

UC Santa Cruz

UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Party and Strategy in Postwar European Marxist Theory

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0ng3q7j0>

Author

Haider, Asad

Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

PARTY AND STRATEGY IN POSTWAR EUROPEAN MARXIST THEORY

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the degree requirements for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by

Asad Haider

June 2018

The Dissertation of Asad Haider is
approved:

Professor Christopher Connery, co-
chair

Professor Massimiliano Tomba, co-
chair

Professor Deborah Gould

Professor Robert Meister

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

© Asad Haider 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Problem of Organization	1
1. Interventions: Theoretical Dissent within the Parties	43
2. Ruptures: Organization Outside the Party	84
3. Infiltrations: Inside and Outside the Party	112
4. Retreats: Decline of the Party Form	154

ABSTRACT

Party and Strategy in Postwar Marxist Theory

Asad Haider

Unlike other terms in the discourse of social movements – power, democracy, citizenship – “organization” is rarely granted the status of a philosophical concept. My dissertation seeks to trace an underground current of political theory that focuses on the issue of organization, by examining certain aspects of the European Marxist debates over the party form and revolutionary strategy in the 1960s and 1970s. I focus on the development of Marxist philosophy in France and Italy countries by situating it not only in the debates over Communist Party strategy, but also in relation to the formation of new organizations that challenged the parties’ hegemony.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to my committee, Chris Connery, Deborah Gould, Robert Meister, and Massimiliano Tomba. I would also like to thank Carla Freccero and Margaret Wuerth for facilitating the completion of this dissertation.

Introduction

The Problem of Organization

I became interested in the problem of organization as a participant-observer of the Occupy movement. Those who followed this unexpected course of events will recall that organization was an absolutely central – I would argue *the* central – axis of strategic debate. On one side were voices from the classical socialist and labor left, along with a new generation of neo-classicists, who argued that the Occupy movement needed to “get organized” to overcome its diffuse and ineffectual character. They convincingly pointed out that without some structure to orient the movement’s activities and ensure its continuity, it would simply disintegrate – as it eventually did. On the other side were those who argued for the embrace of spontaneity, conceived as the very opposite of organization, since the latter was always imposed by leaders and hierarchies which would ultimately become obstacles to the realization of the movement’s aims. Though their underlying theoretical approach varied widely, from autonomist horizontalism to ultra-left catastrophism, these critics pointed out that the classicists were operating on an ahistorical conception of organization, failing to understand the wide-ranging transformations that separated our present moment from the history of the workers’ movement (a history far more contradictory than the various forms of socialist nostalgia imagined).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have summed up the history of debates

leading to this antinomy and the concomitant indecision in their recent *Assembly*:

For more than a half century activists have rightly criticized how centralized, vertical forms of organization, including charismatic figures, leadership councils, party structures, and bureaucratic institutions, become fetters to the development of democracy and the full participation of all in political life. Gone are the days, on the one hand, when a political vanguard could successfully take power in the name of the masses; the claims of political realism and the presumed effectiveness of such centralized leadership have proved completely illusory. And yet, on the other, it is a terrible mistake to translate valid critiques of leadership into a refusal of sustained political organization and institution, to banish verticality only to make a fetish of horizontality and ignore the need for durable social structures.¹

However, as this debate was resurging during the Occupy movement, a massive disavowal lay beneath the abstract fixation on organization. Both sides of the debate failed to recognize that the Occupy movement *was* organized, sometimes in the most ornate and complicated ways. Its organizational forms were effective for some goals and in certain contexts; they were inadequate for other goals and in other contexts. They emerged from the very specific circumstances that gave rise to the Occupy movement in the first place: a layer of highly educated unemployed or precariously

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xiv.

employed young people; an economic crisis which had changed not only living conditions but also longstanding parameters of mainstream political ideology; a prehistory of movements against globalization, privatization of universities, and police violence; the international examples of the Arab Spring and the Indignados; the widespread diffusion of digital communication technology and therefore social media networks. General assemblies and spokescouncils, kitchens and libraries, building occupations and black bloc vandalism – all of these represent intricate forms of organization formulated by participants from the ground up.

However, these organizational forms ran up against important limits. General assemblies disintegrated into interminable and unproductive arguments, and participatory democracy was undermined by the “tyranny of structurelessness.”² Street fights with police brought some media attention, and even popular support, but were ultimately powerless against the evictions and arrests which led progressively to the movement’s defeat. Self-help and mutual aid went some way towards reproducing the camps – at least for those willing, by ideology or necessity, to sleep in tents and eat vegan food – but did literally nothing to slow the deepening of economic inequality, much less alter the underlying economic and political system.

Historical examples served as an invaluable guide for thinking through these questions, and like many others I entered into an intensive study of the political

² See Jo Freeman’s “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” surely one of the most perceptive texts to address organization as a theoretical and political question; accessed June 21, 2018. <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.

theory of the workers' movement. I had already developed an interest in the innumerable theoretical debates among the small but fervent organizations of the 20th century, usually dismissed as sectarian nonsense even by the aging erstwhile participants. I was convinced that a symptomatic reading of this tradition and its peculiar combination of blindness and insight would reveal new questions to answer about our own history, questions that we had been heretofore unable to articulate.

But it became clear as I extended this research alongside the trajectory of the Occupy movement that this history provided no *solutions* to today's dilemmas. In fact, the debates over organization throughout the history of the workers' movement were just as complicated, just as equivocal as those of the present day.

This in itself is no revelation, even if our memory often eludes us, or yields readily to a comforting repression. More unexpected is that reading these texts through the prism of organization presents us with a transformed image of the most obvious questions of Marxist theory; debates over the nature of the state, the category of class, and the course of the socialist transition, are all tied up with a sometimes esoteric, sometimes apparent discourse on organization.

Every social movement practices a determinate form of political organization, which it represents to itself with varying degrees of theoretical efficacy. Yet unlike other primary terms in the discourse of social movements – power, democracy, citizenship – “organization” is rarely granted the status of a philosophical concept. Here we will set out to trace an underground current of political theory, as a step towards producing the concept, by examining certain

aspects of the European Marxist debates over the state and revolutionary strategy in the 1960s and 1970s, which for us in the 21st century hold an incredible fascination – close enough to us to promise the possibility of a mass movement in our contemporary society, yet far enough to live within a world of Communist Parties in parliament and workers occupying factories.

Unions and Parties

Our difficulty in identifying and reckoning with this history is compounded by the fact that we have never really come to terms with the historical situation in which the party form experienced both consolidation and crisis: the “Golden Years” – the period, alternately described as “Fordist” or “Keynesian” which ran from the end of the Second World War up to the crisis and restructuring of the 1970s. For the workers’ movement of the advanced capitalist countries, the characteristics of the postwar boom represented the deepest of challenges for existing models of organization. One might have been tempted to conclude that with the World Wars and the Great Depression left in the past, capitalism had entered a period of stabilization, accompanied by the total administration of society and thus the closure of the revolutionary horizon. The once immiserated and unruly working class was now bought off by the affluence of consumer culture, while revolutionary parties and their unions were simply in the service of the USSR and its peculiar variant of total administration. The discontent of youth and those relegated to the margins of

society, then, would represent the only possibility for a liberatory force, otherwise only detectable in art and poetry; for those with more pessimistic inclinations, such outbursts would be more redolent of the ominous threat of left-wing fascism, with no source of revolutionary agency in sight.³

A somber prognosis of this kind was belied by historical reality, even while it was being articulated. The extraordinary, unprecedented prosperity of postwar capitalism actually heightened workers' demands, and the conditions of full employment increased their bargaining power. The bureaucratic limits of the parties and unions could not succeed in crushing their legacy of collective struggle, which was reactivated by youth movements and the proliferation of new extraparlimentary organizational forms.

Critics of capitalism are in widespread agreement that the postwar boom will not be brought back. Nostalgia has been harder to overcome, however, when it comes to the forms of working class organization that accompanied it. In the absence of the historically specific economic-political coordinates of Fordism, calling for the revival of mass unions tied to political parties functions as a kind of conservation of memory, an urge to preserve the possibility of a sustained, broad-based workers' movement, at a time when it seems that social movements can only pop up contingently and cluster spontaneously around fleeting, mediatized moments of discontent, confining themselves to the margins and failing to build any lasting institutions.

³ See for example Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

Unfortunately, this nostalgia risks not only preventing us from understanding the new forms of organization that have begun to emerge in our very different present, it also obscures the real, complex processes by which the classical organizational forms emerged. The concrete forms of class struggle at the point of production, central to the whole history of the workers' movement, were neither an automatic result of the capitalist labor process as such, nor an effect of an omnipresent and intangible consciousness. They were embedded in forms of organization which have complex histories of emergence and construction – autonomous forms of shopfloor micro-organization dynamically responding to technological development, alongside the formation of political programs and institutions which responded to specific national contexts and the uneven development of bourgeois democracy.

Furthermore, it is not enough today to say that the party form is now obsolete; we need to understand what role it played and how it established the political language we still speak, and we need to understand the reasons for its disintegration. To genuinely understand why the party form is now widely rejected, we cannot simply adopt a moral perspective (it was authoritarian and thus bad, which we have now realized), or a teleological one (it was the necessary expression of a historical moment which we have now surpassed, and we now have access to more adequate forms).

Theory and Ideology

It is not my goal to provide a history of the French and Italian Communist Parties, or even European communism in general. My concern is theoretical, and I set out here to put politics in command at the level of theory – by which I mean an interpretation of theoretical concepts as *interventions* in particular political conjunctures, which reveal strategic lines of demarcation. It is this mode of reading which is suppressed in mainstream accounts like Jan-Werner Müller’s *Contesting Democracy*. Müller does suggest that a study of twentieth-century Europe reveals that “the ideologies contained in abstruse books” – ideology understood as “passionate, even fanatical belief in ideas and blueprints for a better society” – had profound material effects on the shaping of political institutions and events. For Müller this was an age in which “political argument was crucially about contesting the meaning of democracy.”⁴ However, Müller simply reduces Marxist theory, for him merely the mirror image of the theorists of the extreme right, to a surreptitious attempt at undermining democracy, despite ideological appropriation of democratic language. The extent to which Marxists inside and outside of the Communist Party were engaged in actually intervening in democratic institutions, participated in shaping them, and on this basis divided into diverse and irreconcilable understandings of “the meaning of democracy,” all become inexplicable.

A different approach has been elaborated from within a certain Marxist

⁴ Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2, 5.

discourse, based on Perry Anderson's enormously influential *Considerations on Western Marxism*. Anderson's short book is vast in scope and totalizing in its analysis; it is known for advancing the argument that "Western" Marxist theory, emerging from the defeat of the European revolutionary movements of the early 20th century, consequently ended up absorbed in the superstructure, concerning itself with method and culture rather than politics or economics. Thus Western Marxism, despite the brilliance and erudition of its constituent figures, represented the abandonment of the core of Marxist theory and practice. In this sense Western Marxism was a symptom of the gap that had emerged between intellectuals and mass revolutionary movements.⁵

However, research into the broader scope of "Western" Marxist theory shows that this thesis requires too many exceptions to be sustained. Such exceptions range far beyond the seemingly singular figures of Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci – Communist Party members who concerned themselves explicitly with politics and economics. Anderson dispenses with the problem by suggesting that they arose too early in the historical process to correspond entirely to his schema. But this explanation will not suffice to understand groupings left entirely out of Anderson's account, such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, which starting in 1948 advanced a heterodox critique of bureaucracy and a practice of collective working-class research that became the foundation for a new "content of socialism," and whose influence extended across Europe and even across the Atlantic to the

⁵ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

United States.

Indeed, even figures who Anderson *does* discuss do not fit into his schema. Much attention is paid to the German thinkers of the Frankfurt School, who were often primarily concerned with aesthetics and evinced a deep historical pessimism. However, in France and Italy, the theoretical developments that emerged from the work of Communist Party members Louis Althusser, Galvano Della Volpe, and Lucio Colletti – to name only the figures explicitly discussed by Anderson, since the theoretical tendencies which emerged from their work are equally and in some cases even more relevant – represent a sustained and original theorization of the concrete problems of strategy and organization, in close connection with mass movements. This is not accidental, since France and Italy had the largest and most powerful Communist Parties in Europe. The development of Marxist philosophy in these countries cannot be understood without situating it not only in the debates over Communist Party strategy, but also the formation of new organizations that challenged the Party's hegemony.

The conjunctural situations and questions which lie in the background of canonical theoretical texts should not be seen as mere dross, from which the gold of pure theory is extracted. The rise and fall of the party form, and the evolution and impasse of revolutionary strategy over the course of the twentieth century, are historical processes that have profoundly shaped our present, and their role in the

production of Marxist theory should not be seen as antiquated sectarian disputes.⁶ By reading theoretical texts in a manner which restores the centrality of the conjunctural questions of strategy, I hope to establish a relationship to history which allows us to better pose questions about our present.

Before turning to examine the changing situation confronted in the 1960s and 1970s by Marxist theory, we must briefly consider the construction of the classical model of party organization and revolutionary strategy at the end of the 19th century, derived from the defeats of the 1848 revolution and the Paris Commune, rapid industrial development, the “long depression” followed by the sustained growth of the European economy, and the evolution of the democratic state – all of which constituted a backdrop for the emergence and consolidation of social democracy in its classical model.

The Prehistory of Organization: Marx and Engels

The formation of the classical organizational model of the socialist party is central to the history of modern political forms. It takes place during a concrete process of social reorganization through the 16th to the 19th centuries, which itself comprises two parallel strands. The first is the replacement of the absolutist state with the organizational form of modern parliamentary democracy, a shift resulting both from

⁶ See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). I rely for historical analysis on this outstanding work of historical synthesis, which manages to be comprehensive without being totalizing and reductive.

contradictions within the ruling classes and the pressure of uprisings from below, dramatized in the vexed category of the bourgeois revolution.⁷ This meant the introduction of the universal ideals of liberty and equality, which had their material basis in the following institutional transformations: the transfer of political power from the monarch to elected parliamentary representatives, and the extension of rights to citizens, including the right to vote, the right to hold property, and the right to freedom of speech and belief. The effect of these new institutions was to shift political power from something expressing the plenitude of a community, or a function of order fulfilled by a sovereign, to an “empty place,” in Ernesto Laclau’s terms, which could be contested; it meant that the demands of various social groups could be expressed in the public sphere, and implemented through the contestation of political power.⁸

But the second process sits uneasily alongside these democratic developments: the emergence of capitalism, in which the organic political hierarchies of feudalism which regulated the power to govern and the securing of subsistence were reorganized into the separate spheres of the political and the economic. The multifarious processes of dispossession which separated people from the means of subsistence, rendering them dependent on the market and subjecting

⁷ On the theoretical difficulties of the category of “bourgeois revolution” and indeed of the “bourgeoisie” itself, see Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1972), 96-106; Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (New York: Verso, 2006), 196-203; and Sandro Mezzadra, “The Topicality of Prehistory: A New Reading of Marx’s Analysis of ‘So-called Primitive Accumulation,’” *Rethinking Marxism*, 23:3 (2011): 302-321.

⁸ Ernesto Laclau, “Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject,” in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996).

them to an uneven proletarianization, all centered on the accumulation of abstract wealth (that is, in the form of money), replacing the conquest of territory which defined feudal accumulation. Over the course of these centuries the global population would be increasingly incorporated into the world market, a significant portion as industrial wage workers at the center of capitalist development.⁹

It is well known that the young Karl Marx, as he tried to understand the social change taking place and participated in movements to overcome the residues of the absolutist state, observed that the new liberal conception of people as the bearers of universal rights was grounded in the social relations of the market, in which people acted as abstract, atomized individuals exchanging their property. Yet the contradiction of modern liberal society was that these market relations foreclosed the real human emancipation that the liberal political revolutions had failed to achieve. What had actually happened was that an economic class – the bourgeoisie – had come to represent its particular interests as the universal social interest, and had achieved political domination to represent the whole of society. Real human emancipation could only be achieved by the new class that had emerged in opposition to the bourgeoisie: the proletariat, the rapidly growing working class, which because of its absolute dispossession could only make the demand for the abolition of the whole structure of society, and thereby represent the genuinely

⁹ On the unevenness of this history see Geoff Eley, “No Need to Choose: History from Above, History from Below,” *Viewpoint Magazine* (June 2014), <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/06/27/no-need-to-choose-history-from-above-history-from-below/>; and Sandro Mezzadra, “How Many Histories of Labor? Towards a Theory of Postcolonial Capitalism,” *transversal* (January 2012), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/mezzadra/en>.

universal human interest of overcoming domination, which had found in market society its most complex and developed, but incomplete form. Overcoming market society would also overcome the classic political-philosophical question of who is fit to rule. Human emancipation is the abolition of any distinction between rulers and ruled; it is the power to self-govern. For this reason class struggle became the central political antagonism of modern societies.¹⁰

Marx had identified the agent, the political subject, which could achieve this transformation of society. In thus narrating the development of Marx's political thought we are not breaking new ground. But there was a seemingly insurmountable contradiction contained in this logic: if market society has reduced the proletariat to atomized, egoistic individuals, how will they achieve the unity necessary to carry out a revolution? Here the problem of organization shifts from the totality of society to the revolutionary subject itself.

Look first at the definition of political power in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as

¹⁰ The relevant texts are of course "On the Jewish Question" and "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction" in *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 3: Marx and Engels 1843-44* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975). See also the idiosyncratic but revealing account of Lucio Colletti in his introduction to Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992).

such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.¹¹

This goal is impossible in the atomized conditions of egoistic society, but a movement towards it can be detected in the progression of history:

At this stage, the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition... But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more... The workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there, the contest breaks out into riots.¹²

Such combinations form because workers are *already* organized by the hierarchy of the factory, with nothing less than a military discipline: "Masses of labourers,

¹¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto" in *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 6: Marx and Engels 1845-48* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 505.

¹² *Ibid.*, 492-3.

crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants.” Their spontaneous revolt against this hierarchy is significant not for any change it provokes in itself, but since it contributes to the eventual organization:

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.¹³

If the proletariat is able to build on the military discipline of the factory “to organise itself as a class,” it can overcome the tendency towards atomization characteristic of bourgeois society:

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 491, 493.

¹⁴ Ibid., 505, 493.

However, this aspiration remained distant. The role projected for the proletariat, which it played in the revolutions of 1848, was to intervene in the continuing political revolutions against the vestiges of feudalism. While it had been predicted in the *Manifesto* that the forces of historical necessity would cause this to continue into a revolution against capitalism, it became clear that no such automatic process could be relied upon. It now became necessary to mediate between the demands of the different social actors whose tenuous alliance had begun to fracture, as Marx and Engels said in their March 1850 address to the Communist League:

The demands of the petty-bourgeois democrats here summarised are not put forward by all of their factions and only very few of their members consider these demands in their aggregate as a definite aim. The further individual people or factions among them go, the more of these demands will they make their own, and those few who see their own programme in what has been outlined above would believe that thereby they have put forward the utmost that can be demanded from the revolution. But these demands can in no wise suffice for the party of the proletariat. While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one

country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one.¹⁵

The defeat of 1848, the turning of the liberal forces of the middle classes against the interests of the working class, introduced a crisis in the teleological conception of revolution. It meant that the underlying problematic upon which Marx and Engel's concept of organization had been based – one which relied on history's inexorable march towards the transcendence of class society, driven by the development of the productive forces and its constantly recurring contradiction with the relations of production – had fragmented. It is easy to see that over the course of the 1850s and 1860s Marx grew increasingly suspicious of the view that the forces of historical necessity would result automatically in a revolution, and therefore in revolutionary organization.

It seems that Marx never really revisited organization as a theoretical question – he focused on writing *Capital* and commenting on the politics of his day.

¹⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Address of the Central Authority to the League, March 1850" in *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 10: Marx and Engels 1849-51* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 280-1.

This is generally correct, but must be qualified with a careful reading of *Capital* itself from the vantage point of the political-strategic problem that preceded it. I will first briefly address the mode in which I believe *Capital* should be read, in order to adequately draw out of it its political character.

Despite the ambiguous starting point of *Capital*, this is not a text which participates in the metaphysical inquiry into value – the question as to what substance inheres in objects to make them valuable, to make them worth exchanging. This question originated in ancient political thought and was extensively examined in classical political economy, which already advanced labor as this substance – for Adam Smith and David Ricardo, the effort expended in production and its balance with the propensity to truck and barter. The presuppositions of this classical labor theory of value were anthropological (rooted in human propensities), physiological (magnitude determined by energetic expenditure), and substantialist (value inheres in objects).

Marx's undertaking was not to complete this labor theory of value advanced within political economy, but rather to advance a critique of political economy, by uncovering its unarticulated questions. The actual insights of classical political economy's labor theory of value, Marx's critique suggests, should *not* be understood in terms of the metaphysical question of value. Instead, they should be understood as an implicit examination of the system of allocation of social labor within the broader structures of commodity exchange. The deductive logic with which *Capital* begins establishes as its starting premise not any problem of human propensities, effort, or

inherent properties, but the specifically capitalist form of appearance of wealth: “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities.’”¹⁶

In Marx’s account the labor theory of value is derived not transhistorically, but from the commodity exchange which has been identified in the first sentence as specific to the capitalist mode of production. In order to proceed from the commodity to the concept of capital, Marx deduces the labor theory of value and proceeds immediately to money as “the necessary form of appearance of the measure of value.”¹⁷ But it is equally necessary to emphasize that Marx ends his account of the transformation of money into capital – value which expands itself through the accumulation of surplus value – by pointing to a “special commodity,” labor-power.¹⁸

By virtue of the concept of labor-power and the new analysis of the capitalist mode of production presented in *Capital*, the question of factory organization is subjected to a treatment drastically different from that of the *Manifesto*. In Marx’s account of the labor process we now witness a process in which a collection of individual labor-powers are brought together in cooperation to constitute a new productive force, one which is continually transformed by technological change. It is thus by virtue of this labor process that individual commodity-owners (those with

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1982), 125. For a valuable but incomplete contribution to this mode of reading see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review, 2013).

¹⁷ Ibid., 188.

¹⁸ Ibid., 270.

nothing to sell but their labor-power) are brought together into a collective agent, one which is interested in minimizing its expenditure of effort and reclaiming the maximum possible wealth ultimately realized from the production process in the form of wages.¹⁹ Since these interests are diametrically opposed to those of the individual capitalist, this new subject is constitutively antagonistic to capital.

However, this constitutive antagonism by no means signals the initiation of an intrinsically revolutionary process. Instead, it results in the introduction of factory legislation, the formation of a collective political interest of capital, and subsequently in the renewal of inter-capitalist competition through the introduction of labor-saving technology, first claiming super-profits on the market, and then, as the innovation is generalized, lowering the value of labor and subsequently allowing for increased accumulation via relative surplus value. While capital gives rise to this antagonistic subject, it proceeds to absorb this antagonism as a motor of its own development; the organization of the subject into a force capable of confronting and destroying capital is now an autonomous theoretical problem.

The further work of Marx returned frequently to the practical questions of organization – the dispute with Bakunin, the analysis of Ireland, the reflections on the Paris Commune, the study of the Russian *mir*, the critique of the Gotha program – but the problem of the relation between history and organizational form, both introduced and cancelled by the teleological conception of the *Manifesto*, was not

¹⁹ See the “historical” chapters of *Capital* which are so often neglected by otherwise precise and rigorous Marxologists, especially chapter 10 on the working day and chapter 13 on cooperation.

revisited on the basis of the new problematic represented by *Capital*.

The Prehistory of Organization: The Erfurt Synthesis

If the *Communist Manifesto* sought to intervene in an unstable reality, to bring about a new coordination of political powers, it had left the practical course of this process unstated; and if *Capital* proposed a new, scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production and the class antagonism at its core, it did not even broach the question of a practical intervention into this mode of production's logic. A provisional answer to these questions, in the form of a foundational model, would first emerge under the name of German Social Democracy.

By the 1860s and 1870s the structural transformations which had taken place across Europe had established formal national boundaries, armies, schools, constitutions, parliaments, and basic political rights. This had immense consequences for emerging socialist movements, which had been previously barred from participating in any meaningful manner in the normal workings of government.

These changes also have to be situated within the recomposition of the European population. An agrarian population was in the process of shifting into urban settings, where they made up the industrial workforce. In order to articulate this workforce as a political subject – even, perhaps, a universal class – socialists defended it against bourgeois accusations of incivility and disorder, arguing that bourgeois society betrayed its own values. Because Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws

had rolled back the exercise of political rights and prevented the socialists from holding explicitly political meetings, this meant producing a socialist subculture, which reshaped workers' everyday lives. Thus even during the initial period of rapid growth in the industrial working class, and the parallel growth of socialist institutions, the organizational forms of the party and union were embedded in a much broader set of practices. The German historian Alf Lüdtke has shown through a study of turn-of-the-century machinists that union membership had no direct relation to party membership, and that workers who were generally disengaged from the daily activities of the union were often the most militant during periods of revolutionary upheaval. He suggests that a foundation of this militancy was an everyday practice of working-class "self-reliance," ultimately manifested in the subculture: bicycling clubs, collective gardens, and grocery co-ops. On the factory floor, this self-reliance was the collective, even if passive, resistance to work – from coffee breaks to insubordination against management.²⁰

After the lapse of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890, and socialists could openly organize at a political level, the subculture was more or less abandoned,

²⁰ Alf Lüdtke, "Organizational Order or *Eigensinn*? Workers' Privacy and Workers' Politics in Imperial Germany" in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); "Cash, Coffee-Breaks, Horseplay: *Eigensinn* and Politics among Factory Workers in German circa 1900" in *Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process: Studies in Proletarian Class Formation*, ed. Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986). On the broader statistical point, Donald Sassoon writes, "Neither the date of creation of the socialist party, nor its electoral strength correlates with the level of industrialization or the size of the working-class electorate. In fact, the statistical correlation is negative." *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 9.

giving way to a party bureaucracy separated from workers' daily lives. But the fact that it was now possible to struggle for and achieve reforms within the framework of capitalism, as steps towards its eventual overthrow, was not initially seen as problematic. After all, revolutionaries like Marx and Engels had already sought to make the revolution permanent by pushing reform past the limits of the bourgeois regime. In 1891 the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) laid out the new form of this strategy in the Erfurt Program, a document which bears the marks of SPD intellectuals Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel, and Karl Kautsky. The change in genre implies a different approach. "Programmes are not manifestos," as Deleuze puts it, "but means of providing reference points for an experiment which exceeds our capacities to foresee."²¹ Rather than interpreting what a specter will have turned

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues 2*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 48. For historical notes on the substance of this difference, see Eric Hobsbawm, "On the *Communist Manifesto*" in *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011): "Until 1905 the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) with its hundreds of thousands of members and millions of voters published new editions of the *Manifesto* in print-runs of not more than 2000–3000 copies. The party's *Erfurt Programme* of 1891 was published in 120,000 copies while it appears to have published not many more than 16,000 copies of the *Manifesto* over the eleven years from 1895 to 1905... The average member of a mass Marxist social-democratic party was not expected to pass examinations in theory. ... In short, the readers of the *Manifesto*, though part of the new and rising socialist labour parties and movements, were almost certainly not a representative sample of their membership. They were men and women with a special interest in the theory that underlay such movements. This is probably still the case" (105). "'Party' still meant essentially a tendency or current of opinion or policy, although Marx and Engels recognised that once this found expression in class movements, it developed some kind of organisation ('diese Organisation der Proletarier zur Klasse, und damit zur politischen Partei'). Hence the distinction in part IV between the 'already constituted workers' parties... the Chartists in England and the agrarian Reformers in North America' and the others, not yet so constituted. As the text made clear, Marx's and Engels' Communist Party

out to be, the program experiments. This is true even for the Erfurt Program, whatever guarantee it may have claimed for itself in the orthodox philosophy of history, and it was in fact this experimental character which allowed it to function in reality.

The Erfurt Program therefore implies a more specific political sequence, and identifies a new and independent agent which initiates it. The program declares:

The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power. It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.

This shaping of the struggle of the working class was the organizational character of

at this stage was no kind of organisation, nor did it attempt to establish one, let alone an organisation with a specific programme distinct from other organisations. Incidentally, the actual body on whose behalf the Manifesto was written, the Communist League, is nowhere mentioned in it" (108-9). "The *Manifesto*'s vision of the historic development of 'bourgeois society', including the working class which it generated, did not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the proletariat would overthrow capitalism and, in so doing, open the way to the development of communism, because vision and conclusion did not derive from the same analysis. The aim of communism, adopted before Marx became 'Marxist', was not derived from the analysis of the nature and development of capitalism but from a philosophical, indeed an eschatological argument about human nature and destiny" (116).

the famous merger between socialism and the labor movement. The content of socialism became a specifically political struggle: it meant achieving political rights and ultimately conquering political power, to use the state apparatus to overcome the regime of private property.

Since the collective discipline of the working class was already “the natural result of economic development,” unions had an auxiliary role in this program. As the form of association which workers would inevitably participate in, they provided a space within which the party could incorporate the political struggle into the workers’ everyday lives. Kautsky would go so far as to say in his commentary on the Erfurt Program that the unions were “an excellent parliamentary school; they afford opportunities for training in parliamentary law and public speaking.”²²

As Kautsky wrote, the role of social democracy was to transform the character of this collective discipline:

We have seen that the modern state regards it as its principal function to make the effective organization of labor impossible. Secret organizations are inefficient substitutes for open ones. The more the proletariat develops, the more it needs freedom to organize... The struggle of all the classes which depend upon legislative action for political influence is directed, in the modern state, on the one hand toward an increase in the power of the parliament (or congress), and on the other toward an increase in their own

²² Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*, chapter 5, accessed June 21, 2018. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/ch05.htm>.

influence within the parliament... The proletariat is, therefore, in a position to form an independent party.

In other words, the point of this program was to continue the historical processes that were already taking place, the automatic organization of workers in factories allowing them to enter into the democratic institutions established by the bourgeoisie, and eventually take power. The formation of the political subject itself was automatically achieved by the forces of history, which was progressing inevitably towards the inevitable socialist revolution; it was a function of this inevitability. But the Erfurt Program added that the organization achieved in the factory was just a precursor to the organization of the proletariat in one of the main institutions of the modern parliamentary state: the political party. And crucial to the party's role, what would facilitate the merger between socialism and the labor movement, was the introduction of socialist consciousness from outside of the working class, which on its own was only capable of a "trade-union consciousness" limited to incremental demands within the existing system, unaware of the necessity of the political struggle. While Lenin's 1901 *What is to be Done* is generally associated with this "vanguardist" view, it was in fact already the orthodoxy of social democracy, as indicated by Lenin's prominent citation of Kautsky:

Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can

arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia*... it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [*von Aussen Hineingetragenes*] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [*urwüchsig*]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat (literally: saturate the proletariat) with the *consciousness* of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle.²³

But the concrete processes of party building had a decidedly complicated relationship to the philosophy of history underpinning the socialist program. While the labor movement had been conceptualized as an expression of the forms of

²³ Kautsky in *Die Neue Zeit* 1901-02, cited in V.I. Lenin, *What is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, chapter 2, accessed June 21, 2018. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm>.

workplace association brought about by economic development, in actual practice the socialist project had been based in a wide range of everyday institutions which did not form a part of the narrative of economic development, despite providing a central reference point for the socialist experiment.

Alongside this gap in the socialist philosophy of history, there was also a tension between the sensibility of *self-reliance* which drew workers into class struggle, and the *military discipline* of factory labor. While the philosophy of history claimed that military discipline at the point of production would be expressed as proletarian collectivity in the party, it was in fact self-reliance that provided the basis for organization as a class. When self-reliance on the shop floor achieved an active organizational expression, it entered into direct conflict with the military discipline of factory labor.²⁴

Social democracy had also exaggerated, from the beginning, the hegemony of the industrial working class. This meant abandoning craft-based, artisanal ideals of self-management, which often worked against the interests of industrial workers, but which also advanced the ideal of a different *kind* of work, rather than simply the enfranchisement of the worker. Social democracy had assumed that peasants were a backward element of the population, soon to be reshaped into the proletariat, and so their demands were necessarily conservative; peasant political agency was foreclosed. Along similar lines, the lumpenproletariat, which lacked both the productivity of

²⁴ See Lüdtkke, “Organizational Order,” and Warren Montag, “Introduction to Louis Althusser, ‘Some Questions Concerning the Crisis of Marxist Theory and of the International Communist Movement,’” *Historical Materialism* 23:1 (2015): 141–151.

workers and the morality of the bourgeoisie, was seen as an element which should be totally excluded from politics, in spite of the fact that Kautsky's analysis suggested that capitalism would drive more and more people into unemployment.

Furthermore, the affirmation of the subculture tensely coexisted with the attempt to make workers measure up to bourgeois morality. This meant, for example, reproducing patriarchal family norms, and as a result, almost all the women in the SPD were wives of male members – female industrial workers had barely any influence.²⁵

Michel Foucault captured the problem of the hegemonic figure of social democracy with acuity:

It seems to me that until the beginning of the 19th century, and even during the French Revolution, popular uprisings were led at one and the same time by peasants, small craftsmen, by the first laborers, and then by that category of restless elements poorly integrated into society that might be highway robbers, smugglers, and so on at any rate, all who had been rejected by the reigning system of legality, the law of the state. And in the 19th century, in the course of political struggles that permitted the proletariat to have itself recognized as a power with compelling demands, that permitted the proletariat to escape, all the same, from violent elimination and constraint, in the course of these

²⁵ See Richard J. Evans, "Politics and the Family: Social Democracy and the Working-Class Family in Theory and Practice Before 1914" in *The German Family: Essays on the Social History of The Family in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee (London: C. Helm, 1981).

political struggles the proletariat was obliged in some way to establish a separation between it and that other “agitated” population. When labor unionization was founded, in order to have itself recognized, it needed to dissociate itself from all the seditious groups and from all those who refused the legal system: We are not the murderers, we are not attacking either people or goods; if we stop production, it is not in an outburst of absolute destruction, but in conjunction with very precise demands. Family morality, which had absolutely no currency in popular circles at the end of the 18th century, had become by the beginning of the 19th century one of the means by which the proletariat was able in some way to establish its respectability. Popular virtue, the “good” worker, good father, good husband, respectful of the legal system – that is the image that since the 18th century the bourgeoisie proposed and imposed on the proletariat in order to turn it away from any form of violent agitation, insurrection, any attempt to usurp power and its rules. That image the proletariat took up and used, as a matter of fact, in an often very efficient way to support its struggles. That “morality” was up to a certain point the marriage contract between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie during the entire second half of the 19th century.²⁶

This ambivalence in the constitution of the figure of the worker sat alongside the political ambivalence of the program itself. As Engels had already noted in his

²⁶ Michel Foucault and John K. Simon, “Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview,” *Social Justice*, 18:3 (Fall 1991): 33-4.

critique of the Erfurt program, the relationship between the achievement of reforms and the eventual seizure of state power was in fact far from clear: “If all the 10 demands were granted we should indeed have more diverse means of achieving our main political aim, but the aim itself would in no wise have been achieved.”²⁷ And indeed, as the decades progressed, the two aspects of Social Democracy’s strategy drifted apart. Eventually the second dimension, the revolutionary seizure of power, though still explicit in the program, completely dropped out in practice. This was an entirely new situation, one which Marx and Engels had not anticipated. The problem of “reformism” would not be explicitly described until Eduard Bernstein granted it the status of a theory in 1899, arguing not only that the party should continue along its current road, but also that the language of revolution should simply be excised, and that the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat” had nothing to do with Marxism. The revisionist controversy started by Bernstein began to question the assumption that workers would be drawn to socialism because of their immiseration, and that capitalism was tending towards a collapse which would facilitate a transfer of power. He also pointed out that living standards of workers were significantly increasing, and claimed that the conditions for a socialist economy – like the centralization of firms – were not present to the extent predicted by Marx. This meant that the idea of revolution would have to be abandoned; instead, socialism had to be equated with a movement for reforms that were in the interests of workers, guided by institutions

²⁷ Friedrich Engels, “A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 27: Engels 1890-95* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 217.

like trade unions. There would be no terminal crisis of capitalism, as the system had become completely stable; with progressive reforms, Bernstein argued, capitalism could simply evolve into socialism, obviating the need for revolution.

While the controversy of Bernstein's revisionism is well known, it also has to be emphasized that the party continued to act the same way as before. In fact, the model seemed to be working – Social Democracy had brought socialists within striking distance of the state, forcing the German Empire to grant numerous reforms, such as social security, accident insurance, and old-age pensions, which fundamentally improved the lives of tens of thousands of workers. Rosa Luxemburg's powerful 1900 rejoinder to Bernstein's text, *Reform or Revolution*, traced Bernstein's argument to a petty-bourgeois influence in the party, one which feared autonomous mass action. But it based its argument on a defense of a theory of capitalist collapse, of a terminal crisis, and once again rooted proletarian revolution in a historical teleology:

Bernstein began his revision of the Social-Democracy by abandoning the theory of capitalist collapse. The latter, however, is the corner-stone of scientific socialism. By rejecting it Bernstein also rejects the whole doctrine of socialism. In the course of his discussion, he abandons one after another of the positions of socialism in order to be able to maintain his first affirmation. Without the collapse of capitalism the expropriation of the capitalist class is impossible.²⁸

²⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch09.htm>.

The Prehistory of Organization: 1905/1917

After 1905, it was impossible to ignore that workers were revolting on their own, outside unions and parties, and the stakes of theoretical disputes grew considerably greater. In the United States, the IWW was formed; there were great strikes in Belgium, a near revolution in Russia, and Germany itself saw more strikes that year than any other between the Revolution of 1848 and the November Revolution of 1918. The sequence of spontaneous mass strikes which had reached an incredible peak in “semi-feudal” Russia also brought about an unprecedented event, a real historical rupture. Rosa Luxemburg argued in her 1906 text *The Mass Strike* and her ensuing debate with Kautsky that the spontaneous upheaval of the workers represented a far more important force in the political process than the trade unions and parliamentary reform; they simply needed the guidance of a party leadership. But perhaps even more significant was the workers’ invention of a new political form: the soviet. The soviet superseded artisanal self-management; it brought this principle directly into the factory, promising the democratic reorganization of the production process, but also a form of organization that would allow all workers to participate in formulating and struggling for political demands.

This disrupted the stability of the Erfurt synthesis: a far more advanced form of struggle had emerged in a more backward country, and it had challenged predictions about the revolutionary sequence and the forms that workers’ struggle would take. Workers’ councils emerged from the organizational process as an

outcome beyond the terminology of the Erfurt experiment's guiding hypothesis. They represented the possibility of building working-class political power *in* the factory.

The antagonistic history of the councils introduced a crisis for the Erfurt problematic of a merger between socialism, that is, the organized party of social democracy, and the labor movement. The party and labor bureaucracies imposed factory discipline, just as revolutionary action undertaken by the working class attempted to destroy it.

It also deeply challenged the very form of the political party. As the council communist Anton Pannekoek would later forcefully argue: "Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution." It is important to be precise: Pannekoek's objection to parliamentary tactics cannot be reduced to pure intransigence. It was rather an analysis of the historical efficacy of parliamentary contestation as a tactic – a tactic which, Pannekoek affirmed, was once "necessary and productive." When social democracy entered parliament at the end of the 19th century, it had used this position not to govern, but to gain a mass audience for socialist agitation. But as proletarian struggle advanced and entered a revolutionary phase, parliamentary activity ceased to be a useful tool. As Pannekoek pointed out, there could be no such thing as socialism without the masses creating "organs of self-action"; and if the goal of parliamentarism was to legislate socialism into existence, it could only reinforce the "traditional bourgeois mentality" which encouraged dependence on leaders instead of

self-organization, and thus could be nothing but an obstacle to the realization of socialism.²⁹

But the Erfurt synthesis was dominant in the socialist movement throughout Europe, and it was reapplied in disparate contexts like Russia. The Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party was divided on the course revolution would take in Russia. They accepted that since their country was much more “backward,” with a far more reactionary state and a much smaller industrial population, they would have to first pass through the phase of the “bourgeois-democratic revolution,” before a socialist revolution could be possible. The party had divided in two over the issue of requirements for party membership, and this division also mapped onto two different positions about the way the revolutionary sequence would proceed.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks held that the industrial working class should align with the peasantry to make the bourgeois-democratic revolution; the Mensheviks thought the working class should align with the bourgeoisie. But the Bolsheviks had also made it a point to fight all traces of opportunism: collaboration with bourgeois elements in a way that undermined the interests of the working class. Despite all the ideas we have about the “iron discipline” of the Bolsheviks, the opportunistic German SPD was much more centralized, disciplined, and hierarchical. The real difference was that the Bolsheviks were quick to draw firm lines separating them from opportunistic tendencies, which they made as clear as possible to the masses. They even formed alliances with the masses outside the proletariat, affirming the

²⁹ Anton Pannekoek, “World Revolution and Communist Tactics,” chapter 4, *marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/tactics/ch04.htm>.

revolutionary potential of the peasantry, and eventually even taking up land reform – a major obstacle to the capitalist development of agriculture that the SPD thought was so necessary – as part of their platform.³⁰

Of course, like most socialists at the time, Lenin had once looked upon the model of German Social Democracy with tremendous admiration. But in both Germany and Russia, the model of social democracy soon entered into its most extreme crisis yet. Instead of speaking out against the First World War in 1914, German Social Democracy supported the Empire's war effort, passing war credits, keeping workers under control, and crushing strikes when they appeared. Even once trustworthy figures like Kautsky advocated abstaining and had implicit sympathy for their own government against the Russian threat. And after the war, the Party witnessed the ingraining of bureaucracy in the very *form* of parliamentary politics, which led it to prevent alternate forms of governance, of proletarian self-government, from taking root.³¹

The emergence of revolutionary Soviets in 1905, German Social Democracy's rightward drift, and the revolutionary situation in Russia after February 1917, eventually led Lenin to articulate a very different strategy. After the February Revolution he returned to Russia with the "April Theses," rejecting the Provisional Government and demanding "All power to the soviets!" This was an extremely unpopular position; it broke with the stagist conception of revolution, of the primacy of "bourgeois-democratic tasks." However, Lenin had begun to alter his conception

³⁰ See Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 141.

³¹ Ibid., 160-1.

of the revolutionary process, a theorization which would be represented in his *State and Revolution*. Instead of calling for the seizure of state power, as the Erfurt synthesis did, he called for the destruction of the bourgeois state, and its replacement by the proletarian dictatorship of the soviets.

This drew Lenin to a reconsideration of the content of Marx's theory, which social democracy had taken for granted. In 1847, Lenin pointed out, Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that the abolition of classes would lead to the disappearance of forms of political power. A few months later Marx and Engels would write in the *Communist Manifesto* that the revolutionary proletariat has to use its "political supremacy to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state," defined as "the proletariat organized as the ruling class." But this remained a "general summary of history," rather than a concrete analysis of the mechanism by which the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie would be replaced by a proletarian power that would ultimately wither away.³²

How, according to Lenin, did Marx go beyond the "purely abstract" presentation of the *Communist Manifesto*? Lenin writes that "it was not logical reasoning, but actual developments, the actual experience of 1848-51," that allowed Marx to proclaim in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that the ultimate failure of previous revolutions lay in the fact that they perfected the state machine instead of smashing it. Hence it was established "with the accuracy of scientific

³² V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, chapter 2, accessed June 21, 2018. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch02.htm>.

observation” that the proletarian revolution would have to smash the state. But the question of what was to replace it was not yet even posed.³³

Two decades later it would become possible to pose and answer this question. Marx had warned that an attempt by militants in Paris to overthrow their government would result in failure. Nevertheless when this uprising did in fact take place, Marx yielded to the interruption; in the positive example of the Paris Commune’s achievement, as well as the negative example of its defeat, he gave concrete character to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin writes: “Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume.”³⁴

It was on the basis of Lenin’s own experience, which interrupted the historical teleology of social democracy, that the theoretical rupture of 1917 took place. It is this that Lenin notes in a minor passage, written in Petrograd on November 30, 1917: the postscript to *The State and Revolution*. He wrote:

This pamphlet was written in August and September 1917. I had already drawn up the plan for the next, the seventh chapter, “The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.” Apart from the title, however, I had no time to write a single line of the chapter; I was “interrupted” by a political

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lenin, *State and Revolution*, chapter 3, accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>.

crisis – the eve of the October revolution of 1917. Such an “interruption” can only be welcomed; but the writing of the second part of this pamphlet (“The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917”) will probably have to be put off for a long time. It is more pleasant and useful to go through the “experience of revolution” than to write about it.

The profound significance of Lenin’s method is contained precisely in the character of the “interruption,” which cannot be reduced to the incursion of external historical circumstances into the world of pure theory. The postscript, then, is neither an afterthought nor an apology. It rather repeats precisely the kind of theoretical event Lenin recounts in his reconstruction of Marx’s view of the state. And in this interruption the classical assumption that socialist consciousness is introduced into the working class from the outside is seriously troubled.

However, I suggest that Lenin’s rupture also derives from what can already be identified in *What is to Be Done* as, to borrow a turn of phrase from Deleuze, the *devaluation* of consciousness – that is, a reduction of consciousness to the mere awareness of a passage in the composition of bodies from a lesser to a greater power.³⁵ Despite Lenin’s stated adherence to the Kautskyan problematic, his theoretical practice is one which engages in a devaluation of consciousness in favor of organization. Relentlessly he redirects the question of consciousness and its place in a Marxist philosophy of history towards the most mundane details of party

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988), 17.

organization. Indeed, the split which emerges in Russian Social Democracy as a consequence of *What is to Be Done* revolves not around any question of consciousness but the definition of a *party member*. In the passage to *State and Revolution* the antinomy of trade-union consciousness and socialist consciousness is displaced by the insistent reference to the “all-powerful Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.”³⁶

After 1917 Communist Parties emerged across Europe, not only in order to break with the opportunism of social democracy, but also to practice fidelity to the new forms of political struggle put on the table by the long process of the Russian Revolution. While the Bolsheviks had initially believed in the progressivist narrative, thinking that Russia would have to go through a period of bourgeois liberal democracy before they could make a communist revolution, the self-activity of the proletariat undermined this narrative in 1905, and exploded it in 1917, putting communist revolution on the agenda. The Bolsheviks saw this and revised their thinking, while the SPD, aside from a very small minority, ignored it and hoped instead for the next elections.

However, the Bolshevik problematic itself would enter into crisis as it confronted the problems of socialist construction that follow from revolution. It is at this point that the Marxist debates on the problem of organization truly begin. We will not go further into the many analyses and interventions of Lenin, Luxemburg, et al. here – they belong henceforth to the age of antiquity for the period we will study,

³⁶ Lenin, *State and Revolution*, chapter 6, accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch06.htm>.

and appear in the form of references to the classics. We may recall Dante, as he encounters Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan in the first circle of Hell:

Thus we went as far as the light, speaking things
of which it is good to be silent now, as it was good
to speak them there where I was.³⁷

³⁷ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume 1: Inferno*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 75.

1. Interventions: Theoretical Dissent within the Parties

Politics of the Break

Louis Althusser, a lifelong member of the French Communist Party (PCF), was nevertheless an entirely heretical member, who remained in the party because he believed it was only place for organic contact with working class. His earliest works are of a Hegelian bent, but this accordance with the orthodoxy began to waver after 1956 and Khrushchev's "Secret Speech." Of course, this was by no means a unique turning point. Marxists across Western Europe, who would eventually constitute the "New Left," experienced the Secret Ppeech and the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution as a political and theoretical crisis which made it impossible to maintain unconditional allegiance to parties which still followed Moscow's lead.³⁸ However, Althusser's dissent was a unique one, drawing inspiration from the anti-revisionism of the Chinese Communist Party, an influence which would be of continuing importance. From this vantage point, despite denunciations of Stalin's crimes within the USSR, the ideology of "peaceful coexistence" advanced by the new Soviet bureaucracy indicated not only a reconciliation with capitalism but the prospect of its restoration within socialism. The early, "classical" works of Althusser cannot be understood outside the political history of Marxist theory.

³⁸ See Stuart Hall, "The 'First' New Left: Life and Times" in Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London: Verso, 1989).

The new revisionism ultimately claimed to have “superseded” the dictatorship of proletariat, arriving at a higher universal stage of history, as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union proclaimed in its 1961 program:

Absorbing and developing all the best that has been created by world culture, communist culture will be a new, higher stage in the cultural progress of mankind. It will embody the versatility and richness of the spiritual life of society, and the lofty ideals and humanism of the new world. It will be the culture of a classless society, a culture of the entire people, of all mankind.³⁹

The rejoinder of the Chinese communist party rejected this perspective in its entirety, proclaiming that the leadership of the USSR

crudely revises the essence of Marxism-Leninism, namely, the teachings on proletarian revolution, on the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the party of the proletariat... advancing fallacies of a “state of the whole people” and a “party of the entire people.” It substitutes humanism for the Marxist-Leninist

³⁹ Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *The Road to Communism: Documents of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 576-7.

theory of class struggle and substitutes the bourgeois slogan of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity for the ideals of communism.⁴⁰

This position especially resonated with communist dissidents in France, since the PCF had put forth a doctrine of “Marxist humanism,” based on young Marx’s texts on alienation, as a basis for uniting with social-democrats, liberals, and Catholics. This kind of reading was so prevalent that even many noteworthy unorthodox theories – like those of Socialisme ou Barbarie – also relied on Marxist humanism to advance a left-wing critique of the bureaucracy.⁴¹

Althusser recalled a similar dynamic earlier in the century, when a number of theorists dissented against the orthodoxy of the Second International. The Second International, oriented by Kautsky and Plekhanov and grounded in Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*, developed a form of dialectical and historical materialism that viewed history as an evolutionary process driven by technological development, which would ultimately result in socialism. Despite its attempt to pass itself off as a scientific philosophy of nature against Hegelian idealism, the teleology of the Second International, which would eventually be reproduced by the Third, actually represented an impoverished Hegel. Paradoxically, however, the criticism of this philosophy by Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and other left-wing theorists actually

⁴⁰ Communist Party of China, “The Origin and Development of the Differences the of CPSU and Ourselves” in *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 92.

⁴¹ See Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings, Volume 1, 1946-1955: From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism*, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988)

grounded itself in a *return to Hegel*, reproducing the very teleology they sought to destroy. The ideology of the Second International was rightly attacked, but only by restoring yet another ideology. In terms of Marx's texts, this meant moving back from the economism/technologism of the 1859 "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* to the progression of classes in the *Communist Manifesto*: dialectical materialism was the worldview of the proletariat, the universal class, and it therefore represented the subject and goal of history.

Fittingly, the postwar philosophy of the bureaucracy was a sublation of this earlier dissent. Though Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* had been published in 1932, they had gone largely unnoticed until now, when they were avidly taken up by the Communist Parties. In the French Communist Party (PCF), this was represented in a dramatic extreme by the "official philosopher" Roger Garaudy. For the PCF the humanism of the young Marx was not only the truth of Marxist theory; it had practical utility as a basis for left unity, on display in the Party's support for Mitterrand's campaign in 1965.

This new humanism was everywhere, encompassing voices of dissent within and outside the Party, from Henri Lefebvre to Cornelius Castoriadis, who attempted to work out their opposition within the theoretical categories also embraced by the reformist leadership. For Althusser, this was the *theoretical* danger of the dissent that had started as "a vital reaction against the mechanicism and economism of the Second International." Despite its "real historical merits," like de-Stalinization in politics, it would channel revolutionary currents towards the right by way of philosophy, as

evidenced by the PCF's “‘rightist’ misappropriation of a historical reaction which then had the force of a protest that was revolutionary in spirit.”⁴²

So Althusser set about a reinterpretation of the entire pre-existing tradition, attempting a critique that broke with the whole ideology, both the positivist philosophy of nature and Hegelian subjectivism. The Hegelian and humanist turn *was not left enough*, “proved” by its adoption in Moscow and the Western party headquarters, since it repeated the Kautskyan and revisionist theories of history with the substitute subject of “Man.” *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* are set against this *teleology* shared both by economism and its Hegelian critique.

But in the practice of the PCF this coalitional discourse was tied to a particular analysis of the historical moment, one comparable to the theories of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), in which the socialization of production set the stage for transcendence of capitalism. This was not, however, in the form of the classic contradiction between forces and relations of production – this contradiction was neutralized in a new phase of “state monopoly capitalism” or “stamocap,” in which small fraction of wealthiest monopolists tried to undermine democratic gains of previous workers’ struggles. The main contradiction was thus between monopoly and democracy, and the goal of the Party was to defend the part of the state that remained under proletarian control from the monopolists. Hence an emphasis on parliamentary participation and forming a “union of the French people,” alongside liberals and small businesses, defending nationalized industries and public sector against the

⁴² Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 119.

monopolies. Since the main contradiction was between monopoly and democracy, and the main struggle over democratic reform, workers' antagonism against bosses at the point of production was potentially disruptive; better to find ways to collaborate, to allow further development and improvement of living standards. Here the union and party bureaucracy found a function, which it embraced with gusto.

Opposed to political and theoretical direction of party and sympathetic to Chinese critique – though not entirely openly, as this was unacceptable in the Party – Althusser's political intervention was based in an exegesis of the texts of Marx and Lenin, but sought to advance an alternative to the humanist left-wing critique of the orthodoxy. Thus the essays which constitute *For Marx*, written for Communist Party journals from 1960 to 1964, are best understood as specifically political interventions, despite the fact that they are also important scholarly works and pivotal in the reception of Marx. The core problem of these texts from the outset is that Marx never explained his philosophical method, the “rational dialectic” which he counterposed in the afterword to *Capital* to the mystical Hegelian dialectic, whose function is to “transfigure and glorify” the existing state of things.⁴³ Marx's methodological reflections are buried within polemics, obscured by shifting vocabularies.

But we cannot mistake the fact that from the outset this inquiry is framed in political terms, in the situating of Marx within a conjuncture framed by the transformation of the state and the rise of new political agencies, which the Hegelian dialectic claimed to illuminate. So Marx worked within an ideological field

⁴³ Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, 103.

established by Hegel and the Young Hegelians; this framed the *questions he could pose*, and this is where Althusser makes use of the notion of the *problematic*. At the simplest level, this term referred to “a systematically interrelated set of concepts.”⁴⁴ More fully elaborated, it indicated “the constitutive unity of the effective thoughts that make up the domain of the existing *ideological field* with which a particular author must settle accounts in his own thought.”⁴⁵

What was the object of the young Marx’s investigations? It was the unevenness of development – the backwardness of Germany next to the advanced industrial economy of England and the political revolutions of France. Hegel’s philosophical account of this had been based on the ideological field he had inherited from English political economy and the French revolutionary legacy. But the Young Marx did not address Hegel directly; as Althusser writes in “On the Young Marx”:

The Hegel who was the opponent of the Young Marx from the time of his doctoral dissertation was not the library Hegel we can meditate on in the solitude of 1960; it was *the Hegel of the neo-Hegelian movement*, a Hegel already summoned to provide German intellectuals of the 1840s with the means to think their own history and their own hopes; a Hegel already made to contradict himself, invoked against himself, in despite of himself.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 2005), 46.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁶ Althusser, *For Marx*, 65.

When taken up by the Young Hegelians, the supposedly materialist critique of Hegel was formulated within the terms of this same problematic, or ideological field – *so even Marx's initial critique of Hegel was from a Young Hegelian, or specifically, Feuerbachian viewpoint.* It could not yet be understood as a “Marxist” critique of Hegel. The standpoint from which Hegel is criticized is not the critique of political economy, since this understanding was already inherent at Hegel, and the young Marx cannot be seen as having surpassed Hegel's understanding.

Thus instead of presenting a critique of political economy, these early texts assume the critical standpoint of species-being. This is the Feuerbachian problematic, the root of the *ethical* and *humanist* element of Marx which governed the prevailing interpretations. Feuerbach claimed to make a materialist critique of Hegel by demonstrating the subject of history is not Spirit but the Essence of Man; the foundation of the Essence of Man is understood to be *materialism*. The Christian conception of God represents the alienation of the Essence of Man, his species-being, projected into the heavens and mistakenly interpreted as the primary reality. But crucially, Christianity plays a necessary role in the historical dialectic; it was only Christianity that exposed Man to the true nature of his species-being – interpreted as the love of the Father for the Son, the miracle of the virgin birth, and so on – which now he can reclaim as the true foundation.

As Althusser would later emphasize, as a *critique of Hegel* this is entirely mistaken; for Hegel, history is not the alienation of Man, but of Spirit, and the progression of Spirit towards self-knowledge represents the teleology of the process,

the fact that the End is contained in the Origin. According to Althusser, if the teleology is rejected, Hegel can be seen to produce a concept of *history as a process without a subject*. But by introducing the Essence of Man as a foundation, Feuerbach cannot grasp this potential innovation; his supposed materialism is a regression behind Hegel.⁴⁷

What is at stake in these theories of history? Quite simply the impossibility of grasping this problem of *unevenness*, of uneven development, within a teleology in which every historical moment expresses the unfolding of an originary contradiction towards its own realization. With Hegel, the historical process became the object of investigation; but substituting his mysticism with naturalism did not provide a new theory of the process. It is inadequate to take structure of Hegelian dialectic and apply it to the material world instead of the idea, a gesture which would not even qualify as dialectical. If the Hegelian idealism resides in form of its dialectic, the Marxist dialectic must change this form.

The *consequences* of such a view are directly political. One is left unable to understand a repetition of this historical *unevenness* – the fact that the Germany of the early 20th century, now advanced rather than backwards, is not the site of revolution, but rather of opportunism and betrayal, while revolution rears its head in backwards Russia. Without the benefit of Marx's late letters on Russia, which criticizes the "supra-historical theory" that would ignore the contingency of concrete conjunctures, in "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (1962), Althusser nevertheless produced a

⁴⁷ See Althusser, "Marx's Relation to Hegel" in *Politics and History*.

critique of the Marxist philosophy of history as a theory inadequate for grasping the real political process of the 20th century.

German social democracy believed that history progresses by its “good side.” They saw the most advanced level of economic growth paralleling the growth of their party in parliament, and so assumed that the simple contradiction between forces and relations of production, expressed as contradiction between capital and labor, would be active in its pure state. But they missed that the “powerful state machine” was not developed democratically by the bourgeoisie; they did not take note of the role of imperialism and nationalism in inhibiting development of revolutionary contradictions.⁴⁸

Russia, on the other hand, represented the “bad side” of history, the weakest link in imperialist chain, and thus represented the “unevenness of capitalist development.”⁴⁹ There was in Russia an “accumulation of ‘contradictions’”: peasant discontent; major cities juxtaposed with mining regions and oilfields; large factories, among the largest in world, next to an undeveloped agrarian countryside; conflict within the ruling class between feudal proprietors, the lesser nobility, the industrial bourgeoisie, and the new professional class; exile of revolutionaries to Western Europe, where they came into contact with Marxism; and the development of the soviets in 1905 revolution.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Althusser, *For Marx*, 98.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100.

It had accumulated the largest sum of historical contradictions then possible; for it was the same time *the most backward and the most advanced nation*, a gigantic contradiction which its divided ruling classes could neither avoid nor solve. In other words Russia was overdue with its bourgeois revolution on the eve of its proletarian revolution; pregnant with two revolutions, it could not withhold the second even by delaying the first. This exceptional situation was ‘insoluble’ (for the ruling classes) and Lenin was correct to see in it the *objective conditions* of a Russian revolution, and to forge its *subjective conditions*, the means of a decisive assault on this weak link in the imperialist chain, in a Communist Party which was a chain without weak links.⁵¹

We can see here why the critique of Hegel was a priority for Marx, and why Althusser emphasizes its importance. The problem was not simply that Hegel’s “good” dialectical structure had been applied to the wrong object (ideas), but that the dialectical structure was a teleology of the essential contradiction:

This reduction itself (Hegel derived the idea from Montesquieu), the reduction of *all* the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch (economic, social, political and legal institutions, customs, ethics, art, religion, philosophy, and even historical *events*: wars, battles, defeats, and so on) to *one* principle of internal unity, is itself only possible on the *absolute condition* of

⁵¹ Ibid., 97-8.

taking the whole concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation (*Entäusserung-Entfremdung*) of an *internal spiritual principle*, which can *never definitely be anything but the most abstract form of that epoch's consciousness of itself: its religious or philosophical consciousness, that is, its own ideology.*⁵²

In other words, the contingent is erected into the necessary, present from the beginning in the form of the essential contradiction: the subject of the process of history. But since the process itself is the subject, Hegel provides the basis for a theory of the teleology; replacing this contradiction with a substance, like Feuerbach, is a step backwards. In Hegel, the contradiction was the historical process itself (sensuous knowledge and its knowledge, through objectification-alienation). Simply replacing the contradiction with “relations” or “forces” of production is either economism or technologism, condemned by Marx; replacing with “man” or “species-being” is humanism; all of these are ideologies.⁵³ Changing terms of this simple contradiction, as Feuerbach did, with alienation of species-being simply preserves this structure; in fact, in a way it is worse, since for Hegel philosophy of history traces the development of its own possibility, a knowledge of conditions of knowledge; when a substitute object like the essence of Man is inserted as center of the process this self-referential character is lost.

⁵² Ibid., 103.

⁵³ Ibid., 109.

This is the means of the persistence of the mystified form of dialectic, even if its content is economic and the worldview is socialist: mystical attributes of Hegel's dialectic are "not just miraculously confined to Hegel's 'world outlook', to his 'system', but are reflected in the structure, in the very structures of his dialectic, particularly in the 'contradiction' whose task is the magical movement of the concrete contents of a historical epoch towards their ideological Goal."⁵⁴

It was with such comments Althusser criticized the theoretical shortcomings of the PCF and the organized communist parties. Their reproduction of the mystical dialectic had led them to reproduce the errors of German social democracy, to fail to grasp the reality of their conjuncture. Thus Althusser's interpretation of Marx is guided towards arguing against a linear history that is an expression of an essential contradiction: he points to the "unevenness of capitalist development" and the absent cause (the accumulation of contradictions at different relatively autonomous levels of the social formation), with the example of Russia and the Leninist development of the subjective conditions of revolution (which are not guaranteed by a unitary historical teleology). Russia is an exception to the rule, but that is because there are only exceptional situations, there will be no historical moment in which the essential contradiction simply stands alone, what in a revolutionary situation appears as contradiction between forces and relations is itself constituted by the accumulation of contradictions. This is the meaning of the famous passage of the essay, too often

⁵⁴ Ibid., 104.

quoted in isolation as if it were a simple methodological point about the relation of base and superstructure:

the economic dialectic is never active in the pure state; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc. – are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the “last instance” never comes.⁵⁵

We learn this if we are attentive to the necessity of the contingency of Marx’s beginnings; everyone has to be born somewhere, Althusser observes, and begin with an inherited problematic. Marx developed a lesson learnt from Hegel: “the feeling for and practice in *abstraction* that is indispensable to the constitution of any scientific theory, the feeling for and practice in *theoretical synthesis* and *the logic of a process* for which the Hegelian dialectic gave him a ‘pure,’ abstract model.”⁵⁶ But the constitution of a scientific theory is not a spontaneous development; Marx’s uniqueness was to return to Hegel’s source materials, to the study of English political economy and French socialism in order to begin to reconstruct the historical field of Hegel’s theory. This was the source of the famous epistemological break: “Marx’s position and his whole critique of ideology implies... that science (which apprehends

⁵⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

reality) constitutes *in its very meaning* a *rupture* with ideology and that it sets itself up in *another terrain*, that it constitutes itself *on the basis of new questions*, that it raises *other questions* about reality than ideology, or what comes to the same thing, it *defines its object* differently from ideology.”⁵⁷

This concept, borrowed from the history of the sciences as developed by Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, has as its basis the premise that scientific knowledge cannot simply reflect the real, or unmask the essence that is already inherent in the real object; instead it is a theoretical practice that makes a rupture with ideology by producing a new scientific object, a thought object that has a new relationship to the real object. For Althusser, Marx’s scientific object was history of social formations, and the transition between modes of production that could explain this history.

To grasp this new object a break with the humanist problematic was fundamental – quite specifically, the break with theoretical humanism as a philosophy of history. But Marx’s theoretical anti-humanism, developed into a theory of *ideology*, served as the basis of a conjunctural theoretical intervention against the humanist ideology of the PCF. The concept of “Man” is recast as an *effect*, an imaginary way individuals relate to the social structure – not an illusion, but also not scientific knowledge. And it was the latter which was required in the complex political conjuncture faced by the communist movement.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 78n40.

Of course, it was just as necessary to break with the productive-forces determinism that formed a couplet with humanism. But as before, Marxist humanists had made the error of imagining that humanism could be the basis of a left-wing critique of this determinism. Thus Erich Fromm wrote in his *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961):

While the Soviet Communists, as well as the reformist socialists, believed they were the enemies of capitalism, they conceived of communism – or socialism – in the spirit of capitalism. For them, socialism is not a society humanly different from capitalism, but rather, a form of capitalism in which the working class has achieved a higher status... The state as a capitalist, as in the Soviet Union, would not have been any more welcome to Marx than the private capitalist. He is not concerned primarily with the equalization of income. He is concerned with the liberation of man from a kind of work which destroys his individuality, which transforms him into a thing, and which makes him into the slave of things.⁵⁸

In “Marxism and Humanism,” commissioned and rejected by Fromm for a symposium on socialist humanism, Althusser attempted to understand this contradictory use of humanism – by both left and right – in terms of the category of ideology. He insisted not only that ideology “is profoundly *unconscious*,” and thus

⁵⁸ Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4.

not a matter of *consciousness*, but also that it is a permanent feature of all societies, including post-revolutionary societies, in which ideology is the field in which individuals live their relation to the world and respond to the demands of their conditions of existence. So in the themes of the ideology of humanism – “free development of the individual, respect for socialist legality, dignity of the person” – the socialists of the USSR were *living* their relation to “problems of the forms of economic, political and cultural *organization*... problems that, far from calling for a ‘philosophy of man,’ involve the preparation of new forms of *organization* for economic, political and ideological life.”⁵⁹

The Aesopian rhetoric of essay indicates that Althusser, in the tradition of Spinoza, had decided to exercise caution. He bridged these various perspectives and bracketed the question of whether the Soviet Union was really passing into a period of complete emancipation (communism); he left open the possibility that it was regressing into capitalism, as the Chinese had argued, but also that it had superseded the “inhuman” aspects of its development. What he foregrounded was the question of what humanism *does* – it is a way of representing ideologically the unsolved problem of creating a society that encourages the free development of the individual. This is not something to moralistically condemn as illusory; it is an ideological moment that is inescapable. But it is an inadequate basis for resolving the actual theoretical problems, which are problems of social organization.

⁵⁹ Althusser, *For Marx*, 239.

Now, these themes return us to the concerns of “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” which ended with a provisional analysis of Soviet state socialism: the problem of communist revolution in which the state did not wither away. Two residual idealist modes of thought had prevented Marxists from understanding this. First, the Hegelian logic of supersession, in which the past is interior to our consciousness of the present, since all events are part of organic evolution of simple contradiction, without exteriority to each other. This mystifying logic was at work in the claim of the USSR to have superseded Stalin the period, moving towards final historical goal guaranteed by development and Marxist humanism. Second, economism, the inversion of Hegel’s understanding of the state as essence of civil society – which would mean simply describing the state as determined by the economic in a linear fashion. If this were the case, the excesses of the Soviet state would be overcome by the completion of its economic development. However, for a materialist understanding, the state could not be understood merely as an expression of given level of technological development, but a relatively autonomous level.

Thus the teleological structure of the historical process, whether its subject was Man or the productive forces, had to be rejected not only as an analytic perspective but also a theory of socialist construction, equated in the orthodoxy with capitalist development. The character of actually existing socialism could only be understood if one frankly acknowledged the possibility that *survivals* of the capitalist state had persisted into the socialist transition. In the USSR the importance of a

revolution against the state apparatus had been buried underneath the teleology of technological development and seizure of state power. Althusser summarized two points that could be recognized by breaking with the unlinear and progressivist ideology of the orthodoxy:

(1) that a revolution in the structure does not ipso facto modify the existing superstructures and particularly the ideologies at one blow (as it would if the economic was the sole determinant factor), for they have sufficient of their own consistency to survive beyond their immediate life context, even to recreate, to “secrete” substitute conditions of existence temporarily; (2) that the new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation of older elements through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) “circumstances.”⁶⁰

No psychological understanding could illuminate the persistence of survivals through the various levels of institutions and practices which composed the social formation. Yet Althusser had left out of his critical consideration the very organizational form of the party, referred to earlier in “Contradiction and Overdetermination” as the “chain without weak links”; and there is no other elaboration of the question until the political crisis of the communist parties, years later, places the question decisively on the table.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 115- 116.

A New Kind of Scientific Interpretation

Mario Tronti wrote in his famous editorial for the first issue of the journal *Classe Operaia*, “Lenin in England”:

Theoretical research and practical political work have to be dragged – violently if need be – into focusing on this question: not the development of capitalism, but the development of the revolution. We have no models. The history of past experiences serves only to free us of those experiences. We must entrust ourselves to a new kind of scientific interpretation.⁶¹

A revolution without models: just as Tronti argued for the centrality of working-class insurgency, he also pointed to an equally fundamental organizational void. “Lenin in England” figured the possibility of overcoming the void: the theorist of the party, transplanted from backwards Russia, where he had proposed the possibility of breaking the weakest link in the imperialist chain with organized working-class insurrection, to England, Marx’s classic ground for the analysis of capitalist development, where the Industrial Revolution told the tale for the rest of Europe. This figure, Lenin in England, came to represent the organizational problem which would be decisive for *operaismo*, or “workerism.” Workerism began as the merging

⁶¹ Mario Tronti, “Lenin in England,” accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>.

of dissident factions from both the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, and its members practiced entryism for years, some figures longer than others.

Significantly, those involved in did not adhere to any of the familiar positions of European communism – Trotskyism, Maoism, etc.

We will return to Tronti's editorial, after tracing its prehistory. The guiding philosophical influence of this perspective was Galvano Della Volpe. "He spoke in difficult language," Tronti would later recall, "and his writing was even harder to understand. But Della Volpe took apart, piece by piece, the cultural line of the Italian Communists, paying no heed to orthodox allegiances."⁶² From France, Althusser lauded Della Volpe for putting at the center of his interpretation of Marx "an irreconcilable theoretical distinction between Marx and Hegel and a definition of the specificity of Marxist philosophy" – despite, at certain moments, detecting lingering historicist traces in the Italian's work.

Workerism radicalized Della Volpe's approach by centering the class antagonism as an epistemological principle. Its early break with the PCI orthodoxy, and its embedding of theory in the class struggles of the period, drew on Della Volpe's anti-Hegelianism. A scientific knowledge of the logic of capitalist society – as the specificity of this historical stage, rather than a moment of universal existential experience – was located in the viewpoint of the agent which would render this stage temporary, the practical refutation of the ideology of capitalism as natural and eternal. Any theory which was restricted to the level of capital would be

⁶² Mario Tronti, "Our Operaismo," trans. Eleanor Chiari, *New Left Review* 73 (January–February 2012): 121.

therefore incomplete. Bourgeois ideology is incapable of science of capitalist society since it assumes capitalism is natural and eternal, and workerism added that the only way to understand the historicity of capitalism is by taking up the working-class viewpoint.

The tendency originates with the journal *Quaderni Rossi* and the practice of “workers’ inquiry” – a kind of continuation of Marx’s practice, on full display in the first volume of *Capital*, of studying the labor process in close connection with the broader categories of political economy.⁶³ This theme was developed by Romano Alquati, in his intervention in the debate over sociology that framed *Quaderni Rossi*. The use of industrial sociology by the bosses had yielded new forms of labor management and discipline, but it had also generated invaluable information about the labor process. While a critical Marxist appropriation of sociology was on the agenda, its relation to the development of the working-class viewpoint was not entirely clear. Some in *Quaderni Rossi* – the “sociologist” faction surrounding Vittorio Rieser – believed that this new science, though associated with bourgeois academics, could be used as a basis for the renewal of the institutions of the workers’ movement. Others, including Alquati, who was trained as a sociologist, felt sociology could only be, at best, an initial step towards a specifically militant collaboration between researchers and workers, a new form of knowledge which would be characterized as “coresearch.” Alquati was guided by this framework of “coresearch,”

⁶³ See Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, “Workers’ Inquiry: A Genealogy,” *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013), <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/>. I have incorporated much of the argument of this earlier text into what follows.

a collaborative factory ethnography involving intellectuals and workers which he would conduct primarily at the FIAT and Olivetti factories.

Alquati's "workers' inquiries" would prove to be fundamental in the development of workerism's economic analysis, as early as his "Report on the 'New Forces,'" a study of FIAT published in the first issue of *Quaderni Rossi* in 1961.⁶⁴ The "new forces" at FIAT were the younger generation, brought in to work the recently installed machinery that had deskilled more experienced professional workers. Management imposed hierarchies within the workforce – a division of labor separating technicians and skilled workers from the majority, along with divisive pay scales. But this process of rationalization was contradictory, and it gave rise to forms of "invisible organization" resulting from the fact that management was constrained to give workers responsibility while at the same time trying to repress their control – a contradiction in the rationality of management that had earlier been described by Cornelius Castoriadis as the division between "directors" and "executants." The workers were unconvinced by the reformism of the official workers' movement, and instead expressed interest in workers' management, in an end to the alienating process of work.

But the struggles Alquati observed within the factory over management and control evolved into not only a question of the rationality of the labor process, but

⁶⁴ See the excellent account of Alquati's development in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 46-58; the texts themselves are collected in Romano Alquati, *Sulla Fiat e altri scritti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975): "Relazione sulle 'forze nuove.' Convegno del PSI sulla FIAT, gennaio 1961"; "Documenti sulla lotta di classe alla FIAT"; "Tradizione e rinnovamento alla FIAT-Ferriere."

also a question of political power outside the factory. Affirming “the necessity of starting a discussion and a common research for a common labor,” and observing that the workers were already in the process of formulating this, Alquati proposed:

It is necessary to intervene and coordinate their forces with a real democratic management, integrating it into the political line as struggle against an exploitation which delegates responsibility and technical authority, but centralizes political power, decision-making, in the hands of a technically parasitical class. Especially since, through the enormous control that it imposes, the control that FIAT exercises not only over production, the market, the state, and Italian society, but also outside increasingly mystificatory national borders, this political power internal to the factory becomes the power of orienting according to the interests of the parasitical class the international life of the laboring classes.⁶⁵

Thus the factory struggle had a general and even international political meaning. But so did the very act of researching the subjectivities of the workers engaged in factory struggles:

But also applicable to this research, for the elaboration of instruments and the formulation of hypotheses, is the discourse of the political line, of

⁶⁵ Alquati, *Sulla Fiat*, 50.

organization. Even the procedure of surveys is a moment of the politico-organizational action that must develop in the demands of the base of laborers. Thus it cannot only be a survey of situations from outside, but must be simultaneously a coresearch. And this also is a hypothesis, but today it is based on the data that the new employees of FIAT have provided, with their spontaneous response to neo-capitalism. In fact here coresearch recurs not as a culturalistic fact, of a Marxian consciousness: but as a political fact spontaneously affirmed by the same executants in the organized forces of the groups of young workers and employees of FIAT with whom we have had contact. Coresearch comes from the structural dialectic as a response to the politico-organizational problems that technological progress poses to the working class and to the socialist revolutionary political militant.⁶⁶

What is striking in this passage is the rejection of consciousness as an object of research; the object instead is the survey as a tool for understanding the *political* forms of organization that workers establish. Furthermore, the very form of knowledge represented by coresearch is an intervention into those organizational dynamics it seeks to grasp. The content of Marxian theory is not derived from the worldview of a class or the historical totality; it is put forth in concrete struggles.

Alongside Alquati's text in the inaugural issue of *Quaderni Rossi*, Ranziero Panzieri, the founder of the review, published a highly influential article called "The

⁶⁶ Ibid., 51.

Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Against the Objectivists.” Panzieri wrote initially as a member of the Italian Socialist Party, arguing within it for the importance of workers’ control. He was ultimately expelled from the party for his opposition to forming coalitions with Christian Democracy. But his decisive contribution came with the formation of *Quaderni Rossi* and his arguments against the teleological underpinning of the Italian road to socialism. Written after Alquati’s “Report,” “The Capitalist Use of Machinery” reflected on the themes raised by Alquati, referring throughout to the workers “studied in the present issue of *Quaderni Rossi*,” while pushing towards a new framework for the analysis of the capitalist mode of production. Panzieri wrote, “the worker, as owner and seller of his labour-power, enters into relation with capital only as an individual.” Through “cooperation, the mutual relationship between workers,” which begins with the labor process, the workers are incorporated into capital.⁶⁷

For Panzieri, the means by which this incorporation took place was *machinery*, in the passage from manufacture to the developed level of large-scale industry. Citing Marx’s remark that in the capitalist factory, “the automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs,” Panzieri’s target was the labor bureaucracy’s enthusiasm for technological development.⁶⁸ According to this orthodox position, technological development represented a transhistorical force, determining the progressive movement through modes of production. To drive down

⁶⁷ Raniero Panzieri, “The Capitalist Use of Machinery,” trans. Quintin Hoare, in *Outlines of a Critique of Technology* (London: Ink Links, 1980), 44.

⁶⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 544.

the Italian road to socialism, the Italian worker would have to submit to the automatons in the automobile factories.

According to Panzieri, “Marx foresaw an increase not just of the nominal but also of the real wage”: “the more the growth of capital is rapid, the more the material situation of the working-class improves. And the more the wage is linked to the growth of capital, the more direct becomes labour’s dependence upon capital.”⁶⁹ For this reason, Panzieri considered wage struggles a function of the unions’ bureaucratic incorporation of labor into capital; only by directly attacking capital’s control and replacing it with workers’ control could technological rationality be subjected to “the socialist use of machines.” For Panzieri, *Quaderni Rossi*’s inquiries showed that the workers were already coming to this view. However, he still warned against drawing any directly political conclusions: “The ‘new’ working-class demands which characterize trade-union struggles (studied in the present issue of *Quaderni Rossi*) do not directly furnish a revolutionary political content, nor do they imply an automatic development in that direction.”⁷⁰

Since the further development of the orthodox position was that collaboration between the unions, the state, and the employers, represented the displacement of competition towards planning, and therefore a step towards socialism, Panzieri also made the argument that *planning* represented the necessary social extension of capital’s despotism in the factory. “The basic factor in this process is the continual growth of constant capital with respect to variable capital”; as machines grew more

⁶⁹ Panzieri, “Machinery,” 59.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 65.

numerous than workers, capital had to exercise an “absolute control,” imposing its rationality of production upon workers, and through the growth of monopolies extending its plan “from the factory to the market, to the external social sphere.”⁷¹

When Alquati’s own investigations turned from FIAT to Olivetti – from a factory that made cars to one that made calculators and typewriters – he was able to draw on and build upon Panzieri’s analysis of technology. In the title “Organic Composition of Capital and Labor-Power at Olivetti,” Alquati definitively brought the discourse of workers’ inquiry back into the language of Marxist economic analysis, and implicitly suggested a new concept: class composition.

While the seeds of class composition can be already observed in the “Report on the ‘New Forces,’” insofar as Alquati attempted to describe the material existence of the working class, its behaviors and forms of interactions and organization, the earlier inquiry had treated machinery primarily as a means by which directors reduced workers to executants. Deskilling was a way to break the will of the executants, and new machinery an instrument in this process. But the inquiry at Olivetti elaborated on the theme mentioned above, of “the politico-organizational problems that technological progress poses to the working class.” The increasing organic composition of capital was seen from the working-class viewpoint as the recomposition of labor-power, that is, the transformation of the very forms of worker cooperation. Technology, in this sense, represented the field in which the social relations of class were embedded, but not as a flat and homogeneous rationality.

⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

Rather, technological development part of a dynamic process in which the conflict between the extraction of surplus value and workers' insubordination shaped the process of production. Directors were not mere parasites; while it was true that executives informally organized their concrete labor, the function of management was to plan and coordinate this labor within the valorization process. Workers' struggles would have to articulate forms of political organization that responded to this technological recomposition. From a political level this meant that self-management was not sufficient as the content of socialism, as Panzieri had thought – except as the workers' self-management of the struggle against the capital relation.

While the new nature of capitalist management had encouraged other critics of Fordism to conclude that a new “irrational rationality” of bureaucracy had displaced the Marxian analysis of value and accumulation, Alquati decisively argued that the organization of the labor process had to be understood in terms of its subordination to the valorization process.⁷² This meant advancing a theory of organization closely tied to the category of “organic composition,” Marx's account of the effect of technological innovation on the “value composition” of capital, to show that technological innovation, which capital is constantly attempting to pursue, actually changes the concrete character of the working class.⁷³

⁷² The most significant example is Cornelius Castoriadis, “Modern Capitalism and Revolution” in *Political and Social Writings, Volume 2, 1955-1960: From the Workers' Struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism*, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 213.

⁷³ The very concept of organic composition poses certain theoretical problems. The value composition of capital describes the proportion of value added by constant capital (machinery and raw materials) to variable capital (labor-power, which generates more value in the

The term “class composition,” in these workers' inquiries, described the technical organization of the labor process, and the way it was transformed by new technologies; but it also tried to unearth the new forms of political organization that responded to the reorganization of the production process. This would come to be characterized as the relationship between a “technical” and a “political” composition of the working class. Technical composition would describe how workers were inserted into specific and dynamic relationships with each other and with their machinery, subject to variation based on skill, the plan of the factory, the degree of automation, etc. Political composition, on the other hand, would describe how these conditions were overturned into the self-organization of the working class, into an organized antagonism towards capital. From this perspective the everyday practices of “self-management” – for example, the organization of workers into “informal work groups” which organized production independent from management’s plan – were significant not as a form of nascent socialism, but as the refusal to allow capital to reorganize the production process for purposes of greater valorization.⁷⁴ The “refusal of work,” whether it consisted of spontaneous absenteeism or a wildcat strike, was the refusal of the working class to allow the use value of its labor-power

production process). Organic composition implies a consistently rising value composition. However, at a certain mathematical level it is problematic to assume this steady rise. Technological innovation can reduce the cost of living and therefore the value of labor-power, making constant capital cheaper and rendering Marxian theories of a “falling rate of profit” based on rising organic composition more or less untenable. However, this has little to do with Alquati’s argument, which is really simply based on the category of relative surplus value, which assumes technological development. See Michael Heinrich, “Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx’s Studies in the 1870s,” *Monthly Review* 64:11 (April 2013).

⁷⁴ Compare to Cornelius Castoriadis, “On the Content of Socialism, 3” in *Political and Social Writings* 2.

– that is, the capacity to add greater value – to be employed. The decisive question would turn out to be the relationship between technical and political composition – was the latter simply the expression of the former, or did it have an independent history?

If these inquiries resulted in the beginnings of a new scientific problematic, and an enthusiastic embrace of new forces, then inquiry turned out to be more politically divisive than the participants had realized. After the riots of Piazza Statuto in 1962, when workers attacked the offices of the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) in Turin, *Quaderni Rossi* would be torn apart by internal disagreements. While Tronti, Alquati, Antonio Negri, and others believed that this represented a new phase of the class struggle, an opportunity to break with the increasingly untenable strategy of collaboration with the unions, Panzieri saw it as a political impasse. Unconvinced that autonomous workers' struggles could advance a lasting organizational form – even if the form of the unions had been exhausted – Panzieri thought that a renewed emphasis on inquiry and sociological research would be required before any movement could emerge.

This political difference was, significantly, also a theoretical one. At an editorial meeting at the end of 1963, Panzieri remarked that an essay of Tronti's was

for me a fascinating resume of a whole series of errors that the workers' Left can commit in this moment. It is fascinating because it is very Hegelian, in the original sense, as a new way of re-living a philosophy of history. It is

precisely a philosophy of history of the working class. One speaks, for example, of the party, but in that context the concept of the party cannot be deduced or forced in; one can only deduce the self-organisation of the class at the level of neo-capitalism.⁷⁵

In January of the following year, this essay, “Lenin in England,” would launch the new journal *Classe Operaia*, formed by Tronti’s faction. His controversial essay would famously announce, in the lines which have now become the inescapable catchphrase of workerism: “We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class.”⁷⁶

In the fall of that year, the last of his life, Panzieri spoke at a Turin seminar called “Socialist Uses of Workers’ Inquiry,” alongside the “sociologist” faction that had remained with *Quaderni Rossi*. Here he argued for “the use of sociological tools for the political aims of the working class,” and in doing so presented a kind of counterpoint to “Lenin in England.” In his intervention, published the following year in *Quaderni Rossi*, Panzieri defended the anti-historicist character of inquiry, claiming that Marx’s *Capital* itself had the features of a sociological analysis:

⁷⁵ Quoted in Robert Lumley, “Review Article: Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis,” *Capital and Class* 12 (Winter 1980): 129; also discussed in Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 58-62.

⁷⁶ Mario Tronti, “Lenin in England.”

In Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and other early writings the point of comparison is alienated being ("the worker suffers in his very existence, the capitalist in the profit on his dead mammon") and the critique of political economy is linked to a historical and philosophical conception of humanity and history. However, Marx's *Capital* abandons this metaphysical and philosophical outlook and the later critique is leveled exclusively at a specific situation that is capitalism, without claiming to be a universal anti-critique of the one-sidedness of bourgeois political economy.

Workers' inquiry as a scientific practice had to be elaborated on this basis – by advancing its own one-sidedness in response. For Panzieri, Marxist sociology "refuses to identify the working class with the movement of capital and claims that it is impossible to automatically trace a study of the working class back to the movement of capital."⁷⁷

As Panzieri put it, "the method of inquiry is a permanent point of reference for our politics," and thus welcomed a critical appropriation of sociology:

This does not make sociology a bourgeois science at all: in fact we can use sociology and criticise it for its limitations, as Marx did with classical political economy. The kind of inquiry we are planning to carry out already features qualities that lie outside of the framework of contemporary sociology. The

⁷⁷ Raniero Panzieri, "Socialist Uses of Workers' Inquiry," trans. Arianna Bove, *eicp* (2006), <http://eicp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en>.

findings of sociology are by and large correct, that is to say they are not false but limited, and this limitation creates internal distortions. Yet sociology still retains what Marx defined as the character of a science, that is an autonomy based on consistent, scientific and logical rigour.

In other words, sociology, as wielded by the bourgeoisie, is not false, only limited. It must be criticized, but it can still be appropriated – just as Marx criticized political economy, but still appropriated its language. A properly “socialist sociological practice,” he continued, “demands a rethinking of sociological tools in the light of the hypothesis underlying this basic assumption: given that conflicts are functional to the system that is advanced by them, they can be turned into antagonisms and no longer be functional to the system.” This translated into a specific type of inquiry: “inquiry needs to be carried out in the heat of the moment and on the spot, it must investigate a situation of great transformation and conflict, and investigate the relationship between conflict and antagonism within it.”⁷⁸

The underlying framework behind this kind of inquiry is grounded on a basic assumption:

an antagonistic society can never reduce one of its basic constituent elements - the working class - to homogeneity. Therefore it is necessary to study the extent to which it is possible to concretely grasp the dynamics behind the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

working class tendency to move from conflict to antagonism and to make the dichotomy typical of capitalist society unstable.⁷⁹

But what was the meaning of this one-sidedness? Panzieri had indicated his distaste for Tronti's grandiose inversion, and this was indeed a pertinent criticism, presaging the increasing distance of workerist theory from the concrete practice of inquiry over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. However, Panzieri was unable to propose a new political approach; while he had tied the practice of inquiry to a Marxist economic analysis, he was unable to bring this theory to bear on the real political activity that was beginning to emerge, and which would characterize over a decade of class struggle to follow. Recently Tronti has reflected on this split:

Panzieri accused me of "Hegelianism," of "philosophy of history." This reading, and the accusation that underlies it, will often return; after all, Hegelianism was a real factor, it was effectively there, always had been; while this idea of a "philosophy of history" absolutely did not... Ours was not a theory that imposed itself from outside on real data, but the opposite: that is, the attempt to recover those real data, giving them meaning within a theoretical horizon.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Tronti, *Noi operaisti*, quoted in Adelino Zanini, "On the Philosophical Foundations of Italian Workerism," *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 60.

Indeed, workerism would, for its entire history, be tortured by the tension between “philosophy of history” and “real data.” But these are the risks taken by those whose eyes are on the “theoretical horizon.” It is important to note that Alquati, who did not share Panzieri’s views on the incompatibility of research and insurrection, split from *Quaderni Rossi* and joined *Classe Operaia*. His conception of inquiry was a militant and political one.

For this reason Tronti’s theoretical synthesis, in his 1965 essay “Marx, Labor-Power, Working Class,” has to be reexplored. This essay makes up the bulk of his *Workers and Capital*, with only a couple concluding sections translated into English. Unlike the rest of the book, which consists of articles written for *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*, this hitherto unpublished essay is a long and continuous argument, developed on the basis of Tronti’s historical analysis and his reading of Marx.

Throughout *Workers and Capital* the primacy of workers’ struggle is described as a *strategic reversal* which attempts to identify and advance the political character of Marx’s theoretical development, with the experience of 1848 and the political writings preceding the scientific economic analysis. In a sense, this represented a new object of inquiry. No longer was the goal to discover proletarian attitudes or consciousness but to access a specifically *political logic* which emerged from the *working-class viewpoint* – a consequence of the difficult relation between strategy and science represented by Marx’s theoretical practice.

The guiding principle of the “refusal of work” meant returning to Marx’s own critique of the ideology of the workers’ movement: “When Marx refused the idea of labor as the source of wealth and took up a concept of labor as the measure of value, socialist ideology was beaten for good, and working-class science was born. It’s no accident that this is still the choice.”⁸¹

Marx had tirelessly repeated that “labor is presupposed by capital and *at the same time* presupposes it in its turn” – in other words, the owner of capital presupposes labor-power, while labor-power presupposes the conditions of labor. On its own, Tronti wrote, “labor creates nothing, neither value nor capital, and consequently it cannot demand from anyone the restitution of the full fruit of what ‘it has created.’”⁸² But since socialist ideology had extended to new theories of labor and class, it would be necessary to “clear the field of every technological illusion” which tried to “reduce the productive process to the labor process, to a relation of the laborer to the instrument as such of his labor, as though it were an eternal relation of man with an evil gift of nature.” Just as treacherous was “the trap of the processes of reification,” which started with the “ideological lament” of machinery’s mortification of the worker and quickly moved to propose “the mystical cure for the class consciousness of this worker, as if it were the search for the lost soul of modern man.”⁸³

⁸¹ Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), 222.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 203.

Instead, recognizing that the “working class is the point of *historical* departure for the birth and growth of capitalism,” Marx’s path was to “start from capital to arrive at *logically* understanding the working class.”⁸⁴ Consequently, it was necessary to affirm that the capitalist viewpoint could attain the status of science. In fact, capitalist science would be superior to socialist ideologies, which were still trapped in the view that “only the working class, in particular in the persona of its representative officials, is the repository of real science (of real history etc.), and that this is the science of everything, the general social science also valid for capital.” It would be better to recognize that “in the reorganization of the productive process of a large factory, there is at least as much scientific knowledge as in the Smithian discovery of productive labor that is exchanged for capital.”⁸⁵ To want to *know more* about capitalist society from the working-class viewpoint “than the capitalists themselves” was a “pious illusion,” and “every form of workers’ management of capital proves to be necessarily imperfect with relation to a directly capitalist management.” The workers’ path was not a perfected management, but destruction of capitalism by revolution. “So from the viewpoint of the capitalists,” Tronti argued, “it is completely correct to *study* the working class; only they are capable of studying it correctly. But the ideological smog of industrial sociology will not succeed in cancelling the death sentence that it represents for them.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid., 230.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 230.

In this regard research from the working-class viewpoint would be distinct from capitalist sociology, since its findings would be oriented towards the *organization* of this destruction. This indicates the question of “political composition”; as Tronti wrote, “the theoretical research we have conducted on the concepts of labor, labor-power, working class, becomes nothing more than an exercise on the path to the practical discovery of a conquest of organization.”⁸⁷ This specific line of research, which emerges from workers’ inquiry and, in the history of workerism, sometimes strays quite far from it, requires a separate investigation. For the time being, we will dwell on the concepts of labor, labor-power, and working class, insofar as they complement and systematize the findings of workers’ inquiry and the category of class composition.

Before even asking what it means to say that the working class *drives* capitalist development, we have to ask what it means to say *class*, and indeed this is the absolutely central question of Tronti’s theoretical elaboration. For Tronti the theory of class cannot be restricted to the point of production, and does not even necessarily begin there. Its exposition begins with Marx’s point in volume 2 of *Capital* (which had been translated into Italian by Panzieri): “The class relation between capitalist and wage-labourer is thus already present, already presupposed, the moment that the two confront each other in the act M-L (L-M from the side of the worker).”⁸⁸ Indeed, Tronti will affirm that “for Marx it is beyond doubt that the class-

⁸⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁸⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 2*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1978), 115; Tronti quotes this passage in *Operai e capitale*, 144-5.

relation already exists in-itself [*an sich*] in the act of circulation. It is precisely this which reveals, which brings out, the capitalist relation during the production-process.”⁸⁹

His analysis pursues the lines of Marx which follow:

Money can be spent in this form only because labour-power is found in a state of separation from its means of production (including the means of subsistence as means of production of labour-power itself); and because this separation is abolished only through the sale of labour-power to the owner of the means of production, a sale which signifies that the buyer is now in control of the continuous flow of labour-power, a flow which by no means has to stop when the amount of labor necessary to reproduce the price of labour-power has been performed. The capital relation arises only in the production process because it exists implicitly in the act of circulation, in the basically different economic conditions in which buyer and seller confront one another, in their class relation.⁹⁰

In an adventurous reconquering of Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts*, against their humanist appropriation, Tronti argued that Marx’s early writings on alienation represented an initial and incomplete theory of abstract labor, arising from

⁸⁹ Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 149.

⁹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Volume 2, 115; second sentence quoted by Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 148-9.

the *separation* characteristic of private property.⁹¹ But this account would only be truly developed in *Capital*.

A theory of class relations specific to capitalist society, then, cannot neglect to explain *how the ability to work can possibly be part of a system of exchange*: how labor-power can be exchanged for a wage, inserted into a system of circulation in which commodities are rendered equivalent according to their values. But this question can only be answered within the context of a *historical* analysis which opens onto the definition of class. Abstract labor is constituted in exchange, but the typical exchange of capitalism is money/labor-power; so how does this constitutive class relation arise, in which owners of money and owners of labor-power confront each other on the market, and what is its relation to the process of capitalist development?

For Tronti, starting from the forms of generalized exchangeability characteristic of capitalism, reducing the development of capitalist class relations to the bourgeois revolution was impossible. For a system in which the typical, defining exchange was money/labor-power, the starting premise had to be *the constitution of a class with nothing to sell but labor-power*, the free laborer constrained economically but not legally to sell labor-power in exchange for a wage. This, for Tronti, was the constitution of the *proletariat*: “the properly historical passage *from labor to labor-power*, that is from labor as slavery and service to labor-power as the sole commodity able to submit wealth to value, able to valorize wealth and thereby produce capital.”⁹²

⁹¹ This argument is presented throughout the introduction to the essay, pages 123-43, with attention to a range of Marx’s other early manuscripts.

⁹² Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 139.

But the proletariat had to enter into exchange not with a *class*, but with *individual capitalists*, whose only “collective” interest was their shared drive to compete with each other:

The historical point of departure sees in capitalist society the workers on one side and the capitalist on the other. Here again is one of the facts which imposes itself with the violence of its simplicity. Historically we can speak of an individual capitalist: this is the socially determined figure which presides over the constitution of capitalist relations of production. As such, at least in the classical development of the system, this historical figure does not disappear, it is not suppressed or extinguished, but only organizes itself collectively, socializing itself so to speak in capital, precisely as the class relation. On the other hand we cannot speak of the isolated worker at any historical moment. In its material, socially determined figure, the worker is from his birth collectively organized. From the beginning the workers, as exchange values of the capitalist, come forth in the plural: the worker in the singular does not exist.⁹³

In this regard the individual capitalist persists, and continues to engage in the market exchange which characterizes capitalism. But the capitalist *class* is “always something else more or less than a social class. Something less, since direct economic

⁹³ Ibid., 232-4.

interest has not ceased and perhaps will not cease to present itself as *divided* on the capitalist side. Something more, because the political power of capital now extends its apparatus of control, domination, and repression beyond the traditional forms taken by the State, to invest the whole structure of the new society” (233).

Once labor-power is exchanged for the wage, Tronti argues, introducing a terminological distinction into Marx’s categories, the proletariat is recomposed as *working class*: as labor-power which is cooperative, collective within the labor-process. This ongoing process of socialization of labor is the first source of relative surplus value; it will later require technological development for its further growth. Here Tronti develops the point implicitly suggested by Panzieri; but while the latter started with the *individual* worker whose labor-power was integrated into the factory plan, Tronti identifies a process of class recomposition.⁹⁴ Between the *proletariat* and the *working class* Tronti sees “the same historical succession and the same logical

⁹⁴ Compare to Panzieri: “The relationship between the workers, their cooperation, appears only *after* the sale of their labour-power, which involves the simple relationship of *individual workers* to capital”; Raniero Panzieri, “Surplus Value and Planning,” trans. Julian Bees, in CSE, *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*, CSE Pamphlet no. 1, (London: Stage 1, 1976). It is worth noting that while Panzieri’s 1964 account was based on the displacement of competition by planning, Tronti’s description of “the plan of capital” a year earlier in *Quaderni Rossi* had represented it as the highest level of development of the socialization of capital *still mediated by competition*, in the individual capitalist’s pursuit of profits higher than the average: “Individual enterprises, or entire ‘privileged’ productive activities, along with the propulsive function of the whole system, constantly tend to break from within the total social capital in order to subsequently re-compose it at a higher level. The struggle among capitalists continues, but now it functions directly within the development of capital.” Planning represented the extension of capital’s despotism to the state, not a new phase displacing competitive capitalism: “The anarchy of capitalist production is not cancelled: it is simply socially organized.” See Mario Tronti, “Social Capital,” *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 98-121.

difference as that which we have already found between the *seller of labor-power* and the *producer of surplus value*.”⁹⁵

The struggle for a normal working day, for Marx so fundamental in the logical exposition of relative surplus value, manifests the class struggle in terms which also framed the proletariat: the struggle to reduce a heterogeneous mass to the commodity labor-power, and the refusal to be reduced to it. This refusal is what drives capital to act in its *collective* interest; in this struggle capital constitutes itself *politically* as a class, which became an absolute imperative in the moment of 1848. Marx’s writings on 1848 show “the encounter and the superimposition of the abstract concept of labor with the concrete reality of the worker.” At this point, Marx could supplement his earlier, intuitive reflections on abstract labor with discovery of the peculiar characteristics of the labor-power commodity: “the labor-power commodity as *working class*.”⁹⁶

It was not enough, however, to conclude that waged workers first constituted themselves as a class when they became sellers of labor-power and were thus incorporated into capital. It was imperative not to “fix the concept of the working class in one unique and definitive form, without development, without history.” Just as the “*internal history of capital*” had to include “the specific analysis of the varied determinations assumed by capital in the course of its development,” against the easy transhistorical assumptions of a “historical materialist” teleology, an “*internal history of the working class*” would have to be “reconstruct the moments of its formation, the

⁹⁵ Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 161.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

changes in its composition, the development of its organization according to the varied determinations successively assumed by labor-power as productive force of capital, and according to the experiences of different struggles, recurring and always renewed, with which the mass of workers equip themselves as the sole adversary of capitalist society.”⁹⁷

And indeed this account of the dynamic historical transformation and reconstitution of labor-power was required by the social relation of surplus value, and the unity of circulation with the process of production: “The history of diverse modes in which productive labor is extracted from the worker, that is, the history of different forms of production of surplus-value, is the story of capitalist society from the working-class viewpoint.”⁹⁸ This is precisely because of the twofold character of labor, Marx’s most treasured discovery, in which both aspects were decisive. While one could not derive the abstract character of labor from the level of use-value and concrete labor – that is, this was not a matter of abstraction as a psychological effect of factory time-management – the valorization of value could not take place without the use-value of labor-power:

labor, the utilization of labor-power, is workers’ labor, a concrete deployment, a concretization of abstract labor – abstract labor which finds itself already in its turn reduced to the rank of commodity, and which realizes its value in the wage. Therefore the step where abstract labor overturns itself and takes the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 170.

concrete form of the worker, is the process of consumption of labor-power, the moment where it becomes in action what it was only in potential, the step of the realization of the use-value of labor-power, if we may. What was already present in the operation sale/purchase as a class relation pure and simple, elementary and general, has definitively acquired from this point on its specific, complex, and total character.⁹⁹

This complex and total character is implied by the cooperative and collective form of the working class. Unless individual labor-powers are brought into association, they cannot “make valid, on a social scale, the special character of the labor-power commodity in general, that is to say cannot make abstract labor concrete, cannot realize the use-value of labor-power, whose actual consumption is the secret of the process of valorization of value, as a process of production of surplus-value and therefore of capital.”¹⁰⁰

Within this process we can glimpse the theoretical location of the concept of class composition: “The sale of labor-power thus provides the first elementary stage, the simplest, of a composition into a class of waged workers: it is for this reason that *a social mass constrained to sell its labor-power* remains the general form of the working class.”¹⁰¹ But this remains an elementary stage, since as Marx concluded in his chapter on the working day, “our worker emerges from the process of production

⁹⁹ Ibid., 166.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 149.

looking different from when he entered it”; entering as seller of labor power (“one owner against another owner”), the worker leaves knowing that the production process is a relation of force, and that for protection “the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital.”¹⁰² For Tronti this difference is “*a political leap*”: “It is the leap that the passage through production provokes in what we can call the *composition of the working class* or even the *composition of the class of workers*.”¹⁰³

We are now in a position to understand why the working-class struggle, for Tronti, comes first in the history of capitalist development. Capitalist development has to be understood as a process of exchange in which the valorization of value is driven by the sale and purchase of labor-power. It is only in the socialization of labor-power within the labor process that proletarians take the associated form of working class, in the realization of the use-value of their labor-power by the individual capitalist. And only the resistance of their reduction to the labor-power commodity can compel individual capitalists, who compete on the market, to form a cohesive class:

The particularity of labor-power as a commodity faced with other commodities coincides therefore with the specifically working-class character

¹⁰² Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, 415-6.

¹⁰³ Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 202.

that the production process of capital takes on; and, inside of this, with the concentration of a working-class initiative in the class relation, that leads to a leap in the development of the working class and to the subsequent birth of a class of capitalists.¹⁰⁴

Workerism's scientific discovery was to push the understanding of class away from a humanist and historicist problematic. We can now understand that workers' inquiry was an investigation into *the composition of the working class*, as the historical body which, separated from the means of subsistence and reduced to the sale of its labor-power, had to be formed into a socialized productive force within a process of constant expansion – the expanded reproduction of the class itself, and its recomposition in ever more technologically advanced labor processes. But just as fundamentally we can understand that science and coresearch from the working-class viewpoint are embedded in the development of political and organizational power. These organizational processes are always taking place, within the very composition of the workforce in the factory and in the networks formed to study them. We might sum up the insight of workerism in a remark of Sergio Bologna:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 166.

The fundamental concept (of this method of research) is this: spontaneity does not exist. What we could call “spontaneity” is, in reality, the formation of microsystems of struggle which are already very mature politically.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Patrick Cuninghame, “For An Analysis of Autonomia: An Interview with Sergio Bologna,” *Left History* 7:2 (2000): 93.

2. Ruptures: Organization Outside the Party

Partisanship

The political content of Althusser's seemingly abstractly theoretical interventions was not lost on the PCF. Althusser found himself criticized not only at the level of scholarship, but also from the political standpoint of the party bureaucracy, the PCF General Secretary Waldeck Rochet complaining of Althusser's "omission" of the "union of theory and practice." In 1966, to settle the matter, the Central Committee met in the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil, ostensibly a discussion of the "problem of ideology and culture," but in fact a theoretical trial of the deviations of Althusser. The conclusion of the Central Committee, under the direction of the surrealist Louis Aragon: "there is a Marxist humanism," announced to the public as a slogan and ethos, reinforcing the Party's control over theory. The 1966 meeting was a political maneuver to mobilize Garaudy's humanism against emerging sympathy among communists for Althusser's arguments, all the while quelling its "spiritualist" excesses.¹⁰⁶ Althusser's student Pierre Macherey, who represented the anti-humanist position at Argenteuil, wrote to Etienne Balibar:

¹⁰⁶ For Althusser's response, in an unmailed letter, see "Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF, 18 March 1966," *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007), along with William S. Lewis's informative "Editorial Introduction." As Lewis notes, Aragon somewhat uncannily charged Althusser with corrupting the youth – his Maoist students at the *École Normale Supérieure*.

Garaudy attacked us with a violence and bad faith difficult to equal; the closing arguments lasted three hours; we've been there before: idealists, formalists, liquidators... on the basis of truncated citations, malicious interpretations. A real festival... The other had with him (with the ineffable Mury) only the most beautiful parade of idiots that I have seen for a long time.¹⁰⁷

What resulted was a long period of self-criticism. But while he claimed to have integrated the insights of his critics, Althusser made no pretense of turning towards humanism.¹⁰⁸ Reflecting in an unpublished 1967 text, "The Humanist Controversy," he dug in his heels on this question:

It is no longer a question of starting out from the "concrete" in theory, from the well-known "concrete" concepts of Man, men, individuals with "their feet firmly planted on solid ground," nations, and so on. Quite the contrary: Marx *starts out from the abstract*, and says so. This does not mean that, for Marx, men, individuals, and their subjectivity have been expunged from real

¹⁰⁷ GM Goshgarian, "Introduction" to Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, trans. GM Goshgarian and ed. François Matheron (New York: Verso, 2003), xii, xxx. Althusser had in fact already been censured in 1963 for "On the Materialist Dialectic." Gilbert Mury, at first a party critic of Althusser (mentioned in *For Marx*, for example 163n2), eventually defected from the PCF to join a Maoist group. For Macherey's letter see François Matheron, "Louis Althusser et Argenteuil: de la croisée des chemins au chemin de croix," *Les Annales de la Société des amis de Louis Aragon et Elsa Triolet*, 2: 169–80.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 173.

history. It means that the *notions* of Man, etc., have been expunged *from theory*, for, in theory, no-one has yet, to my knowledge, met a flesh-and-blood man, only the *notion* of man.¹⁰⁹

These political debates are the context for the new definition of philosophy Althusser began to circulate, in his introduction to a 1967 course on the “spontaneous philosophy of the scientists” and the famous lecture “Lenin and Philosophy” in early 1968. He turned against a “theoreticism” in *Reading Capital*, which had provisionally implied that Marxist philosophy could constitute a kind of absolute knowledge that would guide practice. The political implications of this notion had been clear for the whole history of the workers’ movement, aligning with a textbook “Leninism” and implicitly endorsing “Kautsky’s and Lenin’s thesis that Marxist theory is produced by a specific theoretical practice, *outside* the proletariat, and that Marxist theory must be ‘imported’ into the proletariat.”¹¹⁰ But totally absent from this Leninism was any theoretical engagement with the question of class struggle.

Althusser began to argue that Marxist philosophy originates in the *proletarian standpoint*, but differed by situating this standpoint in a *non-teleological* framework – the proletariat, far from the identical subject-object of history, is constituted by the class struggle specific to the novel capitalist form of exploitation, and the assumption

¹⁰⁹ Althusser, “The Humanist Controversy” in *Humanist Controversy*, 264.

¹¹⁰ Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 141. For the new definition, see “Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists” in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, trans. Ben Brewster, James H. Kavanagh, Thomas E. Lewis, Grahame Lock, and Warren Montag, ed. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 1990).

of its standpoint is a practice of *partisanship in philosophy*. In this new definition, philosophy had no object and did not distinguish between truth and error. Philosophy was a battleground, whose entire history was constituted by the struggle between idealism and materialism, each representing the standpoint of a class. Marxist philosophy intervened to defend science against ideology, but this process was a complex relay – philosophy, at certain moments, emerging after a scientific discovery to explain its consequences for knowledge, and at others, initiating the possibility of a *revolutionary* science by breaking with ideology and assuming the proletarian standpoint, as Marx had done when he affiliated himself with communists in Paris.¹¹¹ The new definition, in the last instance, was that philosophy is class struggle in the field of theory, and Althusser would retain this definition until the end. While his earlier “theoreticism” defended the autonomy of intellectuals, he now took a drastic left turn against them: “A professional philosopher who joins the Party remains, ideologically, a petty bourgeois. He must revolutionize his thought in order to occupy a proletarian class position in philosophy.”¹¹²

The historical context of this critique, and the limits of the international communist movement to which Althusser remained devoted, meant an affiliation with Maoism. Preceding his self-criticism was a 1966 text called “On the Cultural Revolution,” published anonymously to avoid inevitable expulsion from the Party, in

¹¹¹ See the different definitions in “Lenin and Philosophy” in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) and “On the Evolution of the Young Marx” in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976).

¹¹² Althusser, “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 13

which Althusser celebrated events in China as the practical application of his thesis in “Contradiction and Overdetermination” four years earlier: communism could not be achieved without a continuing revolution against the state apparatuses. Indeed, even these earlier texts, in the period of the Sino-Soviet split, waded into dangerous waters by aligning with the Communist Party of China’s critique of de-Stalinization, which in less philosophical language had attacked humanism as the ideology of “peaceful coexistence,” a concession to imperialism. Favorable citations of Mao gave further evidence that the PCF’s suspicion had been justified.¹¹³

Althusser described a double-bind, the fact that even though the Party’s program was intrinsically limited, it was lodged within mass movements that were not accessible to leftist groups outside the Party: “if the Party wanted to analyse and take control of social relations, it could have nothing more to do with any movement, especially if it was linked to the salaried class, which was concerned solely with wage rises, etc., in order to tackle the *whole process of production*; but that has only ever been done outside the Party and the via the inept concept of self-management.” The fate of these “isolated individuals,” Althusser said, “such as Souvarine and Castoriadis who provided interesting information and good ideas on a good number of points,” was to be “left alone, deprived of all *organic* contact... with the active and organised section of the population and outside any organisation involved in

¹¹³ Anonymous (attributed to Louis Althusser), “On the Cultural Revolution,” trans. Jason Smith, *Décalages*, 1:1 (2010)

struggle... what impact could these isolated individuals have on the workers and the masses?”¹¹⁴

All these theoretical shifts were to be overshadowed the following year in Paris by the events of May 1968, when a spirit of wildcat refusal started in Paris and spread throughout France, shutting down the economy and nearly toppling the government. Student activists had invented new forms and alliances, with their spontaneous action committees and aesthetic insurrections. They also opened the language of politics to social groups – women, gays, immigrants, youth – whose demands had so often been excluded from the workers’ movement.

However, the communist organizations were not the vanguard of this revolt. Althusser himself described what happened with perfect clarity in his memoirs: “Out of fear of the masses and fear of losing control (reflecting its permanent obsession with the primacy of organisation over mass popular movements), the Party did all it could to break the popular movement and channel it into straightforward economic negotiations.”¹¹⁵

At the time, however, he was ill and in the hospital, and indicated no dissent from the PCF line. But we can now honestly acknowledge the ambiguity of the situation itself: the institutional power of the PCF was a fatal limit on the insurrections of May and June, but it was also one of the enabling conditions for the extension of this insurrection to a mass scale. When student occupations of the

¹¹⁴ Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, trans. Richard Veasey and ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier-Boutang (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 238-9.

¹¹⁵ Althusser, *Future*, 230.

Universities of Paris were attacked by police, the bureaucracies of PCF and its union, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), were forced to recognize that rank-and-file sympathies were with the students; they permitted an initial mobilization in protest of police repression, sending 800,000 workers on a one-day strike. The CGT was unable to contain the avalanche that resulted from this encounter. As May continued, *nine million* workers went on strike, without permission from the union, sometimes occupying their workplaces and kidnapping their bosses. In June the union's reluctant acquiescence gave way to an open alliance with the bosses; it would do its best to turn workers against students, and assist the state in returning France to work.

The contradictory role of the PCF and the CGT was that they did everything they could to block the development of a real class struggle – but against their own intentions, they provided an institutional basis for class solidarity and mass political activity. Even Althusser's theoretical adversary Jean-Paul Sartre, who considered the May revolt to be “freedom in action,” said in an interview with *Rossana Rossanda* that “the party, in relation to the mass, is a necessary reality because the mass, by itself, does not possess spontaneity” – but due to its institutional structure, the party has at the same time “a tendency to sclerosis.” While he argued that the 1968 revolt failed because it “lacked a party capable of taking up completely the movement and its potentialities,” Sartre pessimistically confessed that he could not

see “how the problems which confront any stabilized structure could be resolved.”¹¹⁶

The attempt to think through these problems would frame the European debate for the following decade.

Workers’ Power

In Italy the theoretical response to the upheavals of 1968, which lasted essentially for an entire decade, focused without mediation on the problem of organization, but also encountered the problem of historicism. These developments were simultaneous with a shift in the workerist organizations themselves. Largely at the urging of Antonio Negri, a group within *Classe Operaia* split off to form the organization *Potere Operaio*, in order to participate in student movement and the emerging revolts. Mario Tronti took a very different direction, having returned to the PCI in 1967. But as in France it was an intersecting of different social actors, the alignment of new demands and political practices, that spurred the traditional workers’ movement to begin to break free from its bureaucracies. One participant, Sergio Bologna, who had urged “the whole of the students’ movement to measure itself with workers’ struggles,” recalled: “It was in 1969 when the whole movement found itself in front of the gates of FIAT that we had won.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 52; “Masses, Spontaneity, Party,” *Socialist Register*, 7 (1970), 235, 240, 245. See also his generous comments about Althusser in “Masses,” 247.

¹¹⁷ Cuninghame, “Autonomia,” 94.

The further theoretical development of workerism was devoted to understanding the peculiarity of this historical moment, in part through elaborating its nascent economic theory and turning to an analysis of the historical development of the current phase of capitalism. At a conference in 1968 called “Workers and the State: Workers' Struggles and the Reform of the Capitalist State from the October Revolution to the New Deal,” Negri outlined a theory of Keynesianism as a capitalist strategy, a response to the development of autonomous proletarian struggles running from 1848 to 1917. While in June 1848 the working class insurrection represented a first glimpse of independence from the ideology of bourgeois revolution, 1917 was a total rupture: “The land of the Soviets stood as the point where the working-class antagonism was now structured in the independent form of a state.”¹¹⁸ It was at this point that Keynes’s argument against punitive postwar reparations represented a geopolitical strategy, to stabilize German capitalism against the wind from the East.

This external threat was mirrored by the *internal* threat posed by the factory councils movement, in which the advanced sector, the vanguard of the skilled labor aristocracy, was united with the rest of the working class. Taylorism sought to break this unity. As Sergio Bologna described in his own contribution to the conference, the ideology of “self-management,” had a contradictory position in this process. While it represented a refusal of capitalist development, supporting workers’ autonomy in the councils, it also resisted changes in *class composition*: the growth of the deskilled

¹¹⁸ Antonio Negri, “Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State” in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 24.

mass worker. In this regard, while capital's new class composition had introduced the mass worker as a necessary social subject, the ideology of self-management contributed to the division of the councilist vanguard, the labor aristocracy, from the rest of the working class.

Henry Ford's contribution was to develop a new conception of the wage. While for Taylor the wage was an individual incentive, Ford used wages as a mechanism of "planned development," as the motor of workers' consumption. It was this strategy, Bologna wrote, that would have to be generalized:

In 1911, Ford's ideas were nothing more than the intelligent discoveries of an individual entrepreneur. It took the threat of a generalised overturning of power relations in the factory (the threat that the workers' council movement, even in its co-management version, represented for capital as a whole), for them to become the strategy of collective capital – i.e. the Keynesian "income revolution."¹¹⁹

Negri's periodization brought these struggles up to 1929, when capitalist crisis forced "the final burial of the classic liberal myth of the separation of state and market, the end of laissez-faire."¹²⁰ But what was unique about this period was not simply state intervention, which had also increased after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871.

¹¹⁹ Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers-Council Movement," trans. Bruno Ramirez, *Telos* 13 (Fall 1972): 7.

¹²⁰ Bologna, "Class Composition," 27.

It was instead the integration of workers' struggles into capitalist development as a resolution to the contradictions of competition. Effective demand for the surging production of commodities could be secured by spontaneous workers' struggle over wages; so the breakthrough of Keynesianism represented a new period in the relation of the capitalist state to the market and to workers' struggles. Negri went on to describe the new capitalist strategy:

Working-class political revolution could only be avoided by recognising and accepting the new relation of class forces, while making the working class function within an overall mechanism that would "sublimate" its continuous struggle for power into a dynamic element within the system. The working class was to be controlled functionally within a series of mechanisms of equilibrium that would be dynamically readjusted from time to time by a regulated phasing of the "incomes revolution." The state was now prepared, as it were, to descend into civil society, to continuously recreate the source of its legitimacy in a process of permanent readjustment of the conditions of equilibrium. The new "material basis of the constitution" became the state as planner, or better still, the state as the plan. For soon this mechanism for re-equilibrating incomes between the forces in play was articulated in the form of periodic planning. The model of equilibrium assumed for a plan over a given period meant that every initiative, every readjustment of equilibrium to a new level, opened up a process of revision in the constitutional state itself. In other

words, the path to stability now seemed to depend on the recognition of this new precarious basis of state power: the dynamic of state planning implied acceptance of a sort of “permanent revolution” as its object – a paradoxical *Aufhebung* of the slogan on the part of capital.¹²¹

The bureaucracies of the official workers’ movement, the parties and unions, could regulate this struggle, ensuring that militancy did not surpass capitalism’s capacity for integration. While these bureaucracies represented the new regime, dominant in the Italy of the postwar “economic miracle” as a kind of proletarian control over the capitalist state (the theory of “state monopoly capitalism,” “stamocap,” endorsed by Moscow and cited by the Western Communist Parties as the basis for workers’ support for capitalist development), the workerists understood it instead as the class antagonism shorn of the epiphenomenon of competition. The reality of the economic miracle, in fact, was continued Taylorist discipline and speed-up, and the conspicuous failure of the much-vaunted “Fiat wage” that had brought so many young men to the factories to materialize. The compromises made by the unions, justified by the ideological commitment to capitalist development, functioned as a way to protect capital’s advantage.

Here the relation between the constitution of labor-power and its antagonistic working-class refusal is expressed in the relation between the “technical” and “political” composition of the working class. Bologna focused on a specific technical

¹²¹ Negri, “Keynes,” 27-8.

composition in early 20th-century Germany: the “professionalized worker,” the skilled machine-tool operator tied to his craft. Bologna sought to show that despite the conservative character of the self-management project, which protected a labor aristocracy against technical innovation and affirmed the position and function of producers, it had a revolutionary character in its conjuncture. By blocking the employers’ attempt to increase the organic composition of capital, the workers’ councils represented a fundamental obstacle to accumulation. They had to be broken with political force, but what’s more, capital had to *decompose* the professionalized worker. Taylorism was introduced in Germany after the First World War in order to answer the challenge of the councils, by breaking the professionalized worker and recomposing the working class into the “unskilled, uprooted, highly mobile and interchangeable modern assembly-line worker.” This “mass worker” could be subordinated to a higher level of automation, but was also able to assert new political forms revolving around wage struggles, which framed Bologna’s period.¹²²

Now, there are at least two different ways to interpret this dynamic. One interpretation describes forms of organization as strategic working-class responses to specific moments of capitalist development. It also traces the reactions of capital to its disruption by organized working-class antagonism. These processes are mutually constitutive but constantly in flux, adapting to one another and establishing new limits and possibilities for the other’s trajectory.

¹²² Bologna, “Class Composition,” 7.

But for another interpretation, these could be understood as stages in the realization of a historical goal, subject to periodization. The professionalized worker would be superseded by the mass worker in order to realize the goal of the complete abstraction of labor – in other words, to realize the fullest extent of capitalist development and the workers’ subjective development. The hegemony of the advanced sector of the working class would serve as the guarantee for the unfolding of this historical process. Class composition becomes a teleological theory of the *expression* of technical composition in political composition.

The premise that any particular class composition is hegemonic – that the technical organization of production at the most advanced edge of capitalist development structures all other residual forms of labor and takes political priority – has been at stake in Marxism from its inception, revolving around the category of wage labor itself, in Marx’s Industrial England vastly outnumbered by domestic servants, and has since been articulated in various periodizations. So this reading did find some support in Marx. Negri argued that the historical unfolding of abstraction had been glimpsed in the *Grundrisse*, though it seemed to be left behind in the scientific and empirical exposition of *Capital*.¹²³ At the same time, Negri seemed to

¹²³ This argument can be observed in the texts which range from “Crisis of the Planner-State” in *Books for Burning* (New York: Verso, 2005) to *Marx Beyond Marx*, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano and ed. Jim Fleming (New York: Autonomedia, 1991). For critical responses to this approach, see the afterword to *Storming Heaven* by Riccardo Bellofiore and Massimiliano Tomba; and Michael Heinrich, “The ‘Fragment on Machines’: A Marxian Misconception in the *Grundrisse* and its Overcoming in *Capital*” in Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas, ed., *In Marx’s Laboratory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

criticize such teleologies in the very same texts. In “Crisis of the Planner-State,” Negri shed the word “law” and centered Marx’s analysis on the concept of the “tendency,” which he counterposed to both “the simple emergence of an unavoidable historical necessity,” and “a historical rule of thumb, lacking any specific content.” Starting from an anti-teleological understanding of history as a process without a subject or goals, he added that capitalist development generates an antagonistic mass subject whose goal is the system's destruction. Marx’s analysis in the *Grundrisse* of the development of the social individual and the incarnation of scientific knowledge in the general intellect showed a new line of battle: the direct appropriation of social wealth, since the productivity of labor had extended outside the confines of the factory floor and the working day.¹²⁴

Bologna, who seemed to prefer scientific and empirical exposition, would later sharply criticize the teleological interpretation, both as a reading of his own work and as a framework for the analysis of new hegemonic figures. But his text did not elaborate a theoretical alternative, and the periodization it presented had difficulty accounting for sectors of the German working class, like the Ruhr miners, whose composition couldn’t be equated to the figure of the professionalized worker.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, trans. Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Timothy Murphy, and Francesca Novello and ed. Timothy Murphy (New York: Verso, 2005), 14.

¹²⁵ For Bologna’s own comments, see, “The Factory-Society Relationship as an Historical Category,” accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/factory-society-relationship-historical-category>; “Eight Theses On Militant Historiography,” accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/eight-theses-militant-historiography>; and “Negri’s *Proletarians and the State*: A Review” in *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha

What the first wave of workerism had not anticipated was that the crisis would result in the disintegration of the conditions of full employment, and the decentering of industrial production. While Tronti, back in the PCI, supplemented workers' autonomy with "the autonomy of the political," Potere Operaio attempted to sustain the centrality of the mass worker by supplementing it with the new social movements of the students. Paradoxically the peak of the mass workers' militancy in the Hot Autumn was also the moment of the decline of its centrality.

The period beginning in 1968 was marked by an ambiguous relationship to the mass worker. Potere Operaio had worked within the decentralized organizations of the student movement, successfully urging them to align with factory struggles. Part of this alignment was a theory of the university as the site of the production of labor-power, as technicians took on a more significant role in the production process – this was the basis for a unity between students and workers. However, the assumptions that technicians had a hegemony as the "advanced sector" of the class with the spontaneously revolutionary theory of self-management, which could be detected in some French sociologists like Serge Mallet, were put into question. Bologna, building on his earlier research on councilism, wrote with Francesco Ciafaloni that "a struggle of technicians for self-management could easily transform itself into a struggle to

(London: Pluto Press, 2005). A useful account is found in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), ch. 8. The Ruhr historian Franz Brüggenmeier criticizes Bologna for neglecting to note how the miners' autonomous self-organization was rooted in the forms of life surrounding work, above all the mutual support between mining families and their migrant lodgers; see "Ruhr Miners and their Historians" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1981), 328.

become a ruling technocracy.” Since the basis of this division of labor was the university, student struggles could be unified with workers’ struggles insofar as they worked towards “a profound critique of the education system and its complete overthrow.”¹²⁶

At the same time, Potere Operaio’s refusal of Tronti’s entryism extended to an intransigence regarding rank and file militants who remained invested in the unions. A movement of factory delegates and committees was beginning to cause trouble for the union bureaucracies, but Potere Operaio, convinced that this model of organization would lead inexorably to absorption by union reformism, ceded the delegates to the unions. As Steve Wright puts it, they had helped “to make their fears of union recuperation a self-fulfilling prophecy.”¹²⁷

While these political determinations of the social subject were shifting, the consequences of the 1971 crisis, above all unemployment and deindustrialization, undermined the centrality of the factory on a wider scale. A wing in Potere Operaio represented by Franco Piperno and Oreste Scalzone tried to overcome this with a call for armed voluntarism, a guerilla war inside the factory – the tendency which would later be taken to a substitutionist extreme by the Red Brigades. But this turn to violence was a symptom of the organization’s disintegration.

By the time of its dissolution in 1973, the framework of Potere Operaio had been challenged not only by the oil crisis but also by the emergence of militant feminists within the workerist milieu who criticized the centrality of the *male* worker.

¹²⁶ Cited in Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 105.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 130.

Women in Potere Operaio split off to form Lotta Femminista, arguing that the attention to work in the factory had effaced the fundamental importance of work in the *household*, unwaged work that reproduced male labor-power. Accompanying this analysis was the demand for “Wages for Housework,” a feminist reinterpretation of Potere Operaio’s demand for a political wage, famously elaborated in Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s essay “Women and the Subversion of Community,” which Negri cites as an influence on “Crisis of the Planner State.”¹²⁸

The work of the feminist wing of workerism, including Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati, and Alisa Del Re, also represented a fundamental development of the framework of class composition. While male workerists had argued that the centrality of the factory had declined, the feminists argued that it had *always* been a fiction. The focus on the factory obscured the formation of labor-power in the home. They also deepened the critique of technological developmentalism:

If technological innovation can lower the limit of necessary work, and if the working-class struggle in industry can use that innovation for gaining free hours, the same cannot be said of housework; to the extent that she must in isolation procreate, raise and be responsible for children, a high mechanization of domestic chores doesn’t free any time for the woman. She is always on duty, for the machine doesn’t exist that makes and minds children. A higher productivity of domestic work through mechanization, then, can be related

¹²⁸ Negri, *Books for Burning*, 50n18.

only to specific services, for example, cooking, washing, cleaning. Her workday is unending not because she has not machines, but because she is isolated.¹²⁹

However, the potentially anti-historicist thrust of the feminist critique was in tension with the undeniable historical changes taking place. In the 1970s capitalist development ran headfirst into a new economic crisis, and the factory basis of social struggles seemed to decline. Italy represented in a dramatic way the dynamic between the new modes of struggle of the 1960s and 1970s and the transition from the post-war Keynesian order to neoliberalism. It was not clear that the student movement could take its lead from the struggles of the mass worker, whose centrality could no longer be taken for granted. And the strategy of refusing work, in strikes and sabotage, was not as effective when the employer was already preparing layoffs. While the student movement had articulated its distinct style of struggle and its new demands to the mass worker, it now seemed to be without an anchor. In the context of deindustrialization, rising unemployment and the emergence of new social movements, it became necessary to try to rethink the revolutionary subject. Negri's solution was to propose a new hegemonic figure: the socialized worker.

What remained unquestioned was the very *premise* of a hegemonic figure of the working class, of a working-class vanguard in the “advanced sector” of capitalist production, and its suturing to the concept of class composition. The methodology of

¹²⁹ Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Falling Wall Press, 1973), 27.

class composition was derived from the attempt to understand postwar capitalist development and class struggle while breaking with the sterility of obsolete models of political organization; in so doing it rejected the theoretical problematic which fit political organization into a philosophy of history with development as its subject and goal. And indeed this orientation is so fundamental to workerism that Franco Berardi has suggested that “compositionism” would be a more appropriate name for the tendency.¹³⁰ Elaborating the new account, however, would pose its own difficulties, with the risk of a philosophy of history reasserting itself in various ways.

¹³⁰ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 33.

3. Infiltrations: Inside and Outside the Party

Dual Power

Althusser entered into an open clash with the party bureaucracy throughout the 1970s over the PCF's abandonment of the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

Althusser's campaign against this move made the front page of *Le Monde* (an article entitled "The abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat is criticized even within the PCF"), and his student Etienne Balibar would defend the concept in front of the Party. The union of the French people, Althusser said in a talk to communist students, could only have meaning if it clearly demonstrated that the Party would subject itself to the initiative of the masses, who would "*organize themselves* autonomously, in original forms, in firms, urban districts and villages, around the questions of labour and living conditions, the questions of housing, education, health, transport, the environment." But not only was such a development politically blocked by the persistence of an ossified "democratic centralism" and the division of labor between the party bureaucracy and the rank and file, it was also theoretically blocked by an ideological conception of the socialist transition. Adding "*the adjective 'democratic' to each existing state apparatus*" failed to appreciate the

basic Marxist thesis that “*it is not just the bourgeois state that is oppressive, but any state.*”¹³¹

The “parliamentary cretinism” of the PCF entered a path to self-destruction in 1977, by which point the Socialist Party’s popularity had dwarfed the PCF.¹³² Rapidly shifting to sectarian rhetoric, the PCF turned against the Common Program and broke with the Socialist Party, dividing the Left and ceding victory to the Right in the 1978 legislative elections. At this point Althusser took the gloves off. His four-part article in *Le Monde*, “What Must Change in the Party,” discerned between the initial reformism and the sectarian break a basic *vertical structure of command*, which made the Party resemble the bourgeois state apparatuses. The exemplary figure of the Party was the “full-timer” who grew ever more distant from the shop floor: “most of the time, he does not even come into any real contact with the masses, since he is too busy controlling them.” The claim of turning towards democracy had actually hidden the retrenchment of this highly authoritarian division of labor, while “stamocap” theory had displaced all “concrete analysis of concrete situations.”¹³³ The only

¹³¹ See G.M. Goshgarian’s outstanding introduction to Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, xxiv-xxv; Althusser, “On the Twenty-Second Congress of the French Communist Party,” *New Left Review* 1:104 (1977), 17, 11. Althusser’s language, typical of nearly all his interventions in party politics, suggests that the Party is already embracing his recommendations (in this case, autonomous mass activity); its actual practice is described as a risk. This Machiavellian rhetorical strategy, comprehensible only in the context of the Party’s stifling of dissent described above, has led to many misunderstandings. For Balibar’s intervention, see his *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1977).

¹³² The term “parliamentary cretinism” is Marx’s, from the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*; see *Marx: Later Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90.

¹³³ Louis Althusser, “What Must Change in the Party,” *New Left Review* 1:109 (1978), 30-3.

possible way forward, he concluded in *Le Monde*, was for the Party to “leave the fortress,” to dissolve its structure of command into the masses and renew Marxist theory.¹³⁴

At a lecture in Barcelona, “The Transformation of Philosophy,” Althusser described what was at stake: a theory of the capitalist state as an open space of contestation displaced an understanding of the state as a *bourgeois* dictatorship, which formed the varying levels of the social formation into a unity that could reproduce the relations of production. He brought this political critique decisively into the field of knowledge: *philosophy* was the unification of different spontaneous ideologies of practice in the constitution of the dominant ideology, which made it a philosophy of the state. Just as the commune and soviet power represented the possibility of the destruction of the state, Marxism was a non-philosophy of the non-state.¹³⁵

However, this argument was developing just as the Communist Parties were engaged in a complete rethinking of their relation to the capitalist state, and this phenomenon was called Eurocommunism. Fernando Claudín, expelled from the Spanish Communist Party in 1964 wrote in his 1977 book *Eurocommunism and Socialism* that the Communist Parties were engaged in an “effort to adapt their conception of socialism and of a strategy of transition to the specific conditions of

¹³⁴ Ibid., 36-7, 44-5.

¹³⁵ Louis Althusser, “The Transformation of Philosophy” in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 264.

advanced capitalism.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, the rise of these parties was situated in the “*long-term structural crisis* of the capitalist economy,” a crisis whose nature was “not economic alone, but social and political, moral and ideological.”¹³⁷ The stakes of working-class struggle were to prevent the imposition of a capitalist “solution” to the crisis, of “‘austerity policies’ within the framework of more authoritarian political regimes” which would attempt to “prepare the ground for a new expansionist phase of capitalism.”¹³⁸

Alongside the capitalist crisis was the general crisis of the Communist movement, as the specific conditions of Western European and Third World struggles came to stand in “radical contradiction” with the dictates of Moscow and the organizational and strategic legacy of the Bolshevik model.¹³⁹ The experience of 1968 had shown that not only infantile ultra-leftism, but also “senile conservatism” was dangerous, and the necessity of fundamentally changing the form of the party could no longer be ignored.¹⁴⁰

Claudín warned against the concessionary tendency which was tied to the dominant anti-monopoly strategy, with the PCI as the prime example. Not only did this theory cover up the fact “that the non-monopoly bourgeoisie comprises the greater part of the bourgeoisie and is responsible for the exploitation of a large part of the working class,” it was also tied to a “gradualist strategy,” centered on elections.

¹³⁶ Fernando Claudín, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, trans. John Wakeham (London: New Left Books, 1978), 9.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

The gradualist strategy, in its subordination of “all forms of mass action and social struggle to a quest for alliances with one or several fractions of the bourgeoisie,” exposed the fear of the party bureaucracies that their leading role would be threatened by “autonomous and unitary organisations of the working class and popular masses.”¹⁴¹

Indeed, the CPs gave no indication that their conduct would differ in any way from May 1968 and the Italian Hot Autumn, when they acted “as a brake, limiting the growth and autonomy of workers’ self-organisation, channelling it into the constraints of institutionalised politics so that there should be no conflict between the two.”

Claudín named factory and neighborhood councils, as well as autoreduction of utility prices, as examples of grassroots democracy which advanced “anti-capitalist goals of struggle.” But since these forms of struggle implied “the rejection of formal legal limits set by the existing political system,” and the strategy of the parties revolved around respecting these limits, the two inevitably entered into antagonism.¹⁴²

In the reevaluation of the strategic legacy this antagonism prompted, the council communist experience was of significant importance. Claudín invoked Pannekoek, and made note of Gramsci’s early councilist orientation, but pointed out that the concrete realization of the councilist model, in the soviet system which emerged in post-revolutionary Russia, did not align with the theory’s predictions. Within the “Comintern Ideology,” then, there was “an essential conflict between

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 107–8.

¹⁴² Ibid., 113, 114.

council democracy and representative or delegated democracy.”¹⁴³ While Claudín embraced the general category of “democratic socialism,” he emphasized the importance of contesting the “legalist, electoralist, gradualist version of that road; the version which seeks to follow a line of class collaboration with the leading group of the bourgeoisie.”¹⁴⁴ The alternative was a new, heterogeneous proliferation of “parties of a new type”: “*The party of the working class is a myth. The reality is rather the working class as a party*, meaning the totality of forms through which the class organises itself and expresses its class antagonism to the bourgeoisie.”¹⁴⁵

But it was by no means clear that Eurocommunism could be seen as a real basis for this development – in fact, it was not even clear it could achieve gradualist and legalist goals. In actual practice, the electoral machine compelled the parties to work to preserve the bourgeois state. In this situation, Sergio Bologna noted in 1977, “the party system no longer ‘receives’ the thrusts from the base; it controls and represses them.”¹⁴⁶ Forcing through austerity, strengthening police powers, placing parliamentary alliances above grassroots mobilization, accepting junior partnerships – all this led the reforming Communist Parties to betray the desires of those who had initially propelled these parties into striking range of political power. In June 1976, the PCI’s electoral results were at an all-time high, and most of this was due precisely

¹⁴³ Ibid., 78. It would be of significant interest to tie Gramsci’s own analysis of the state to his earlier writings on the factory councils.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 129.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 135, 124.

¹⁴⁶ Sergio Bologna, “The Tribe of Moles,” in *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge, Mass; London: Semiotexte, 2007).

to the new social struggles. The next month, however, the PCI, lacking any coherent general strategy regarding the question of state power, took the easy route, and made an alliance with the Christian Democrats, supporting the government of the anti-communist Giulio Andreotti in July 1976, without a single communist receiving a portfolio. The real content of the PCI's "Historic Compromise" with Christian Democracy, Claudín argued, was the attempt to suppress mass struggle and "restrict its demands for reform to the limits compatible with the system."¹⁴⁷

These parties quickly lost the support of the new working class, such that by the late 1980s, only the old guard remained. As Claudín argued, the right Eurocommunist insistence on becoming "parties of government" rather than "parties of struggle" led to failure even in reformist terms; the electorate ultimately opted for the much more consistent and credible social democratic parties in *every* case, and the path was paved for "Eurosocialist" austerity. The stakes, Claudín noted, were high:

Eurocommunism contains the possibility and the hope of overcoming – within advanced capitalism – the general crisis of the communist movement. But it could just as well turn out to be its swan song... If socialism does not throw over the practices of social-democratic reformism, or if Eurocommunism fails to live up to its promises, then there may occur a restabilisation of capitalism

¹⁴⁷ Claudín, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, 115.

for a whole historical period, blocking the road to socialism in Europe for the indefinite future.¹⁴⁸

This is, indeed, precisely what happened. But like Claudín, other figures involved in the left wing of Eurocommunism were aiming at a sober evaluation of the political conjuncture faced by the parties and extraparlimentary movements. Certainly the most brilliant of these was Nicos Poulantzas, a Greek émigré to France, who in his career as a legal philosopher in Paris had shifted from a Lukácsian-Sartrean formation to Althusser's circle.

In a remarkable 1977 interview with Henri Weber of the Trotskyist *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), from the same year that *Marxism and Politics* was published, the difficulty of maintaining the classical insurrectionary conception of revolution took center stage. As Poulantzas characterized it, the dual power scenario of the October Revolution was “to surround the strong castle of the state from outside with the structures of popular power” – to build the counter-state of direct democracy, which would meet the capitalist state in a ruptural clash. But for Poulantzas, such a dual power scenario, which Weber continued to defend, was “extremely unlikely in the West” – not only because of the massive development of the state in advanced capitalism and its close integration with many aspects of social life, but also because of the limits of left organizations.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Claudín, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, 146.

¹⁴⁹ Nicos Poulantzas, *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State*, ed. James Martin (London: Verso, 2008), 340–1.

Others, like Henri Weber himself, continued to defend the dual power model against Eurocommunism. An earlier interview he had conducted with Ernest Mandel had also criticized Eurocommunism from the vantage point of classical dual power and direct council democracy. As Mandel put it, “In a revolutionary situation, the revolutionary Marxists must be the force most committed to the strengthening of class unity and organization. They must constantly advocate the unity of the class apparatus of the workers, and this is made easier by the fact that the organs of workers’ unity are precisely the organs of its self-representation: the Workers’ councils.”¹⁵⁰

In other words, the organizational void was already filled, for Weber and Mandel, by the parties of the Fourth International. But as Poulantzas pointed out to Weber, it was not at all clear that these parties resolved the problem of organization, nor that they could have functioned as a mass political force:

We cannot ignore the actual forces on the ground. In reality, your hypothesis

¹⁵⁰ Ernest Mandel, “Revolutionary Strategy in Europe – A Political Interview,” *New Left Review*, I, no. 100 (December 1976): 97–132; See also Henri Weber, “Eurocommunism, Socialism and Democracy,” *New Left Review*, I, no. 110 (August 1978): 3–14. Weber warned presciently that the Eurocommunist call for democratization of the state could, instead of opening the way to socialist transformation, simply be substituted for it. But the possibility of a theoretical discussion of the problems of organization was buried under the incantation that in a revolutionary situation, “the role of a revolutionary party is to foster the unity and class independence of the workers and to champion the socialist alternative in as practical and concrete a way as possible” (13). Weber is now a representative of the French Socialist Party in European Parliament, which by no means invalidates his analysis, but does make his inferences about the latent reformist content of the theories he criticizes somewhat difficult to swallow.

is not based solely on an evaluation of the objective possibilities of a revolutionary crisis in France. It is also based, implicitly, on the possibility of the extremely rapid and powerful development of a revolutionary party of the Leninist type, to the left of the French Communist Party. Your whole hypothesis is based on that. It's there in black and white in Mandel's interview on revolutionary strategy in Europe.

But I don't think that this is at all likely. First, because of what I said before about the new reality of the state, the economy, the international context, etc. And then, because of the weight of the political forces of the traditional left, particularly in a country like France.

Your hypothesis implies, for instance, that the LCR will grow from 7,000 militants to ten or twenty times that number in a few months! That's never happened anywhere!¹⁵¹

The right wing of Eurocommunism based itself on the theory of state monopoly capitalism, that is, the domination of the state by a monopoly fraction of the bourgeoisie, which implied a popular alliance with the progressive side of the bourgeoisie to defend the state's democratic aspects. In response to Weber's suggestion that he, too, had come close to these "official" PCI and PCF theories,

¹⁵¹ Poulantzas, *Poulantzas Reader*, 357.

Poulantzas replied that they were based on a “completely false conception”; he affirmed that “the whole of the present state and all its apparatuses – social security, health, education, administration. etc. – correspond by their very structure to the power of the bourgeoisie. I do not believe that the masses can hold positions of autonomous power – even subordinate ones – within the capitalist state. They act as a means of resistance, elements of corrosion, accentuating the internal contradictions of the state.”¹⁵²

He confirmed in a 1979 interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt for *Marxism Today* that “it is very clear that in Eurocommunism you can find the reformist tendency.” The differences lay in certain matters of emphasis: first of all, the left wing was distinguished by “the importance given to direct and workers’ council democracy, which has always been a decisive continuum between reformist and a revolutionary road to socialism. Left-wing Euro-communism gives a much greater significance to rank-and-file democracy.” Second, the left wing emphasized “the necessity of radical transformation” of the apparatuses of the state, while the right wing “tends to see those apparatuses more or less as neutral apparatuses and consequently does not attach the same importance to their transformation.”¹⁵³

It has to be noted that the strategy Poulantzas proposed in his discussion with Weber was not necessarily more convincing. Poulantzas had defended “a struggle designed to sharpen the internal contradictions of the state, to carry out a deep-seated

¹⁵² Ibid., 337.

¹⁵³ Nicos Poulantzas, “Interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt,” *Marxism Today*, July 1979, 196.

transformation of the state,” aligned with “organs of popular power at the base, the structures of direct democracy,” which would “bring about a differentiation inside the state apparatuses.”¹⁵⁴ The development of this phenomenon in the Eurocommunist context was blocked by the bureaucratism and opportunism of the parties, whose tenacity Poulantzas had underestimated.

However, the rethinking towards which Poulantzas drew these strategic problems in his last book, *State, Power, Socialism*, led to remarkable theoretical developments. This text, which engages with Foucault and Deleuze and criticizes the *nouveaux philosophes*, cannot be adequately summarized here, so we focus on the themes already raised. Just as the May ‘68 revolt had once prompted Poulantzas to reconsider the theme of ideology, its *failure* led him to the problem of direct democracy.¹⁵⁵ In the context of a critique of Foucault, though a parallel argument was also made with reference to Lefort and Castoriadis, Poulantzas criticized the “simplistic illusions of anti-institutional purity” which imagined that by placing oneself outside the state, “one is thereby situated outside power (which is impossible).” This was not only a theoretical mistake; it was also “the best means of *leaving the field open for statism*: in short, it often involves a retreat in the face of the enemy precisely on this strategically crucial terrain.”¹⁵⁶

The stakes of the problem were elaborated with a new investigation of the strategic legacy of socialist revolution. He referred first and foremost to the critique

¹⁵⁴ Poulantzas, *Poulantzas Reader*, 339, 341.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁵⁶ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: New Left Books, 1978), 153.

of the Russian Revolution advanced by Rosa Luxemburg, who criticized Lenin not for his neglect of direct democracy, but for his “*exclusive* reliance” on it – the elimination of representative democracy (in the form of the Constituent Assembly) in favor of the new kind of state represented by the soviets.¹⁵⁷ The model of dual power, of the encircling and seizure of the fortress, required not only the razing to the ground of the existing apparatus but the formation of another one capable of taking its place:

What is to replace the bourgeois State en bloc is no longer direct, rank-and-file democracy. The soviets are now not so much an anti-State as a parallel State – one copied from the instrumental model of the existing State, and possessing a proletarian character in so far as its summit is controlled/occupied by a “single” revolutionary party which itself functions according to the model of the State.¹⁵⁸

Stalinist statism, which paradoxically took over a revolution that had raised the practical possibility of direct democracy, converged fundamentally with “social-democratic state-worship,” characterized by “basic distrust of direct, rank-and-file democracy and popular initiative.” Both forms of socialist statism viewed the popular masses as standing “in a relationship of externality to a State that possesses power and constitutes an essence.” To then occupy the state involved “replacing the top

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 253. A useful analysis of the historical background can be found in Fernando Claudín, “Democracy and Dictatorship in Lenin and Kautsky,” *New Left Review* I, no. 106 (December 1977).

¹⁵⁸ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 255.

leaders by an enlightened left élite and, if necessary, making a few adjustments to the way in which the existing institutions function.” This moderately adjusted state would “thereby bring socialism to the popular masses from above.” But to escape from a “techno-bureaucratic statism of the experts” through “the other tradition of direct, rank-and-file democracy or self-management would really be too good to be true.” The threat of these forms of despotism was in fact constantly posed by the very materiality of the existing state apparatus.¹⁵⁹ And indeed, technocracy embedded itself in “the complex nature of tasks in a post-industrial society,” which invited the emergence of “left experts” flanked by a “self-management commissar.”¹⁶⁰

For Poulantzas, then, the question of democratic socialism had to be posed differently:

how is it possible radically to transform the State in such a manner that the extension and deepening of political freedoms and the institutions of representative democracy (which were also a conquest of the popular masses) are combined with the unfurling of forms of direct democracy and the mushrooming of self-management bodies?

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 255–6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 262; see also 196.

Instead of a model of dual power as encircling and seizing the fortress, it was a matter of “articulating transformed representative democracy and direct, rank-and-file democracy.”¹⁶¹

While this argument was sure to put the scent of reformism in the air, Poulantzas suggested that the posing of “every strategy other than that of dual power as reformist” by the Third International had prevented the effective analysis of reformism. As a result, the Third International invented its own kind of reformism, relying on its instrumentalist understanding of the state: “You corner some loose parts of the state machinery and collect a few isolated bastions while *awaiting* a dual power situation. Then, as time passes, dual power goes by the board: all that remains is the instrument-State which you capture cog by cog or whose command posts you take over.”¹⁶²

But reformism was really “an ever-latent danger, not a vice inherent in any strategy other than that of dual power.” With this in mind, it was not necessarily wrong to say that the democratic road to socialism posed a greater risk of reformism and “social-democratization.” To avert this risk, to prevent the traversal of the state from concluding in the administration of capitalism, there had to be a process of “real

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 256–7. For a careful reading of Poulantzas on this point, vis-a-vis his interpretation of Gramsci on dual power, see Peter Thomas, “Conjuncture of the Integral State? Poulantzas’s Reading of Gramsci,” in *Reading Poulantzas*, eds. Alexander Gallas, Lars Bretthauer, John Kannankulam, and Ingo Stützle (London: Merlin Press, 2011), 279ff.

¹⁶² Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 258.

breaks,” at the apex of which “the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the State swings over to the side of the popular masses.”¹⁶³

It was precisely this context that made the articulation of representative and direct democracy so vital for Poulantzas. There could be no more talk of “smashing” the state, if this meant “the eradication of any kind of representative democracy or ‘formal’ liberties in favour purely of direct, rank-and-file democracy and so-called real liberties.” It was necessary for socialism to involve “political (party) and ideological pluralism, recognition of the role of universal suffrage, and extension and deepening of all political freedoms including for opponents.” But this was a process necessarily accompanied by “the development of new forms of direct, rank-and-file democracy, and the flowering of self-management networks and centres.” Both sides were indispensable; on its own, “the transformation of the state apparatus and the development of representative democracy would be incapable of avoiding statism.” But conversely, “a unilateral and univocal shift of the centre of gravity towards the self-management movement would likewise make it impossible, in the medium term, to avoid techno-bureaucratic statism and authoritarian confiscation of power by the experts.”¹⁶⁴ The only way to prevent the statist and social-democratic dangers was the “active reliance on a broad, popular movement... the continuous support of a mass movement founded on broad popular alliances.” Such a broad movement could be built by “taking up especially new popular demands on fronts that used to be wrongly

¹⁶³ Ibid., 258–9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 261–2.

called ‘secondary’ (women’s struggles, the ecological movement, and so on).”¹⁶⁵ In the interview with Hall and Hunt, he addressed the problem of the form of the party beyond the principle of pluralism:

I am not sure that a political party is the best form of organizing even, in their differences, the new forms of social movements. For example, I am not sure at all that we must ask a revolutionary political party to take under consideration the ecological problem, the feminist problem and so on. So the problem is not only to have a party so good that it is not only going to be political but take up every sphere of social life and economic life. I think that this conception of the party as the unique centralizer, even if it is a very subtle centralization, is not necessarily the best solution. I think more and more that we must have autonomous social movements whose type of organization cannot be the same as that of a political party organization. There must be a feminist movement outside the most ideal possible party because the most ideal party cannot include such types of social movements even if we insist that the revolutionary party must have certain conceptions of the woman question.

It was not enough to say that there should be many parties – “pluralism of parties in the democratic road to socialism means necessarily changes in the function of the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 263–4.

party itself.” It was this that accounted for the crisis of the parties at the end of the 1970s as they tried to respond to the new social movements.¹⁶⁶

The historical moment faced by Poulantzas had made it necessary to confront the interrelation between the theory of the state and the *form of the party*, meaning both the relation of working-class movements to the bourgeois state, and the role of the state in the potential exercise of socialist power. This interrelation was embedded in the *problem of revolutionary strategy in the context of advanced capitalism, for which no model of revolution was historically available*. Poulantzas critically theorized the potential for bureaucratism and opportunism if this absent center of strategy was not met with an explicit confrontation with the question of organization.

However, Poulantzas did not adequately engage with the theoretical production of the councilist tradition, which had its own critique of parliamentary democracy; and he did not seek to understand how councilism emerged within a specific moment of capitalist development – which would help to understand how other forms could emerge at other moments.¹⁶⁷ The characterization of the council as

¹⁶⁶ Poulantzas, “Interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt,” 200–1. Claudín similarly writes: “No class organisation can fulfill the role of the women’s liberation movement or the student movement”; Claudín, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, 123. For a discussion of the relation between party forms and new social subjects in France and Italy respectively, see Étienne Balibar, “Après l’autre Mai,” in *La Gauche, le pouvoir, le socialisme: Hommage à Nicos Poulantzas*, ed. Christine Buci-Glucksmann (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), 99–119; and in the same collection, Rossana Rossanda, “Crise et dialectiques des partis et mouvements sociaux en Italie,” 120–36.

¹⁶⁷ Though see Poulantzas’s comment on the failure of Castoriadis and Lefort to connect their “largely justified” advocacy of self-management to a non-reductive state theory: “In reality, however, it is the terrifyingly palpable role of the State which necessitates a transition to socialism largely based on direct, rank-and-file democracy;

the form of direct democracy did not capture how it was situated at a specific moment of capitalist development centered on the factory, with a figure of labor characterized by high levels of skill and a close relationship to the machine. The council's political significance lay not in the abstract principle of self-management but in its antagonism towards capitalist command at the point of production – the block it imposed on technological development, and the nascent possibility it presented of the expropriation of wealth. In the Russian context the party had to mediate between this class figure and the spread of council organization to the “toiling masses.”

Throughout the 20th century the applicability of this model was not always clear. The decentering of the factory in the capitalist restructuring of the 1970s would make it even more necessary to discover the new ways that the proletariat articulated antagonistic demands and organizational forms. This dynamic cannot be illuminated by raising the problem of “representative democracy” – and even “direct democracy” does not bring out its content, the constitution of a collective subject capable of establishing forms of life beyond capitalist relations of production, which in the 1970s could be observed in the autonomous struggles that were emerging outside of the party. In this sense, as Antonio Negri argued in response to a parallel set of claims in the Italian context (which Poulantzas had invoked explicitly), the old term

and that requires exact knowledge of the State and of its current role.” Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 38–9.

“dictatorship of the proletariat” – or perhaps, instead, “communist power” – actually comes closer to naming the political process at work.¹⁶⁸

The limit of this theory, then, was its displacement of the theory of organization onto the philosophical problem of the relation between representative and direct democracy. But Poulantzas was correct to show that the form of organization could not simply be taken as an expression of the historical changes in the composition of the class. It had to be explicitly brought into question.

The objective process of state incorporation extended across European social democracy and reached even the mass Communist Parties on the Continent, paving the way for a distinct kind of reformism in the postwar period. It was Poulantzas’s ambivalent insight that this process implied a crisis in the classical strategic problematic. Thus postwar reformism was of an entirely different character: it manifested a deep uncertainty about the relation of the capitalist state form, now fully developed into a structure markedly different from the states previous revolutions had set out to seize or smash, to the organizational form of the revolutionary subject, now that the legal political party had been incorporated into the normal functioning of the state and the social conditions for the classical insurrectionary scenario no longer existed; the reformism of the left parliamentary parties was a structural reality entirely distinct from classical revisionism.

¹⁶⁸ See the exchange between Bobbio and Negri in Norberto Bobbio, *Which Socialism?: Marxism, Socialism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

The Crisis of Marxism

Meanwhile Althusser was engaged in a vigorous theoretical polemic against Eurocommunism, which took on a public expression with his famous intervention on the “crisis of Marxism” at the 1978 *Il Manifesto* conference in Venice, at the invitation of Rossana Rossanda. To inquire into the crisis of Marxism let us begin with Rossanda, who addressed the problem of revolutionary strategy in several articles throughout the 60s and 70s.

In 1972 Rossanda noted that the Trotskyist strategy, the one that we have seen represented by Henri Weber, had too often reduced its analysis to an “excessive dramatization,” which saw the heroic and authentic instance of revolution in October 1917 transformed into a “fatal bureaucratic degeneration,” whose causes were explained by “the phenomenology of power, at the social-psychological level.” This was a theory of “history as a mistake, a non-history.” And if “the USSR is the country of Leninism betrayed, the Chinese revolution is quite simply incomprehensible.”¹⁶⁹

More interesting to Rossanda was the example of China, since it posed the question of *what precisely was lacking in the Soviet model from 1917 on*, and what alternatives were available. Rossanda wrote in 1970:

In its first editorial, a year ago, *Il Manifesto* explicitly referred to the example

¹⁶⁹ Rossana Rossanda, “Revolutionary Intellectuals and the Soviet Union,” *Socialist Register* (1974): 22, 35.

provided by the “cultural revolution.” We were then still members of the Communist Party, and in this way we showed the Party that the cultural revolution appeared to us as one of the roads that must be taken in order to regenerate not only the Party itself but also the strategy of the revolutionary movement in the West.¹⁷⁰

Rossanda pointed out that while it was certainly true that Chinese communism was distinguished by its divergence from Soviet communism, this divergence was often interpreted in theoretically unsatisfactory ways, first of all in the interpretation of the Cultural Revolution as the struggle against a capitalist superstructure through the building of a socialist consciousness. This standard interpretation was based on the premise that Soviet state socialism was characterized by a contradiction between a socialist economic base, defined by the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, and a capitalist superstructure, defined in terms of the effect of consciousness on material existence. Thus two responses were possible: “for those on the Right, the need to find a solution by liberalizing institutions, and, for those on the Left, the need to stimulate devotion, disinterestedness, the spirit of sacrifice and egalitarianism as a lifestyle. Revisionism and cultural revolution are both relegated to the sphere of consciousness.”¹⁷¹

However, for Rossanda, this primacy granted to consciousness distorted Mao’s actual theoretical insight, which she argued was classically Marxist rather

¹⁷⁰ Rossana Rossanda, “Mao’s Marxism,” *Socialist Register* (1971): 53.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

than a voluntarist turn to the superstructure. The structural economic problems of socialist construction, as Lenin had clearly seen, were not simply resolved through state ownership of the means of production. The economic base remained rife with contradictions: on the one hand the verticalization and bureaucratization of management, on the other hand the use of market pricing mechanisms. Even in this early stage of socialist construction the economic base bore the marks of the survivals of former property relations, despite the abolition of private ownership. Mao's insight, in Rossanda's view, was not only to reject the dichotomy between base and superstructure, but also to highlight this complexity of the economic base.

She pointed out that the capitalist mode of production is not reducible to solely the relation of private ownership of the means of production, but that this relation is embedded within the web of relation that constitute capitalist accumulation: the selling of labor-power, the division of labor, etc. Thus the break with the capitalist mode of production would have to be a "total upheaval," breaking not only with private ownership but also with all these other relations. The abolition of private ownership is a necessary but insufficient condition for socialist construction. "It follows that what is called the 'transitional' society is a society in which a great deal of the capitalist mode of production survives, not as a vestige of the past but as an intrinsic form of the present."¹⁷²

The significance of the Cultural Revolution was to carry the struggle in the economic base towards these other "bourgeois relations," which Rossanda insisted

¹⁷² Ibid., 61.

“are not at all ‘ideological’ relations, empty projections of material forms that no longer exist, but projections of material relations that are still concrete and fully real.”¹⁷³ Her whole argument was directed *against* the assumption that the Cultural Revolution can be understood as an *ideological* struggle, specifically insofar as an ideological struggle would be understood as a struggle over the transformation of *consciousness*, and therefore an equation of the political level with consciousness. She wrote:

The priority of politics is not a matter of consciousness. It is the stressing of practice as the only factor of destruction (of the enemy, and also of what has entered into ourselves from the enemy) and of construction of a new order. But and here too the cultural revolution seems to me to have been misunderstood- this practice is not aimed at bringing about "ideological" changes, it is not educative or rhetorical: it is applied so as to achieve material changes, real changes in the objective relationship between labour and authority... By “priority to politics” we are not to understand “priority given to good feelings over practical reality.” In “politics” and “economics” Mao symbolically distinguishes two factors which, in practice, he constantly strives to fuse together, in a Marxist way, by denying the independent existence and alleged objectivity of a meta-historical economics, separated from the social context, and restoring to politics its nature as the agent

¹⁷³ Ibid., 63.

transforming the structure.¹⁷⁴

Maoism had presented, then, not a question of the divergence of revolutionary *strategies*, but rather a question of *differing and irreconcilable conceptions of revolution*:

The cultural revolution thus breaks with certain fundamental assumptions that have dominated the construction of the transitional societies in Europe. On one point essentially: the need for a radical rejection, a ceaseless re-examination of the elements of historical continuity that the capitalist epoch hands on to subsequent epochs. In short, the innovation here is that the revolution is seen not as a new way of managing a society which has been inherited, but as an act of destruction followed by a new condition of social being.¹⁷⁵

Now, here it is useful to return to Althusser's own commentary on the Cultural Revolution, published anonymously in *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* in 1966. At first glance Althusser's argument seems to be in contradiction with Rossanda, because it is precisely the character of the Cultural Revolution as an *ideological* struggle that he emphasizes. "Its ultimate aim is to transform the ideology of the masses, to replace the feudal, bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology that still

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 75.

permeates the masses of Chinese society with a new ideology of the masses, proletarian and socialist — and in this way to give the socialist economic infrastructure and political superstructure a corresponding *ideological superstructure*.”¹⁷⁶

Yet as we know, Althusser’s understanding of ideology is precisely one which refuses to conceive of it in terms of *consciousness*. Already in “Marxism and Humanism,” published two years before the start of the Cultural Revolution, Althusser had insisted not only that ideology is *unconscious*, but also that it is a permanent feature of all societies, including post-revolutionary societies, in which ideology is the field in which individuals live their relation to the world and respond to the demands of their conditions of existence. As we have already observed, Althusser argued that the themes of humanism were ideological expressions of problems of material organization. So it was precisely this distinction that Althusser found at work in the Cultural Revolution, since it recognized that “a transformation of the ideology of the masses *can only be the work of the masses themselves*, acting in and through *organizations* that are *mass organizations*.”¹⁷⁷ In other words, the Cultural Revolution was an ideological struggle not because it sought to alter consciousness, but because it sought to change the organizational forms of social life. There is a relay between the economic, political, and ideological levels that is constitutive of socialist revolution and socialist construction.

The problem of *survivals* of capitalism was fundamental for Althusser, as it

¹⁷⁶ Althusser, “Cultural Revolution,” 7.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

was for Rossanda, not only as a problem of socialist construction, but also in the character of Marxist theory itself. If it was possible for a socialist country to *regress* towards capitalism, this meant that the *ideological* interpretations of Marxism had to be rejected. The thesis of regression becomes “unthinkable if Marxism is an essentially religious philosophy of history that *guarantees* socialism by presenting it as *the goal* toward which human history has always worked.”¹⁷⁸ The very meaning of Marxism was then at stake – the significance of Maoism, for Rossanda and Althusser, was to pose the fundamental questions of its essence which since the October Revolution had been subordinated to the philosophy of history.

In fact, Rossanda had pointed out that the question of organizational form had always been caught up in the theory of the historical process, in an article called “Class and Party,” (1969) which introduced her interview with Jean-Paul Sartre on May 68. She wrote:

the organization is never considered by Marx as anything but an essentially practical matter, a flexible and changing instrument, an expression of the real subject of the revolution, namely the proletariat. The organization expresses the revolution, but does not precede it; even less does it anticipate its objectives and its actions... between the proletariat and the party of the proletariat, the relationship is direct, the terms are almost interchangeable.

For between the class as such and its political being, there is only a practical

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

difference, in the sense that the second is the contingent form of the first. Moreover, Marx is convinced that the proletariat does not require a specific and autonomous mode of organization and expression, for it creates and destroys as it goes along its political forms, which are simple practical expressions, more or less adequate, of a consciousness which is synonymous with the objective position of the proletariat in the relations of production and in the struggle.¹⁷⁹

So there is once again the question of consciousness, and in Marx's thought there is a close and necessary link between the material conditions of social being which constitute the conditions for revolution and the consciousness that is formed to carry it out. It is neither a mechanical process nor a "subjective plan."¹⁸⁰ The "fusion between social being and consciousness" can only be achieved by the very fact of struggle. There is no room in Marx's thought for an independent political level which would be the level of the party:

The class struggle has thus its material roots in the mechanism of the system itself; and revolution – meaning the process which is intended to transcend the system – is a social activity which creates, over time, the political forms which the class needs and which constitute its organization – namely the party. If the party and the proletariat sometimes appear as interchangeable in

¹⁷⁹ Rossana Rossanda, "Class and Party," *Socialist Register* (1970): 218.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

Marx, this is only so in the sense that the former is the political form of the latter, and constitutes its transitory mode of being, with the historical imperfections of concrete political institutions; while the proletariat remains the permanent historical subject, rooted in the material conditions of the capitalist system. It is not by chance that the proletariat is destined to destroy and overcome the traditional modes of political expression, including its own, insofar as they are something else than direct social rule.¹⁸¹

Now, in the theories of Kautsky and Lenin the party is no longer a mere expression of the subjectivity of the proletariat, a temporary expedient for its political activity, but an independent level. Rossanda pointed out that this poses the risk of idealism:

if the passage from social being to consciousness in the proletariat presents a theoretical difficulty, that problem becomes quite insoluble if, at the risk of falling back into Hegelianism, one deduces consciousness from consciousness-worse, if one does not fear to make the consciousness of the proletariat the product of the consciousness of intellectuals miraculously freed from their social being and abstracted from their class.¹⁸²

Yet Lenin would later turn precisely to the problem of *mass organization*, and the conception of socialist consciousness being introduced to the masses from the

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 220.

¹⁸² Ibid., 224.

outside “was contradicted by the thesis ‘all power to the Soviets’ – the Soviets being the direct expression of the class obviously possessed of consciousness to the point of being able to direct the new society.”¹⁸³

The *Il Manifesto* conference on “Power and Opposition in Post-Capitalist Societies” centered on the political level through an interrogation of the persistence of state repression in actually existing socialist societies – a practical dilemma for the international communist movement but also a theoretical question which Marxism did not appear equipped to explain. As Rossanda suggested, “the real relation of production, and therefore the real social classes, in the countries in which the revolution occurred ceased to be transparent or visible.”¹⁸⁴ China’s foreign policy maneuvers had revealed that its break with Soviet state socialism fell short. As for Eurocommunism, “that poor man’s version of the Gramscian approach to revolution in the west, stands exposed on all fronts.” But this was precisely because the East-West polarity had offered an incorrect way of framing the question: “We view the question of post-revolutionary society as a current political problem of the Italian left, and not as past history... We do not believe in two societies, socialism for backward countries and Social Democracy for developed ones; we still hold to a unified theory of world processes.”¹⁸⁵ At stake was not only the question of strategy but “the very idea of socialism, not as a generic aspiration but as a *theory of society*,

¹⁸³ Ibid., 225.

¹⁸⁴ *Il Manifesto, Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies*, trans. P. Camiller and J. Rotschild (London: Ink Links, 1979), 5.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 8.

a *different* mode of organization of human existence.”¹⁸⁶ And just as much at stake was the status of Marxist theory. Was it capable of answering these questions, or had it ossified into a doctrine that its adherents saw as complete in itself? Here Rossanda introduced the theme of the crisis of Marxism:

Neither the Socialist, nor Trotskyist, nor libertarian, nor Marxist-Leninist currents have succeeded in assuming this heritage positively. They cling to old paths, or move reluctantly into new ones, or simply give up. The crisis of ideals is reflected in the uncertainty evinced by European leftist parties when they stand on the threshold of governmental power. Unable to explain the history of revolutions elsewhere, they lose the thread of their own. One of the reasons why the Eurocommunist and democratic-socialist groups have been unable to constitute alternatives is that they themselves suffer the maladies of the “real” socialist systems as their own limits. Nor have the new left groups dared to deal with this question, for fear that demobilization would set in if they ceased to cultivate myths, and because of the temptation to believe that it was all the result of a “mistake” and that everything could be set right through a return to “correct” principles. This is not the least of the reasons for their failure. The crisis, moreover, goes beyond the purely political domain and invests the realm of theory itself. It is a crisis of Marxism, of which the *nouveaux philosophes* are the caricature, but which is experienced by

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

immense masses as an unacknowledged reality. Marxism – not as a body of theoretical or philosophical thought, but as the great idealistic force that was changing the world – is now groaning under the weight of this history.¹⁸⁷

This was not a defeatist claim. “Marxism offers a reliable instrument,” Rossanda affirmed, for rendering the social relations of post-revolutionary societies visible and transparent.¹⁸⁸ Althusser’s extemporaneous intervention was an attempt to carry forward this theme, but with a markedly positive inflection, which was endorsed in Rossanda’s concluding remarks.¹⁸⁹ Althusser’s exuberance is more clearly indicated by the original title it was given upon its initial publication in *Il Manifesto*: “Finalmente qualcosa di vitale si libera dalla crisi e nella crisi del marxismo.”¹⁹⁰ The French translation “Enfin le crise du marxisme!” retains something of this triumphant tone, while the English reduction to simply “The Crisis of Marxism” allows for a voice of despair.¹⁹¹

Althusser had spoken in Spain the previous year of the “crisis of the international communist movement,” manifested in the abandonment of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁹² But the crisis of Marxism went beyond the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 243.

¹⁹⁰ *Il Manifesto*, 16 November 1977.

¹⁹¹ *Il Manifesto, Pouvoir et opposition dans les sociétés postrévolutionnaires* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978).

¹⁹² Louis Althusser, “Some Questions Concerning the Crisis of Marxist Theory,” *Historical Materialism* 23:1 (2015): 153. See also the excellent introduction to this speech by Warren Montag in the same issue.

divisions in the communist movement, provoked by the vacillations of the socialist states and the Western parties. It was the suppression of the “difficulties, contradictions, and gaps” within the theory itself that began with the repressive climate of the 1930s that had provoked the crisis, because prior to this these difficulties, contradictions, and gaps were the source of Marxism’s vitalities, the contradictions which required the dynamism of theory in relation to its historical conjuncture and its political practice:

the crisis of Marxism has not spared Marxist theory: it does not take place outside of the theoretical sphere, in a simple historical domain of chance, accidents and dramas. As Marxists we cannot satisfy ourselves with the idea that Marxist theory exists somewhere, in pure form, without being involved in and compromised by the hard task of the historical struggles and their results in which it is directly concerned, as a "guide" to action.¹⁹³

Althusser identified two crucial theoretical gaps: the state and the organizations of class struggle, which were the subject of a follow-up interview by Rossanda, published in *Il Manifesto* in 1978 as “La questione dello stato, oggi e nella transizione.” Rossanda’s aim was explicitly to bring Althusser’s comments into relation with the debates already happening in Italian Marxism around the theory of the state, which had a very concrete pertinence: starting in 1976 it appeared to be

¹⁹³ *Il Manifesto, Power and Opposition*, 227.

possible for the Italian Communist Party to actually achieve state power, while its participation in the state under the banner of compromise put the meaning of this power into question. At the same time 1977 had brought an explosion of political activity that originated outside the party. Thus questions which had been deflected to the East were now at center stage for the revolutionary strategy of the West. In this context Althusser's interview sparked a debate represented in the collection *Discutere lo stato*, which presented the interview as "Il marxismo come teoria 'finita'," the title it would retain upon translation into French for Christine Buci-Glucksmann and David Kaisergruber's left Eurocommunist journal *Dialectiques*.¹⁹⁴ The interview consisted of only one question by Rossanda:

During your intervention in Venice, you declared that there was no theory of the State in Marx. I think so too, although there are fragments of an analysis of the modern state more developed than in Lenin and a sort of counter-theory: what the socialist State must not be. This debate concerns the socialists States and political life in the phase of the transition to

¹⁹⁴ *Discutere lo stato: posizioni a confronto su una tesi di Louis Althusser* (Bari: De Donato, 1978); *Dialectiques*, 1:23 (Spring 1978). For an interesting account of *Discutere lo stato* from a German vantage point, see Elmar Altvater and Otto Kallscheuer, "Socialist Politics and the Crisis of Marxism," *Socialist Register* (1979). I draw on the brilliant interpretation of this text and its relation to Rossanda's work in Étienne Balibar's 2010 talk "The *Genre* of the Party," trans. Patrick King and Asad Haider, *Viewpoint Magazine* (2017), <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/03/15/the-genre-of-the-party/>; see also Étienne Balibar, "Althusser and 'Communism,'" *Crisis and Critique* 2:2 (November 2015).

communism. Does this life pass through the party, which becomes the State, even by means of an internal dialectic? Or if contradictions continue to exist, do they need to be expressed politically? In other words, can a society that is contradictory (Mao) live without rules of the game?¹⁹⁵

Althusser's response clearly indicates that a recognition of the crisis he had spoken of the previous year was a necessary step in confronting these questions. It was not possible to address the problem of the state and the socialist transition if Marxist theory had been understood as a "total" and complete theory:

I believe that Marxist theory is "finite," limited: that it is limited to the analysis of the capitalist mode of production, and its contradictory tendency, which opens the possibility of the passage towards the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by "something else" which already appears implicitly in capitalist society. I believe that *Marxist theory is entirely the opposite of a philosophy of history* which "encompasses" the whole future of humanity, and would thus be capable of defining the "end": communism, in a positive manner. Marxist theory (if we leave aside the temptation of the philosophy of history to which Marx himself sometimes ceded, and which dominated in a crushing fashion the Second International and the Stalinist period) is *inscribed within and limited to* the current existing phase: that of capitalist

¹⁹⁵ Althusser, *Discutere lo stato*, 7.

exploitation. All that it can say about the future is the *fragmented* and *negative* extension of the *current* tendency, the tendency to communism, observable in a whole series of phenomena of capitalist society. It is entirely necessary to see that it is on the basis of the *current* society that the transition (dictatorship of the proletariat) and the ultimate extinction of the state are thought. These are only indications deduced from the *current* tendency, which like every tendency in Marx, is counteracted and may not be achieved, unless the political struggle makes it real. But this reality cannot be predicted in its positive form: it is only in the course of the struggle that the possible forms come to light, are discovered, and become real.¹⁹⁶

The question of these *forms* had a concrete importance in the organizational crisis of the communist parties. While left Eurocommunists had encouraged an openness to the new social movements, they had done so on the basis of liberal democratic pluralism – the “rules of the game” that Rossanda had alluded to. But the importance of these movements, Althusser suggested, could not be understood on the basis of these juridical categories:

An important tendency is currently taking shape, to take politics out of its bourgeois juridical status. The old party/union distinction is put to a harsh test, totally unpredicted political initiatives emerge outside the parties, and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

even outside the workers' movement (ecology, women's struggles, youth struggles, etc.)... I readily interpret on this point the great difficulties of the PCI at integrating or even having contact with certain new movements as the sign that the classical conception of politics and the role of the parties has been challenged. And naturally this has also put into question the organizational form of the communist party, constructed exactly on the model of the bourgeois political apparatus... It is evident that this profound contamination of the conception of politics by bourgeois ideology is the point on which the future of the workers' movement will be played out.¹⁹⁷

This rejection of the bourgeois form of politics was of a piece with Althusser's argument on the dictatorship of the proletariat. The class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie took the form of parliamentary democracy; the proletarian dictatorship, which would take the form of an even greater mass democracy, would constitute an active process of transformation which would lead to the withering away of the state. But this model had been associated with the idea of *the party becoming the state*, the source of the confusion underlying the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its substitution with the bourgeois rules of the game. However, the Eurocommunist principle of *entering* into the state ended up reinforcing the very identification of politics with the state that the proletarian dictatorship sought to destroy:

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

If the party makes itself the state, we have the USSR. I have been writing for a long time, to Italian friends that never, absolutely never, on principle, must the party consider itself “a party of government” – even if it can, in certain circumstances, participate in government. On principle, according to its political and historical purpose, the party must be *outside the state*, both under the bourgeois state, and even more so under the proletarian state. The party must be the instrument of the destruction of the bourgeois state, before becoming, bit by bit, one of the instruments of the withering away of the state. The political exteriority of the party with regard to the state is a fundamental principle that we can draw from the scarce texts of Marx and Lenin on this question. Without this autonomy of the party (and not of politics) with relation to the state, we will never get out of the bourgeois state, however “reformed” we want it to be.¹⁹⁸

Pluralism thus had to be understood as an organizational practice which revolutionized the very forms of politics which bourgeois ideology had constrained and equated with the state:

It is this autonomy of the party with relation to the state which allows the possibility (or even the necessity) of what is formally called “pluralism.”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

There is every advantage to the existence of *parties* in the transition: this can be one of the forms of the hegemonization of the working class and its allies – but on one condition, that the party be unlike the other, that is, solely a piece of the political ideological state apparatus (the parliamentary regime), but fundamentally *outside the state* by its activity in the masses, impelling in the masses the action which belongs to the destruction of the apparatuses of the bourgeois state, and the withering away of the new revolutionary state.¹⁹⁹

We might ask, however, why the original formulations of Marx, as Rossanda had described them, was not sufficiently powerful to constitute an effective challenge to the bourgeois forms of politics. Why can we not speak of the dialectical unity of social being and consciousness, which renders the vanguard party unnecessary, if not impossible, by eliminating the independent political level? Althusser addressed this question in a third Italian intervention, “Marxism Today,” published in the 1978 *Enciclopedia Europea*:

“Workers of the world unite!” effectively means “Organize!” Now it seems that the exigency of organization did not pose a particular theoretical problem for Marx: the whole problem was resolved in advance through the transparency of a conscious, voluntary community constituted by free and equal members – a prefiguration of the free community of Communism, a

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

community *without social relations*. The idea – which the working class would have to confront in its historical experience – that every organization must furnish itself with an apparatus so as to ensure its own unity of thought and action, that there is no organization without an apparatus, and that the division between apparatus and militants could reproduce the bourgeois division of power and cause problems so serious as to end in tragedy – this was inconceivable to Marx. But his successors did not tackle it as a theoretical problem either – not even Rosa Luxemburg, who had sensed the danger. And Marx, besides having a transparent notion of organization, never abandoned his old transparent conception of ideology as “consciousness” or “system of ideas,” and never succeeded in conceiving its materiality – that is to say, its realization in practices governed by apparatuses functioning as forms of dominant ideology, dependent upon the State. Most of Marx's successors have done nothing but repeat (i.e. gloss or interpret) Marx himself, and blindly plunged into the darkness of night: in the dark on the State, in the dark on ideology, in the dark on the Party, in the dark on politics - at the extreme, toppling Marx's thought into something utterly alien to him.²⁰⁰

Once again we may note a resonance and tension between Rossanda and Althusser's deployment of these identical terms. For Rossanda the transparency of social

²⁰⁰ Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 276.

relations in post-revolutionary societies is precisely what must be realized by a renewal of Marxist theory – by a rigorous analysis of the relations of production and the political forms which hold together new social practices and the survivals of the old society. Without this, the social relations of the post-revolutionary society remain opaque and obscure.

But what is the form of knowledge implied by this making transparent? In *Reading Capital* Althusser showed that in the Feuerbachian problematic of the young Marx, “to know the essence of things... was simply to *read*... the presence of the ‘abstract’ essence in the transparency of its ‘concrete’ existence.” He added: “This immediate reading of essence in existence expresses the religious model of Hegel’s Absolute Knowledge, that End of History in which the concept at last becomes fully visible, present among us in person, tangible in its sensory existence – in which this bread, this body, this face and this man are the Spirit itself.”²⁰¹ But the empiricist approach which claims a materialist status belongs to the same religious conception of vision, “with the mere difference that *transparency* is not given from the beginning, but is separated from itself precisely by the veil, the dross of impurities, of the inessential which steal the essence from us, and which abstraction, by its techniques of separation and scouring, sets aside, in order to give us the real presence of the pure naked essence, knowledge of which is then merely sight.”²⁰²

To render the relations of post-revolutionary societies visible does not involve, then, a mere empiricist operation of abstraction, an unveiling of the essence

²⁰¹ Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 16.

²⁰² Ibid., 37.

which exists in the real object. It involves rather the production of a new object and the founding of a new problematic: a theory of the state and of organization. The religious counterpart of the empiricist vision is the vision of a socialist “new man” whose relations to his conditions of existence would be immediate and total, a society beyond every kind of alienation and separation in which individual can directly see the relations which constitute them. But behind this new man is the subject whose imaginary experience can never coincide with its real conditions of existence, and whose consciousness is constituted by determinate practices and material institutions – the apparatuses of the capitalist state, or the mass organizations which seek to abolish it.

4. Retreats: Decline of the Party Form

Archaeology

We have tried to draw out the basis for the concept of class composition in early workerist texts, and we have also noted that it is elusive and ambiguous – It is rare to find an actual definition of class composition in the workerist canon. But one such definition can be found in Negri’s 1982 reflection from prison, “Archaeology and Project,” which inflects it with his own approach:

By class composition, I mean that combination of political and material characteristics – both historical and physical – which makes up: (a) on the one hand, the historically given structure of labour-power, in all its manifestations, as produced by a given level of productive forces and relations; and (b) on the other hand, the working class as a determinate level of solidification of needs and desires, as a dynamic subject, an antagonistic force, tending towards its own independent identity in historical-political terms.²⁰³

What is above all at stake in the concept of class composition is the relation between these two aspects of the definition, most famously at the level of the relationship between the technical organization of the labor process and the organizational forms

²⁰³ Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved* (London: Red Notes, 1988), 209.

of the workers' movement. These two aspects are for Negri identical to the labor-power/working class duality identified by Tronti, but they situated with a particular process of historical evolution: "given a certain level of capitalist development, the concept of labour-power becomes dissolved... the relationship of capital/labour-power becomes that of capital/working class."²⁰⁴ Furthermore, for Negri labor-power becomes the working class only in refusal; there are instances when "labour-power effects a revolutionary transformation in its composition and becomes working class."²⁰⁵ From this vantage point, we cannot conceive of a defeated working class. So for Negri instead of a logical duality, there is a historical progression: the theory of labor-power caught in a dichotomy between variable capital and working class "has, historically speaking, been progressively negated"; indeed, "at our given level of development, the old dialectic of labour-power within/against capital is played out."²⁰⁶

Negri's theory is a response to "social diffusion, decentralisation of production, and the political isolation of the mass worker in the factory"; in response to these conditions, which are themselves a capitalist reaction to the struggles of the mass worker, he seeks to "modify and extend the concept of working-class productive labour," pointing to "the *emergence and growth of diffused forms of production* [which] *redefined as directly productive and 'working class' a whole series of*

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 212.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 223-5.

functions within social labour that would otherwise be seen as marginal or latent";
“from the mass worker to the social worker” or socialized worker.²⁰⁷

We will return to the socialized worker, as it is elaborated in the 1970s. But here we must underline that his approach is a historicist periodization of the relations between categories. But unlike the historicism of the PCI, this does not imply the smooth development towards socialism. There is, even in Marx, a vision of “a real and proper *Aufhebung*” in which “the antagonism is transcended via an image of communism which is the necessary outcome of the dialectical process developed up to that point.” It is this vision of the *Aufhebung* that is taken up in the orthodoxy:

In the more banal of the socialist vulgates, the *Aufhebung* - whose schema, in Marx, is conceptual, structural and synchronic - becomes diachronic, utopian and eschatological. To further clarify this point, I shall spell out my thesis: *at the level of real subsumption* (i.e. at the level of the complete socialization and abstraction of all the productive and reproductive segments of labour), *we are dealing not with linearity and catastrophe, but with separation and antagonism.*²⁰⁸

The nature of this separation and antagonism was Negri’s primary political concern following the experience of *Potere Operaio*. Within the umbrella title of the “Area of Autonomy,” a new network of movements had emerged, and the workerist theory of

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 208-9.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 216-7.

contemporary capitalism took on a greater plasticity. Struggles over the wage were now, in a period of significant inflation, struggles over prices, and these struggles were rooted in the feminist analysis of the reproduction of labor-power. Organized refusals to pay price increases, especially for rent and transportation, or “auto-reduction,” was one side of this extension of class struggle to the social space of reproduction. The other side was the emergence of “occupied social centers,” squats in abandoned factories that were operated as cultural spaces by youth and drop-outs. The Movement of 1977, which filled the streets with festivals and riots, was this network’s most visible and spectacular expression.

At the opposite pole the “Historic Compromise” of the PCI, its electoral coalition with the Christian Democrats, which would turn the extraparlimentary left against the PCI completely. Negri and his group *Autonomia Operaia* or *Autonomia Organizzata* sought to operate a Bolshevik maneuver: to follow the lead of Lenin and discover the form of party organization that would gather spontaneous revolt together into an insurrectionary force.

But for Negri this could only be based on the emergence of a new unitary social subject, the socialized worker. The term, first put forward by Alquati, was advanced most systematically by Negri in 1975’s *Proletarians and the State*, presented at its core as a critique of Eurocommunism. Later, in *Domination and Sabotage*, Negri proposed that Eurocommunism seeks to resolve the class antagonism into an impossible *Aufhebung*:

Eurocommunism sets itself up as a candidate to represent the developed working class, as a party that mediates between the process of proletarian self-valorisation and the restructuring of capital. Eurocommunism is the party of restructuring - it is the party of the synthesis between proletarian self-valorisation and capitalist valorisation.²⁰⁹

The Eurocommunist parties can claim to represent the working class, then, only insofar as they subordinate it to the processes of capitalist restructuring. In its use of the term “hegemony,” Eurocommunism “allows the processes of working-class socialisation to be interpreted as tending towards the dissolution of class into society”:

It substitutes a Hegelian and populist terminology for a Marxist one.

Operating in this framework, Eurocommunism displaces the debate from the terrain of class struggle over reproduction, over productive labour, that is to say, the terrain of class composition, to “society” understood generically, and politics as the complex of institutions.²¹⁰

In this sense, Eurocommunism’s goal is to save society. It speaks for the society of austerity, the society of crisis, the general interest, instead of the power of the

²⁰⁹ Negri, *Books for Burning*, 253.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 254.

working class. But in so doing, it necessarily traps itself within capital's plan, for the society it wishes to save can be nothing other than capitalist society.

Against the Eurocommunist perspective, Negri set out to formulate a new theory of capitalism's objective laws, bridging the political challenge to the centrality of the mass worker and the crisis of the Fordist regime of accumulation. He argued that the socialization of abstract labor had extended to such a scale that the production of value could no longer be measured by units of time within enclosed spaces of work. Productivity had extended across the whole social process – and while the law of value was in crisis, it had not ceased to operate. Instead, it was imposed as a form of command upon a working class whose militancy had forced capital to restructure. The unity of this new social subject was also the basis for a new kind of party – not as the mediating element that resolved the working class into capital, but as a tactical moment of the proletarian strategy of total refusal. Just as in the earlier workerist texts, the professionalized worker's hegemony gave way to the mass worker, Negri argued that the mass worker had been displaced by the socialized worker, tending towards the same unity and antagonism as the mass worker at a higher level of socialization and technological development.

What Negri had recognized was that the shift out of manufacturing was neither a momentary aberration nor an apocalyptic collapse; instead, it was part of the integration of other forms of labor, encompassing services and cultural production, later described as “immaterial.” “Value-as-command” was an ambitious attempt to capture capital's acknowledgement that profitability would not be recovered in the

factory, and that instead the production process would have to be oriented towards the disciplining of labor. However, his assessment of the balance of forces – the assumption that labor was the dominant side and capital was on the defensive – turned out to be mistaken. The crisis of the 1970s was total, for labor as well as capital, but the state was able to launch an offensive that proved effective by 1979, when most of the militants of the Autonomia movement were imprisoned or exiled.

At the same time, the declaration of the death of the mass worker may have been premature. As capital restructured in the 1970s, it moved towards the renewed subjugation of the mass worker. Bologna, who had diverged with Negri over the course of the 1970s in the debates over “Leninism,” wrote a critical review of *Proletarians and the State*, warning against the temptation to declare a new phase in history with a new social subject. He wrote of the complexity of working-class subjectivity, which could not be captured in Negri’s sweeping periodizations:

There have been so many small (and large) battles, but battles nonetheless, during which the political class composition within Italian factories has substantially altered—and certainly not in the direction suggested by Negri. In fact, what has happened has been the opposite of what he claims, the opposite of greater unity. The fact is that a deeper split has been created, not between factory and society but within the factory itself—between the working-class left and the working-class right. In short, there has been an operation of extending reformist hegemony over the factories, and it has been

brutal, with no holds barred, determined to root out the working-class left and expel it from the factories.²¹¹

With the group of historians in the journal *Primo Maggio*, Bologna urged for a return to the “workers’ inquiry” that had initiated *Quaderni Rossi*, collective research within spaces of labor as the basis for a theory of the mode of production. Conducting inquiries into the new social movements and the restructured factories during the 1970s, the *Primo Maggio* circle found diffusion and fragmentation. For them, instead of proposing a new hegemonic figure, it was more urgent to try to understand the reality of defeat, to understand what had been lost with the decline of the mass worker. Political composition also had to be studied in terms of culture and memory, the legacies of the Resistance and the networks established among older militants.

When this model of research was extended to the Movement of 1977, Bologna found a diffuse, even splintered movement, quite contrary to the unity described by Negri. But just as important was the situation within the factory. What Bologna was able to predict was that restructuring would also involve the renewed subjugation of the mass worker. Solidarity within factories was now broken by employing youth and women who had not participated in the militant culture of the 1960s, and certainly did not have the utopian memories of the Resistance. Workers were forced to be extremely mobile, constantly shifting from factory to factory, unable to establish the

²¹¹ Bologna, “Negri’s *Proletarians and the State*,” 44.

ties that allow for organized action. And corporations like FIAT began to incorporate more service work into their production process, introducing even more internal divisions and hierarchies within the workforce.

Here we encounter all the familiar terms: diversification, financialization, decentralization, and offshoring. At the same time this was a process of recomposition of the working class, represented by automation, tertiarization, and the hiring of a younger generation of workers. Mass layoffs were followed with the accelerated installation of robots in the production process, which could serve as a productivity enhancement, but also a disciplinary measure.²¹²

The investments of the ownership had been shifted into financial speculation, in order to at least break even while automating the factory and accepting that production was operating at a loss. Women had been brought into the factory, and were dependent on the job, as were young people who lacked a memory of the anti-fascist resistance and the experience of trade-union struggle. This fragmented workforce was further decomposed by a policy of moving laborers between factories, and placing some workers within more service-oriented sectors of production. The tactic of a work stoppage was now extraordinarily difficult to organize; the timing of the work process was regulated by orders from computers, superseding the synchronization by work groups that had allowed for autonomous workers' control.

This recomposition was also a feminization of the workforce, encouraged by new laws which promoted the hiring of women. As Alisa Del Re has pointed out, the

²¹² See Wright, *Storming Heaven*, ch. 9.

entry of women into the waged labor market was driven by a fundamental “insecurity of access to the means of survival.” Inflation had directly attacked women, who managed household consumption, and it required them to enter into the “double work shift” of waged labor alongside unwaged reproductive work in the home.²¹³

These struggles were firmly situated within cycles of crisis and restructuring – changes in the regime of accumulation that both heightened class antagonisms and reacted against them. One of the crucial theoretical premises of the student movement was that the line between students and workers was getting more and more blurry. The university was becoming a business that generated human capital, rather than a monastery for traditional intellectuals; it shaped a labor-power appropriate for an increasingly technological production process. The classical conditions of full employment, so conducive to strikes, were in decline, giving way to heavily automated factories and creeping joblessness. Social movements had to extend outside the factory, and in Italy they did with some success. But as capital shifted from the Keynesian compromise to neoliberalism, laying off workers, financializing itself, and moving labor-intensive production out of the country, it also imposed new forms of control on workers who were still tied to manufacturing.

This is exactly what happened to the Italian struggles in 1980, after a bitter 35-day strike at FIAT was finally defeated. The state had already violently destroyed the movement and arrested its militants – 5,000 in jail or driven abroad. As many as

²¹³ Alisa Del Re, “Women and Welfare: Where is Jocasta?” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 101; “Workers’ Inquiry and Reproductive Labor,” *Viewpoint* 3 (2013).

two hundred workers committed suicide; after mass layoffs, the employers, in alliance with the managerial staff, broke the residual power of the mass worker.²¹⁴ The student movement had tried to bring technicians and white-collar workers into the struggle, but now they betrayed the dream of proletarian unity and opted for competition over solidarity. Their ideology of a “right to work” was a justification of managerial power over manual laborers, whose control of the production process was compromised by the introduction of a computerized chain of command. The story is repeated everywhere: subcontracting, multi-tasking, job rotation, temporary and part-time work, stagnant wages – and the decimation of the protection that workers did get from unions and the welfare state

In October 1980, this decade of class struggle and restructuring culminated in a five-week strike against layoffs, which Marco Revelli of *Primo Maggio* recounted in an article translated into English as “Defeat at FIAT.” The failure of the strike was due to the unprecedented manifestation of a mass anti-worker sentiment, when the 10-15,000 picketing workers confronted 20-40,000 middle managers, foremen, and white-collar workers who defended their “right to work” in a counter-demonstration. For Revelli, this was an “extreme decomposition of the class,” resulting from the “planned insecurity promoted by capital,” which led the “middle layers” to “offer loyalty in exchange for security.”²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Sergio Bologna, “The theory and history of the mass worker in Italy,” accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/theory-history-mass-worker-italy-sergio-bologna>.

²¹⁵ Marco Revelli, “Defeat at FIAT,” trans. Red Notes, *Capital & Class* 16 (Spring 1982): 99, 108.

So Revelli argued that it was time to reconsider the “schematic” analysis of unitary class compositions which can then be neatly periodized into stages. In fact, the condition for the whole history of workers’ struggle had been a fundamental heterogeneity. The experiences of past struggles were communicated to emergent sectors, building networks that enabled new struggles. The mass worker was not *superseded* by the student and youth movement; the two class figures had been articulated to each other in complex ways which could not be reduced to the hegemony of one or the other. As Revelli put it: “The young metropolitan proletariat [can] go ‘beyond’ work precisely because... the area behind the front line is well defended by a working class strength that has been moulded and formed in work.”²¹⁶

Workerism had emerged from a specific historical moment. Tronti began with the *hegemony* of the factory to show how the class antagonism could be thought together with capitalism’s laws of motion, in a way that his predecessors had failed to do.²¹⁷ Italian workerism would also have to respond to changes in capitalist development which they had not predicted: global economic crisis, the restructuring of production, and the decline of factory hegemony. Attempts to develop this theoretical problematic still have to respond to this historical challenge, and navigate around Panzieri’s warning – the risk of lapsing into a philosophy of history supported by the ontologization of labor. Although the introduction of class composition

²¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

²¹⁷ Introduced in “Factory and Society” in the second issue of *Quaderni Rossi* (1962), collected in Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 39-59; see also Sergio Bologna, “The Factory-Society Relationship as an Historical Category,” accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/factory-society-relationship-historical-category>.

identified capitalism with industrial labor, and the social world created by the postwar boom, its method would have to adopt the constitution and transformation of labor-power in the context of uneven development and global crisis.²¹⁸ Tronti confesses that his and his comrades' fixation on the industrial working class now presents itself as an unresolved problem: "I have come to the conviction that the working class was the last great historical form of social aristocracy. It was a minority in the midst of the people; its struggles changed capitalism but did not change the world, and the reason for this is precisely what still needs to be understood."²¹⁹

Despite Negri's insight into the indispensable character of organization, without which the workers' antagonism is incapable of confronting the state, his failure to break with the philosophy of history, his positing of a new hegemonic working-class vanguard, resulted in a distorted conception of the political moment. While Negri had met the challenge of the feminist argument to talk about labor outside the factory, he had locked it into a periodization which failed to appreciate that what is now called affective labor can by no means be understood as new; class formation outside the workplace had only become more difficult to ignore when the hegemony of the factory declined in the 1970s.

²¹⁸ For an account of the workerist attempt to develop the theory of money and class composition in the context of the economic instability of the early 1970s, see Steve Wright, "Revolution from Above? Money and Class-Composition in Italian Operaismo" in Karl Heinz-Roth and Marcel van der Linden, ed., *Beyond Marx* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

²¹⁹ Mario Tronti, "Towards a Critique of Political Democracy," trans. Alberto Toscano, *Cosmos and History*, 5:1 (2009): 74.

Detached from inquiry, his teleological perspective suggested that capital's crisis was permanent, its rule turned to pure command and violence, and the socialization of labor was complete; now it was possible for the proletariat to reclaim use-value for itself, and in fact it was already doing this; communism could be achieved without transition once the shell of capitalist domination was cast off. The harsh judgment of Maria Turchetto is that this turn implied a "complete reversal" of the initiating position of workerism. With Negri's notion of a *final stage* of capitalist development and class composition, "the old orthodoxy which formed the main target of the critiques developed in *Quaderni Rossi* – the 'development of the productive forces' propelling history towards communism – is revived."²²⁰

But as it turns out, history seemed to be propelled somewhere else. Capital was very successful at breaking the power of labor; it was clearly on the offensive and would emerge victorious in 1979, breaking the movement and sending Negri to prison.

This debate, however, led to an impasse. Negri discussed the question of organization at length, but tended to reduce it to the expressive totality of the new historical period, tied to the new hegemonic class figure. For the tragic, syndicalist line of Bologna and *Primo Maggio*, on the other hand, there could only be investigation of existing organizational forms, and Negri's call for a strategic development beyond them was an impermissible lapse into Leninism. The problem

²²⁰ Maria Turchetto, "From 'Mass Worker' to 'Empire': The Disconcerting Trajectory of Italian *Operaismo*" in Jacques Bidet, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 295. Turchetto's critique is useful, but much harsher than necessary.

of finding a form of organization which responded to a given class composition and could bring about a rupture with capitalist development, yet was not simply an automatic *effect* of this development, was obscured.

The tendency of Negri was to retain the basic theoretical and political orientation of workerism while attempting a philosophical upheaval of the classical categories. Sergio Bologna, on the other hand, returned to the classical workerist practice of “workers’ inquiry,” researching the “class composition” of the new social struggles. Negri attempted to find a basis for the *unity* of these diverse social groups and class actors, to facilitate a “party of autonomy” which could organize the diffuse movement. Bologna instead pointed pessimistically to the fragmentation of the mass worker and the new movement, and found that the conditions for unified political struggle had receded; for him, inventing new abstract categories of unity simply obscured the real situation, and unity remained forever elusive.

Decomposition

With this study I have aimed to propose that organization should be raised to the status of a theoretical concept, instead of being seen merely as a pragmatic expedient or a reflex of historical laws. What I have only begun to address is the equally fundamental question of *disorganization*, the decisive dynamic of what is now called “neoliberalism.” In its scientific capacity the term describes the state-driven process of crisis management, which functioned to overcome the contradictions of the

postwar “Golden Age” and sweep away the existing barriers to accumulation. Regrettably, this rather precise definition too often gives way to a kind of weak phenomenology, which reduces the capitalist revolution from above, the turbulent and uneven processes of crisis management and restructuring, to the way we feel when we look at Facebook. Such impressionistic sketches of flows and fragmentation can hardly account for the harsh authoritarianism of the law-and-order society which facilitated the transition, nor the resort to the traditional cultural values of family, church, and nation.

The theme of disorganization responds to a classical question of political philosophy, most clearly articulated in Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*: why do people fight for their servitude as if it were their salvation? Spinoza was right to insist that this question cannot be answered at the level of consciousness. We have to understand these “sad passions” in terms of the material forces which diminish our power to act. It is only by entering into composition with other bodies, by adding our powers to theirs, that we can know the joy of acting. So when the corporeal constraints imposed by tyranny make us unable to act, superstition causes our impotence to appear in our imaginations as the result of our own will.²²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, posing the question anew in *Anti-Oedipus*, presented it

²²¹ Baruch Spinoza, “Theological-Political Treatise” in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan and trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002). Deleuze’s account in the second chapter of *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988) remains a brilliant distillation of the philosophical method which determines Spinoza’s response. My understanding of Spinoza’s *politics* is anchored in the indispensable analysis of Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* (London: Verso, 1999).

within the framework of “desire,” tracing it through to Wilhelm Reich’s question as to whether the masses *desired* fascism.²²²

Nostalgia for the old organizations may also be a sad passion. What counts is the forms of composition which can today augment our capacity to act; and the appearance of these forms of composition is not guaranteed. This is why it is urgent to produce a concept of organization, against the philosophy of history which renders it invisible, but also against the libertarian impulse which rejects it as undesirable. I have drawn on Deleuze’s remarkable account of Spinoza to show why the existence of servitude and tyranny cannot be explained by consciousness. But I part ways with him when he contrasts a plane of immanence, which consists of what we might call the limitless creativity of being, to a plan of organization, that is, a transcendental direction imposed from above.²²³

This opposition of “immanence” and “organization,” presented in the 1981 essay “Spinoza and Us,” retrojects the language of Deleuze’s collaborations with Guattari onto his earlier work on Spinoza, and thus represents an attempt to transcend certain earlier ambiguities. Deleuze’s previous formulations employ the language of organization in a positive light to elaborate on a logic of composition *almost* aligned to ours here, attentive to learning the art of “organizing good encounters, composing

²²² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 29.

²²³ By using the language of “creation” I follow, part of the way, the critique of Peter Hallward in *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (New York: Verso, 2006).

actual relations, forming powers, experimenting.”²²⁴ This reasoning is spelled out mostly clearly in Deleuze’s 1968 study of Spinoza, whose concepts are summarized in the glossary of two years later: “A man who is to become reasonable, strong and free, begins by doing all in his power to experience joyful passions. He then strives to extricate himself from chance encounters and the concatenation of sad passions, to organize good encounters, combine his relation with relations that combine directly with it, unite with what agrees in nature with him, and form a reasonable association between men; all this in such a way as to be affected with joy.”²²⁵

However, here we are faced with the ambiguous notion of “joyful passions,” whose shaky foundation and theoretical shortcomings have been demonstrated by Pierre Macherey.²²⁶ As Macherey writes:

On this particularly difficult question, I would claim rather bluntly that for Spinoza all passions, without exception, are sad – even those that are or appear to be joys. Or that they are all ultimately sad, in a sort of passionate entropy, being precisely transitions unfolding in time that cannot be reduced to momentary states. In anything that places the soul in a passive situation there is something fundamentally bad or harmful, and no conjuring with the situation will ever turn something bad or harmful into something useful. One

²²⁴ Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, 119.

²²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Expressionism in Philosophy*, trans. Martin Joughin (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1999), 262; see also *Practical Philosophy* 23, 55.

²²⁶ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 273-4, 283-8, 310-11; *Practical Philosophy* 27-8, 50-1, 55-6.

might speak of a sad destiny of the passions, of all passions without exception, including joys that are passions. A “joyful passion,” indeed, is a contradiction in terms, corresponding at best to a passing, unstable and literally non-viable state of our constitution. Not only is it not enough to multiply, to accumulate such joyful passions to provide a framework for the soul to accede, in a qualitative leap, to the level of activity; such an accumulation is actually impossible because joyful passions, which are in fact imaginary joys linked to encounters with external bodies, cannot be assembled into a coherent stable group, but rather tend inevitably to conflict, tending not towards any composition but towards decomposition.²²⁷

We may conclude that Deleuze imagines the possibility of a smooth transition towards action, thereby foreclosing an analysis of the structural reality which will stand in the way of any attempt “to take formal possession of this power and to experience active joys.”²²⁸ Hence the eventual fall from fortune of the term “organization”: “a plane of immanence has no supplementary dimension; the process of composition must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives. It is a plan of composition, not a plan of organization or development.”²²⁹

²²⁷ Pierre Macherey, “The Encounter with Spinoza” in Paul Patton, ed., *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 153-4.

²²⁸ Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*, 103.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

This opposition of composition to organization leaves the ethical problem of the earlier texts unresolved. Insofar as Deleuze's account does not go beyond elaborating the ethical path of the individual, it does not proceed to the social and political level which is represented in the theory of *constitution* that Antonio Negri detects in Spinoza's politics.

It was in the moment of total disorganization and defeat that Negri turned to Spinoza, in the darkness of his prison cell. In the third chapter of *The Savage Anomaly* Negri draws the relation between *spontaneity and organization* – perhaps the primary concern of Negri's party-political interventions before his imprisonment – towards the relation between substance and its attributes ("First Foundation").²³⁰ This ultimately leads in the seventh chapter ("Second Foundation") to the antagonism between "the organization of human liberation" and what has already been described as "the transfiguration of the nexuses of organization into relations of command" – that is, the market.²³¹ Suffice it to say that we must distinguish this fertile line of reasoning from the ultimately historicist problematic of the *productive forces* in Negri's thought, which returns us to dilemmas we have already encountered in Deleuze in a paradoxically Hegelianized frame. Once again it is Macherey who makes the point: "there is something profoundly Hegelian in Negri's approach, and in his effort to make the synchronic standpoint of the system depend on the diachronic standpoint of the process, that is, to present the true 'not only as substance but also as

²³⁰ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

²³¹ Ibid., 156, 69.

subject.””²³² When Negri argues that the antinomy between spontaneity and organization is overcome in the singularity of the mode, he implies a progressive movement which suppresses the constitution of substance itself by its attributes. Organization as the expression of liberation lives on, but the possibility of disorganization, decisive for Spinoza, is excluded; this is the philosophical realization of Negri’s analysis of the 1970s political conjuncture.

Unless we retain an insistence on a non-teleological moment of organization, we cannot adequately confront the *relations of force* which decompose any challenge to constituted powers. The tragic persistence of capitalism, and the defeat which permeates the whole history of anti-capitalist struggle, demonstrate that there is no ontological guarantee of creation, or indeed of liberation, which can express itself simply by casting off a transcendental plan. There is no composition, in other words, without organization. The varied practices of working-class organization have never in fact been the result of a transcendental plan dictated by historical laws and their bureaucratic interpreters – they were actively and experimentally *produced*. Our task today is to formulate a materialist analysis of the processes of disorganization that have constituted our present, and to establish reference points for the experiments which will enable new kinds of organization.

²³² Pierre Macherey, “Negri’s Spinoza: From Mediation to Constitution,” trans. Ted Stolze in Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha, ed., *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri, Volume 2: Revolution in Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume I: Inferno*.

Translated and edited by Robert M. Durling. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Alquati, Romano. *Sulla Fiat e altri scritti*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975.

Althusser, Louis and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1970.

Althusser, Louis et al. *Discutere lo stato: posizioni a confronto su una tesi di Louis Althusser*. Bari: De Donato, 1978.

Althusser, Louis. "Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF, 18 March 1966." *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007): 153-172.

Althusser, Louis. "On the Twenty-Second Congress of the French Communist Party." *New Left Review* 1:104 (1977).

Althusser, Louis. "What Must Change in the Party." *New Left Review* 1:109 (1978): 19-45.

Althusser, Louis. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Translated by Grahame Lock. London: New Left Books, 1976.

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Verso, 2005.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

- Althusser, Louis. *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*.
Translated by Ben Brewster, James H. Kavanagh, Thomas E. Lewis, Grahame
Lock, and Warren Montag and edited by Gregory Elliott. New York: Verso,
1990.
- Althusser, Louis. *Philosophy of the Encounter*. Translated by G.M. Goshgarian. New
York: Verso, 2006.
- Althusser, Louis. *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*.
Translated by Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1972
- Althusser, Louis. *The Future Lasts a Long Time*. Translated by Richard Veasey and
edited by Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier-Boutang. London: Chatto and
Windus, 1993.
- Althusser, Louis. *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*. Translated by G.M.
Goshgarian and edited by François Matheron. New York: Verso, 2003.
- Altwater, Elmar and Otto Kallscheuer. "Socialist Politics and the Crisis of
Marxism." *Socialist Register* (1979).
- Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: New Left Books,
1976.
- Anonymous (attributed to Louis Althusser). "On the Cultural Revolution." Translated
by Jason Smith. *Décalages*, 1:1 (2010).
- Balibar, Étienne. "Althusser and 'Communism.'" *Crisis and Critique* 2:2 (November
2015).

- Balibar, Étienne. "The *Genre* of the Party." Translated by Patrick King and Asad Haider. *Viewpoint Magazine* (2017).
<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/03/15/the-genre-of-the-party/>.
- Balibar, Etienne. *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Translated by Grahame Lock. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- Berardi, Franco. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.
- Bobbio, Norberto and Antonio Negri. *Which Socialism?: Marxism, Socialism and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
- Bologna, Sergio, "The theory and history of the mass worker in Italy." Accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/theory-history-mass-worker-italy-sergio-bologna>.
- Bologna, Sergio. "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers-Council Movement." Translated by Bruno Ramirez. *Telos* 13 (Fall 1972): 4-27.
- Bologna, Sergio. "Eight Theses On Militant Historiography." Accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/eight-theses-militant-historiography>.
- Bologna, Sergio. "Negri's *Proletarians and the State*: A Review." In *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*. Edited by Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha. London: Pluto Press, 2005.

Bologna, Sergio. "The Factory-Society Relationship as an Historical Category."

Accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/factory-society-relationship-historical-category>.

Bologna, Sergio. "The Factory-Society Relationship as an Historical Category."

Accessed June 21, 2018. <https://libcom.org/library/factory-society-relationship-historical-category>.

Bologna, Sergio. "The Tribe of Moles." In *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*. Edited

by Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi and translated by Ed Emery.

Cambridge, Mass; London: Semiotexte, 2007.

Brüggemeier, Franz. "Ruhr Miners and their Historians." In *People's History and*

Socialist Theory. Edited by Raphael Samuel. London: Routledge, 1981.

Buci-Glucksmann, Christine *La Gauche, le pouvoir, le socialisme: Hommage à Nicos*

Poulantzas. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981

Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Political and Social Writings, Volume 1, 1946-1955: From the*

Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism. Translated and

edited by David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

1988.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Political and Social Writings, Volume 2, 1955-1960: From the*

Workers' Struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern

Capitalism. Translated and edited by David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Claudín, Fernando. "Democracy and Dictatorship in Lenin and Kautsky." *New Left Review* 1:106 (December 1977).

Claudín, Fernando. *Eurocommunism and Socialism*. Translated by John Wakeham. London: New Left Books, 1978.

Communist Party of China, "The Origin and Development of the Differences the of CPSU and Ourselves" in *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 92.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *The Road to Communism: Documents of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 576-7.

Cuninghame, Patrick. "For An Analysis of Autonomia: An Interview with Sergio Bologna." *Left History* 7:2 (2000): 89-102.

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and Selma James. *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Falling Wall Press, 1973.

Del Re, Alisa. "Women and Welfare: Where is Jocasta?" In *Radical Thought in Italy*. Edited by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Del Re, Alisa. "Workers' Inquiry and Reproductive Labor." *Viewpoint* 3 (2013).
<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/25/workers-inquiry-and-reproductive-labor/>.

Deleuze Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues 2*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and

Barbara Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007

Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Expressionism in Philosophy*. Translated by Martin

Joughin. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1999.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. San

Francisco: City Light Books, 1988.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. San

Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988.

Early Writings. Translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. New York:

Penguin, 1992.

Eley, Geoff. "No Need to Choose: History from Above, History from Below."

Viewpoint Magazine (June 2014).

<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/06/27/no-need-to-choose-history-from-above-history-from-below/>

Eley, Geoff. *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. New

York: Oxford University Press, 2002

Elliott, Gregory. *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*. Boston: Brill, 2006.

Evans, Richard J. "Politics and the Family: Social Democracy and the Working-Class

Family in Theory and Practice Before 1914." In *The German Family: Essays*

- on the Social History of The Family in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Germany*. Edited by Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee. London: C. Helm, 1981.
- Foucault, Michel and John K. Simon. "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview." *Social Justice*, 18:3 (Fall 1991): 33-4.
- Freeman, Jo. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." June 21, 2018.
<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.
- Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Haider, Asad and Salar Mohandesi, "Workers' Inquiry: A Genealogy." *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013). <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/>.
- Hall, Stuart. "The 'First' New Left: Life and Times." In Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Hallward, Peter. *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Assembly*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Heinrich, Michael. "Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx's Studies in the 1870s." *Monthly Review* 64:11 (April 2013).

- Heinrich, Michael. "The 'Fragment on Machines': A Marxian Misconception in the *Grundrisse* and its Overcoming in *Capital*." In Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas, *In Marx's Laboratory*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Heinrich, Michael. *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*. New York: Monthly Review, 2013.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- II Manifesto. *Pouvoir et opposition dans les sociétés postrévolutionnaires*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978.
- II Manifesto. *Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies*. Translated by P. Camiller and J. Rotschild. London: Ink Links, 1979.
- Kautsky, Karl. *The Class Struggle*. Accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/>
- Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Lenin, V.I. *The State and Revolution*. Accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>.
- Lenin, V.I. *What is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*. Accessed June 21, 2018. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>.
- Lewis, William S. "Editorial Introduction." *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007) 133-151.
- Louis Althusser. "Some Questions Concerning the Crisis of Marxist Theory." *Historical Materialism* 23:1 (2015).

Lüdtke, Alf. "Cash, Coffee-Breaks, Horseplay: *Eigensinn* and Politics among Factory Workers in German circa 1900." In *Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process: Studies in Proletarian Class Formation*. Edited by Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Lüdtke, Alf. "Organizational Order or *Eigensinn*? Workers' Privacy and Workers' Politics in Imperial Germany." In *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*. Edited by Sean Wilentz. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

Lumley, Robert. "Review Article: Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis." *Capital and Class* 12 (Winter 1980).

Luxemburg, Rosa. *Reform or Revolution*, accessed June 21, 2018.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch09.htm>.

Macherey, Pierre. "Negri's Spinoza: From Mediation to Constitution." Translated by Ted Stolze. In Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri, Volume 2: Revolution in Theory*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

Macherey, Pierre. "The Encounter with Spinoza." In Paul Patton, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Mandel, Ernest. "Revolutionary Strategy in Europe – A Political Interview." *New Left Review*, 1:100 (December 1976): 97–132.

- Marcuse, Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
- Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 27: Engels 1890-95. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 3: Marx and Engels 1843-44*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 6: Marx and Engels 1845-48*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 10: Marx and Engels 1849-51*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1982.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume 2*. Translated by David Fernbach. London: Penguin, 1978.
- Marx, Karl. *Marx: Later Political Writings*. Translated and edited by Terrell Carver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Matheron, François. "Louis Althusser et Argenteuil: de la croisée des chemins au chemin de croix." *Les Annales de la Société des amis de Louis Aragon et Elsa Triolet*, 2: 169–80.
- Mezzadra, Sandro. "How Many Histories of Labor? Towards a Theory of Postcolonial Capitalism." *transversal* (January 2012).
<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/mezzadra/en>.

- Mezzadra, Sandro. "The Topicality of Prehistory: A New Reading of Marx's Analysis of 'So-called Primitive Accumulation.'" *Rethinking Marxism*, 23:3 (2011): 302-321.
- Montag, Warren. "Introduction to Louis Althusser, 'Some Questions Concerning the Crisis of Marxist Theory and of the International Communist Movement.'" *Historical Materialism* 23:1 (2015): 141–151.
- Montag, Warren. *Bodies, Masses, Power*. London: Verso, 1999.
- Müller, Jan-Werner, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2, 5.
- Negri, Antonio. *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*. Translated by Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Timothy Murphy, and Francesca Novello and edited by Timothy Murphy. New York: Verso, 2005.
- Negri, Antonio. *Marx Beyond Marx*. Translated by Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano and edited by Jim Fleming. New York: Autonomedia, 1991.
- Negri, Antonio. *Revolution Retrieved*. London: Red Notes, 1988.
- Negri, Antonio. *The Savage Anomaly*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Pannekoek, Anton. "World Revolution and Communist Tactics," chapter 4, *marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/tactics/ch04.htm>.
- Panzieri, Raniero, "Socialist Uses of Workers' Inquiry." Translated by Arianna Bove. *eicp* (2006). <http://eicp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en>.

- Panzieri, Raniero. "Surplus Value and Planning." Translated by Julian Bees. In CSE, *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*, CSE Pamphlet no. 1, (London: Stage 1, 1976).
- Panzieri, Raniero. "The Capitalist Use of Machinery." Translated by Quintin Hoare. In *Outlines of a Critique of Technology*. London: Ink Links, 1980.
- Peter Thomas, "Conjuncture of the Integral State? Poulantzas's Reading of Gramsci." In *Reading Poulantzas*. Edited by Alexander Gallas, Lars Brethauer, John Kannankulam, and Ingo Stützle. London: Merlin Press, 2011.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. "Interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt." *Marxism Today* (July 1979).
- Poulantzas, Nicos. *State, Power, Socialism*. Translated by Patrick Camiller. London: New Left Books, 1978.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State*. Edited by James Martin. London: Verso, 2008.
- Revelli, Marco. "Defeat at FIAT." Translated by Red Notes. *Capital & Class* 16 (Spring 1982).
- Rossana Rossanda, "Class and Party." *Socialist Register* (1970).
- Rossanda, Rossana. "Mao's Marxism." *Socialist Register* (1971).
- Rossanda, Rossana. "Revolutionary Intellectuals and the Soviet Union." *Socialist Register* (1974).
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Masses, Spontaneity, Party." *Socialist Register* 7 (1970): 233-249.

- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*. New York: Pantheon, 1977.
- Sassoon, Donald. *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996.
- Spinoza, Baruch. "Theological-Political Treatise." In *Complete Works*. Edited by Michael L. Morgan and translated by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).
- Tronti, Mario. "Lenin in England." Accessed June 21, 2018.
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>.
- Tronti, Mario. "Our Operaismo." Translated by Eleanor Chiari. *New Left Review* 73 (January–February 2012): 118-139.
- Tronti, Mario. "Social Capital." *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 98-121.
- Tronti, Mario. "Towards a Critique of Political Democracy." Translated by Alberto Toscano. *Cosmos and History*, 5:1 (2009).
- Tronti, Mario. *Operai e capitale*. Turin: Einaudi, 1966.
- Turchetto, Maria. "From 'Mass Worker' to 'Empire': The Disconcerting Trajectory of Italian Operaismo." In Jacques Bidet, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
- Weber, Henri, "Eurocommunism, Socialism and Democracy." *New Left Review*. 1:110 (August 1978): 3–14.

Wright, Steve. "Revolution from Above? Money and Class-Composition in Italian Operaismo." In Karl Heinz-Roth and Marcel van der Linden, *Beyond Marx* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Wright, Steve. *Storming Heaven*. London: Pluto Press, 2017.

Zanini, Adelino, "On the Philosophical Foundations of Italian Workerism," *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 39-63.