in unemployment and systemic crisis.

These concepts have, with good reason received a great deal of attention from Marxist economists over the years, especially with respect to the issues of labor displacement and crisis. The tendency of capital to displace labor and to generate a reserve army of unemployed workers has been a generally accepted part of Marxist theory among most of its practitioners. On the other hand, preoccupation with the evolution of the organic composition of capital has been at the center of seemingly endless debates among Marxists over the meaning and importance of the so-called tendency of the rate of profit to fall and its relationship with capitalist crisis.

Recognition of the limits of Marx's treatment of these issues, however, emerged in the midst of working class struggles around the introduction of technological changes during the post-war modernization of Italian industry. The violent refusal of Italian workers to accept the Italian Communist Party's (PCI) view of such modernization as a development with which workers should cooperate led some Italian Marxists, such as Raniero Panzieri, to re-examine Marx's own analysis. Through that re-examination they rediscovered a class bias to such change, which the PCI and its theoreticians had been downplaying, namely the capitalist use of machinery to control and dominate the working class.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the PCI had emphasized the positive benefits of such change --rising productivity and thus the possibility of rising wages-- they were ignoring the way in which the rise in the organic composition of capital was being used by capital to increase exploitation --and reduce the relative strength of workers. The workers, of course, saw this very clearly and the gap between their experience and the PCI's

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<sup>6</sup> Note: the value of the constant capital introduced is irrelevant to the issue of a rise in the organic composition of capital. The only thing that matters is whether the introduction of that new constant capital raises the productivity of labor. Thus the error of those, such as Paul Sweezy, who have argued that there is no inevitable long run "tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise" because the per unit value of constant capital falls with the rise in the productivity of Department I industries producing the means of production. See Sweezy's discussion in his *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1942, pp. 103-104, and the subsequent debate.

<sup>7</sup> See Raniero Panzieri, "The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Versus the Objectivists," in Phil Slater (ed) *Outlines of a Critique of Technology*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1980, pp. 39-68. Originally published as "Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo," *Quaderni Rossi*, No. 1, 1961.

response was enough to make them angry over the PCI's complacency before such change. The work of Panzieri and his colleagues gave a theoretical articulation to that anger.

This work led to deeper, more detailed analyses, not just of theory, but also of actual changes in industrial production processes and their relationship to the issue of workers power.<sup>8</sup> It was this work that led to the kind of theoretical and political inversion I want to emphasize. Whereas Marx's work focused on how a rise in the organic composition of capital was a means to the realization of relative surplus value, these Italian theorists linked this with Marx's closely related study of the division of labor and drew new implications from Marx's own work. If Marx had recognized, as he did, how any given division of labor was always a vehicle of capitalist control, they argued, then we must also recognize that any change in that division would have an impact on the structure of that control. Moreover, Marx's own argument that technological change was often introduced in response to workers struggles<sup>9</sup> could not only be reinterpreted as a response to a breakdown in the structure of control built into the existing division of labor, but could also be seen as the introduction of a new division of labor aimed at restoring control.

In this way, the focus in the study of technological change was shifted from innovation in the means of capitalist domination to the dynamics of the class struggle in which workers overcame one such mechanism and capitalists responded by trying to introduce a new one. This kind of research thus led to a new series of concepts to study technological change as a moment within the changing balance of class power: class composition, political recomposition and decomposition.<sup>10</sup> To Marx's concept of the "composition of capital," these Italian theorists juxtaposed "class composition." Both concepts refer to the same phenomenon: the organization of the production process, but whereas the emphasis in Marx's concept is on the aggregate domination of variable by constant capital, the concept of "class composition" involves a disaggregated picture of the structure of class power existing within the division of labor associated with a particular organization of constant and variable capital. Moreover, the concept of "class power" here is associated not only with the power of capital to dominate but also with the power of workers to resist, which is directly related to the intra-class distribution of power among workers. All divisions of labor, it was pointed out, involve some kind of hierarchical distribution of intraclass power --usually codified in a wage hierarchy. This shift to "class composition" thus opened the door to a much more complex kind of analysis of class forces than Marxists had ever associated with the concept of "composition of capital." It was both a theoretical and political enrichment of Marxist theory.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Among the most important of these studies were those by Romano Alquati. See, for example, his "Composizione organica del capitale e forza-lavoro alla Olivetti," (1962) and "Ricerca sulla struttura interna delle classe operaia," (1965) reprinted in Romano Alquati, *Sulla FIAT e Altri Scritti*, Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> As in the passage from Chapter 15, section 5, of Volume I of *Capital*: "It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt."

<sup>10</sup> For more discussion of these concepts and their usefulness in analyzing the history of working class struggle, see Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979, and Yann Moulier, "L'Operaismo italien: organization/representation/ideologie ou la composition de classe revisité," in Marie-Blanche Tahon et Andre Corten, *L'Italie: le philosophe et le gendarme, Actes du Colloque de Montreal*, Montreal: VLB editeur, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> It also opened the door to a reinterpretation of the meaning of the "relations of production" and "forces of production" --those concepts whose use in the "Preface" to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* has formed the basis of so much unproductive speculation. For such a reinterpretation see: Harry Cleaver and Peter Bell, "Marx's Crisis Theory as a Theory of Class Struggle," *Research in Political Economy*, V. 5, 1982, pp. 194-195.

This is even truer for the concepts of "political recomposition" and "decomposition" which were developed to deal with the all important dynamics of change in technology and the division of labor. While it can be said that capital seeks a "class composition," i.e., a particular distribution of inter- and intra-class power which gives it sufficient control over the working class to guarantee accumulation, it is also true that workers' struggles repeatedly undermine such control and thus rupture the efficacy (from capital's point of view) of such a class composition. Such a rupture occurs only to the degree that workers are able to *recompose* the structures and distribution of power among themselves in such a way as to achieve a change in their collective relations of power to their class enemy. Thus the struggles which achieve such changes bring about a "political recomposition" of the class relations --"recomposition" of the intra-class structures of power and "political" because that in turn changes the inter-class relations.

In response to such an overcoming of its structure of control, of some particular configurations of its mechanisms of domination, capital (i.e., the managers of production) must seek to "decompose" the workers' newly constructed relations among themselves and create some new, controllable class composition. The introduction of new technologies, of new organizations of machinery and workers, if successful, results in the undermining of workers struggles and their reduction, once more, to the status of labor power. But whatever new "class composition" is achieved, it only becomes the basis for further conflicts because the class antagonism can only be managed; it cannot be done away with. Thus, these three new concepts, one static and two dynamic, provide guides to the analysis of what have come to be called "cycles of class struggle," wherein the upswing in such a cycle involves a period of political recomposition by workers and the downswing, however much the workers win or lose, a process of class decomposition through which capital reestablishes sufficient control to continue its overall management of society.<sup>12</sup> The concept of political recomposition theoretically articulates the central role of working class struggle at the heart of technological change and the concepts of class composition and decomposition provide vehicles for rethinking the issue of technological domination in terms of capital's efforts to cope with an autonomously active, and opposed, historical subject. These concepts both complement and extend Marx's analysis. In Italy they constituted not only a theoretical and political challenge to the hegemony of CPI-style Marxism but more importantly they provided the Italian New Left, and then others elsewhere, with partial guides to a politically useful research agenda geared directly to the development of workers struggles.

With the development of the class struggles in Italy --especially with the rise of the student and then the women's movement and community conflicts in general-- these new concepts were extended from the analysis of the sphere of production narrowly defined to a much broader analysis of the whole of capitalist society. The theoretical basis for such an extension already existed in Mario Tronti's analysis of the tendency of capital to extend its domination from the factory to the rest of society, to transform society into a "social factory."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> There is no assumption here that class confrontation will always assume a "cyclical" form --that depends entirely on whether capital is actually able to reestablish control. Marxist analysis holds out the constant possibility that such confrontation may achieve revolutionary success, such that capital fails to reestablish control and is driven from the historical stage.

<sup>13</sup> In an essay written in 1962 on "The Factory and Society," Tronti wrote: "The more capitalist development advances, that is to say the more the production of relative surplus value penetrates everywhere, the more the circuit production-distribution-exchange-consumption inevitably develops; that is to say that the relationship between capitalists production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state, become more and more organic. At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as

If such theoretical considerations had indicated that the "reserve army" was not really in reserve at all but actively put to work in the circulation and reproduction of capital (and thus part of the working class), the rebellious self-activity of "unwaged" students and housewives convinced the Italian New Left that they were integral parts of the working class for-itself as well and the analysis of class composition must include the totality of the working class.<sup>14</sup> The political recomposition of the working class was thus understood to involve not only changes in the distribution of power among waged workers in the factory but also changes among the unwaged and in the relationships between the waged and the unwaged as well.<sup>15</sup>

With this example in mind, I want to move to the examination of another area of theory where we need, and have recently made strides towards achieving, the kind of theoretico-political inversion necessary for the full development of Marx's theory where he left it lopsidedly underdeveloped. This second area of Marxist theory is the one surrounding the concept of "valorization."

### **From Valorization through Alienation to Disvalorization**

Marx's theory of valorization is at the core of his theory of capitalism. "Valorization" [*Verwertung*] designates the complex process through which capital is able not only to put people to work, but to do so in such a way that the process can be repeated on an ever greater scale. Technically, valorization involves all of the steps included in Marx's circuit of productive capital: the process of production, wherein people are put to work producing products which exceed their own requirements for living, the sale of those products at prices which permit the realization by the capitalist of surplus value, and finally the reinvestment of that surplus value such that people will, once more be put to work. To label this process "valorization" is to emphasize the enormous transformation capital achieves by reducing the diversity of human productive activity to a unified mechanism of social control. Marx's analysis of this process in terms of "value" captures the essentially undifferentiated sameness of the production activities included within this process from the point of view of capital. It doesn't make any difference what kind of production is undertaken, what kind of work is done, as long as it produces a product whose sale will realize enough surplus to make it possible to begin all over again.

This undifferentiated sameness can be seen not only in concept of abstract labor and in the capitalists' indifference to the kind of labor commanded, but also in the money form, which directly symbolizes the qualitative equivalence among both products and the labor which

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a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society." (my translation) Mario Tronti, "La fabbrica e la società," *Quaderni Rossi*, No. 2, 1962, p. 20. (This essay was reprinted in Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, Torino: Einaudi, 1966 (1971), pp. 39-59.) This theorization grounded an alternative approach to Gramsci and Frankfurt School's visions of capitalist hegemony --one in which class antagonism does not disappear but permeates everything, including the dynamics of cultural development.

<sup>14</sup> Early analysis of the "unwaged" as integral parts of the working class was developed in Italy, see, for example, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, "The power of Women and the Subversion of the Community," *Radical America*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January-February 1972 or Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, *Le Operaie della Casa*, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1975. The subordination of unwaged work --such as housework-- to the reproduction of capital was later analyzed in non-Marxian terms by Ivan Illich in terms of "shadow work." See his book *Shadow Work*, Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981.

<sup>15</sup> For an example of the extension of these concepts in Italy see: Roberta Tomassini, *Studenti e Composizione di Classe*, Milano: edizioni aut aut, 1977. For examples of such analysis --at the level of the "social factory"-- in the United States see: Paolo Carpignano, "U.S. Class Composition in the Sixties," the other articles in *Zerowork* No. 1, 1975, and No. 2, 1977, and more recent articles in *Midnight Notes*. For an example of such analysis applied to unwaged peasants in the Third World see: Ann Lucas de Rouffignac, *The Contemporary Peasantry in Mexico*, New York: Praeger, 1985.

produced them, and through profit, which is the money form of command over future labor -- money which can be used to renew the original kind of work, or to command some other (if more profitable) form of labor. The labor theory of value is thus a theoretical expression of capital's own view of work and the meaning of work in society. But, unlike other theories, such as neoclassical economics, which in its own way also expresses capital's perspective, the labor theory of value makes the alienating reductionism of capitalist command transparent and provides conceptual tools for a quantitative as well as qualitative understanding of the dynamic of capitalist domination. Thus the theory of value is inextricable from the theory of surplus value, the theory of the labor process from the theory of valorization, the theory of society from the theory of the accumulation of life as work.

Put differently, the theory of valorization is the theory of the way in which capital subordinates, transforms and utilizes human productive activities for its own purpose: endless command over society.<sup>16</sup> To understand this is to understand why Marxists have sometimes expressed the nature of capitalism by saying that it is a case of "production for the sake of production," or, to put it differently, capital puts people to work most fundamentally just for the sake of putting them to work --it is capital's way of organizing civilization, civilization as one vast labor camp --the Global Gulag.<sup>17</sup> This is an understanding that points toward the kind of theoretic-political inversion of class perspective which can enrich our understanding of valorization and the class struggles associated with it.

### **Marx and Alienation**

Once we recognize that valorization involves the subordination of human productive activities to capitalist command, we can, as in the case of the "composition of capital," invert our perspective and examine this phenomenon from the point of view of the people whose productive activities are being subordinated. When we do this we can draw together a variety of moments of analysis from the history of Marxist analysis of work. Qualitatively, Marx addressed this issue directly when he discussed the way in which capitalist command over people's work results in *alienation*. The counterpart of capital's control over the labor process, over the relations among workers and over the product, is the workers' experience of alienation: lacking control, they experience work as an imposed, forced activity rather than as a self-determined activity, they are separated from and pitted against their co-workers rather than finding in work one interesting form of social interaction and their products are used against them rather than being expressions of their own personalities and vehicles for bonding with others. Thus in his discussion of these phenomena in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx dwells both on how the workers are reduced to objects in these processes and the workers' feelings about them.<sup>18</sup> Later on in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, while he would emphasize and elaborate on the former, he would take the latter for granted. Even more vividly than in his earlier methodical

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<sup>16</sup> In short, the theory of valorization is another part of the Marxist theory of capitalist domination, complementary to the theory of the composition of capital but different from it, for we can discuss valorization in abstraction from the particular relationship between constant and variable capital. The concept of the composition of capital is at once more concrete, because it does deal with such particular relations, and more limited because it always refers to production, while the circuit of valorization includes not only production but also circulation.

<sup>17</sup>The juxtaposition of the "labor process" with "valorization" in chapter 7 of volume I of *Capital* does not make this immediately apparent, but section 2 of chapter 10 of that same volume does, when Marx points out that unlike previous societies where rulers have imposed surplus labor on others to benefit themselves, in capitalism the imposition of work is endless and independent of the production of any particular use-values, including the luxuries consumed by the capitalist class.

<sup>18</sup> See especially the section on "estranged labor."

examination, the capitalist imposition of work appears repeatedly in *Capital* as a "Werewolf or Vampire-like" relationship through which capital maintains itself and workers experience their subordination as the draining away of their life.<sup>19</sup> Through these texts we can understand Marx's theory of "alienation" as an inverted perspective on "valorization."

However, the isolation and objectification of the subject denoted by the concept of alienation fails to reflect a fundamental aspect of valorization, which we have examined, namely the reductionism achieved through the processes of subordination. In and of themselves productive activities are enormously diverse and involve many kinds of human activity, yet as they become subordinated to capital not only are they treated on the common ground of being means to social control, but over time, with the development of what Marx called the "real subordination of labor to capital," the diversity of workers' activity is reduced through a material simplification in which most workers are divorced of their skills, knowledge and mastery of production which are, in turn, concentrated both in the minds of a much smaller number of workers and in the fixed capital of machines. This, of course, is a side of the story of capitalist domination that even Adam Smith recognized (and decried): the degradation of workers from craftspeople to cogs in an industrial machine. Marx's analysis of alienation touched on this, but he dealt with it in much greater detail in his later works, especially the *Grundrisse* where, in the so-called "fragment on machines," he projected this tendency to the point where workers are reduced to mere tenders of machines, barely essential to the production process itself. Subsequently, Marxists of various stripes have recognized that technological development, especially but not uniquely in the factory, has involved such degradation of workers skills. Indeed, another way of talking about this is in terms of "deskilling."

Two moments of such deskilling that have received considerable attention were the development of Taylorist and then Fordist methods of reorganizing production and workers' tasks. In the case of Taylorism, it has been pointed out how Frederick Taylor was quite self-consciously involved in undermining workers ability to limit the amount of work they could be forced to do for capital by utilizing the power they possessed over the labor process.<sup>20</sup> The stopwatch and clipboard were the tools not only to appropriate the workers skills but also to decompose them (and the workers' power) in such a way that the capitalist rather than the workers controlled the process --and thus the rhythm, continuity and intensity of work. Fordism, in turn, to the degree that it involved a reorganization of the labor process around the assembly

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<sup>19</sup> The persistence of such vivid representations of alienation in *Capital* gives the lie to those, such as Althusser and his followers, who have sought to disassociate the "science" of Marx's mature work from its Hegelian, immature predecessors. The workers' product owned and controlled by capital becomes a "monster" (*Capital*, New York: Vintage, p. 302) It is in Chapter 10 that we find this monster pictured by Marx as a *Vampire*: "Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks." (Ibid, p. 342) But dead labor is precisely the products produced by workers, products that have become alien objects, part of capital, which are used to dominate workers. The expression "sucking living labor" clearly means forcing humans to work, and the more they are forced to work, the more products are produced, the more surplus value is extracted and the more capital thrives. Still further (Ibid., p. 353) he speaks of capital's "were-wolf hunger for surplus labor", again the alien monster seeking ever to impose more work. And then in Chapter 11 we find in somewhat less colorful language: "It is no longer the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production which employ the worker. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity, they consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life-process, and the life-process consists solely in its own motion as self-valorizing value." (Ibid., p. 425). Finally, in the chapters on machinery and modern industry there is a whole discussion about how under capital the worker comes to serve the machine rather than visa versa.

<sup>20</sup> See Mike Davis, "The Stop Watch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World," *Radical America*, Vol. 8, No. 6, January-February 1975.

line, also organized a further reduction of worker skill and command over work.<sup>21</sup> More recently, with the growth of the service sector and the extension of Taylorist and Fordist methods to office and other kinds of white-collar work, some Marxists have also extended their analysis of these forms of domination to those new arenas.<sup>22</sup>

### **Illich and *Desvalor***

Also recently, a growing concern with how the deskilling of many has had as its counterpart the creation of small groups of skilled "professionals," as well as anger over the displacement of peasant cultures by a spreading capitalist cultural imperialism has led some non-Marxist intellectuals, who have nevertheless been clearly influenced by Marxism, to elaborate a concept which they call, in Spanish, "*desvalor*," or "disvalue." This concept has a theoretical content very close to what one might look for as an inversion of "valorization." The concept of "disvalue" seems to have originated in the work of Ivan Illich who, following in the path of Karl Polanyi, has for quite some time been elaborating a critique of "market society."<sup>23</sup> A central aspect of Illich's critique, which he spelled out at some length in his book *Tools for Conviviality*, has been the analysis and rejection of both the commodification of needs and the professionalization of their satisfaction.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on commodification is very Marxist in two ways. First, in historical terms, Marx's own analysis of capitalism emphasized the tendency of capitalism to take over and commercialize all aspects of life. A central aspect of his analysis of primitive accumulation, for example, was the displacement of domestic food and handicraft production by capitalist commodities --an essential aspect of what he called "the creation of the home market."<sup>25</sup> Second, in theoretical terms, the commodity plays a central role in Marx's analysis of capitalism; it is the universal form of wealth, and thus one universal embodiment of value and the class relations of capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

The second part of Illich's critique appears as an updating of Marx's and many Marxists' analysis of the separation of manual and mental labor and its negative impact on workers.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Marxist preoccupation was primarily with the factory and later on the office, and the way workers' were degraded by having their skills stripped from them, and monopolized by higher paid "mental workers" such as engineers who alone understand of the design of

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<sup>21</sup> See Benjamin Coriat, *L'Atelier et le chronomètre*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1979. Both Taylorism and Fordism concerned other issues than deskilling. Both involved new ways of manipulating wages and work incentives as well as direct control over the production process.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974 and all the spin-offs from it.

<sup>23</sup> Illich's way of characterizing the society he wishes to overcome has evolved over time. In the early 1970s, in his *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), influenced by then current discussions of "limits" and by his readings of Marx, he referred to it as "industrialism" or "industrial mode of production," a term he clearly felt to be more inclusive than "capitalism" and capable of referring to the social structure of "socialist" as well as those of Western capitalist countries. Later, in his *Shadow Work*, op. cit., drawing on Leiss, Polanyi and Dumont he called it a "commodity-intensive society." More recently in their work on the "archeology of the modern mind," he and his co-workers have often just called it "economic society."

<sup>24</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, op. cit. See also his "Useful Unemployment and its Professional Enemies," written as a post face to the earlier book, in Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs*, Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1977 as well as his *Deschooling Society*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

<sup>25</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, chapter 30: "Impact of the Agricultural Revolution on Industry. The Creation of a Home Market for Industrial Capital."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1983.

machinery incorporating those skills, Illich elaborated a similar analysis of the professionalization of the service sector and replacement of the self-production of use-values by the consumption of commodities. For example, Illich blasted the monopolization of the skills of learning by professional teachers and the monopolization of the skills of healing by health professionals.<sup>28</sup> Related to Marx's analysis of the alienation of the producer from both the labor process and the product but emphasizing the experience of people as consumers being dominated by their alienated products rather than as alienated laborers producing those products, Illich described the growing "disvalue" of peoples' helplessness and dependency on commodities and professionals, i.e., on market supplied services. In some ways his concept of "disvalue" expresses the same phenomena neoclassical economics call "negative externalities" --or the "disutility" which emerges as byproducts of market production-- such as pollution whose nasty effects have no price and therefore tend to be ignored in a market economy.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as he has elaborated the concept, it has a more significant meaning than this, and one much closer to the Marxian concepts of alienation in production and deskilling.

### **From *Desvalor* to Disvalorization**

The usefulness of Illich's concept becomes clearer if we shift our attention from his search for phenomena that can be labeled *disvalue* to looking at the *processes* that produce them, i.e., at processes of *disvalorization*. As a process, disvalorization can be seen to express precisely the counterpart of valorization. That is to say if *valorization* denotes the capitalist subordination of human productive activities to capitalist command, then *disvalorization* expresses people's loss of those abilities which are absorbed by capital. Viewed in this way disvalorization is a more comprehensive and meaningful concept than deskilling or the degradation of work. Although what capital absorbs are carefully and narrowly defined abilities (as in the case of the time-motion studies of Taylor), Illich's treatment shows us that what people lose is much broader; they lose the very fabric of the self-construction of their lives. Those "abilities" or "skills" that they lose are integral moments of their own self-determined interconnections with the world, of the sinew of peoples' lives that give them form and hold them together. In processes of disvalorization what were integral moments of that sinew are ripped out, isolated and stripped of all their rich interconnections and meanings; they are reduced to narrowly defined skills devoid of their previously rich cultural significations.

Moreover, there is another kind of impoverishment associated with such processes of disvalorization: namely, the absolute losses which occur when the particularity of diverse skills and abilities are replaced by some narrower range of mechanized, commercialized, mass-produced skills. The rise of professional medicine, for example, not only produced a widespread loss of abilities to heal, but it also involved the substitution of one particular paradigm of healing for a much larger number of approaches to "health," and thus an absolute social loss --the virtual disappearance of a multiplicity of alternative "values." If valorization involves a great reduction of diversity via the imposition of only one relevant measure, then we must recognize that the actual historical processes of disvalorization are closely connected to *devaluation* or the absolute loss of values.

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<sup>28</sup> See his *Deschooling Society*, op. cit., his *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, New York: Pantheon, 1976 and his *Disabling Professions*, London: Marion Boyars, 1977.

<sup>29</sup> At some points Illich seems to use these terms interchangeably, as in "This is a form of *disvalue* necessarily associated with the proliferation of commodities. This rising *disutility* of industrial mass products. . ." (my emphasis) in *Toward a History of Needs*, op. cit., p. 11.

## Marx and Disvalorization

In Marxist theory *devaluation* has always involved the destruction of capitalist value, e.g., the collapse in existing value that occurs because of a rise in productivity (the falling average value of a commodity reduces the value of existing similar goods) or of an economic crisis (not only the drop in monetary values in times of deflation, but the absolute destruction of unused and wasted resources). If we think of the extreme diversity of abilities and skills that have existed separately outside of capital, irreducible to any common measure, and if we want to speak of those abilities and skills in terms of "values," then clearly the concepts we use to represent the material diversity must involve an equally great diversity in concepts of "value." The counterpart to our refusal of capital's material and conceptual hegemony must not involve the replacement of one hegemony by another but must rather involve the acceptance of non-comparability and of the diversity of "values."

It must be said that while Marx was certainly clear about the nature of valorization and devalorization within the on-going accumulation of capital, he was ambivalent in his treatment of the processes of devalorization and disvalorization during the rise and spread of capitalism. When we examine his writings on primitive accumulation and colonialism --from the *Communist Manifesto* to *Capital*-- we often find little or no empathy for the cultures being destroyed/subsumed by capital. He certainly recognized such destruction/subsumption but frequently saw its effects on feudalism and other pre-capitalist forms of society as historically progressive. For Marx, workers were being liberated from pre-capitalist forms of exploitation (they "escaped from the regime of the guilds") and peasants from "serfdom" and "the idiocy of rural life."<sup>30</sup> Yet at the same time, he also showed how they were being hurled into a new form of exploitation and how these changes involved their impoverishment, degradation and enslavement. His treatment of the theft of their independent means of production and living vividly details the violent enclosures and clearings of peasants and artisans from the land, the robbery of their land rights, the destruction of their homes and villages.

Such thoroughgoing devastation meant, of course, the destruction not only of farms, houses and villages, but also of ways of life, of cultures. But of this we gain little insight from Marx. In his city-boy ignorance of rural life and perhaps in a desire to avoid any backward-looking sentimentalism, Marx seems to have spent little time or energy during his studies of primitive accumulation in England and in the colonies trying to understand what positive values might have been lost. Unlike many of his generation who did worry about the nature of those social ties and communal values that were rapidly disappearing, Marx kept his attention fixed firmly toward the future.<sup>31</sup> This appears to have been first and foremost a political orientation based on his belief in the thoroughness with which capitalism appeared to be quickly wiping out all survivals from its pre-history. If such wiping out were being rapidly accomplished, little purpose could be served by dwelling on a defeated past. Only when he thought there was some chance of a pre-capitalist society providing the basis for an effective anti-capitalist struggle did he pay close attention to such phenomena. This exceptional attention we can find in his serious study of the *Mir* or peasant commune in Russia. Drawn into a debate over revolutionary strategy in that country, Marx learned Russian, read everything he could find on the subject and

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<sup>30</sup> The reference to the escape from the guilds and from serfdom is from *Capital* Volume I, chapter 26. The reference to being saved from the "idiocy of rural life" is from the *Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of the 19th Century preoccupation with the displacement of community by an atomized capitalist society, see John P. Farrell, "Reading the Text of Community in *Wuthering Heights*," *ELH* 56, 1989. This article provides useful references to the 19th Century discussions in both literature and social thought.

concluded that the nature and strength of the *Mir* was such as to make it, just possibly, the point of departure for the creation of a communist society.<sup>32</sup>

Time and experience have proven that while the *Mir* failed to realize its possibilities, Marx's less informed and much bleaker view of the destiny of other "pre-capitalist" social forms often both overestimated the efficacy of capital's destructive power and underestimated their tenacity and durability. As a result, any attempt to estimate the possibilities inherent in a vast array of struggles against capitalism in the world today must involve the kind of close and empathetic examination which Marx gave to the Russian peasant commune rather than the kind of cursory, superficial attention he gave to other groups of peasants. (See below)

### **From Survival through Vernacular Subsistence to Self-Valorization**

Recognition of the process of disvalorization of hitherto autonomous abilities and skills opens a whole new realm of inquiry, namely that of the nature and dynamics of such autonomous abilities themselves, independently of the question of their eventual subordination by capital. Partly, this has been one interest of academic anthropologists who study past, or existing, "pre-capitalist" cultures, or cultures that have not yet been completely disvalorized into one more impoverished moment of capitalist hegemony. Among political activists in such communities who fight against such absorption --to whom more politically motivated anthropologists sometimes give aid and lend their prestige-- many existing non-capitalist cultural practices are not only seen as sources of strength against capital but also as desirable in their own right or as legitimate points of departure for the elaboration of autonomous ways of being.<sup>33</sup> In such circumstances, being able to clearly differentiate between autonomous practices and those that contribute to capitalist valorization is clearly a necessity for any political strategies geared to the preservation and elaboration of existing cultural autonomy.

On the other hand, however valid such struggles are, this vision is too restrictive. It is too "historical" in the sense that it is mainly preoccupied with cultural *survivals*, remnants of the past worth preserving and developing into the future. But the genesis of autonomous activities, while inescapable from their historical roots and context, occurs through processes that are constantly renewed. The sources of such autonomy are not merely historical *habits*, which we may associate with daily routines or with periodic rituals, but also include the wellspring of human creativity itself that repeatedly breaks free of habit, whether those habits are the ones cultivated within capitalist valorization or within some other social framework. Capital itself knows that even where it has completely disvalorized pre-existing abilities and skills, its job is never done.

There is no one term in Marxian theory that expresses capital's own point of view on the activities which constitute such creative autonomy. Such activities are either regarded as creative and imaginative --where they appear to be co-optable-- or as deviant and subversive when they resist co-optation and prove to be unrecuperable. The first of these attitudes --

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<sup>32</sup> See Teodor Shanin (ed) *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marxism and 'The Peripheries of Capitalism,'* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983. As the materials in this collection make clear, this political question led Marx to reconsider the history of primitive rural social structures in Western Europe as well. Although he recognized that some primitive agrarian communes in Germany (near his hometown of Trier) had demonstrated enough "natural vitality" to survive into the 19th Century, he apparently thought them to be isolated curiosities and not worthy of the attention he accorded the much more widespread Russian *Mir*. (p. 107)

<sup>33</sup> Among the many such political collaborations between anthropologists and the struggles of indigenous peoples for autonomy, see the work of those associated with the organization Cultural Survival and its journal *Cultural Survival Quarterly*.

apparently open but actually repressive because aimed at co-optation-- are important for capital's own development. Indeed, absolutely central to what dynamism exists within capitalism is its ability to absorb, co-opt, or instrumentalise the ever-resurgent autonomy of those it has impressed into its "working" class. The second, more overtly repressive, side is also important for capital because that which it cannot digest it must purge or be poisoned by. Therefore, in mainstream bourgeois social theory there have been many terms to characterize unintegrated, unmanageable working class autonomy: deviant, delinquent, deficient, uneducated, primitive, backward, underdeveloped, criminal, subversive, schizophrenic, infantile, paranoid, sick, and so on. In the struggle against the repression such terms justify, we must investigate the nature of such autonomy and its relationship to capital's own valorization with great care. In doing so we should examine any theory --Marxian or non-Marxian-- which illuminates the nature and dynamics of such autonomous struggle in ways that help us invert capital's own repressive perspective.

Among non-Marxists, Ivan Illich and his collaborators are among the most interesting of those who have shown a sensitivity to the existence of autonomous creativity in the struggle against contemporary society as well as a desire to contribute to its flowering.<sup>34</sup> Although like Marx, most of Illich's work has been devoted to detailing the evils of modern society and their disastrous consequences, he has also searched both in the past and in the present to discover alternatives. Early in the 1970s, in the midst of his work on the rise of the service sector (e.g., schooling, the health industry) he emphasized not only the way autonomous competences had historically been converted into needs and associated commodities (i.e., disvalorized) but also the possibilities of developing what he called "convivial tools" to facilitate either the survival and development of such competences or their genesis.<sup>35</sup> By the early 1980s, Illich's investigation of past forms of autonomy --their nature, their suppression or their survival-- led him to shift his emphasis from propositions for a future "conviviality" to an exploration of concrete "vernacular subsistence," i.e., autonomous values and practices through which people have satisfied their everyday needs despite and against the depredations of the "economy." It is quite clear in his choices of illustrations of his meaning --especially his discussion of language and housework-- that this concept is broader than his earlier preoccupation with production and "convivial tools."<sup>36</sup> For Illich, the history of the economy (a history --the way he defines it-- that most Marxists would equate with that of capitalism) has been a history of a war on autonomous subsistence activities (what we might, at this point, call the history of disvalorization).<sup>37</sup> There has been such a war because such subsistence activities have both survived and been repeatedly created anew --more so in some places than in others. These activities, Illich and his collaborators feel, provide a point of departure for the elaboration of concrete alternatives to economic society. Gustavo Esteva, for example, who works with Illich and who has been deeply involved with the struggles of urban "marginals" and rural peasants in Mexico, has eloquently described the nature and struggles of such "vernacular subsistence activities" to carve out more

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<sup>34</sup> Much broader than any one theory or group of intellectuals have been the social movements that have contributed to the construction of, and reflection on, autonomous social projects. Probably the most important of these, in so far as they have truly sought to develop --in both theory and practice-- alternative ways of being have been the gender movement (both women and gays), and the green/environmental movement. Here I limit my discussion to Illich who has sought to draw general conclusions from a wide variety of struggles, but further work needs to be done examining the practices and thinking which has been generated within these social movements whether those activities are self-consciously "Marxist" or not.

<sup>35</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work*, op. cit., Chapter II: "Vernacular Values."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter III: "The War Against Subsistence."

space for their autonomous development.<sup>38</sup> Along the way, he has contributed to the struggles of pro-peasant *campesinistas* to combat the widespread *assumption* that the peasantry is doomed to extinction. Before confronting such understanding with Marxian theory, let us first examine what there is in the Marxist tradition that recognizes and analyses the existence of such autonomous activities, their relationships with capital and their relationship with a possible post-capitalist future.

### Marx on the "Future in the Present"

Marx's own work, from early on, emphasized that the germs of the future are to be found in the present. "Within the old society," he wrote in the *Manifesto*, "the elements of a new one have been created." Those elements, of course, were first and foremost, to be found in the working class capital itself had created, but whose autonomous self-activity would lead to the overthrow of the old society and the constitution of a new one. Refusing utopian projects formulated *for* the working class by outsiders, Marx insisted on the need to work within "the gradual, spontaneous class-organization of the proletariat" which alone could give rise both to the power to overthrow capitalism and to the power to construct a new social order. The search for the future in the present, he argued, must focus on the struggles themselves.<sup>39</sup>

His own contributions to the identification of such autonomous elements were primarily theoretical. His efforts to locate and understand the forces emerging in opposition to capital and with the potential power to found an alternative to it led him to a focus on the labor process -- capital's fundamental vehicle of social control. There, at the heart of capitalist power, Marx isolated and emphasized the autonomous creative moment within it: "living labor." Indeed, Marx followed Hegel in seeing in the creativity of living labor an essential aspect of what made humans different from the rest of nature. However anthropocentric this view may have been, when coupled with the perception that the major mechanism of capitalist domination was the control of that living labor, it resulted in Marx's privileging the analysis of the labor process and locating within it one crux both of the class struggle and of the possible transcendence of capitalism. Living labor was at the heart of the class struggle because its dynamism was a fundamental source of antagonism against capitalist domination. He saw the struggle for freedom from domination as being located, in part, in the struggle by creative living labor to liberate itself from outside control. "The ontology of living labor is an ontology of liberation."<sup>40</sup> In turn, capital was forced to constantly adapt to that antagonism by seeking to harness the strength of that creativity to its own valorization. While capital's socialization of labor would clearly be the point of departure for "associated labor" in a post-capitalist society, his analyses of the way capitalist control has been embodied in existing forms of "socialized" labor --such as his theory of the "composition of capital"-- suggests that while current "socialization" is relevant

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<sup>38</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "Los 'Tradifas' O el Fin de la Marginación," *El Trimestre Economico*, Vol. L(2), Núm. 198, Abril-Junio de 1983, pp. 733-769; "Para Ser Como la Sombra de un Arbol," *El Gallo Ilustrado*, No. 1247, 18 mayo 1986, p. 17; "En la senda de Juan Chiles," *El Gallo Ilustrado*, No. 1250, 8 junio 1986; "Cocinar la Autonomía," *El Gallo Ilustrado*, #1276, 7 Diciembre 1986, pp. 8-9; "Las naciones Indias en la nacion mexicana," *El Gallo Ilustrado*, #1308, 19 Junio 1987, pp. 8-10; "Regenerating People's Space," in *Alternatives* XII, 1987, pp. 125-152; "Food Reliance and Peasant Self-Management: Bases for the Agrarian Transformation of Mexico," typescript; "Celebration of Common Men," typescript.

<sup>39</sup> See the analysis of "Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism," in chapter III of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

<sup>40</sup> This is Toni Negri's formulation. See Thesis 13 in his contribution to this volume.

to the future, the concrete forms that it presently takes will undergo substantial modification.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, the weakness of workers struggles in the 19th Century gave Marx little or no opportunity to study which aspects of socialized labor might be perpetuated by workers in a post-revolutionary period and which aspects might be eliminated or transformed.

At the same time, other parts of Marx's writings made clear that living labor was only part of the source of antagonism opposing capital's domination and fighting to build a new world; there was also the struggle against the reduction of human life to the one-dimensionality of work, and for the creation of time and space for a many sided existence.<sup>42</sup> His most eloquent discussions of the struggle against work can be found in the historical parts of chapter 10 of Volume I of *Capital* on the working day where he chronicled workers' battles to reduce work and in the more abstract "Fragment on Machines" in the *Grundrisse* where he evoked the possibilities of liberation from work and the substitution of "disposable time" for "labor time" as a measure of value.

Unfortunately, however, Marx's detailed study of concrete struggles against work was not complemented by anything like an equally detailed study of worker attempts to fill the time liberated by such struggles. This, together with his tendency to dismiss the struggles of pre-capitalist survivals, meant that he left us little in the way of exemplars of such study. He spoke evocatively of the abstract possibilities of workers converting the socialized labor of capitalism into a post-capitalist associated labor, of the liberation of time from work creating the space for community (*Gemeinschaft*) and the "free development of individualities," but he failed, except in the case of the Russian *Mir*, to identify any concrete developments in the present which could be seen as "elements of the future."

In his analysis of the Russian peasant commune, Marx's analysis goes a little further than his more general remarks about the potentialities inherent in socialized labor under capitalism. In this case he analyzed the "dualism" of this form of social organization, isolating both those forces pushing towards its disvalorization into capitalism and those pushing for its autonomous development. His discussion of those aspects of the peasant commune whose development -- because of its nature and omnipresence-- could make it the "fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia" centered on common land ownership, collective cultivation of common meadows, and the *artel* relationship (or traditional practices of co-operation in production or housing construction). All of these practices, he argued, provided concrete moments in the development of social co-operation in labor and appropriation.<sup>43</sup> If a revolution in Russia, he argued, could

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<sup>41</sup> Thus the mistake of those such as Lenin who thought capitalist technologies --such as the Taylorist organization of production-- should be taken over and used by workers in a revolutionary society. See the section on "Raising the Productivity of Labor" in Lenin's *Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, 1918, in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 27. Illich is quite correct to attack such positions among orthodox Marxists in his *Tools for Conviviality*, op. cit. although he seems to have been unaware of similar critiques from within Marxism, e. g. those of Western Marxism and of the autonomist Marxists cited in the preceding discussion of "class composition."

<sup>42</sup> Among those Marxists who have most clearly articulated this aspect of Marx's thought are Herbert Marcuse, especially in his *Eros and Civilization*, the French Situationists, many in the Italian New Left --such as Mario Tronti with his "strategy of refusal"-- and the American authors of *Zerowork*, a journal which was published briefly in the 1970s, and *Midnight Notes* which is still published out of Boston. Among non-Marxists whose study of the world led them to a similar understanding, see Bertrand Russell and his elegant essay "In Praise of Leisure" in Vernon Richards (ed) *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society*, London: Freedom Press, 1983, pp. 25-34, and Jacques Ellul, "From the Bible to a History of Non-Work," *Cross Currents*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 43-48.

<sup>43</sup> Also of interest here, in the light of his remarks in the *Grundrisse* about the liberation of life time allowing for the "full development of individualities" are Marx's comments (accurate or not) about how in the Russian commune, as opposed to more primitive kinship based social forms, the existence of "the house and yard as an individual family preserve" helped foster "individuality." Shanin (ed) *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, op. cit., p. 120.

destroy the state and capitalist exploitation of the peasants and make available to them the material "positive achievements" of Western capitalism, then the "spontaneous development" of their communal agrarian organization could lead directly to a new post-capitalist society.<sup>44</sup>

The two major tendencies of subsequent Marxist theory (orthodox and Western) both ignored much of his analysis. The first tendency was an impoverishing one: it downplayed the struggle against work as "economistic" in favor of the guiding role of the Leninist party, while embracing a narrow vision of socialism as the liberation *of* work. In its fascination with a one-class society of workers, this productivist tendency conveniently forgot Marx's understanding that living labor develops most fruitfully when it exists as only one moment of a broader, more diverse life experience.<sup>45</sup> The second tendency, which fully understood these limitations in the first, was more depressing than impoverishing: although its studies have followed capital beyond the factory into its efforts to colonize the cultural time liberated by working class successes in reducing work time, it has simply expanded the orthodox vision of despotism in the factory and cataloged every clever, manipulative mechanism of cultural domination it could find.<sup>46</sup> Neither tendency has ever proved capable of developing a theory of working class autonomy as an effective force against capitalism and both have always privileged the role of intellectuals (i.e., their own role) as the key to successful social transformation.

Outside these main streams of Marxist tradition, there have been some who remembered Marx's own preoccupation with the power of working class autonomy that they too sought to understand and to augment. After the cycle of struggles of the late 1910s and early 1920s, the council communists emphasized the creative moment of working class struggle that had given birth to the Soviets in 1905 and 1917 and to the workers councils in Western Europe after 1918.<sup>47</sup> In the 1950s, a variety of non-Leninist autonomist Marxist groups accorded the same respect not only to the workers councils created in the upheaval of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, but also to the day to day ability of workers on the job and in their communities to create new kinds of social relations.<sup>48</sup> This recognition and respect was accorded not only the autonomy of workers in general but also to various sectors of the class, such as black workers vis

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<sup>44</sup> Marx's analysis of these elements is to be found primarily in a series of letters and drafts of letters written as interventions into the debate in Russia over the role of the peasant commune in revolutionary strategy for that country. These materials are now available in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1989, Volume 24, pp. 346-371. Shanin (ed) *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, op. cit., presents these materials along with several interpretive essays and supplementary materials, including translations of several Russians whose work influenced Marx.

<sup>45</sup> This tendency includes virtually the totality of the Marxist-Leninist tradition with its socialist work ethic that mirrors in a secular fashion all the narrowness of its Calvinist counterpart.

<sup>46</sup> This tendency includes much of "critical theory" and its offshoots that have proven incapable of either seeing or theorizing working class struggle except through the perspective of capital's instrumentalization. Marcuse's work, of course, whatever its limitations, was a notable exception within this tradition because he sought to understand the autonomous dynamism of the forces capital had to control in order to survive.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the council communists see: Mark Shipway, "Council Communism," in Maximilien Rubel and John Crump, *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987 or Peter Rachleff, *Marxism and Council Communism*, New York: Revisionist Press, 1976.

<sup>48</sup> These non-Leninist Marxists included those who had been part of the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the U.S., especially C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, and those associated with the early years of the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France. See C.L.R. James, Grace C. Lee and Pierre Chaulieu, *Facing Reality: The New Society ... Where to Look for It, How to Bring it Closer*, Detroit: Bewick/Ed, 1974 (originally published in 1958) especially chapter 1, Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, London: Pluto Press, 1975 (originally published in 1958) and the collection of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

à vis whites and women vis à vis men.<sup>49</sup> This was a kind of appreciation of diversity which had been rare among Marxists but which would be demanded with great vigor first by the minority movements in the 1960s and then by the women's movement in the 1970s. These Marxists spoke of "the invading socialist society" and sought, more carefully than Marx himself, to identify those autonomous moments of concrete working class creativity that might prefigure post-capitalist society. The purpose of such identification, of course, was to found political strategies to strengthen such positive moments of struggle.

### Self-Valorization

Then, out of the international cycle of struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s came a new theoretical articulation designed to express precisely this autonomous creativity as a fundamental source not only of working class power but also of the possibility of going beyond capitalism. As one contribution to a whole movement to build, as well as to theorize, the development of working class autonomy within and against capitalism, Italian Marxist Antonio Negri proposed the concept of working class "autovalorizzazione" or "self-valorization."<sup>50</sup> This concept grew out of the early work by Panzieri, Tronti and others to grasp simultaneously the full extent of capitalist power (such as its attempts to convert all of society into a "social factory") and the full potential and expression of the working class power of "refusal," of its power to subvert capitalist domination.<sup>51</sup> Negri's concept of "self-valorization" aimed at contributing to the latter project by showing how the power of refusal could and must be complemented by the power of constitution. In many ways his concept expressed the side of workers struggles, especially those of young workers, which was coming to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the creative use of times, spaces and resources liberated from the control of Italian and multinational capital - -uses such as the proliferation of "free radio stations" or the widespread development of women's spaces which, along with many other self-managed projects, helped constitute what many came to call "the counter-culture."

Although Marx sometimes used the term "self-valorization" as a synonym for "valorization," Negri proposed an entirely distinct meaning. His use of the prefix "auto" or "self" (which sounds more natural in English translation) indicates a process of valorization which is autonomous from capitalist valorization --a self-defining, self-determining process which goes beyond the mere resistance to capitalist valorization to a positive project of self-constitution.<sup>52</sup> "The self-valorization of the proletarian subject," Negri writes, "contrarily to

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<sup>49</sup> On the issue of black autonomy see, for example, C. L. R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA," (1938) reprinted in C. L. R. James, *The Future in the present, Selected Writings Vol. I*, London: Allison & Busby, 1977. On the issue of women's autonomy see the early essay of Selma James, "The Power of Women" included in Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press 1972.

<sup>50</sup> The fullest discussion of this concept by Negri available in English is to be found in his Ecole Normale lectures on the *Grundrisse* published as Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, Bergin & Garvey, 1984, Autonomedia (forthcoming).

<sup>51</sup> On the power of working class refusal, see Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that the prefix "self," as used here, has no necessary connotations of the individual self but may refer either to the individual or to a complex but collective class subject. Negri, in his own work, has tended to use the term self-valorization in discussing the macro class subject. The concept, however, can also be useful in thinking about the dynamics of individual autonomy --the kind of micro or molecular struggles addressed by Félix Guattari in his *La Révolution moléculaire*, Paris: Éditions Recherches, 1977 (Penguin, 1984) or in his and Gilles Deleuze's two books *Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Paris: Minuit, 1972 and *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Paris: Minuit, 1980. Recently Negri and Guattari collaborated to write: *Les Nouveaux*

capitalist valorization, takes the form of auto-determination in its development."<sup>53</sup> Through a close textual reading of the *Grundrisse*, Negri argued that the concept of self-valorization was implicit in Marx's development of his concept of the working class from labor power through living labor and collective labor to the wage as autonomous power, working class for-itself and the proletariat as revolutionary subject. We can see that it also designates one aspect of those struggles that had come to be analyzed in terms of political recomposition.

Negri's concept of self-valorization thus designates what I find useful to characterize as the *positive* moments of working class autonomy --where the *negative* moments are made up of workers' resistance to capitalist domination. Alongside the power of refusal or the power to destroy capital's determination, we find in the midst of working class recomposition, the power of creative affirmation, the power to constitute new practices. In some cases, these autonomous projects are built on old bases, inherited and protected cultural practices from the past that have successfully survived capital's attempts at disvalorization and devalorization. In other cases, these projects are newborn, created whole cloth out of appropriated elements that have hitherto been integral parts of capitalist accumulation. In such cases self-valorization is not only autonomous from and opposed to valorization but it can also be the converse of disvalorization. It can include processes akin to what the Situationists used to call "détournement" or the diversion of elements of domination into vehicles of liberation.<sup>54</sup>

The relationship between the refusal of capital's determination and the affirmation of self-valorizing activities is an intimate one. The power of self-valorization is largely the power to fill the spaces liberated from capitalist domination with alternative, autonomous projects. Thus the importance of the refusal of work, highlighted by Tronti and others in the Italian New Left (as well as by the French Situationists), is not displaced but appears as the necessary foundation of self-valorization. "The refusal of work," Negri writes, "its planned organization by the working and proletarian class, measures the quantity and quality of the transition, measures. . . the concrete constituting process [of self valorization] determined by the subject."<sup>55</sup> If capital is successful in converting all of life into work there is no space or time or energy for self-valorization. The refusal of work with its associated seizure of space (e.g., land, buildings) or time (e.g., weekends, paid vacations, non-work time on the job) or energy (an entropy raising diversion from work) creates the very possibility of self-valorization.<sup>56</sup>

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*Espaces de Liberté*, Dominique Bedou, 1985. In Negri's current work "constitution" has largely replaced "self-valorization." See the essay in this collection.

<sup>53</sup> Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>54</sup> The Situationists' concept of "détournement" was one of the very few earlier moments of Marxist theory that sought to grasp how the mechanisms of domination could be subverted and used by workers for their own purposes. The dominant Marxist paradigm for thinking about the mechanisms of domination seems to have been derived from Lenin's comments on the capitalist state --they could not be used but must be smashed. Among the Italian New Left theorists, Negri's general concept of self-valorization was predated by a new understanding of the wage as an expression of working class power. This too reversed the usual Marxist understanding of the wage solely as a means of exploitation. Among the most interesting work on the wage as source of working class power has been that by women Marxists involved in the Wages for Housework Movement who developed an analysis of the role of the unwaged within the overall class composition and a political campaign based on that analysis. See Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, op. cit., and Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," (1975) in Ellen Malos (ed) *The Politics of Housework*, London: Allison & Busby, 1980.

<sup>55</sup> Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>56</sup> At the same time, without self-valorization, the refusal of work merely creates empty spaces susceptible to capital's recolonization. But this is largely an abstract possibility because, as a rule, the struggle against work is not aimed a replacing work with a vacuous do-nothing "leisure" --as its detractors often cynically insist-- but rather with creating the time and space for all the things people would like to do beyond and despite of their work. In those

An important part of Negri's elaboration of the concept of self-valorization is his recognition that, unlike valorization and unlike most socialist visualizations of communism, it does not designate the self-construction of a unified social project but rather denotes a "plurality" of instances, a multiplicity of independent undertakings --not only in the spaces opened within and against capitalism but also in their full realization. Communism, for Negri, is thus not only a self-constituting praxis, but also the realization of "multilaterality" of the proletarian subject, or better, of a subject which in its self-realization explodes into multiple autonomous subjects. In this way his concept embraces the kind of intra-class autonomy recognized and held sacred by autonomist Marxist groups since at least the 1950s.

The concept has also proved flexible enough to be useful for understanding and appreciating struggles that have often been considered outside of the working class. These include not only the struggles of so-called urban "marginals" which have often been relegated to the "lumpenproletariat" but also a wide variety of peasant struggles. Unlike traditional Marxists who have tended to *assume* backwards or petty bourgeois politics among peasants, Marxists equipped with the concept of self-valorization have been able to perceive and learn from the diversity of peasant projects of communal construction that do not fit those traditional expectations. In this they have rejoined Marx who, through his careful study of the Russian peasant commune, was able largely to shed the anti-peasant bias he had developed in his more limited studies of peasants in Western Europe. They have also joined forces with Esteva and his *Campesinistas* who have insisted, against traditional Marxists, not only on the autonomy of such struggles but also on the diversity of those efforts.<sup>57</sup>

The concept of self-valorization thus complements the earlier reconceptualization of the capitalist tendency to widen its valorization to the entire "social factory." This not only engenders broader refusal, but also a proliferation in the number and diversity of projects of self-valorization confronting capital in the spaces opened by that refusal. Self-valorization thus appears to be a concept rich enough to counterpose to valorization. Where Marx's concept of valorization draws our attention to the complex sequence of relationships through which capitalism renews itself as a social system of endlessly imposed work, so the concept of self-valorization draws our attention *through* the complexity of our refusal of valorization *to* our efforts to elaborate alternative autonomous projects which constitute the only possible source of a self-constituting alternative to capitalism.

### **Self-Valorization and Vernacular Subsistence**

When we compare this Marxist approach with Illich's concepts of "conviviality" and "vernacular subsistence activities" the similarities seem more striking than the differences. The kinds of existing subsistence and convivial activities, identified by Illich and his collaborators, certainly seem to be embraced by the concept of self-valorization or the self-constitution of alternative ways of being. Nor is it hard to see how, in Marxist terms, we can understand the "war against subsistence" as capitalist attempts to disvalorize (or, failing that, to devalorize) just such autonomous self-valorizing activities. The problem, which Illich raises, with talking about these activities in terms of the Marxian concept of the production of use-values (as opposed to

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times and places where the working class has been forced to work so long that it has sought "free time" purely for rest, that rest, however necessary and understandable, can hardly be seen as anything other than the simple reproduction of labor power.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Ann Lucas de Rouffignac's sympathetic treatment of the *campesinista* position in her *Contemporary Peasantry in Mexico: A Class Analysis*, New York: Praeger, 1985, chapter 2 "The Debate in Mexico Over the Peasantry and Capitalism" or her treatment in "El Debate Sobre los Campesinos y el Capitalismo en México," *Comercio Exterior*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Abril 1982, pp. 371-383.

the production of commodities) lies neither with the ideological taint he detects, nor any tendency to confuse use-values with "unpaid, standardized, formalized activities."<sup>58</sup> The problem lies rather in the restriction of the concepts of vernacular or self-valorizing activities to the sphere of production. Both concepts, as we have seen, are broader than this. Illich, by his choice of illustrations, and Negri, by his emphasis on the refusal of work have both avoided precisely the capitalist tendency to subordinate everything to work.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, both concepts are quite self-consciously aimed at movements from the present into the future. There is nothing in Illich's more recent formulations to contradict his earlier aim of expanding the spaces of conviviality through the intentional development and design of "convivial tools" --new technologies and ways of being that avoid subordination to "the economy" (i.e., to capitalism or socialism). Negri's critique of traditional Marxist concepts of the "transition" from capitalism to communism, in which he argues that the only meaningful transition can occur through a development of self-valorizing activities which negates capitalist command, makes clear that the concept of self-valorization designates the existing ground of an emerging post-capitalism.

Also similar in the two approaches is the appreciation for the diversity of such movements into the future. Both Illich and Negri quite explicitly want to escape the homogenizing measurement and manipulations of capitalist "Chicago Boys" and socialist "Commissars."<sup>60</sup> Against traditional socialist demands to subordinate difference to unity in the struggle against capital and in the construction of a unified post capitalist order, both embrace what Negri calls the "multilaterality" of self-determination, the multiplicity of autonomous projects whose elaboration can constitute a new world whose "pluralism" would be real rather than illusory as is the case today in the world of capital.<sup>61</sup>

The major differences between the two approaches derive from their conceptualization of the social setting of "vernacular" or "self-valorizing" activities. Illich's understanding of that setting --largely derived from Polanyi and Dumont-- as an "economic" society which seeks to reduce human beings to special cases of *homo economicus* is close to, but not the same as, a Marxist understanding of capitalism as a social system which seeks to reduce everyone to mere worker. Methodologically speaking, the most important consequence of this difference is that whereas Illich can identify and examine the development of "vernacular" human activities which have escaped integration into the economic, Negri's Marxist analysis can also grasp such "self-valorizing" activities as both generated by and yet, in their antagonism, autonomous from the dialectic of capital. Illich and those who utilize his approach can observe, and herald, the

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<sup>58</sup> See *Shadow Work*, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>59</sup> Illich's earlier work, such as *Tools for Conviviality*, op. cit., was not so free from the objection he raised eight years later. Despite arguing that his notion of "tools" was broader than the usual meaning, his choice of illustrations and his pervasive focus on the sphere of production --including the conversion of reproductive activities to production in the service sector-- seemed to retain a preoccupation with work as the one activity which could, at least potentially, give meaning to human life. Indeed, in his juxtaposition of labor to work (chapter 2) he reproduced Engels' distinction between undesirable, nasty labor under capitalism and desirable, free work in post capitalist society. Such a position not only fails to see or appreciate the great diversity of ways in which human life can be realized but also fails to recognize that the only way work can become an interesting mode of human self realization is through its subordination to the rest of life, the exact opposite of capitalism.

<sup>60</sup> Illich, *Shadow Work*, op. cit., p. 58; Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, op. cit., Lesson Eight: "Communism and Transition."

<sup>61</sup> "Each step toward communism is a moment of extension and of expansion of the whole wealth of differences. . . . The communist transition follows at this stage the path which leads from auto-valorization to auto-determination, to an ever greater and more total independence of the proletarian subject, to the multilaterality of its way." Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, op. cit., p. 167-168.

ultimate failure of the "economy" to achieve complete hegemony while celebrating the autonomous, convivial subjects whose resistance they accord responsibility for that failure. But, unlike the concept of self-valorization, that of the vernacular provides no theory of *the genesis* of such antagonistic subjects within the development of contemporary capitalist society. Illich laments the destruction of the subject and calls for the pursuit of "conviviality" but, because of his rejection of Marxism, fails to show how such autonomous subjects repeatedly arise within even the thoroughly woven nets of capitalist control. This is why, I think, there is so much emphasis among Illich's collaborators on those living in communities that have been able to avoid, more or less, being fully integrated into capital.<sup>62</sup> In particular it helps explain both the preoccupation with the period before and during the rise of capitalism (of Polanyi's disembedded and hegemonic "economy") and the attractiveness of Illich's theory to those in the Third World (or those who study it) --where perhaps most communities that are readily identifiable as autonomous are located. While there can be no doubt that such communities can certainly be considered privileged zones of insight because of the degree to which they have achieved the elaboration of their own autonomous ways of being, the overthrow of the existing capitalist (economic) order can only derive from the proliferation of a diversity of such spaces throughout the social fabric of capital. We need both an awareness and appreciation of such possibilities -- which either approach can provide-- and a theory of the processes of spontaneous antagonistic generation that give them birth --which only Marxism has been able to provide.

### **Beyond Marxism?**

But if Marxism provides a theory of the generation of autonomous subjects within capitalism, its relevance to the internal logic of the autonomous development that is constructed within those spaces, to our understanding of and contribution to the processes of self-determination, is not so obvious. If one is a dialectical materialist, of course, or even an historical materialist, for whom Marxism is a philosophy of universal applicability, then Marxism remains relevant, at least methodologically. But if one takes Marxism as a theoretical and political practice which emerged within capitalism and whose usefulness is restricted to a working class articulation of the class struggles of that society, then understanding the many processes of self-valorization or self-constitution that escape the control of capital clearly requires grasping those processes in their own terms.

We may proceed analogically at first, seeking to utilize what we have learned by studying capitalism as a point of departure for grasping such uprisings against it, but that will inevitably focus our attention mostly on the scars of the birth process --the ways these self-activities have been shaped by the fact of emerging out of capitalism. These scars we can see all around us for we inscribe our struggle first on the walls with which capital imprisons us. We liberate spaces and times but those spaces and times are still bounded by the structures of capitalist power. We craft autonomous environments and activities but we do so in spaces scarred by capitalist exploitation and with commodities and personalities at least partially shaped

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the work of Esteva mentioned above. He can celebrate the historical appearance of what he calls "common man" (as opposed to *homo economicus* or traditional man etc) but he cannot explain his appearance within capitalism. Esteva's conception that his autonomous "common man" was "born in the interstices of society" reflects both his own preoccupation with the "margins" and his lack of a theory as to how such autonomous subjects can emerge within and against the dynamic of capitalist society. In Marxist terms his self-valorizing subjects are not once thoroughly integrated workers (*homo economicus* in the language of Illich and Esteva) who in their struggle against capital have carved out time and space for the elaboration of their autonomy to the point of revolutionary rupture. They are rather those whom capital has failed to integrate into its expanded reproduction -- those whom capital defines as marginal to itself.

by the processes of valorization. All this guarantees that post-capitalist society will no more establish itself in the world completely freed of its past than capitalism did. Just as capitalism, even today, is forced to deal with pre-capitalist "survivals," so too can we know that our efforts to create a post-capitalist society will be marked with the signs of capitalism --for a long time to come. To the degree that this is so, the Marxist theory of capitalism will be of continuing interest.

It is in identifying and understanding the new and original qualities of self-valorizing activities that we face the greatest need for imagination and creativity and can rely the least on old theories, even those of Marx. On the one hand, we can expect new understanding to be generated within and as an integral part of such new activities. On the other, if we accept the idea that post-capitalist society is coming into being as a plurality, as a complex mixture of diverse ways of being, then it is already obvious that we, as individuals, are unable to participate authentically in more than a fraction of such alternatives and, as a result, are faced with the task of trying to understand those projects of self-valorization that we do not know from within. Unlike the theoreticians of capital who can simply project their own concepts onto others as part of the capitalist project of subsumption of everyone and every social structure into itself, the struggle against all forms of domination requires the refusal of such theoretical imperialism and much more open, imaginative attempts to understand alternative ways of being in their own terms. It is for this reason that we must privilege all such projects of self-valorization --those we are involved in and those we only observe from the outside. Even where capital is successful in crushing the autonomy of self-valorization and subordinating that creativity to itself, the experience or study of that autonomy can inform other efforts to build the future within the present. It has always been true in the class struggle that we need to learn from past mistakes. It has become increasingly true that we also need to recognize and learn from our successes, however fleeting, in constructing autonomous ways of being.