

## Living Labour and the Labour of Living: A Tractate for Looking Forward in the Twenty-first Century (2004)

To Colin MacCabe, sympathetic editor in scanty times: he asked for more

Vain is the word of a philosopher which heals no human suffering.

— EPICURE

### o. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

#### o.1

I wish to articulate an initial approach within which: a/ the insight of Karl Marx is indispensable to any looking forward that attempts to avoid catastrophe for humanity; b/ this insight is best understood as being constituted by a fusion of three domains and horizons (*cognition, liberty, and pleasure*), with a set of regulative principles (*dialectic, measure, absolute swerve*), and a focus applying them to the determining factor of capitalist and any post-capitalist life: work, or better *living labour*.<sup>2</sup>

1 My argument, especially in Part 1, was triggered by Preve's wondrous *Il filo di Arianna*, from which it departs. My thanks for comments leading to improvements go to Sam Noumoff and Joan Roelofs.

2 Other ways of understanding the place and significance of Marx may be, of course, legitimate for other purposes. For example, Lenin's definition of "The Three Sources

It will be seen that the mortification of living labour, effected by trading creativity for alienation, leads with accelerating speed to personal and collective death. This is the reason for a radical refusal.

## 0.2

Faced with global capitalism and its colonization of the habitats, hearts, and minds of people, we need allies to understand its devastations well. The best one I can find is the teacher for life, history, in its precapitalist achievements. It may supply an estranging mirror.

The richest and most articulated counter-cultures would be the ones of the Chinese cultural circle (China and Japan) and of the Indian tradition. Alas, each needs one lifetime of study. A third possibility would be the European medieval tradition, but it is coded in theological terms which would need too much decoding for a brief approach. The classical Greco-Roman tradition, and then the classical communist tradition culminating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are therefore, in the position we find ourselves, the best detours in hope of a springboard: *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

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and Three Component Parts of Marxism” as being the best of “German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism” (23) is obviously correct, given his horizons; I shall have something to say about each of them. Yet I would claim that today, in direr straits than in Lenin’s time, we have to go back to the ultimate roots.

## 1. Three Interlocking Domains: Cognition, Liberty, Pleasure

### 1.1 Cognition

Cognition or understanding (*sapientia*) is in Marx on the one hand science but on the other hand integral human practice. I have argued in three earlier essays (“Transubstantiation,” “Utopian,” and “What”) how *Wissenschaft* or knowledge was in German subsumed by Kant to mean a systematic body of cognition with a proper correlation of principles and consequences. Now, on pain of having no transmittable knowledge, scientific or other, we cannot do without systems in the sense of articulated wholes or provisional totalities organized according to an overarching method; yet only dynamically equilibrated systems, with a deniable and thus changeable rather than closed history can today be defended. Therefore, we may still wish (I would) to retain the methods and name of science for strictly articulated and formalized cognition, as opposed to what Aristotle called “opinion” (*doxa*). But this can be rescued from its present dominant use as a death-dealing variant of absolutist belief, enslaved to capitalist profit, only if it gets into continual feedback with values and interests from human practice.

Science is nothing without humanity: as Gramsci remarked, whether the universe would exist in the absence of humanity is for us (today) an empty question. It is not outside history: “One basis for life and *another* for *science* is in itself a lie” (Marx, “Private” 311). Yet this is what happens under capitalism, where living labour is incorporated into variable capital while technoscience is opposed to it as alien fixed capital. But we would need for science an analysis as rigorous as Marx’s of labour and production as use-value vs. exchange-value. For, simultaneously, science as use-value is that form of human practice from whose ideal horizon all partial interests (of a class, gender or other limited group) have been expunged: “its dialectic consists in the fact that science is simultaneously a rigorously non-anthropomorphic vision of the world and in exclusive service of human happiness and serenity” (Preve 26). It has its first and noblest systematic form in Hippocratic medicine, which differentiates people only by the environment that pervades them.

## 1.2 *Liberty*

Liberty or freedom is the power of each person, but then also of each human class by which the person's possibilities are as a rule determined and constricted, to choose a stance and most actions. The problem consists in how to reconcile two usually clashing realities: history is real (there is a sufficiently stable Being out there determining us) and yet human choice is also real (there is a possibility for people to intervene into Being determining it); as Marx put it, people make history but constricted by conditions not of their choosing. Marx found in Epicure, whose stance he prefers to determinism in his doctoral dissertation, a strictly materialist explanation of freedom through unforeseen, casual but unavoidable, swerves of atoms from the straight path because of their inherent weight; but he adopted it for deep reasons of his time where the personal coincided with the political: the bright hope of the French Revolution, and the fact that even a well-off middle-class youngster and rising star such as himself could choose to become its devotee. The weight is the atom's participation in the material world, and following the deviation's effect in the world made of Epicure, in Hegel's opinion, the inventor of empirical natural science (cf. Asmis and Serres). The *parenklisis* or swerve (*clinamen* in Lucrece's Latin) was invented from an analogous necessity to imagine the possibility of a Hellenic intellectual refusing the social relationships of his time without resorting to gods or other heavenly sanctions (see Thomson), and the same held for his interpreter Lucrece and his best readers through centuries: Machiavelli, Erasmus, Montaigne, Bruno – who found in him an infinity of worlds – or Savinien Cyrano, Gassendi's pupil in seventeenth-century Paris. It is an *avoidance* of the fated straight line by the swerving atoms, of pain by the body, and of the declining world as a whole by the blessed gods in the intermundia and (as far as possible) by the adepts in the Epicurean communities or Gardens.

Why does this straight line, asks Derrida, fall from above to below; what does the provenience of case (*casus*, in German *Fall*), chance, and accident from the root for falling, *cadere*, entail (22)? It is because they come from the above, a place of power not subject to human will, of whimsical Gods or blind Nature, and may fall or break in upon any of us, like

meteorites – or their symmetrical obverse, the freewheeling and imprevisible idea (*Einfall*). In fact, Epicure properly scoffs at the anthropomorphic idea that in the infinite there is an up and down. The fixed destination of Destiny may be perturbed and deviated by some action (Derrida 24). For Lucrece, the swerve breaks the chains of Fate, and sanctions “the free will of people living in the world / [...] By which we move wherever pleasure leads each of us.”<sup>3</sup> It opens a free space for choice, where causal strings dilate and possible Being may be born from Non-Being (as sub-atomic particles from interstellar vacuum). This rescues accident and unforeseeability from its marginal status in the pioneering discussion of Aristotle (*Metaphysics* V–VI), and transfers it from the casual to the causal realm. It may thus serve as basis for, and it is of a piece with, an analogous rescue of pleasure, Lucrece’s High Venus, from Aristotle’s somewhat lukewarm treatment in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Marx rightly sees this alienation (*Entäusserung*) and contradictoriness as the heart-piece of Epicure’s philosophy, its strengths and its limit: the atom is defined equally by the possibility of movement and of deviation (*Texte* 154, 150, and *passim*). There is no necessity to live under necessity: finally, life itself can be avoided or withdrawn from. Such an avoidance simultaneously denies the norm and yet observes it as its presupposition (*ibid.* 100–02, 142, 150–52, and 158).

Of course, in modern class society possibly no concept has been more abused than liberty. As Hegel noted: “When freedom is mentioned, one must always be careful to see whether it is not really private interests that are being spoken of” (Lenin enthusiastically approved, see *Philosophical* 311).

- 3 Lucretius II: 254–8. Historians of science as a rule sneer about Epicure’s swerve, but it seems to be less extravagant than many a contemporary scientific tenet (see Andrade IX and *passim*, Georgescu-Roegen 168). The pioneer of a proper revaluation was Marx’s dissertation and its preparatory notes, see *Texte* 59ff., 99–103, 142, and 148–58. By the way, *clinamen*, the de-clination or deviation, is akin to Haraway identification of language as “made of tropes, constituted of bumps that make us swerve from literal-mindedness” (11): this should make believers in linguistics as the hegemonic epistemology like Epicure. In fact, about his system as expounded by Lucrece, Serres concludes that post-Einsteinian science is fully compatible with it: their hands meet across the centuries of Newtonian quantification.

Beside Epicurean hedonism, the other great classical idea of freedom was the Stoic freedom as the recognition of necessity, a universal concatenation of causal nets. It proved indispensable for the revolutionary and communist movements both then and after Marx, as it taught steadfastness in face of adversity and sacrifice, and it was together with Epicureanism the first to affirm world brotherhood in the expanding world of Mediterranean empires. However, predestination is fine while you seem to be the winning wave of the future, but after epochal defeat it easily becomes a confirmation of and justification for a necessary, destined unfreedom. This happened to Stoicism too: the so-called Middle Stoa became in the Alexandrian age the doctrine teaching Roman oligarchy how to use philosophy in conjunction with State-enforced religion for purposes of rule. Marx's Epicureanism is a better ally for and mainspring of a movement toward freedom, though I would differ from Preve in stressing the inescapable necessity for revolutionary movements to practice a dialectical interaction between a final horizon of hedonism and the immediate crutch of stoicism while hobbling toward it. This dialectics can also be thought of in medieval clerical terms as one between the triumphant and militant horizons of the movement. Thence Lenin's love of Chernyshevsky's *narodnik* asceticism: but the crutch should not be taken for the horizon.

For stoicism is a philosophy of permanent losers, often complemented by a vague messianism. As such, it has no answer to the two central questions of praxis and practical philosophy: the limit of life in a relatively early *death*, and the duration of life (very often, much too often) as *unhappiness*.

### 1.3 *Pleasure*

Epicure's breakthrough was to conjoin being wise, honourable, and friendly (that is, more than simply just) with felicity or pleasure (maxim 5), and furthermore, using a healthy individualism, to found all the rest on pleasure, insisting primarily on the evacuation of pain. Sensual experience is the basis for understanding, but it is steered by wise decision. Natural science (*physiologia*) is needed to know how to cope with pleasure and pain (maxim 11), and wisdom to distinguish natural, necessary, and vain pleasures (maxim

29), to illuminate their proper measure. The passion for wealth is at best sordid (maxim 30), but friendship (*filia*) a cosmic principle of blessedness (maxim 35) in human affairs. State and right were founded on a utilitarian agreement between people (maxims 33, 36–38). A life in concord without war, and indeed (as the early Christian Eusebius realized – see Farrington, *Faith* 78) a commonwealth without class strife, was prefigured in the Epicurean “Gardens” which admitted the unlearned, women, and even slaves. Centrally, this intellectual intuition or penetration (*epibole tes dianoias*) issues in freedom – in Lucrece’s poetic words:

[...] with pitiless judgment  
 Evaluate, and if things seem true to you,  
 Give yourself up to them, but if something is wrong, take up arms  
 Against it. For the spirit seeks reasons  
 [...] as far as thought desires to look  
 And the thrust of the spirit freely flies across.  
 (II: 1041–47)

The fusion of the domains I indicate as central to Marx is contained here in a first approximation.

Epicure’s original answer (and it may have been better than we know, as it has come to us mutilated by unceasing persecution) adapted the unitary materialism of Greek philosophy by providing weight to the primordial atoms and thus a capacity for self-originated motion and deviation. This was a decisive step, and Marx remembered it much after his dissertation. Perhaps self-critically, a note on “points not to be forgotten” at the end of his “Introduction” on the foundations and critique of political economy reads: “*This whole conception* [i.e., of his outline of capitalism] *appears as a necessary development*. But legitimation of chance [...]. Of freedom also [...].” (*Grundrisse* 109). I shall argue in Part 4 why it is doubtful that capitalism was unavoidable (its failure to arise in medieval China weighs heavily against this necessity) and that the laudation in the *Communist Manifesto* would have to be balanced with an even longer list of the blights the bourgeoisie is responsible for. Parallel to this cosmic self-management, Epicure posited as principle of human existence pleasure instead of necessity. His

pleasure is not immaterial but rooted in the belly (*gaster*), the seat of desires for food, drink, and sex.

True, Epicure intended his hedonism for small communities of sages, effacing pain by opting out of class society and its politics. Here the limits of avoidance or refusal understood as simple abandonment of what is general by the “abstractly single” (Marx, *Texte* 152), in order to achieve a sage suppression of troubling passions (*ataraxia*), become apparent. Yet such a secession is unavoidable at the beginning of any potentially revolutionary sect, from Epicureanism and Christianity to Feminism (though finally this does not suffice, and especially in the invasive world of technoscientific and worldwide capitalism). As Spinoza expanded it, already halfway to Fourier, the yearning to exist (*conatus existendi*) encompasses both avoiding pain and searching for pleasure, and furthermore it is not simply an instinct of self-preservation (*conatus sese conservandi*) but also and primarily a yearning to understand (*conatus intelligendi*) carried by bodily passions and ideas (*Ethics* III, prop. VI and LIII): people are defined by desire, which is “appetite together with consciousness of appetite” (*Ethics* III, prop. XCVI).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, full Epicurean hedonism not only faces the two questions of death and unhappiness but also provides an approach that can be built upon. It starts from the place of our bodies in the scheme of things. It collapses death into the question about life: “the art of living well and of dying well is the same” (*Letter to Menecaeus* – see Fallot, and Farrington, *Science*). Epicure and Lucrece remark rightly that no-one can be hurt when one is not – though perhaps this is not quite sufficient today, for one will know that her/his dear ones will be hurt and that one’s infelicity may greatly increase by not having time to accomplish certain sense-making actions. At any rate, all hinges on the sensuous quality of living (even if in Epicure’s particular situation wisdom meant for him contenting oneself with the indispensable minimum). The socialist and communist movements also started from and for this, with Fourier and Marx, but then largely neglected it in pursuit of quantitative competition with capitalist life-style: a philo-

4 For the filiation Spinoza-Marx see De Vries 50 and passim, Rubel, and Negri.



sophically (cognitively) and politically (pragmatically) equally disastrous failure of nerve and backslide.

#### *1.4 Plebeians and Philosopher-Poets*

The third pertinent current in ancient Greece, arising not out of intellectuals but out the dispossessed and exploited plebeians, was Orphism. Its mystical worship of Dionysus was co-opted by Pisistratus in the City Dionysia and thus gave rise to Athenian tragedy. Though encoded in mythologemes, which we can partly read off Hesiod and Empedocles, these were significant: Justice (*Dike*) sits beside the throne of Zeus looking at the dispossessors, ending the reign of force as physical coercion (*bia*); and Love, yearning for the reunion of what was dispersed and recovery of what was lost, is a revered creative power: “To the nobility Love was a dangerous thing, because it implied desire, ambition, discontent [...]. [To the Orphics] the world is best when Love overcomes Strife.”<sup>5</sup>

The failure of classical hedonism to effect an alliance with the plebeians, to engage in sweeping collective movements, is repeated, as in a mirror image, in the failure of official Marxism to articulate the horizon of happiness through radical existential choice, left to mainly individualist schools, say from Kierkegaard to Sartre, when not to burgeoning sects. Against Marx, the most advanced philosophy (and poetry!) was again disjoined from radical mass politics. The suicides of Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva dramatically point out the closure of an epoch that opened with Blake, Hölderlin, Shelley, Hugo, and Heine.

- 5 Thomson 238. It might be tempting to substitute Love for Pleasure in this sketch, as Cicero did (*hedone* certainly embraces also Joy). Alas, the former term has been sullied first by Plato and the Christian churches, and then by Rousseau and Hollywood, to the point of near uselessness.

### 1.5 *In Sum*

These three domains cannot be fruitfully disjoined, even for analysis. Each qualifies, delimits, and throws into relief elements of the other two; most importantly, each solidifies the other two. Of Jefferson's triad, liberty is the precondition for a life worth living and for the pursuit of happiness or pleasure. However, liberty without cognition is blind narcissism and without pleasure it is dutiful subservience. In Epicureanism, "the three criteria for cognition (feeling, affection, and expectation) are at the same time criteria for pleasure" (Fallot 8). Cognition without either liberty or pleasure is self-defeating elitist self-indulgence: this is masterfully articulated in Brecht's *Life of Galileo*. Pleasure without liberty is Sadean corruption, without cognition it is empty.

In sum, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and understanding are nothing without and outside humanity. Humans are certainly not cosmically free to choose one's birth, often not to choose one's death, and our control of life in between is still shaky, because we are ruled by the blind gods of capital. For most of life below the upper mammals and all of inorganic nature, the question of liberty is senseless. For humanity, it is a question of to be or not to be.

## 2. Regulative Principles: Dialectic, Measure (Justice), the Swerve

### 2.1 *The Dialectic*

The dialectic is, as mentioned in section 1.1, an inalienable part of valid cognition today. It is also its method. It starts by saying no to empirical reality, and goes on, as Heraclitus put it, by fusing disbelief with belief: most things (in the ways our societies and languages apprehend them, I would add) simultaneously are and are not; a thing at variance with itself agrees with itself, we step and do not step into the same river:

The universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man; it has always been, is now, and shall always be ever-living fire, kindled by measure, quenched by measure. (fr. 22B30, translation modified)<sup>6</sup>

The universe is, much as in Daoism, timeless and self-regulating through fluctuating changes based on such unstable unities of opposites. The “fire” is an image and universal equivalent for ceaselessly metamorphic matter: “All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for goods” (fr. 22B90); fire is “want and satiety, fire shall come and judge all things” (fr. 22B65). We are in a world of far-flung trade embracing two and a half continents, where “war is what all things have in common and justice is strife” (fr. 22B80), soon to be frozen and destroyed by the full penetration of slave work, and reborn only in modern industrial capitalism that spanned the globe. This is not only why the dialectic is now our daily bread but also why its zealous detractors (willy-nilly) prevent us from understanding what is to be done.

Already the Orphics managed dialectics: Ares is invoked to bring peace, Pan to free them from panic terror, Death to ensure longevity (Cassola 297). And Aristotle’s careful discussion of potentiality identified it as something which both may be and may not be actualized. This openness, the “potentiality of contraries” (*dynamis ton henantion*, *Metaphysics* IX, 2, 1046b5) in all creative activities, is what founds the onto-epistemological status of this liberating category. Epicure improved on such Hellenic attempts at dialectics, from Heraclitus on, by his central insight how chance and necessity (or determination and liberty) interpenetrate, applied to the relationship between humans and nature and to the zigzags of human history. Finally, Hegel’s dialectic, based on the strategic centrality of contradiction within a reason that thinks totalities, is omnipresent in social reality. Yet Lenin was right to call for a “society of materialist friends of Hegel”: for we cannot do without Hegel’s sweeping rediscovery of the dialectic for the epoch of

6 Except perhaps in ancient China and India, which I am too ignorant to judge fully, I do not know of a better encapsulation of valid cosmology than this fragment of Heraclitus. Lenin would agree (see Lefebvre, ch. 3D): his *Philosophical Notebooks* show the greatest interest, after Hegel, in Heraclitus and then Epicure.

swiftly changing capitalism, where each determination is also a manifold negation, but – dialectically – we cannot use it without rejecting all traces of his arrogant Christian theory of history either (and of his esthetics).

Marx usually did this. His dialectic begins with the Hegelian liquefaction of rigid entities into relationships between social beings (such as the capital), where all movements arise and flow from fiery and fluid magmatic depths, as in Lucrece. However, he does not use the pain of the antithesis – the blood, sweat, and tears of “the wrong side of history” – as a rhetorical ploy on the order of a double negation necessarily ending in the victory of the good synthesis: that is, for what Hegel called a theodicy (justification of Providence). Induced from the ways people cohabit and relate in the epoch of capitalist economics, it is not an illustration of pre-existing speculative schemes but an open-ended process, and Marx stresses the unforeseen ruses of history. If history is necessarily a dialectic of free vs. unfree self-creation through struggles of societal classes and fractions, which is since the rise of capital centered on the existential tug-of-war of living labour versus commodification and fetishism, then it has no end (but untold catastrophes and triumphs: Rosa Luxemburg’s “socialism or barbarism”). Marx’s dialectics, so far as I can see yet untranscended, turns Hegel’s frequent teleology into open-ended history. The key concepts are posited as historically contingent, referred to material and fleshly reality of the living labour. Given A and B in the concrete totality C (see Suvin, “Two Cheers”), D necessarily follows, but A and/or B could have been otherwise, is the unspoken presupposition. This kind of dialectic, “development as a unity of opposites [...] furnishes the key to the >self-movement< of everything existing; [...] to the >leaps,< to the >break in the continuity,< to the >transformation into the opposite,< to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new” (Lenin, *Philosophical* 358). It is the only tool for understanding movement.

Just as science, the dialectic is nothing without humanity: it is not an exclusive property either of the scientific mind or of the universe itself, but of their interaction. The interaction is here more complex than in the case of (human) life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, clearly sociopolitical animals. To my mind, it is legitimate to find in physical nature instances of the dialectic, if and when one can; but since all our facts to conclude from

are constituted by human social history (Marcuse), there is no dialectic of nature (the universe).

Both philosophy and science begin by transforming practice into mythical personifications and then micro-metaphors, and end in one vast macro-metaphor (as, for example, Wiener's definition of mathematics goes). They cannot reflect upon themselves unless they recognize how deeply consubstantial they are to poetry: Eros turns into Newton's attraction, geometry into gravitational fields, the wayfarers' horizon into Einstein's relativities. When most at strife with itself, the subject-object opposition agrees with itself.

## 2.2 *Measure, Justice*

Thomson has magisterially shown how the passage from tribal to class society led from the matriarchal ancestresses and avenging deities to Dike, first as habitual punishment through revenge, and then, passing through judgment, to the abstraction of Justice (goddess and notion of right or equity). The praise of justice as the highest virtue, because it does not concern only oneself but primarily the other citizens, was best synthesized in Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* Book V, especially 1129b and 1130a). There is no Freedom without Justice, and viceversa. Most interestingly, Dike is in Hesiod associated with proper order, civic peace, and labour, while it punishes transgression against the due measure (*metra, metron*): in Solon's words, against "snatch[ing] and steal[ing] from one another without sparing sacred or public property" – that is, against undue enrichment and violence. "Metron" is in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Certamen* the measure of oneself as an independent worker-owner, and in Solon the measure proper to a city-state which avoids the perpetual violence of covert polarization between the rich and the debt slaves or of overt civil war. It can be generally formulated as "the convenience or fitness (*convenance*) of one being to another or to itself" (Nancy 205). Its violation is, from Solon through Aeschylus to Sophocles, *violent excess* (*hybris*).

Yet the reasonable efforts of mediators, recalling that we all sit in the same boat and sink with it, came up squarely against the new introduction

of coinage, of riches not as land but as money and commercial capital. While the landed space is finite, money can be accumulated in time, so that “Riches have no limit” (both quotes from Solon in Thomson 232 and 233); this will be repeated by Aristotle: “There is no limit to the aim of money-making” (*Politics* 1.9.13), and for our epoch by Marx: “The circulation of capital has therefore no limits” (*Capital* I: 159 Kerr 1993 edn).

To summarily suggest another filiation, the Latin one: *modus* seems to be a close analogue to *metron*, a measure which is not quantitative but “presupposes reflection and choice, thus also decision.” It is “not [...] a mensuration, but a moderation, [...] a measure of limitation or of constraint,” and he who is provided with such a measure is *modestus*. In bodily balances, personal or political, the alternative root in med- gives *medeor*, to heal, and *medicus*, the healer (Benveniste 2: 123ff.).

Philosophically speaking, as best defined in Hegel, measure is “a qualitative quantity”: “All things have their measure: i.e., the quantitative terms of their existence, their being so or so great, does not matter within certain limits; but when these limits are exceeded by an additional more or less, the things cease to be what they were.” (Part One of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*: “The Logic,” First Subdivision, VII. 85). Thus, the stakes here are very high – it is a matter of naturalness vs. denaturing: Hegel concludes the preceding quote by emphatically affirming that measure is the way to arrive from a discussion of Being to that of Essence, and follows it up with a long discussion in sections 107ff. where measure is needed to complete the characterization of Being, and is indeed compared to God who is the measure of all things. There is a danger here, I would add, that – just as in the Hellenic tradition – measure (and qualitative nature) can become fixed and static, but this does not apply to properly historicized and dynamic measure or indeed Essence (see Suvin, “Two”).

For Aristotle it was still obvious that economy was the art of living well, consubstantial to use-values whose measure is emphatically limited by the uses a human body can put them to. The communal ship or trireme, Athens as freedom on the seas (Thucydides), withstood the Persian aggressors but could not withstand the hurricanes of private possessiveness. Individualism needs slavery and empire. One generation later, looking at the havoc-ridden downfall of the seemingly boundless empire erected by Aristotle’s pupil

Alexander, Epicure needed only (only!) to refuse the existing political order to get to his pleasure principle as just measure, opposed to unlimited desires.

In modern capitalism, we have progressed indeed: the boat being sunk by this boundless movement is not only a particular political unit (Athens) or group of units (Greece) but also the environmental eco-system, vertebrate life globally. The “techno” part of technoscience indicates well the presence of competence in a quite limited domain together with the absence of asking why, that is, the absence of a measure – a qualitative, thoughtfully applied *modus* or *metron*, moderate and modest – what is the technique for and what are its human costs (see Anders, esp. vol. 2). As Pythagora reportedly defined it, the lack of measure (*ametria*) includes illness in the body, ignorance in the psyche, sedition in the community, and discord in the house (Iamblichus, in Pitagora 2: 340). Or, as Hegel remarked, when the measure is exceeded, the quality of the quantity changes radically (*Encyclopädie* paras 107–09 and *Wissenschaft* I.1.3).

### 2.3 *The Absolute Swerve: Fourier I*

Marx’s argument is today still overlaid by his intermittent nineteenth-century urge toward Newtonian scientificity; yet in Marx cognition is in no way bound by those “positive” parameters, but inextricably fused with the visionary or poetic elements (which are not irrational but supply what conceptual reason has yet no instruments for). In order to understand him properly, the strengths of his greatest precursor and complement, Charles Fourier, have to be factored in.

Fourier’s major strength is to have responded to the system of bourgeois “industry” (which for him means artisanal work and commerce) by an “absolute swerve” (*écart absolu*) based on the pleasure principle, both personally sensual and socially combinatory, as a totalizing horizon; and his major weakness is that he did not understand revolutions, industrial

or political (just as Epicureans never understood labour). But he caught supremely well their consequences.<sup>7</sup>

Fourier judged “civilization” (class society, in particular bourgeois commercialism) to be, in a popular image, a “world upside down” (*Nouveau* 14). In it, the lawyer has to wish for “good lawsuits,” the physician for a “good fever,” the officer for “good wars, that killed half of his colleagues,” the priest for the “good dead, that is, funerals at one thousand francs apiece,” the monopolist for a “good famine, which doubled or tripled the price of bread,” the wine merchant for “good frosts,” and the builders for “a good conflagration to consume a hundred houses and further their trade” (*Théorie* I: xxxvi); family means adultery, riches mean bankruptcy, work is constraint, property ruins the proprietor, abundance leads to unemployment, and the machine to hunger. There is no reforming this ridiculous and pernicious set-up except by a new set-up, the harmonious association based on passionate attractions among people.

Extrapolating from the cognitive tradition formulated in Lucretius, all change and meaning arise out of interaction between a linear continuation of tradition and a deviant modification (*tropos*), between pious stability and heretic mutation. But now, faced with the radical nonsense that dynamically constitutes the everyday world of the bourgeoisie, the Epicurean fortuitous swerve must become a radical refusal.

#### 2.4 *Passionate Attraction: Fourier II*

People are by ineradicable nature bundles of passions for Fourier, and these can only be steered and organized. Passions stand in Fourier for all the central human faculties: sensations, feelings, stances, bearings – much as in the young Marx’s focus on human senses, pleasure (*Genuss*), and needs, which could be fully developed only after abolishing private property (“Private Property and Communism,” in *Writings* 305–09). The central problem of

7 I have taken over some formulations from my *Metamorphoses*, where eleven titles of secondary literature up to 1975 may be found.



bourgeois individualism was how to shape a community which would, as Rousseau put it, protect the person and goods of each without making him obey anybody but herself. Fourier's politics are a radical quest for sensual happiness for one and all: from him stems the socialist slogan that the degree of female emancipation is the measure of a society's freedom. He starts from enlightened egotism and aims for a society where the individual can only find his/her benefit through operations profitable to the whole community; he calls this new regime of free association the Phalanstery. As in the Orphics and eighteenth-century sensual materialism, appetite or passionate attraction is a universal principle, and Fourier extends it from Newton's matter to the other three worlds of plant, animal, and social life. People and their passions are not equal but varied yet complementary. Therefore, their appetites, primarily sexual and gustatory, are in Phalanstery developed and harmonized by composing them into series where classes of people (by sex and age) are, by an intricate and even maniacal system of idiosyncratic analogies (see Jameson), composed into a "calculus of Destinies."

This extends to the future and the universe: from the eighteen different creations on Earth, ours is the first and worst, having to go through five horrible stages from Savagery down to Civilization, before ascending through Guarantism (the economico-sexual welfare state of the federated *phalanstères*) to Harmony. At that point there will be no more sexual or economic repression, hunger, war, States, nations, illnesses or struggle for existence. Most important for Marx, there will also be no split between intellectual and manual labour, or labour and "leisure" (see *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, and Debout). The blessed life of Harmony, innocent of private property and salaried work, of nuclear family and the split between city and country, will right the proceedings of class Power: courts and priests will be Courts of love and priesthoods of sex, wars will turn into competitions of (e.g.) pastry-making, armies will clean, plant, and reconstruct, work will become attractive as play and art, and swerving abnormality the norm of society.

Fourier's shattering interplay of maniacal poetry and ironical dialectic, rooted in the deep longings and genuine folk imagination of ancient working classes just being crushed by commerce and industry, was the first to take into account the necessities of huge demographic agglomerations. It

will reappear in garden cities and kibbutzim, in Marx (see *Grundrisse* 712) and the hippies. What it lacked was a reckoning with industrial labour and capital, and with the deep-seated, internalized and normalized, violence its reign and its leaping technoscience bring.

### 2.5 *In Sum*

Dialectic is the way the swiftly and harshly transforming world works. Justice is the minimal – and Epicure’s friendliness the optimal – measure to be observed in those workings if the society is not to tear itself apart. Even the most extreme speculations by Fourier are an attempt to apply measure to the passions of possession or self-affirmation, which is what was traditionally called wisdom. The absolute deviation or swerve is the wise measure within the dialectics of the present epoch: the urgent necessity to turn upside down the murderously transformed world in order to make it livable.

## 3. Marx I: Production, Creation – Living Labour

### 3.0

Two presuppositions are quite central to Marx’s analysis of the “material mode of production” constituting capital and capitalism. The first one is living labour (*lebendige Arbeit*), “the living source of value” (*Grundrisse* 296–97); Preve perspicaciously notes that this “absolute starting point [...] functions for him as a true Being” (144)<sup>8</sup> and Dussel that it is “the category which generates all other categories by Marx; fetishism being

8 Marx, *Grundrisse*; a long list of secondary literature to Marx and the *Grundrisse* was given in Suvin “Transubstantiation” and Suvin-Angenot, to which today at least

the lack of reference to it" (39). Marx's definition of men is one of beings who "produce [...] their material life" (*German* 37). As against the Idealist definition of human being as *animal rationale*, it might be one of *animal laborans*, or the animal with labour power (*Arbeitskraft*) (Arendt 86 and 88). The second presupposition, to be initially approached in Part 4, is the measuring of living labour as time.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1 Alienation of Value-Creation

Creative power is appropriated by capital:

The worker [...] sells labour only in so far [...] as its equivalent is already measured, given; capital buys it as living labour, as the general productive force of wealth [...]. [I]n exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, [the worker] surrenders its *creative power*, like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage [...]. The creative power of his labour establishes itself as the power of capital, as an *alien power* confronting him. He divests himself of [externalizes, alienates – *entäussert sich*] labour as the force productive of wealth; capital appropriates it, as such. (*Grundrisse* 307)

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Antonio Negri's *Marx beyond Marx* (Brooklyn, NY, and London: Autonomedia and Pluto, 1991) should be added.

- 9 I am aware that I here rush into an area that is hotly debated through hundreds of pages by commentators of Marx, of which I have read only a part. Even more important, Marx has in works posterior to the *Grundrisse*, especially the later parts of *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*, had more to say on Smithian production, with at least partly new ways of envisaging it (that include a distinction between the two approaches to "production," e.g., *Theorien* I: 125 or 356). I hope to return to this in a following article to deal with time and quality; in the meantime I trust that, in this most knotty field, following Marx's own development and dilemmas is not the worst way to proceed.

I need to add that much after publishing this essay I finally laid my hands on some works that Enrique Dussel has been publishing since 1985 and which I had sought in vain in major European libraries. I was happy to see we came to the same view of living labour, though he does it at more length and with a stress on the labourer's corporeality, poverty, and denudation which I have now no space for. The single quote from him does not adequately represent my appreciation.

Labour not as object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value. (*Grundrisse* 296)

The productivity of labour becomes the productive force of capital [... C]apital itself is essentially *this displacement, this transposition* [of the productive force of labour], and [...] *this transubstantiation*; the necessary process of positing its own powers as alien to the worker. (*Grundrisse* 308)

The worker is impoverished by the process of production, during which s/he must enter into and be transformed by an “absolute separation between property and labour, between living labour capacity and the conditions of its realization, between objectified and living labour, between value and value-creating activity.” His/her “value-creating possibility” is transformed into

capital, as master over living labour capacity, as value endowed with its own might and will, confronting him in his [...] poverty. He has produced not only the alien wealth and his own poverty, but also the relation of this wealth as independent, self-sufficient wealth, relative to himself as the poverty which this wealth consumes, and from which wealth thereby draws new vital spirits into itself, and realizes itself anew [...]. The product of labour appears as [...] a mode of existence confronting living labour as independent [...]; the product of labour, objectified labour, has been endowed by living labour with a soul of its own, and establishes itself opposite living labour as an *alien power*. [...]. As a consequence of the production process, the possibilities resting in living labour’s own womb exist outside it [...] as *realities alien* to it [...]. (*Grundrisse* 452–54)

In brief, as Marx concluded, living labour is transformed into production of commodity plus surplus-value, both “incorporated” into capital in unequal exchange (*Theorien* I: 353 and *passim*).

### 3.2 *Fantastic Metamorphoses and Anamorphoses*

The product of a subject (labour) is unnaturally born out of it as not simply an objectified reality (like a baby or an artefact) but as a malevolent usurper, taking from the subject its “vital spirits,” vitality or indeed soul. This is not too bad an approximation to a Gothic tale, in two variants, with a male and

female protagonist: the first, in which the unclean capitalist Power seeds the womb of labour (here a *succuba*) with a demon birth; the second, in which the unsuspecting hero is beset by a power he unwittingly let loose out of his soul-substance or vitality, and which turns upon him to suck the rest of such “vital spirits” – from the Sorcerer’s Apprentice tale (already used in *The Communist Manifesto*) to the popular image (though not the more sophisticated original novel) of Dr Frankenstein and his monster.

Or, “[t]he accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain is thus absorbed into capital [...]” (*Grundrisse* 694). As in horror-fantasy, brain-forces are absorbed into the villain, the “*animated monster*” of capital (*Grundrisse* 470). In older language, he practices soul-extraction, soul-transferral or soul-eating. For when value becomes capital, living labour confronts it “as a mere means to realize objectified, dead labour, to penetrate it with an animating soul while losing its own soul to it” (*Grundrisse* 461). The underlying image of vampirism and vampiric reincarnation, the evil incarnation process, is reproduced in Marx’s very syntax:

Capital posits the permanence of value (to a certain degree) by incarnating itself in fleeting commodities and taking on their form, but at the same time changing them just as constantly; alternates between its eternal form in money and its passing form in commodities; permanence is posited as the only thing it can be, a passing passage-process-life. But capital obtains this ability only by constantly sucking in living labour as its soul, vampire-like. (*Grundrisse* 646)

### 3.3 *Two Meanings of Production*

The radical alienation of all relationships under the hegemony of capital (living labour vs. alienated labour, use value vs. exchange value, and so on and on) can perhaps most clearly be seen in the two diametrically opposite meanings for which Marx – in a shorthand – uses the term “production” in the *Grundrisse*:

Marx was perfectly clear about the distinction between “production in general” and “capitalist production.” Indeed it was the claim of the latter, through its political economy, to the universality of its own specific and historical conditions, that he especially attacked. But the history had happened, in the language as in so much else. What is then profoundly difficult is that Marx analysed “capitalist production” in and through its own terms, and at the same time, whether looking to the past or the future, was in effect compelled to use many of the same terms for more general or historically different processes. (Williams 90)

I shall use P<sub>1</sub> for economic “*production founded on capital*” (*Grundrisse* 415) and defined from the capitalist point of view, that is, as producing surplus value while producing use-value only insofar that is “the bearer of exchange-value” (see Marx, *Theorien* I: 53, 121, 116, and 267). Here Marx reuses the classical bourgeois meanings from Smith on; the briefest definition I found is “*Productive work* is thus that which – within the system of capitalist production – produces *surplus value* for its employer [...], that is work that produces its own product as capital” (*Theorien* I: 359). Obversely, I shall use P<sub>2</sub> for meta-economic or better *meta-capitalist production* of use-values in the sense of *creative force* (*schöpferische Kraft*, *Grundrisse* 307):

What is *productive labour* and what is not, a point very much disputed back and forth since Adam Smith made this distinction [Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* II, 355–85], has to emerge from the dissection of the various aspects of capital itself. *Productive* [P<sub>1</sub>] *labour* is only that which produces *capital*. Is it not crazy, asks e.g., (or at least something similar) Mr. Senior, that the piano maker is a *productive worker*, but not the *piano player*, although obviously the piano would be absurd without the piano player? [Senior, *Principes fondamentaux* 197–206]. But this is exactly the case. The piano maker reproduces *capital*; the pianist only exchanges his labour for revenue. But does not the pianist produce [P<sub>2</sub>] music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even to a certain extent produce [P<sub>2</sub>] the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces [P<sub>2</sub>] something; but that does not make it *productive labour* in the *economic sense* [P<sub>1</sub>]; no more than the labour of the madman who produces [P<sub>2</sub>] delusions is productive [P<sub>1</sub>] [...]. (*Grundrisse* 306; and see *Grundrisse* 273)

“The poet, the madman, the lover” (to use a phrase from Marx’s favourite writer) are to the bourgeois economist the very exemplars of unproductivity. Their production is purely qualitative creation.

The two meanings of production arise from the fact that Marx must *simultaneously explain and criticize* Smith's and Malthus's political economy. As he lucidly put it in the letter to Lassalle of 22 February 1858: "The present work [...] is at the same time presentation of the system of bourgeois economy and its critique by means of the presentation" (*Werke* 29: 550). Thus, he must meticulously account for the epoch-making innovation of capitalist production [P<sub>1</sub>] and sweepingly condemn it by indicating the anthropological limitation which renders it unable to subsume human production outside of the realm of necessity, i.e., the "species-specific" production [P<sub>2</sub>], that would not reproduce capital.<sup>10</sup>

Smith also opposes actors producing [P<sub>2</sub>] a play to those being productive [P<sub>1</sub>] by increasing their employer's wealth (*Grundrisse* 328–29). It is not accidental that Smith, Senior, and Marx all use examples from spiritual or esthetic production, which is clearly both potentially creative from Marx's anthropological standpoint (as opposed to the alienation of labour power) and yet unproductive from the standpoint of bourgeois political economy. This production [P<sub>2</sub>] has in bourgeois society only been preserved in non-capitalized enclaves, of which the most valuable may be artistic production and love. This is why the development of labour as use-value "corresponds generally [...] [to a] half-artistic relation to labour" (*Grundrisse* 587), and obversely why one of the best Marxists of the twentieth century, Brecht, returns to the concept of love as production [P<sub>2</sub>].<sup>11</sup>

While production had been confiscated by the rulers in all class societies, Marx's wrath implies that it is now for the first time both unnecessary (in view of the giant development of the forces of production, see, e.g., *Grundrisse* 705–06) and covered up by a giant ideological mystification of the new ruling class that pretends to freedom and integral humanism but

10 "For Marx, assumption of bourgeois perspective and voice, through what might be termed a heuristically useful travesty, was thus a frequent counter-ideological procedure" (Terdiman 23).

11 On Brecht, see Suvin "Haltung" and "Emotion." About Marx on art and production see the lucid distinctions – mostly on the material of the *Theories of Surplus Value* – by Sánchez Vázquez, 181ff.

whose only horizon is P<sub>1</sub>, which Marx will after the *Grundrisse* define as production of surplus-value appropriated by and constituting capital.

### 3.4 *Labour as Living Fire*

The most incisive formulation may be:

Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time. In the simple production process [...] the transitoriness of the forms of things is used to posit their usefulness. When cotton becomes yarn, yarn becomes fabric, fabric becomes printed etc. or dyed etc. fabric, and this becomes, say, a garment, then (1) the substance of cotton has preserved itself in all these forms [...]; (2) in each of these subsequent processes, the material has obtained a more useful form, a form making it more appropriate to consumption; until it has obtained at the end the form in which it [...] satisfies a human need, and its transformation is the same as its use. (*Grundrisse* 361)

“Living labour” is thus not a reified abstraction but the human bodily energy and skill, where body includes mind, the force of the living subject being invested in and basic to production. Labour power is a *vis viva*, the human incarnation of the “natural property of matter [being] movement [...] as *impulse, vital spirits, tension*”, a tradition going from Aristotle’s *entelekhia* and final cause to what Bloch will call latency-cum-tendency (*Prinzip* 1625ff.).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps it is by now not startling that “the advance of population [...] too belongs with production” [P<sub>2</sub>] (*Grundrisse* 486). From Marx’s very beginnings, such a formulation, in which the goal of and reason for labour is the production [P<sub>2</sub>] of life (see Arendt 88), where the “mode of

12 Marx–Engels, *The Holy Family* 152. The term *vis viva* is derived from Marx’s readings in – and then Engels’s full impregnation by – Leibniz (see Marx’s “Auszüge”), in particular Leibniz’s *Specimen dynamicum* [...] *circa corporum vires*, a polemic against Descartes’s reduction of motion to purely quantitative, pleading for a self-developing finality from inside any monadic form. This knot is discussed at length in Bellinazzi (73, 116–17, 136–37, 257–59, and passim). Marx’s monad is here sensual human activity, as found in labour (see the *Grundrisse*; also *The Marx–Engels Dictionary* s.v. “Force” by J. Russell).



production [...] is [...] a definite *mode of life*" (Marx–Engels, *German* 37), was permanently present in him. It is confirmed by Engels's famous preface to *The Origin of the Family*: "the production and reproduction of immediate life [...] is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence [...]; on the other, the production [P<sub>2</sub>] of human beings themselves" (455).

As opposed to production of exchange-values for profit [P<sub>1</sub>], the production of use-values for consumption [P<sub>2</sub>] is a beneficent metamorphosis of life into more life, human quality into another human quality: "*living labour makes instrument and material in the production process* into the body of its soul and thereby resurrects them from the dead [...]" (*Grundrisse* 364). The classless society or realm of freedom necessitated by the qualitative logic of human vitality, which sublates the quantitative logic of political economy, is one which has turned the vampiric dispossession of labour and its vitality into a Heraclitean but even more a Promethean "form-giving fire," into a means of renewed life. Humanized production or creativity replaces death with life: the essential Marxian argument is as "simple" as this.

### 3.5 In Sum

Thus the *Grundrisse*, and then *Capital*, are the high point and crown of a whole millennia-old (if not millenary) plebeian tradition of metamorphic imagery, omnipresent already in Lucretian poetics. In it the immortal labouring people constitute the world's body in metamorphic feedback with the world's goods, refashioned by, in, and as their bodies – a tradition best set forth in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. This tradition runs on the affirmative side from early metamorphic myths – such as the central one here, Prometheus as both fire-bringer and shape-giver (*pyrphoros* and *plasticator*) – and from folktales, through what Bakhtin calls "prandial libertinism" such as the Cockayne stories and Rabelais – positing a magically unimpeded direct appropriation of nature without war, scarcity or work – to Fourier's future of passionate attractions. On the negative side, Carnival is accompanied by Lent: all that falls short of such full contentment is treated as a demonically unnatural state of affairs, a misappropriation of

the people's living forces or vital spirits by vampiric villains. To mention only Marx's most likely sources, such a filiation runs again from the horrific elements in myths and folktales, culminating in those of the Grimm brothers, through classical antiquity (Homer's Circe and Lucretius rather than Ovid's codification of metamorphoses), to the Romantic elaborations on these motifs (e.g., from Goethe's *Faust*, see also *Grundrisse* 704). The subversive plebeian genres (or the twin genre) of horror fantasy cum utopian alternative, radically alienated from the seemingly solid and unchangeable status quo and therefore committed to seemingly fantastic processual and metamorphic imagery, supplied Marx in the *Grundrisse* with the popular, spontaneously materialist imaginative tradition formulating the lot of exploited people as a struggle between living renewal of their forces and a zombie-like death-in-life.

Marx changed and fulfilled this tradition by fusing it with the materialist and dialectical intellectual traditions which stem from similar roots but developed somewhat independently from Heraclitus and Epicure to Hegel and Feuerbach, briefly fusing with the plebeian tradition also at such earlier high points as Lucretius, Rabelais, and Cyrano. Marx's main innovation was to alter *the people's body* into *labour's living body*, which makes out of the cosmic presupposition of ever-living fire a concrete, everyday matter of *living labour's formative fire*. This radically transcended the dominant Greek vision of activity split between the *praxis* of free and wealthy citizens and the *poiesis* of the plebeian "mechanics," slaves, and women: "there is no effective liberty which would not also be a material transformation, [...] but also no work which is not a transformation of one's self [...]."<sup>13</sup> Marx's Copernican revolution substituted for the *polis* dichotomy, already rejected by Vico and Kant, the deeper binary relationship of living labour and vampiric capital. The Epicurean swerve, exasperated into a total refusal in Fourier, found its source in living labour.

13 Balibar 40–41. But such a doctrine of "ongoing transformation" (*Fortbildungslehre*) has been a ground bass of Ernst Bloch; see his final formulation in *Experimentum* 132.

Where labour was before the development of productive forces under capitalism traditionally an outgrowth and warding off of poverty (which is evident in the semantic kinship between the two terms, *ponos* and *penia* in Greek, *Arbeit* and *Armut* in German), Locke noted that it is the source of all property, Adam Smith that it is the source of all wealth: yet both believed it needed money for fructification. Though already Fichte objected, taking his cue from the radicals in the French revolution, that “as soon as anybody cannot live from his labour, [...] the [social] contract [on which the right to property is based] is in respect to him fully abrogated” (cited in Lukács 71), it was only in Hegel that labour was taken as the realization of human essence, as a formative or materially shaping force (see *ibid.* 378). Noting this, Marx however not only raised to central position the view that labour was the sole source of all creativity (see Arendt 101), possessing its own undying fire, he also changed Hegel’s recognition of “the positive side of labour” by stressing that it was the realization of man “within alienation, or as alienated person” (*Writings* 322, translation modified). Marx thus added to the plebeian defence of the consuming and hedonist body, culminating in Fourier, as well as to Spinoza’s understanding by means of bodily passions and idea, the crucially new cognition and trope of *the producing body*, which both incorporated and criticized (that is, dialectically sublated) bourgeois political economy.<sup>14</sup> A marginal but programmatic note of his in *The German Ideology* posits: “The human body. Needs and labour” (44). That is why his understanding will last as long as the economy of alienated labour and the need to imagine a radical alternative to it.

14 For arguments how well Marx knew Fourier, see Bowles, Lansac 119–34, Larizza, and Zil’berfarb.

## 4. Marx II: Capitalism as a New Thing under the Sun

### 4.1 *Time as Quantity*

The second mainspring of Marx's analysis of capital and capitalism is denaturing living labour by *measuring it in time* as an exchangeable quantity. It takes up and hugely enriches the classical argument that the only way to avoid the daily and unceasing violence of creeping or leaping civil war or, in Orphic or medieval terms, to practice the supreme civic virtue of justice, is the observation of due measure: "The circulation of capital has no limits" (*Capital* 129).

All production happens in time, but only capitalist productivity is measured per time unit. Piano playing is most precisely time-bound (each note has a time-duration), but – unless a music impresario exploits a player's labour – only piano-making produces wages and capital. In all uses of living labour there occurs a transmigration and metamorphosis of labour's soul and vitality. This creativity becomes demonic when reproducing capital, which is effected by measuring labour in the linear time of potentially limitless capital accumulation: "*Labour time as the measure of value* posits wealth itself as founded on poverty [...]" (*Grundrisse* 708). The distinction between the two senses of production is also one between maintaining the *qualitative* nature of human living labour, which reposes on a finite measure (like the Hellenic *metron*), or losing it for mere *quantity* in order to enable it as exchange-value:

Use value is not concerned with human activity as the source of the product, [...] but with its being for mankind. In so far as the product has a measure for itself, it is its natural measure as natural object, mass, weight, length, volume etc. Measure of utility etc. But as effect, or as static presence of the force which created it, it is measured only by the measure of this force itself. The measure of labour is time. (*Grundrisse* 613)

As a *specific, one-sided, qualitative* use value, e.g., grain, its quantity itself is irrelevant only up to a certain level; it is required only in a specific quantity; i.e., in a certain *measure* [...]. Use value in itself does not have the boundlessness of value as such. Given objects can be consumed as objects of needs only up to a certain level. (*Grundrisse* 405)

An incipient dialectic of time as duration, horizon, and value is at work in Marx, which it would behove us to learn from and develop.

#### 4.2 From Community to Loneliness

Marx's *Grundrisse* starts thus from the "first presupposition [...] that capital stands on one side and labour on the other, both [...] alien to one another" (*Grundrisse* 266), so that labour time must be exchanged for money. This is not at all a natural state of affairs. Historically, "[a]nother presupposition is the separation of [...] [labour] from the means of labour and the material for labour [...] the dissolution of small, free landed property as well as of communal landownership [...]" (*Grundrisse* 471). Before capitalism, the "labouring individual" existed as a member of a community (tribe, Asian or medieval village, etc.) whose "communal landed property [was] at the same time *individual possession*" (*Grundrisse* 492); he had "an *objective mode of existence* in his ownership [i.e., stewardship] of the land, an existence *presupposed* to his activity [...]" (*Grundrisse* 485). Capital presupposes the full annihilation of "the various forms in which the worker is a proprietor, or in which the proprietor works." This means above all: 1) dissolution of the worker's relation to land and soil, "the workshop of his forces, and the domain of his will"; 2) "dissolution of the relations in which he appears as the proprietor of the instrument"; 3) dispossessing the worker of "the means of consumption [...] during production, *before* its completion" (all 497). Capitalism having done away with the worker's "self-sustenance, his own reproduction as a member of the community" (*Grundrisse* 476), he has now been forcibly separated from materials and tools for labour, so that, as Marx ironically notes, "[i]n bourgeois society, [...] the thing which *stands opposite* [the worker] has now become the true commonality [*Gemeinwesen*], which he tries to make a meal of, and which makes a meal of him" (*Grundrisse* 496).

With the historical sketch of "Precapitalist Production Forms" (*Grundrisse* 471–514) it becomes clear "that the capitalist mode of production depends on social connection assuming the 'ideological' form of individual dis-connection" (Hall 24). Robinson Crusoe on his desert

island is a totally mystified myth of origin for political economics. But he is a powerful emblem for the “disconnected” status of the manual and mental worker. “[T]he same process which divorced a mass of individuals from their previous [affirmative] relations to the *objective conditions of labour*, [...] freed [...] land and soil, raw materials, necessities of life, instruments of labour, money or all of these from their *previous state of attachment* to the individuals now separated from them. They are still there on hand, but [...] as a free fund, in which all political etc. relations are obliterated.” (*Grundrisse* 503). This means that the disconnection and integral bodily repression went very deep. Marx’s vampiric, cannibalic, and demonic imagery indicates this well; and it also modulates into the language of dispossession, the result of which is the individual’s objective *loneness* (isolation, *Vereinzelung*): “the individual worker [...] exists as an animated individual punctuation mark, as [the capital’s] living isolated accessory” (*Grundrisse* 470).

This is a historically unique reshaping of living labour and use-value “into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain is thus absorbed into capital [...]” (*Grundrisse* 694). It amounts to a major cultural revolution, and has also been remarked upon by culture critics from the Right as a somewhat unclear “dissociation of sensibility” (T.S. Eliot). On the Left, it was best articulated by Lukács and Bakhtin as the descending curve of the novel from the collective values of Cervantes and Rabelais to the unhappy individualism of Gogol and Flaubert. This is both a consequence and an emblem of the disintegration of precapitalist communities and commonalities under the onslaught of the capillary rise to power of exchange-value, use-value turned into money and reproducing capital.

The disintegration of precapitalist communities, however subordinated and exploited they were as a whole, led to the ferocity of individualist aloneness. For, capitalism destroyed not only common land and co-operative work, but the further impalpable but quite real use-values of pride in work, skill, common values and beliefs, and overt numinosity. This leads to sweeping disenchantment (Weber), where most people come to lead lives of noisy or quiet despair (Thoreau). It is testified to by mass social

movements such as alcoholism, Luddism, and emigration but may be seen most clearly in the Realism of Stendhal's and Balzac's age.

### 4.3 *Reshaping the Time-Horizons of History*

Capitalism thus means the steady, at times explosive but always relentless, disintegration of most prior forms of people's relationships to each other and to the universe of society and nature. It means a consubstantial change in both overt value horizons and the depths of the human *sensorium*.

I shall pursue this in another place. Here I wish to note that, if this is correct, then the historical overview proposed by the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and other works of Marx, Engels, and the whole tradition flowing out of them needs a central correction. I have in an earlier chapter (Part 3 of Chapter 13) doubted the Hegelian triad necessarily evolving through tribal, class, and higher classless societies. First, I do not see a preordained necessity of such – possibly of any – evolution; that it happened is no proof that it had to happen. Second, neither are elements lacking which speak against taking class society (the Asiatic, slave-owning, feudal, and capitalist social formations) as a fully meaningful unit. Marx's own investigations in "Precapitalist Production Forms" give substance to my doubt. Political economy is a bourgeois beast, and it is not to be extrapolated backwards, he implies (see *Grundrisse* 497). Before the rise of capital, the aim of acquiring wealth was at least counterbalanced by other aims, such as stabilizing society – for example, by creating good citizens (in "Antiquity", *Grundrisse* 487). Wealth was certainly important, and decisive in some pursuits, such as long-range commerce, but landed communities could survive without it at times of political collapse. In its "bourgeois form," wealth is on the contrary "a complete emptying-out [...] [and] sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end" (*Grundrisse* 488). The separation of "living and active humanity" from "their metabolic exchange with nature [...] is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital. In the relations of slavery and serfdom this separation does not take place" (*Grundrisse* 489). "For capital, the worker is not a condition of production [as the slave and serf were], only work is," remarks Marx

presciently: “If it can make machines do it, or even water, air, so much the better.” (*Grundrisse* 498) All of this does not mean that slavery or serfdom were better, only quite different: in them, “use value predominates, production for direct consumption [and payments in kind] [...]” (*Grundrisse* 502). Finally, only in capitalism the rise of monetary wealth leads to the industrial revolution; and only in capitalism is there conquest of production in time rather than of the products in space (see *Grundrisse* 506 and 512). In fact, Marx concludes that slavery and serfdom – and a fortiori the Asiatic mode of production – were more akin to the clan system, whose forms they modify (*Grundrisse* 493)!

This conclusion (and the whole astounding argument in *Grundrisse* 493–95) goes even further than I would advocate, for it might lead us to posit a new triad of modes of production: precapitalist, capitalist, post-capitalist. I shall content myself with being non-Hegelian and proposing instead the tetrad: tribal → precapitalist → capitalist → classless societies.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the depth processes in economics mentioned above, capitalism adds to precapitalist or tributary class societies at least five further, key factors: first, the huge development of productive forces; second, the complete supersession of direct relationships between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited (as opposed to the situation of slaves, tributaries or serfs); third, the rise of nation-states; fourth, the replacement of religion as undoubted *doxa* by political economy and its ideologies of productivity (which draws surplus value out of labour) and of technoscience (frozen labour that does not strike) as well as – alas to a lesser degree – by the public opinion of civil society; and fifth, the convergence of profit urge and technological means in increasing globalization, culminating in our days. This means then that capitalism was not providentially necessary, a

15 When I put up my hypothesis of quadripartition of historical mega-periods or social formations in Chapter 12, sparked by hints in Marx both in the *Grundrisse* and in his further rethinking when studying Russia in 1873–74, it was mainly derived from Thomas More and Chinese history, and secondarily from Karl Polanyi and E.P. Thompson. But I now find, culpably late (but life short, craft vast), that this point has been argued by Dobb in 1947, Bookchin in chapter 6 of his *Ecology*, first version 1982, and by Wood throughout the 1990s, as can be seen in her *Origin*.



Happy Fall ensuring final redemption – more likely, it might have been “a break in the cultural history” (Amin 53, and see 59–61)! This can be also read out of Utopia, and few people are for me more authoritative than Thomas More about the rise of capitalism; and it can be found in Marx’s repeated disclaimers in his correspondence with Russians in 1877–81 against the use of his depiction of “how capitalism arose in western Europe” for erecting “a theory of the general development prescribed by destiny to all peoples” (Marx–Engels, *Geschichte* 192–93, and see 191–213)! More mileage for the twenty-first century is here latently present: for this also means that capitalism will not be providentially overcome. I concluded that we may have to reformulate the price for further failure as not simply a “return to barbarism” but a more horrifying spectre of a decennial or centennial fascism, fusing aspects from all the worst capitalist, feudal, despotic, and slave-owning societies in the interest of the new rulers.

#### 4.4 *Consecrating Creation*

Not the least interesting argument in the “Precapitalist Production Forms” is the one about the deification of the community’s (tribe’s etc.) appropriation of land in labour. The “comprehensive unity” that stands above and sanctions the real communities’ hereditary possession appears “as a *particular* entity above the many real particular communities [...] and [the] surplus labour takes the form of [...] common labour for the exaltation of the unity.” Marx rightly identifies this person, the condensate of the everyday sacrality inherent in the creative relation between labour and land, as partly the despot, the patriarchal “father of many communities,” and partly “the imagined clan-being, the god” (*Grundrisse* 473); but to my mind the numinous force or god is the original personification of the imaginary substance of the community, a vision (and increasingly an illusion) of its life of unitary sense, while the emperor is only “the Son of Heaven” or living deity on earth.

Here too, capitalism is at the alienating antipodes. Its unceasing alienation of creative power does not affirm and guarantee it but *withdraws* it from the subject and object of labour. Its “value-creating possibility”

(*Grundrisse* 452) results in an emptying out of value for the worker – in the widest sense (that is, everybody excluding the capitalists and their henchmen, who revel in the value of domination). The impoverishment of the labourer, discussed in my Part 3, is not simply economical, it seamlessly extends to matters of life and death: political disempowerment over relations to other people and “religious” disempowerment over relations to the universe. Where the transitoriness of the worked-on objects led to usefulness and use-values and was renewable as cyclical life, the arrow of time brings now subjection to monstrous powers which are faceless, as it were dissolved into the world of commodified relations and only dimly apprehended as deadly consequences. Weber’s disenchantment can and should finally be identified with the loss of a structure of feeling of unitary sense in people’s works and days.

We can today see that intolerable disenchantment further leads, in a classical return of the repressed, to even worse – because unacknowledged – re-enchantment (Balibar 59ff.). It is not only that from the oceanic depths of the capitalist mode of production there monstrously appear new religions and sects. It is not even that all varieties of revolutionary politics and socialism seem to be necessarily a mixture, in diverse modes and proportions, of disenchantment and re-enchantment. It is primarily that the everyday life gets split into work and leisure, and that both of them impact upon the sensorial system, people’s consciousness, and their sense of values in totally new ways.

To reach for an understanding of these ways it is indispensable to take Marx’s fetishism hypothesis seriously, which means also literally, and redo it for the age of world wars and TV sensationalism. This would begin with taking in and valorizing all the main passages in which Marx dealt with fetishism and depth mystification inherent in the capitalist production process and mode of life, and not merely the famous chapter in Book One of *Capital*. Not that his views had centrally changed after 1857–58, when he wrote the *Grundrisse* (which I used here as the first and probably the richest formulation of this subject-matter). But in Book 3 of *Capital*, as already in *Theories of Surplus Value* (written in 1861–63), he advanced from what he confined himself to in *Capital* 1 to a first consideration of interest-bearing capital, which he called its “most fetishized form”, and

then followed up “the enchanted and topsy-turvy world of capital” from production into the circulation process, determined not only by labour time but also by circulation time, and clearly implied this was even more “mystical” (*Werke* 25: 404 and 835–36 *Theorien* 3: 451–65).

If, as all creation, love as well as child-bearing and child-rearing belong to production in the non-bourgeois and anti-capitalist sense, then Marx takes this sense [P<sub>2</sub>] for his implicit yardstick with which to measure the wrong character of capitalist production [P<sub>1</sub>]; but it is right to say that he, and the whole Marxist tradition, does not focus on this production as creation. Though many women and children worked in Marx’s time on turning labour into reproduction of capital, this was eventually found less profitable than using them for the hidden costs of reproducing the labour force, and industrial labourers became as a rule male. There was much reason in his focussing on the problem as it concerned these male labourers, on labour as abstractly genderless, but that does not excuse the neglect after him. Epicure deposed his will in the temple of Demeter, the Great Earth Mother which grows trees, grain, and people, the goddess of natural needs and their fulfillment; and practically consubstantial to it was the great Epicurean Aphrodite-Venus, Lucretius’s “human and divine pleasure” (Fallot 34–35, and see Cassola 327, 332, and 436–37). We have to recover this lost legacy where women and their living labour are the indispensable second pole for human freedom, cognition, and pleasure – and as the more oppressed sex/ gender, a measure for all of them.

A crucial and vital updating of Marx’s insights for the twenty-first century must use at least two new currents of cognition. First, the insights of critics of bourgeois presuppositions to economics, from Polanyi to present-day ecological debates, beginning with the absolutely necessary dethroning of the Gross National Product (GNP) as yardstick for well-being. Second, the insights of materialist feminism. Beside adding new foci, such as the intertwining of the producing and the gendered body, they add new methods. There should be no deep obstacles for such an alliance (though many contingent ones, arising mainly out of opposed interests of male and female elites competing at the capitalist poker table). To the Marxian demonic birth, Feminist and Brechtian holy birth – all creation that consecrates life – has to be added.

### 4.5 *An Economy of Death*

I cannot enter here into the properly economic discussions flowing out from Marx's two mainsprings. But as Preve remarks, all political economy "is an attempt to measure what is by nature measureless, and only the dialectic allows us to measure the measureless": he could have added that mathematicians had for the same reasons to invent the differential and integral account. He caps this fulgurant argument by noting that the problem of determining bounds to the boundless means in philosophical language a determination of totality, and that "the idea there could be a critique of political economics without the dialectic seems like the joke of a bad comic: one laughs, but only out of courtesy" (Preve 54–55). The bourgeois practice and theory of political economy are thus erected on quicksand: their basic move is to pretend the measureless can be arithmetically measured with sufficient precision to go immeasurably on. They have no inkling of life's being a small island of negentropy within an ocean of entropy that tends toward absolute zero, so that each manifestation of life is cosmically rare and must be cherished. They use for all their fatal decisions such obviously nonsensical instruments as the GNP, where crime and war officially contribute to riches, while the costs of air, water, health assistance, and all other life-enhancing activities yielding no profit on capital are kept out of its figures. This is logical: capitalist political economy is an ally of entropy; it is an economy of death rather than life [see Appendix].

Therefore, as Benjamin and Gramsci came to realize, whenever unions or revolutionary movements adopted the perspective of a merely quantified time, where the present is perpetually sacrificed for a shining future, they also swallowed the capitalist view of production as profit and sacrificed the union of intellectual freedom with material and poetic creation: the revolution turns into a shortcut to subaltern reform.

Necrophilia cannot be reformed, only done away with. Any life-affirming conservatism, muzzling the boundless and boundlessly destructive "aim of money-making," leads thus today not to the middle way of Aristotle but to a Marxian, revolutionary absolute swerve.

## 5. Prospect

Another great forebear of ours, Spinoza, says in *Ethics* that “[the] knowledge [of a free man] is a meditation on life, not on death” (584). Paradoxically, however, only in view of death, knowing how to meet it fearlessly in integral Epicureanism – which means getting away from life as duration in favour of life as the freedom of cognitive pleasure – is such a proper life and pursuit of happiness possible. Engels somewhere says that the human hand, with its opposable thumb, is the key to the hand of the ape. In exactly that sense, living labour and its liberation is the key to our present labour of living, to the horizons – the prospects as well as the just and unjust limits – of life.

## Appendix on Political Economy and Entropy<sup>16</sup>

*o*

I have been asked to expand on the compressed remarks about political economy with special attention to possible alternatives today. Now I am no economist, and dozens of weighty tomes have been written about the hugely destructive effects of our final phase of capitalism. Thus I can here only summarize a few most salient arguments. In Polanyi’s pioneering terms, when labour, nature, and even money are turned into commodities, then people are alienated and humiliated, the planet’s resources recklessly

16 My thanks for bibliographic indications in this brave new continent for me go to Matko Meštrović and Richard Wolff. Today (2008) the uselessness of GNP is well established in professional discourse, and there is a plethora of further instruments, surveyed in Talberth. The estimate of the Iraq invasion costs by Stiglitz is at least 3,000 billion dollars and the Daly–Cobb index of well-being ISEW would definitely be back at the level of the 1930s.

squandered, and money subsumed under financial speculation. Both natural resources and human life have become extremely cheap: probably around 1,500 million people live today in the most abject poverty, which means more or less slowly dying of hunger and attendant diseases, facing the few thousand billionaires – so that the hundred million dead and several hundred million other casualties of capitalist warfare in the twentieth century seem puny in comparison (though their terror and suffering is not). The purpose of economy is found to be compatible with mass dying and unhappiness, at best with social stability in the upper two thirds of the Northern metropolis of global capitalism, while it clearly ought to be the survival of the human species and other species ecologically linked to us (which means practically all). Our run-away sciences, which could have finally made (as Brecht put it after 1945) this planet habitable, have been turned into providers of enormous quantities of commodities without regard to quality of life. Economic growth benefits “only the richest people alive now, at the expense of nearly everybody else, especially the poor and the powerless in this and future generations [...]. Life on planet Earth itself is now at risk.” (Ayres 2) The “higher growth” of (as I shall argue) all our fake economical statistics is largely synonymous with more pollution, resource plunder, environmental destruction.

I shall attempt to deal in this Appendix with some discussions about the relation of official income to actual well-being and conclude with an indication of the entropy calculus as a basis for any future program of human survival.

# I

It is indispensable to start at “the accounting assumptions at the very heart of industrial capitalism, the statistic known as the Gross National Product” (Greider 452), further GNP. It measures the yearly monetary transactions involved in the production of goods and services, the flow of money paid out by producers for all their costs: wages, rents, interests, and profits, also depreciation and excise taxes. It is founded on defining “capital” as the manmade assets producing goods and services, and leaves out the natural

assets depleted by production (not to speak of surplus extraction of value from workers). It further ignores services and goods transacted without payment, the entropic costs (to which I shall return), and it throws into the same bag useful and murderous goods and services. For example, any known monetary transactions in arms, drugs, prostitution, and crime, any repairs after natural or manmade devastations, unnecessary lawsuits or medical interventions, all count as increase of richness. Ridiculous paradoxes ensue: if prices fall, richness is officially reduced; if family help to the sick is monetarized by hiring a nurse, or if a family member's death is followed by payment of insurance, richness grows. Finally, GNP does not at all deal with "non-monetarizable" exchanges of services and goods – not only the illegal "black market" of smuggling and immigrant work but also housework, leisure and volunteer activities, etc. – which some accounts estimate at almost two thirds of total work in industrialized countries (Möller cols 67–68). Therefore, the GNP's elaborate rows of numbers purporting to prove rising richness, and trumpeted ceaselessly by all governments and world capitalist bodies, conceal falling well-being and destruction of nature. The GNP may have been a useful instrument to measure capitalist production at the beginning of the industrial age, in what Mumford called paleo-technics, but beyond a certain level long ago achieved by industrialized countries, it becomes simply an instrument of ideological brainwashing, a Disneyland for the economists.

Pioneering demurrals against the GNP were entered in the first half of twentieth century by Irving Fisher, John Hicks, and Kenneth E. Boulding, but the critique picked up steam from the 1960s on in Baran, Sametz, Nordhaus-Tobin, Economic Council of Japan, Zolotas, and culminated in various more encompassing proposals at the end of the 1980s (see for this history Leipert 55, 62–63, 68–72, and 331ff.). Most of them concluded that the GNP is not "even a reasonable approximation [of economic well-being]" (Nordhaus and Tobin, cited in Ayres 5), and proposed to modify it more or less drastically to achieve such an approximation.

The most systematic, encompassing, and reasonable proposal for modifying the GNP by subtracting the real if hidden, and therefore difficult to estimate precisely, costs of capitalist life – production and consumption – was Daly and Cobb's magnum opus *For the Common Good* (1989, rev. edn with slightly less pessimistic calculations 1994). They proposed to effect not only a better measurement of real income but also to relate that income to what I am calling well-being (welfare being by now associated with doling out).<sup>17</sup> Accepting the framework of capitalism, proposals such as theirs were naively meant as a sanitizing of its savage aspect. But insofar as they dealt with people's real well-being rather than their monetarized richness, they were – intentionally or not – radical.

Daly and Cobb identify the GNP as mainly oriented toward measuring market activity but with modest adjustments in the direction of well-being, which it also claims to judge. Instruments like GNP are thus impure, a result of ideologico-political negotiation. They are a multi-purpose compromise: an example is the non-market accounting for capital depreciation (which raises the GNP: a total depreciation, the loss of all value to capital assets, would theoretically give a maximum rise to the GNP!). And since some GNP entries relate to well-being positively, some negatively, and some neutrally, Daly and Cobb concluded they can be extended to cover, say, depreciation of natural assets. By a series of such manoeuvres – subtracting thirteen categories such as environmental damage and depletion or foreign debt, and adding 4 categories that estimate household labour and some services (such as public expenditure on health and education) – they arrive first at so-called Hicksian income, that is, what can be consumed without impoverishment in the future, and then at their estimate of well-

17 A good formulation of human welfare in the sense of well-being is in Ruskin's *Unto This Last*: "There is no wealth but life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man [sic] is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence ... over the lives of others."



being called Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). In order to measure consumption (well-being) rather than production (riches), they underline the per capita amount arrived at (Table A1, 418–19). Here is their staggering difference with the GNP (all figures as US\$ per capita):

	<i>Official GNP</i>	<i>Daly–Cobb’s ISEW</i>
1950:	3,512 dollars	2,488 dollars
1973:	5,919 dollars	3,787 dollars
1986:	7,226 dollars	3,403 dollars

This means that the US per capita income, recalculated to measure well-being better (but still not fully oriented to use-value) passed since 1961 through two phases: 1961–73 it did not rise (as per GNP) 44 percent but did rise 26 percent, still a considerable achievement; 1974–86 it did not rise (as per GNP) 24 percent but *fell 9 percent!* Thence, the average US well-being was in 1986 back to where it was in the mid-1960s. (One shudders to think what that might be in 2003, when the pumping of hundreds of billions of dollars in military expenditures into the US economy would also be subtracted to arrive at an index of well-being – back at 1950? inching into the 1930s?) Quite beyond Daly–Cobb’s horizon, subtracting from GNP the income of the upper (say) 2 percent would disastrously lower the per capita for the 98 percent that remain.

In sum: capitalist growth since 1973 – the onset of Post-Fordism – impoverishes the great majority of US people in terms of human well-being. This would hold *a fortiori* for most other countries of the North, except a few with remnants of the welfare State, while for the South, that is three quarters of mankind, the abyss of poverty for the majority grows daily larger.

This figuring in of the “social costs” of a profit economy, defined by Kapp (Chapters 4–9 and 13) as those costs caused by capitalist producers but not paid by them, signals that above a certain medium level of industrialized affluence, in a society based largely on “brain labour,” the ability to buy more regardless of all other factors influencing life – the GNP – is by itself a poor measure of well-being. Beyond that level the official economic growth proves nothing: it “reflects increasingly frantic activity, especially

trade, but little or no progress of human welfare in ‘real’ terms (health, diet, housing, education, etc.)” (Ayres 2, and see 2–5 *passim*). It is dubious also whether increase of competitiveness – the ideology of capitalist globalization – significantly contributes to well-being. The much-touted “sustainable economic growth” is an oxymoron: growth raises the GNP but probably damages at least as much as it improves well-being.

## 3

Of course, there can and must be sustainable development in the sense of a “qualitative improvement without quantitative growth beyond the point where the ecosystem can regenerate” (Greider 455). For now we pass beyond tinkering with exploitative and destructive economics to consideration of *ecology and survival*, where the aim changes from maximum to optimum production. The ideologized commitment of the world’s major powers – governments and corporations – to infinite growth on a finite globe, collides with the elementary fact that “[a]ny physical system of a finite and nongrowing Earth must itself also eventually become nongrowing” (Daly–Cobb 72). It follows that the major focus must be to optimize production by raising the productivity of its scarcest element – today, the natural resources. This is possible to achieve, but only if the real social costs of using air, water, soil, and labour are figured in and unproductive consumption (most marketing and PR, useless innovations, artificial obsolescence, unceasing turnover of fashion trends, and other similar activities extraneous to use-values) is rigorously taxed. This means that both population growth in the poorer countries (the South) and per capita consumption in the richer countries and classes (the North) must be strongly, if reasonably, curbed. (The only fair and efficient way to curb population growth is, of course, making the poor richer – that is, meeting poverty head on rather than furthering it as the capitalist globalization does.) Their common denominator is the total consumption of energy. However, I shall vault over the, to my mind, intermediate discussion of energy (see Georgescu-Roegen 138–40 – or even Einsteinian matter-energy, however eye-opening its consequences would

already be – to focus on what seems to me the furthest reach of today's discussions: the management of *entropy*.

Entropy, the central term of thermodynamics, is usually explained as the inverse measure of the energy available to do work, but it is trickier than that. As Georgescu-Roegen's pioneering text, written in the 1960s (which I gloss in this Section), applies it to economic philosophy, the Second Law of Thermodynamics means that the entropy of any isolated structure increases not only constantly, but also irreversibly (6). Since life is tied to activity, any life-bearing entity survives (maintains homeostasis) by sucking low entropy from the environment, and thereby accelerating the transformation of the environment into one of higher entropy. The Entropy Law founds a different physics: it leads away from motion, which is in principle reversible, and opens onto irreversible qualitative change. It has no time quantification – how fast will it happen – and no particularization or specification – exactly what will happen at any particular point (10–12 and 169). Thus, beyond being a branch of physics dealing with heat energy, thermodynamics underlies any biophysics of life and activity (including thinking).

Life is characterized by a struggle against entropic degradation of matter, but its activities always *pay a clear price*: the price of life is the degradation of the neighbouring universe or total system – for example Earth. “[A] given amount of low entropy can be used by us only once” (278), so that “the basic nature of the economic process is entropic” (283). Since any collectively significant activity must be paid in the coin of less chance for future activity, the importance of purpose, what is something done for, becomes overwhelming. Aristotle's final cause and the old Roman tag *cui bono*? (in whose interest?) are rehabilitated as against scientism's narrow concentration on the efficient cause, how to manipulate matter (194–95). If, as the Second Law of Thermodynamics recites, the entropy of the universe at all times tends toward a maximum, then we are in the domain of “a physics of economic value” (276). For, “low entropy is a necessary condition for a thing to be useful” (278): for example, copper in a bar has much lower entropy than copper diffused in molecules, or coal than ashes. The economic process is, regardless of local fluctuations, entropically unidirectional. This means it will always be generating irrevocable

waste or pollution, and foreclosing some future options (use of oil after it has been burned). Since, however, it also generates not only life but also all possibilities for “enjoyment of life” (281–82), we must become careful stewards, on the constant lookout for minimizing entropy.

For example, it is from the point of view of minimizing entropy that we must switch from the present huge raising of entropy inherent in using terrestrial energy (oil, gas, and coal) to solar energy, which we get from outside the Earth system. The proportions in the mid-1980s were oil, gas, and coal 82 percent, nuclear 2 percent (its use depends on both safety and the entropic cost of waste disposal, probably too high), renewables 16 percent, and today it is probably worse. This has already brought upon us the climate change only hired guns in science pretend not to notice, with economic damages on the order of untold billions of dollars which will be rising geometrically (but the partial combating of which uses up even more energy, raising the entropy – and the GNP!). And since solar energy is huge – all terrestrial stocks of energy (low entropy) are equivalent to four days of sunlight – and practically free except for the initial cost of R&D plus installations, yet limited in its yearly rate of arrival to Earth, the preparations for the increase of its proportion in our energy consumption, which is the only alternative to a civilizational crash, should begin as soon as possible. Photosynthesis is our best bet, and if gasoline need be for limited purposes, it should be gotten from corn instead of feeding it to cattle (see 304). Our wars for oil are a testimony not only to gigantic cruelty but also to gigantic imbecility and a lemming-like suicidal urge among our ruling classes and their brainwashed followers.

4

So what is to be done? Again I can only mention a few general orientations towards maximizing life.

An idea by Georgescu-Roegen could be developed into a pleasing calculus of preconditions for felicity. He pleads for a “maximum of life quantity,” defined as the sum of all the years lived by all humans, present and future, and stresses it “requires the minimum rate of resource depletion”

(20–21). We could refine this, possibly by adding past humans too, certainly by specifying minimum conditions of dignified life, etc. Clearly the goal is a *maximum stock of life quality*, but quality presupposes a minimum quantity. Since this is an anti-entropic (negentropic) enterprise par excellence, a minimum program toward it would have to include a shift to an economics of stewardship not ownership (see Brown), such as seems to have obtained before class society. The biosphere is indispensable to human physical and psychic survival, even beyond the need for photosynthesis. The flourishing of humanity is predicated on a substantial decrease of the human ecological niche as well as of the human boosting of entropy (see Daly–Cobb 378). This ties into the diminution and eventual elimination of dire poverty, since desperation cannot be expected to spare the environment (for example, locate farming where it does the least ecological damage). Such orientation toward a maximum of use-values compatible with a low rise of entropy must override all globalization based not only on financial speculation but also on the sole goal of profit.

Various sets of measures will be necessary for this, and have been for years now debated in the “new global” movements. Greider proposes reasserting political governance – where possible international, where need be national – over capital; an old-fashioned and entirely legal way of doing this is by taxing the worst corporate entropy-mongers more and restoring purchasing power to the middle and lower classes by taxing them less. A first, very simple and minimal step towards this was the 1980s proposal of the “Tobin Tax”, a small exit-and-entry toll at major foreign-exchange centres, which would greatly reduce the unproductive daily speculation in money values and yield hundreds of billions of dollars for good purposes (257). Abandoning the GNP and reformulating the meaning of growth in all our public statistics is another necessary prerequisite, for something like Daly–Cobb’s instrument would both educate the public as to the more realistic costs of what we do and open the door for recognition and tax support of what Frigga Haug calls “activity by and for a collective” and a “community-oriented economy” (Möller cols 71–2): the unpaid work in the family or elsewhere discussed earlier and taking up more time than the paid work (especially among women).

“[...] in the meantime” (Greider wisely continues) “defend work and wages and social protection against the assaults by [capitalist corporations]” (472). The working time per week, growing by leaps and bounds in the last 30 years as the reality underlying the GNP, is a good rule-of-thumb measure of exploitation, and the 35-hour week of the French Socialist Party was the right idea (which they did not have the will to really defend). This holds for the North and has to be accompanied *pari passu* with the alleviation of poverty in the South by introducing work for a living wage and social protection there – for without such an alliance in the long term both will come to nothing. The huge and hugely growing inequalities between North and South would remain the breeding ground of terrorism responding to Northern State terrorism.

The ecological imperative to focus on use-values instead of exchange-values brings us, finally, back to Marx’s living labour. For if his horizon is valid, then such a focus cannot be accomplished without a radical change of social formation. It is by now obvious that the speculative globalization in capitalism is causally crucial for the planetary ecological disaster.

Two major difficulties would immediately arise. Capitalism functions by distancing the privileged Northern consumer from the true costs of production. Let me take the clearest case of energy prices in the North. As Kapp and others have argued, the Northern consumer buys not only that commodity but also the hidden content of ecological quality destroyed by the production of energy. The ecological replacement cost has to be added to the energy price, or entropy will spiral away and the sporadic crashes of our energy supply will grow systematic. Figuring such costs in was in the 1980s calculated as adding up to two thirds of the present prices for densely populated industrialized countries (Leipert 32–33 and 39–40, and see Greider 446 and *passim*). Persuading a family to pay 165 dollars or pounds instead of 100 in order to save our planet would be a major task of political education, probably impossible without access to power and thus to the mass media. The case of energy can be extended, perhaps less starkly, to other instances of what William Morris called the unnecessary offers of the market.

Second, as Wallerstein has pithily remarked, “the implementation of significant ecological measures [...] could well serve as the coup de grâce

to the viability of the capitalist economy" (81). When people like Samir Amin speak of a "transition beyond capitalism" as the only alternative to hugely destructive warfare on all social levels (85), when they say the present crisis of misery and ecocide cannot be overcome within capitalism and yet must be overcome if we are not to fall back into barbarism (114) – or perhaps a genetic caste society – I believe they are right. But the question then arises: how is that to be organized and brought about? We have seen military destruction brought upon Serbia, Iraq or Afghanistan by the US government when much smaller and further-off threats were perceived. I have remarked upon the political naivety of proposals such as Daly–Cobb's: this was tolerable at the time of Carter perhaps, but is not at the time of Bush Jr.

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