

Radicalizing the Root: The Return of Philosophical Anthropology to the Critique of Political Economy

Jason Read

Abstract: This paper examines the return to philosophical anthropology to the critique of political economy in the work of Etienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, and Paolo Virno. I argue that this return is no longer a question of the alienation or realization of a human essence, but the way in which the very idea of the human is itself produced in and through the exploitation of labor power. The quotidian act of selling one's labor power, of selling a capacity to work, makes it possible to reexamine the anthropological concept of humanity as potential, as the capacity to learn new habits. Finally, I argue that it is through this generic figure of the human, and its exclusions that we must think the ground for political struggle.

Keywords: Philosophical Anthropology, Labor Power, Pierre Macherey, Paolo Virno, Etienne Balibar.

“Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself.” Karl Marx

Humanity, or more to the point, philosophical anthropology, has returned to the critique of political economy, after being relegated to the margins for decades. Of course for some it never left, Marxism was always understood to be a critique of the alienation of humanity by capitalism, an exploitation of our communal being, the lost and return of the question of philosophical anthropology that I am referring to here, is in the very same traditions that repudiated it, those of post-Althusserian and post-autonomist Marxism, loose assemblages held together more by their common points of philosophical reference, such as Spinoza, and joint publications, *Futur Antérieur* and *Multitudes* then shared texts. The very traditions that have embraced a post-humanist critique of capital have now turned to the question of the human; “Philosophical Anthropology” has appeared as the subtitle of works by Etienne Balibar and Arnold Gehlen has become a point of reference for Paolo Virno. Between the eclipse and resurgence of philosophical anthropology the fundamental question has changed as well. It is no longer primarily a question of whether or not Marx had a concept of human nature, although such questions are always unavoidable, but what does anthropology offer a critique of political economy. Or, more to the point, why philosophical anthropology now? The question is no longer oriented to the past, to the question of the philosophical legacy of Feuerbach, of influence and break, but toward the present, toward the current conjuncture, specifically the

changing intersection of human capacities and the labor process. Thus, to hazard a provocation, the question of the human, of human nature, comes to the fore at the moment in which more and more aspects of humanity are put to work in contemporary production; labor power is not just a matter of physical work, the effort of hands and body, but emotional and intellectual capacities as well. At the same time, at the level of ideology or discourse, the rise of neoliberalism has led to capitalism being defended on primarily anthropological grounds. Capital is no longer simply justified through the efficiency of the invisible hand, the efficiency of the market as an institution, but as an expression of our truly competitive nature. Homo sapiens has become homo economicus. As capitalism has become anthropological so has its critique.

Essence and Ensemble

The early writings of Marx offer multiple and conflicting statements of anthropology, but perhaps none is more ambivalent, more torn between humanism or post-humanism, than the sixth thesis on Feuerbach. In that thesis Marx states that the human essence is not an “abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.”¹ As Louis Althusser argued there are two ways of interpreting this thesis, the first, broadly humanist way, sees the individual as the totality of their different relations and aspects, as being a worker, a citizen, etc.--as a multifaceted ensemble of social relations. The individual, humanity is then in excess of any given society, which can only realize it in different ways. The other, interpretation, the one that constitutes Marx’s break, sees the ensemble in question as nothing other than a precursor to the concept of the mode of production, to historical materialism.² The ensemble is understood a priori to, and in excess of, the human individual, constituting not only its essence, but its actualization. The ideological concept of human nature is replaced, or at least displaced, by the more properly scientific concept of the mode of production, for which the term ensemble functions as a placeholder.

Much could be said about this trajectory in Althusser’s thought. For example there is his insistence in *Lire Le Capital* that the relations of production are irreducible to inter-subjective relations.³ Thus the mode of production is not a concept of society, of relations between individuals, but must be understood as a relation constitutive of different forms of individuality, of subjectivity. Or, as Balibar writes, in his contribution to *Lire le Capital*, the mode of production makes it possible to examine

1 Marx 1978, p. 144.

2 Althusser 2003, p. 254.

3 Althusser 2015, p. 291.

different forms of historical individuality.⁴ It is not that the individual is so rich and complex that it comes into being, only in and through the totality of social relations. The causality and priority is reversed, social relations do not realize the potential of the individual, but the individual only exists as a product, and bearer (*Trager*), of its social relations.⁵

While such a survey of the vicissitudes of Althusser’s specific anti-humanist reading of relations is not doubt interesting and worthy of consideration. I am interested in the inflection that this concept takes in the work of Etienne Balibar. Unlike Althusser, who sets up an opposition between essence and ensemble, between speculative anthropology and historical materialism, Balibar stresses essence as ensemble, arguing that the human essence is that which can only exist in and through its relations. Balibar stresses that in the thesis in question Marx uses the French word *ensemble* stressing the non-totalizable nature of the relations that constitute and affect this essence. Balibar argues that the combination of essence and ensemble works against two directions at once: it is opposed to the nominalist or empiricist thesis which posits individuals as the ultimately reality, and the realist, or universalist, thesis that posits any shared essence of humanity.⁶ Marx’s thesis cuts against both directions, against nominalism and universalism, placing relations, not individuals or universals, as the ultimate basis of reality, but relations. “The materialist critique of ideology, for its part, corresponds to the analysis of the real as relation, as a structure of practical relations.”⁷ To use a term that will become central to Balibar’s conception of philosophical anthropology, the human essence is necessarily transindividual.⁸

Of course any reading of the question of human nature in Marx must move beyond the *Theses*, which are as fragmentary and inconclusive as they are promising, to encompass Marx’s critique of capital, which is to say *Capital*. At first glance *Capital* would be too concerned with the specificity of capitalist exploitation to enter into a discussion of anthropology, but, as I will argue below, the fundamental concept of labor power, the selling of the capacity to do work, contains an anthropological provocation that exceeds its putative economic content. For Balibar, the most provocative statement of an anthropology in the critique of political economy is found in the Chapter on ‘co-operation.’ As Marx writes, “... [T]he special productive power of the combined working day, is under all

4 Balibar 2015a, p. 417.

5 Macherey 2008, p. 151.

6 Balibar 2012, pg. 5.

7 Balibar 1994, p. 92.

8 Balibar 1995, p. 121.

circumstances, the social productive power of labour, or the productive power of social labour. This power arises from cooperation itself. When the worker co-operates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of this species [*Gattungsvermögen*]."⁹ Capital does just not exploit individual labor power understood as the physical or mental expenditure of this or that individual; it exploits the collective labor of not only those gathered in the factory or workshop, but also the collective inheritance of language, skill, and knowledge embodied in any individual's productive labor. As Balibar writes,

We must give this thesis its maximum force to understand the conclusions that Marx wants to reach, not only is labor socialized historically, so that it becomes transindividual. Essentially it always was, insofar as there is no labor without cooperation, even in its most primitive forms, and the isolation of the productive labourer in relation to nature was only ever an appearance.¹⁰

What is asserted speculatively in *Theses on Feuerbach* is affirmed practically in *Capital*: there is no human essence, individual or collective, outside of the relations and practices that constitute it. Labor, which is to say social practice, is transindividual. Labor is not, as John Locke argued, a fundamental possession of the human body, the initial start up capital that, if employed industriously, make accumulation possible, nor is it a generic attribute of man as a species. It is a relation, what Marx called a relation of production, it exists only in and through collective relations, the cooperation necessary to the labor process, but the way in which these cooperative relations are themselves situated within technological and social relations. Transindividuality is not intersubjectivity, not a relation between individuals already constituted, but a relation in and through the constitutive conditions of individuals.

Labor Power as Ontology and Anthropology

Simultaneously following and departing from Balibar it is necessary to take as our ensemble the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It is through the practices and relations that constitute capital that we can find not so much an answer to the question "What is man?" but a provocation of what it means to think humanity through capital, and vice versa. In order to do so, to read the question of political anthropology in *Capital*, it is necessary to dispense with a myth that

9 Marx 1977, p. 441.

10 Balibar 2014, p. 85.

immediately interrupts any such reading. This myth is not so much a myth of *Capital* itself, but of the entire edifice of Marxist thought. It gets its most succinct formulation in Michel Foucault's writing. As Foucault writes,

So I don't think we can simply accept the traditional Marxist analysis, which assumes that, labor being man's concrete essence, the capitalist system is what transforms labor into profit, into hyperprofit or surplus value. The fact is capitalism penetrates much more deeply into our existence. That system, as it was established in the nineteenth century, was obliged to elaborate a set of political techniques, techniques of power, by which man was tied to something like labor—a set of techniques by which people's bodies and time would become labor power and labor time so as to be effectively used and thereby transformed into hyper profit.¹¹

Foucault's rejection of the implicit anthropology underlying Marxism is not just a theoretical question of humanity, but also a political question of power and an economic question of exploitation. Or, more to the point, it is the place where politics and economics intersect in the very idea of human nature. If we accept the premise that labor power is man's concrete essence, that mankind is homo laborans, then the role of capitalist exploitation is only that of claiming the lion's share of the value produced. If labor is taken to be something given, something that is humanity's essence, the exploitation can only ever be a matter of how much of the product of production goes to the worker and how much goes to the capitalist.

Foucault suggests a fundamental point of difference, either one takes labor power as a given, as part of humanity, focusing on exploitation, or one examines the way in which human beings become disciplined, become subjects of labor power, focusing on power. Foucault argues that capital does not encounter human individuals as bearers of labor power, but must constitute and discipline disparate human bodies until they become productive, calculable, and interchangeable.¹² There is thus a stark opposition in Foucault's terms between an economic analysis, which assumes an anthropology of homo laborans, seeing its exploitation as simply an extraction, a theft, of what is produced, and an analysis of power that sees the worker as not just someone who produces, but something that is produced.¹³ If Marx, or Marxism, have occluded the political dimension of work, losing sight of the productive nature of

11 Foucault 2000, p. 86.

12 Foucault 2013, p. 235

13 Laval 2015, p. 36.

power to the point where mankind becomes homo laborans, a laboring creature, Foucault risks obscuring the economic, or historical, specificity of labor power to the point where the imperative to increase productivity while decreasing insubordination becomes a general problem of agency and domination.¹⁴The opposition that Foucault constructs between an economic analysis of exploitation and a political analysis of discipline are as much a product of conflicts with the French Communist Party, and orthodox Marxism as they are philosophical. As the antagonisms have faded, the differences have become reified, at least in the United States, into an opposition between Foucault and Marx as competing methods and intellectual hegemony. Cracks in this division have begun to develop in this opposition in recent years. The breakdown has in part been an effect of the publication of such texts as Foucault's own "Mailles du Pouvoir," in which Foucault credits Marx with inventing an analysis of power. However, I am less concerned with all of the various ways of reconciling, or relating, Marx to Foucault, then the manner in which their intersection touches on a fundamental blindspot, that of the ontology and anthropology of production, positing a worker that is simultaneously produced and productive, of thinking together politics and economics without reducing one to the other. What is invisible here is not just the intersection of determination and action, the capacity to affect and be affected, but the particular articulation of this intersection through the historically specific institutions of wage labor and the working day.¹⁵

It is precisely this intersection that is at stake in Pierre Macherey's 'Le Sujet Productif'. For Macherey, the question of productivity, of a productive subject not only challenges a certain conception of labor power, but challenges the entire idea of Marx's critique. Contrary to Marx's claim in *Capital* that locates metaphysics on the side of the commodity, in the market, in contrast to the prosaic reality of use value, capitalist production must be understood as a metaphysical matter, as the transformation from potential to actuality, as labor power is made actual. Or more to the point, labor power must first be made virtual, and then productive. The foundation of the capitalist relationship is the separation of the workers from the means of production, and thus the creation of labor power as a potential. Once this potential is sold, enters into the workplace, it must then be actualized, transformed into actual productive acts. As Macherey writes,

From this point of view, we could say that when the capitalist occupies himself with his workers' labor-power, which he has acquired the right to employ in exchange for a wage, treating it as

.....
14 Legrande p. 28.

15 Bidet 2016, p. 123.

a "productive power" whose productivity he intends to increase in order to produce relative surplus value – he practices metaphysics not in a theoretical but in a practical way. He practices this peculiar sort of metaphysics not during his leisure time, as a distraction or mental exercise, as he would a crossword puzzle, but throughout the entire working day dedicated to production. By opening up his company to notions such as "power," "capacity" and "causation," he thereby makes them a reality, realizing these fictions, these products of the mind, which he then employs with daunting efficacy. In this way, with payrolls and charts of organizational tasks at hand, he shows, better than a philosopher's abstract proofs, that the work of metaphysics could not be more material, provided that one knows how to put it to good use in introducing it into the factory. One could, incidentally, derive from this a new and caustic definition of metaphysics: in this rather specific context, it boils down to a mechanism for profit-making, which is no small matter. This means that, amongst other inventions that have changed the course of history, capitalism has found the means, the procedure, the "trick" enabling it to put abstract concepts into practice – the hallmark of its "genius."¹⁶

Macherey's assertion mirrors, without citing, Alfred Sohn-Rethel's claim regarding real abstractions, abstractions created not by the act of thinking but by practical activity.¹⁷The genesis and actualization of abstraction is not a mental matter, the work of philosophers, but is a practical matter, as factories and offices turn the capacity to do work into actual work. The difference is, however, is that while Sohn-Rethel focused on the fundamental formal conditions of abstraction, abstract labor and the equivalence of the commodity form as the primary abstraction, for Macherey this abstraction becomes an entire metaphysics, a way of thinking genesis and creation. This metaphysics has as central term, its central problem, that of productivity. Productivity is not an ideology, it is simultaneously more and less than that, more because it is not just an idea or a concept, but a fundamental restructuring of reality, workers are made more productive, and less, because it does not have a justification or rationalization. It is what Macherey calls an infra-ideology, an infra-ideology does not stand above a practice, dictating its goals and ideals, but is entirely immanent to it.

It is at this point, the point of second nature, that the metaphysics of capital become its anthropology. It is not the anthropology of homo economicus, rational interest bearing individual, nor of homo laborans,

.....
16 Macherey 2015.

17 Sohn-Rethel 1978, p. 26.

of man as a worker and bearer of labor power, but the produced and productive anthropology of man as living labor, as labor power. What Macherey stresses, following Bernard Ogilvie, is the negative, or indeterminate nature of this second nature. As Ogilvie writes, "There is only a human that is instituted, not an originary privilege of essence."¹⁸ Ogilvie rejects the various concepts that have been used to rehabilitate or save this concept of second nature, such as progress or spirit, which make its particular negation of negation an affirmation of human history. Second nature is liberated from ground, as Pascal argued it effaces the first nature, but also from telos, from an end or goal. For Pascal, as Macherey argues, humanity must be thought in its fundamental errancy, distraction.¹⁹ Second nature is not the dialectical overcoming of nature, but it improper and necessary substitute. It is the artifice that is nature, but it is equally important that it be taken as nature, to function as something taken as given. Second nature is simultaneously artifice and nature, or artifice taken as nature and nature as nothing other than artifice. Productivity becomes our anthropology and economy.

Capital's metaphysics, and anthropology cannot be reduced to productivity. Its metaphysical subtlety is more complex than that. As much as the labor power that is sold must be made productive it also must exist as potential. It cannot identify too strongly with a given task, or job; it must be simultaneously be concrete and abstract labor, a specific skill and the possibility to acquire new skills, or in metaphysical terms, actual and potential all at once. This paradox is at the center of not only Paolo Virno's understanding of not only capitalism, but anthropology as well. As Marx writes, "...labor is not this or another labor, but labor pure and simple, abstract labor; absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity, but capable of all specificities."²⁰ What Virno stresses is less the metaphysics of this transformation, or its constitution of a new second nature, but the way that this divide, the divide between the potential and actual, but is situated at the intersection of the quotidian fact of labor power and the very idea of a human nature. The divide between potential and actual, between labor power and specific tasks, is not just a mundane fact of exploitation but as the meta-historical condition of history. Humanity, human nature, must be grasped not as a specific set of actual behaviors or drives, but as a fundamental indetermination, as potential. Every actually existing society, or social relation from language to habits and fashions, is a realization of this potential. In capital, in the selling of labor power, however, something different happens; as much as this potential is put to work in specific actions and routines, it

18 Ogilvie 2012b, p. 65.

19 Macherey 2009, p. 29.

20 Marx 1977, pg. 296.

is simultaneously sold as potential, and can only be sold insofar as it is radically separated from any ability to actualize itself. 'Potential becomes a good in itself only when it is radically separated from the correlated acts. The worker sells her labour power because, without any means of production of her own, she cannot apply it by herself.'²¹ The labor relation is the historical actualization of the very conditions of history. Capitalism is the direct exploitation of anthropogenesis: it puts to work the very capacity to learn new habits, to adopt new characteristics, which is the paradoxical artifice of human nature.

This general condition is transformed in contemporary capitalism. Virno's first formulation, that of abstract human potential, as the biological basis for labor power, is a formulation more or less corresponding to formal subsumption, to the early stage of capital in which all that is altered is the formal relationship of wage labor, the worker sells his or her labor power rather than producing for use or the selling of goods. At this stage, the technological and social composition of labor remains unchanged. Exploitation is the exploitation of absolute surplus value, the exploitation of the difference between the time spent reproducing the costs of labor, necessary labor, and the surplus produced. For Virno real subsumption has to be understood as not just a transformation of this economic relation, as capital restructures the technological and social conditions of labor shifting exploitation from the quantitative expansion of the working day to its qualitative intensity, but also a fundamental alteration of the anthropological basis of labor power. In real subsumption it is not just that one sells one's capacity to do work, a capacity that always remains distinct from its actualizations; what is sold, what is put to work, is nothing other than the very capacity to develop new capacities. What contemporary capitalism puts to work are not just actualized potentials, not this or that habit, but the very potential to create habits itself. As Virno stresses with respect to the "general intellect," the socialized knowledge that has become a productive force, this intellect is not the specific knowledge of the sciences or computer programming, but the very capacity to learn and create. "General intellect should not necessarily mean the aggregate of the knowledge acquired by the species, but the faculty of thinking; potential as such, not its countless particular realizations. The general intellect is nothing but the intellect in general."²² Contemporary capitalism, the capitalism of

21 Virno 2015 , 162.

22 Virno 2004, p. 66. The term "general intellect" is drawn from "the fragment on Machines" in Marx's *Grundrisse*. As Marx writes, "Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are the products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have

services, precarity and mobility, is not just one historical articulation of the actualization of the natural capacity to learn and develop habits, but is, in some sense, the exploitation of this very capacity. What capital puts to work is not this or that specific manifestation of human nature, but human nature, humanity as potentiality, itself.

Human nature returns to the centre of attention not because we are finally dealing with biology rather than history, but because the biological prerogatives of the human animal have acquired undeniable historical relevance in the current productive process.²³

Previous societies, even earlier stages of capital, were grounded upon the production and reproduction of a particular set of habits, concepts, and compartments, but with capitalism, all that is solid melts into air, and what comes to light is not this or that habit, but the very capacity of gaining (and losing) them. "Precarity and nomadism lay bare at the social level the ceaseless and omnilateral pressure of a world that is never an environment."²⁴ One need not look to the drama of migrants and the displaced around the globe to see this, it can also be found in the more quotidian matter of the want ads, where the term "professional" has ceased to refer to a specific set of skills to become a generic set of shifting characteristic traits, an attitude or compartment.²⁵

For Macherey and Virno the quotidian and commonplace selling of labor power, of selling not this or that work, but the capacity to do work, must be understood as touching on both the highest metaphysical problems, that of potential and actuality, and on the very nature of what it means to be human. They differ in terms of how they conceive of the nexus of potential and actual. For Macherey the emphasis is on the actualization of potential, on the becoming productive, as capital extracts more work, more productivity, from human beings. In contrast to this Virno stresses the paradoxical status of the actuality of potential as such, a paradox that deepens as the work of real subsumption, puts to work potentials that are more open ended and flexible. This difference, a difference at the level of the metaphysical question of actuality, gives way to an even stronger difference at the level of anthropology. Macherey's

come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it (Marx 1973, 706). Virno has offered two correctives to this concept. First, he has argued that this general intellect is not just manifest in machines, as science is a part of technology, but must be thought of as the general social knowledge. Second, this social knowledge is not to be found exclusively in specialized knowledge, but is the set of general capacities put to work any time language or social cooperation is relied upon. (Virno 2004, 64).

23 Virno 2009, p. 142.

24 Virno 2009, p. 143

25 Virno 2007, p. 44.

use of the term second nature, a second nature that effaces and fundamentally transforms any nature, any prior condition, underscores his emphasis on the way in which labor power has to be understood as something that is produced, as a product of power relations. As Macherey writes, "At the limit, one could say that capitalist industrial production produces the human essence under the form of a productive force, in order to exploit it; in this sense capitalism is a pioneer of humanist ideology."²⁶ Virno, however, posits a human nature, nature understood not as an actually existing essence, but as potential, the potential to develop language, habits, ways of thinking and acting. In all hitherto existing history these potentials existed only to be actualized in a given language, a given set of customs, a given social order. Capitalism changes this in that it purchases labor power, the capacity to do work, making human potential, a reality, a real abstraction. In Macherey and Virno we can grasp a repetition of the fundamental dichotomy of the produced and productive aspect of human nature, the first stresses the produced second nature while the latter stresses the productive, but never actualized, potential nature. Only now this dichotomy is placed at a higher stage of abstraction; it is no longer a matter of labor, homo laborans, as an essence but potentiality and productivity as a fundamentally inessential essence.

Déjà vu or Human Capital Again

Macherey and Virno's different philosophical anthropologies of labor power invite us to oppose them in terms of constituted and constituting, innate or acquired, or, in the ultimate nadir of critical perspectives, nature versus nurture. This seems to me besides the point. Besides the point in part because the essence that is under debate here is not "an abstraction inherent in each individual," but an ensemble, a relation. Potential and productivity are only actualized, only realized in specific historical conditions. Moreover, they are each part of an inessential essentiality, less concrete qualities or specific characteristics than a general matrix from which such qualities emerge. The real issue, the central reason why it seems besides the point to pit Macherey and Virno against each other in terms of differing accounts of human nature, is not that there are not points of disagreement, but such points of disagreement distract from the more pressing question, why consider this anthropological dimension of capital, of the sale of labor power now?

One possible answer is that such an anthropological examination is a response to the anthropological turn of contemporary capitalism, of neoliberalism. One of the multiple ways in which neoliberalism can be understood as an ideological expansion of capital, and not just a new regime of accumulation, is in its increased claim to not just be an

26 Macherey 2014, p. 208.

account of the economy and how it functions, but of human nature, of what it means to be human. (One could argue that the rise of certain forms of evolutionary thought from *The Selfish Gene* onward have extend beyond the human to make risk, capital, and competition not just the entirety of human rationality but the explanatory principle for all of nature). Neoliberalism is a massive expansion of economic rationality and thinking, to the point where economic calculation, maximum benefit for minimum cost, becomes the very definition of rationality.²⁷ Thus, it possible to argue that human nature comes to the fore not, as Virno claimed, because of transformation of production, but because of a transformation of the terms of ideological conflict. This would be one way of understanding the anthropological turn of Macherey, Balibar, and Virno, as a response to the call to arms that Fredric Jameson uttered years ago, ‘The market is in human nature’ is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; in my opinion, it is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time.”²⁸ To understand Macherey and Virno’s turn to anthropology as a counter to the dominant anthropology, however, is to overlook the extent to which neoliberalism, or the current moment in capital, is not just a change of ideology, a shift of its content, but a transformation of its very form and structure. It is no longer ideology understood as “ruling ideas of the ruling class,” as a doctrine propagated and disseminated by philosophers and pundits, than the way in which particular social relations, a particular ensemble, generates its own representation and conceptions. To borrow Balibar’s distinction, we could say that it is more of a matter of fetishism, of the way in which capitalist relations constitute their own appearances than ideology, the specific representations articulated by philosophers, priests, and pundits.²⁹ Or, to use Althusser’s term, a spontaneous ideology. Ultimately the division between the two concepts is less a rigid opposition than a difference of emphasis. Marx’s own invocation of “Freedom, Equality, and Bentham” as the spontaneous ideology of the market already suggested that specific ideologies are perhaps only the rendering explicit of the norms and ideas implicit in different practices.³⁰ This is perhaps easily seen in the way in which neoliberalism has, as perhaps its defining principle, an ability to appeal to certain aspects of life under capitalism, such as the freedom and liberty of shopping in order to make them the very model of economic life.³¹

27 Laval, 2007, p. 17

28 Jameson 1991, p. 263.

29 Balibar 1994, p. 72.

30 Balibar 2015b, p. 97.

31 Jameson 1991, p. 261.

This is explicitly what is at stake in Macherey’s concept of infra-ideology. An infra-ideology is an ideology that is inserted directly into practice, dispensing with any justification or rationalization.³² If modern man has been made productive, as Macherey claims, then it is worth noting that this imperative functions simultaneously as a material transformation, extracting more activity from minds and bodies, producing more of anything from iphones to service phone calls, and its ideological justification, productivity has become the cornerstone of our pop psychology. To be productive is both a cultural imperative and an economic practice. However, as an imperative it is a strangely open, undefined; being productive is a intransitive demand without an object or a justification. This accounts for both its pervasiveness (who does not desire to be productive?) and its flexibility (it can be applied to every practice and object).³³ Macherey’s concept of infra-ideology draws from Foucault’s concept of the norm, a norm understood not as a prescriptive statement or declaration, but as a practical target and object of practices. Norms do not so much dictate the ultimate ground or rational for actions, the classical terrain of ideologies, but their effective goals and targets. The division between Marx and Foucault is overcome not just in terms of power, or anthropology, seeing in both the constitution, and not just the exploitation, of the worker as worker, but also in terms of the divide between norms and ideology, between effective and obfuscating representations of society.³⁴ Infra-ideology is immediately practical and effective, it is something one does rather than something that one believes. Nonetheless it remains ideological if only in its ability to reify a particular order, foreclosing any representation of alternatives. Productivity has become a second nature, we cannot imagine a life or an existence outside of it.

Virno’s philosophical anthropology traces a similar foreclosure of alternatives, but one that passes through a different articulation of the present, hinging on the metahistorical division between potentiality and actuality. As much as one sells labor power, one is engaged in effective labor: as much as one puts to work the general intellect, it is actualized in specific forms of knowledge. Knowledge as such can never be a productive force, just as abstract labor must always be concretized.

32 Macherey 2014, p. 302.

33 Macherey 2014, p. 342.

34 As with the anthropological division above, this division is not as stark as it would first appears. As much as Foucault constantly distances himself from the concept of ideology, preferring a study of bodies in their materiality and discourses understood as a production of truth. However, Foucault’s declaration on this point is undercut by his own assertion that disciplinary power is concealed beneath the rights and liberties of modern society. As Foucault writes, “power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself.” As Jacques Bidet and Pierre Macherey argue, Foucault would seem to have an unnamed concept of ideology in his examination of the way in which the true functioning of power is obscured.

For Virno the very exploitation of the generic capacity in contemporary capitalism leads to a kind of confusion; the present moment is taken not as an instantiation of the generic faculty, one other historical articulation of its condition, but of the manifestation of the generic faculty itself. Virno compares this historical confusion with the temporal confusion of déjà vu. Virno argues that the experience of déjà vu is best understood from the perspective of Bergson, from the memory that is internal to the experience of the present. Memory, the difference of past and future, is integral to every actual temporal experience.³⁵ Déjà vu confuses this memory that makes the present possible with the present as a memory. Rather than memory being a condition of the present it seems as if the present itself is being remembered, that everything happened before. The faculty is manifest not as a potential, but is confused with a fact. This psychological confusion explains, or is analogous to, our historical confusion in which the current historical organization of language, thought, and habit appears as the manifestation of the very capacity for thought, language and habit. Déjà vu and our historical condition are both defined by the apparent presence of potential. For Virno the bourgeois or classical political economists failure to historicize, to make the categories of capital meta-history rather than one particular manifestation of history, so that mammoth hunters become entrepreneurs and flints become investments, is not a simple act of bad faith or even ideological mystification, but stems from the capital relation itself. As Virno writes,

When capitalism appropriates an anthropological requisite like the potential to produce, the accent can fall either on the contextualized ways in which the appropriation takes place, or on the indeterminate character of this requisite, pertaining to any epoch or society. The second emphasis points to the ‘bourgeois narrow-mindedness, which regards the capitalist forms of production of production as absolute forms—hence as eternal, natural forms of production.’ It is the concept of labour-power that explains the spread of state of mind (little matter where it be melancholic or euphoric) inspired by the “end of history.”³⁶

The historical existence of meta-history, the transformation of human potential itself into a mundane fact of life, creates the alibi of the end of history, of the foreclosure of any other possibility.

A singular thread cuts through Macherey and Virno’s anthropology, that of ‘capitalism penetrating deeply into our existence,’ to borrow

.....
35 Virno 2015, p. 17

36 Virno 2015, p. 173.

Foucault's terms. The abstraction and indetermination that defines human nature becomes in contemporary capitalism an actual part of daily existence, and a mundane one at that. The metaphysics of capital are not to be found in the fetish of commodities, or the abstractions of speculation, but in the quotidian practice by which the worker sells the capacity, the potential to do work, and that potential is put to work. The metaphysics is perfectly mundane one. Capital brings together the most lofty and the most mundane, the fundamental transformation from potentiality to actuality has become a daily task of survival. It presents itself as a the very expression of our human potential, or, to draw together Virno’s concept of potential with Macherey’s infra-ideology, capital’s infra-ideology is that presents itself as the very condition of realizing one’s potential, a condition that is all the more pervasive for being absolutely impersonal and abstract. What stands between me and the realization of my potential is not some agency, collective or individual, but nothing other than the conditions of the market, conditions that appear to complex and contingent to seem real. As Jonathan Crary writes, describing this condition.

Now there are numerous pressures for individuals to reimagine and refigure themselves as being of the same consistency and values as the dematerialized commodities and social connections in which they are immersed so extensively. Reification has proceeded to the point where the individual has to invent a self-understanding that optimizes or facilitates their participation in digital milieus and speeds.³⁷

Virno and Macherey make it possible to map these pressures, or more importantly why these pressures do not appear as pressures at all. The daily act of selling one’s labor power appears simultaneously as a simple fact of life, as a necessary condition for survival, and as a realization of human potential. The infra-ideology, the daily imperative to be productive, contains within itself the very outside of ideology, potentiality itself.

Anthropological Divisions

As much as a critical anthropology of labor power can reveal how capital penetrates into our existence, its fundamental axiom, the mutual reinforcing definition of labor power and humanity, has little to say about those who are excluded from the wage relation. The formulation humanity equals labor power might account for its critical force in excavating the basis of our existence, but such an axiom does not account for the multiple exclusions of contemporary capitalism. These

.....
37 Crary 2013, p. 100

exclusions encompass those whose work is not measured by the wage, the entire sphere of reproductive work and unwaged care work, work that is not directly waged but mediated by the wage, but also those that are entirely outside of wage relation altogether, surplus populations outside of capitalist accumulation. The former, care workers, house work, and the anyone who performs reproductive labor without being paid a wage, can be considered excluded by inclusion. It is their very functioning for capital, the role they play in keeping the costs of reproduction low, that constitutes their exclusion from the wage relation. Those outside of labor altogether can be considered included by exclusion, which is to say that as much as they are outside of labor, not even exploited, they are still internal to it through dependency on commodities. "Capital may not need these workers, but they still need to work."³⁸

Following the argument constructed above each of these exclusions and inclusions must be understood to have effects that are not just economic or political, but anthropological. They must touch on the very definition of humanity. With respect to the first, to the included excluded nature of care work and housework. The anthropological dimension is implied in its very existence. As Silvia Federici argues if work is not waged, and thus not in response to external and recognized goals, then it is turned inward, seen as expression of inner drives and desires.³⁹ As much as the wage form obfuscates exploitation, concealing it in the fiction of a job paid for, it also recognizes work as a work, as a social contribution. Thus, it is possible to say that care work and housework is subject to a double exclusion, once at the level of the economy, not being subject to a wage, and once at the level of its representation, where its exclusion as work leads to its internalization. The wage is an impersonal bound between worker and boss, a form of machinic enslavement, but care work, work do in the private space of the home is subject to social subjection. Care work thus reproduces and reinforces an anthropological difference between men and women. This is true of both waged care work, or emotional labor, such as nursing, waitressing, flight attendants, and child care, in which one is compelled to perform a gender that is taken to be natural, and the unwaged variant, the care that sustains families and relations. These two aspects of care work, the waged and unwaged, form a mutually reinforcing circle, the naturalness of work performed at home outside of the wage justifies and reinforces its devaluation in the wage form.⁴⁰ Gender difference is both outside the wage form, as its supposed ground, and inside, as its effect.

The exclusion from labor constitutes the basis for a different

38 Clover 2016 p. 26.

39 Federici 2012, p. 16.

40 Weeks 2011, p. 25.

anthropological divide, a divide perpetuated by its inclusion. Those outside of the market, unable to afford the basic commodities for existence, still need to find work, to sell their labor. There is no frontier, no unclaimed territory for them to migrate to. This is what it means to be excluded by inclusion. As Balibar writes, "At the moment at which humankind becomes economically and, to some extent, culturally "united," it is violently divided "biopolitically."⁴¹ This divide creates an entirely new anthropological category, that of a disposable human being.⁴² Of course the disposability of human beings is not new, what has perhaps changed is the impersonal or abstract nature of this exclusion. The exclusion is not a political act or declaration, but is itself an effect of the market. This ambiguity, it cannot be called a dialectic, of the natural and the social, creates the very image of the disposable human being. As Balibar writes.

The "disposable human being" is indeed a social phenomenon, but it tends to look, at least in some cases, like a 'natural' phenomenon, or a phenomenon of violence in which the boundaries between what is human and what is natural, or what is post-human and what is post-natural, tend to become blurred; what I would be tempted to call an *ultra-objective* form of violence, or *cruelty without a face*; whereas the practices and theories of ethnic cleansing confront us with what I would call *ultra-subjective* forms of violence, or *cruelty with a Medusa face*.⁴³

These two forms of cruelty, ultra-objective and ultra-subjective, reinforce and expand each other. The ultra-objective cruelty of being excluded from the market leads to ultra-subjective forms, immiseration creates conflict, which in turn serves to justify future repression and immiseration. At the center of this back and forth of forms of cruelty is the disposable human being, an excluded, racialized body. This is a particular neo-racism: race no longer justifies exclusion, functioning as the alibi for legal and social inequality, but exclusion, inequality, justifies racism. Race is the immediate and self-evident explanation of a system of exclusion and hierarchies that exceeds it.⁴⁴

If the human essence is to be found in the ensemble of social relations as Marx claimed, then untotizable totality of the ensemble does not only include the wage relation, the selling of labor power, which has produced a humanity that is both potential and productive, a

41 Balibar 2004, p. 130.

42 Ogilvie 2012a, p. 77.

43 Balibar 2002, p. 143.

44 Balibar 1991, p. 19.

humanity defined by a mutually reinforcing abstraction of labor power and collective human potential, but it also includes the exclusions from the wage relation. These exclusions take on their own particular anthropological salience. These exclusions are the extreme points, the end points of a hierarchical labor market. Gender intersects with the anthropology of wage labor not just through the unwaged work of housework, but also through the general feminization of labor, which demands a more caring, responsive, and docile worker.⁴⁵ Femininity is both the supposed ground and effect of this new form of labor. In a similar manner race is not just the alibi for those completely excluded, but it also functions as the alibi for a labor market that is far less mobile than its supposed ideal. Race explains immobility and stagnation in the face of a market that is supposed to be defined by its mobility and transformation. Just as there is a racialization of the divisions of the labor, class itself is racialized, as the divisions between classes, between mental and manual labor, become attributed to different classes. As Balibar writes on the intersection of race and class,

This process modifies the status of the human body (the human status of the body): it creates *body men*, men whose body is a machine body, that is fragmented and dominated, and used to perform one isolable function or gesture, being both destroyed in its integrity and fetishized, atrophied and hyterophied in its useful organs... This is an unbearable process for the worker, but one which is not more 'acceptable', without ideological and phantasmic elaboration, for the worker's masters: the fact that there are body men means that there are *men without bodies*.

It is not, as it is often claimed that race and gender are added to exploitation, added to class, forming a triad of forms of domination, but that the wage form, exploitation, always already has effects of racialization and gendering. This is not to suggest that capital, or the critique of political economy is itself the necessary and sufficient basis for grasping all of the various divisions of humanity. The differences of exploitation are always already modified by the intersecting structures of nation, state, and home. The human essence is not some abstraction in each individual it is unequally and incompletely distributed across the totality of humankind according to the divisions and transformations of labor, transformations that intersect with the nation state, the global terrain, and the intimate space of the household. Or understood differently, it is because neither capital nor the nation state have a univocal anthropological dimension, are thus each defined in terms of their fundamental ambiguity that they necessarily involve the other.

.....
45 Power 2009, p. 20.

As Balibar writes:

The determining factor, the cause, is always at work *on the other scene*—that is, it intervenes through the mediation of its opposite. Such is the general form of the 'ruse of reason' (which is every bit as much the ruse of unreason): economic effects never themselves have economic causes, no more than symbolic effects have symbolic or ideological causes.⁴⁶

This ambiguity is twofold. First, as much as capital and the modern state have a universal dimension, labor power as a universal human attribute or the citizen as a generic figure of inclusion, this universal is fundamentally unstable in terms of its symbolic dimension. The act of work, of selling ones labor power can be understood in a collective manner, as the basis for solidarity, or it can be individualized. As Balibar writes, describing the current symbolic economy of work. 'The capitalist is defined as a worker, as an 'entrepreneur'; the worker, as the bearer of a capacity, of a 'human capital.'⁴⁷ A similar instability can be found with respect to the citizen, the universal figure of political belonging, it is split between its insurrectional and constitutional aspects, the basis of rebellion and authority. The fundamental ambiguities of the worker and the citizen is then complicated by the necessary exclusions of each. The human is always already overdetermined by the mutual intersections of capital and nation, work and political belonging.

Post-Capital/Post-Human

A few provisional conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the quotidian anthropology of labor power (and its exclusions). First, and most immediately, there is no unified subject of humanity, no working class with nothing but its chains to lose, and no citizen as the universal figure of human political belonging. As much as the general direction of capital is to posit an interchangeable figure of humanity that is nothing other than its potential, a potential that exists to be actualized into multiple different forms of labor, this is not without its qualifications and exclusions. The division of the human essence into multiple figures means that any struggle against capital has to forego any universal anthropological postulate, neither total inclusion and exploitation or total exclusion and immiseration can become the basis for struggle. Rather any opposition against capital will have to think through the multiple and contradictory articulations of this essence, which are nothing other than the multiple and contradictory articulations of the labor process.

.....
46 Balibar 2004, p. 19.

47 Balibar 1994, p. 52.

This limit, and barrier to struggle, is also the condition for renewed and expanded struggle. As we have seen the identity of labor power and humanity leads to a fundamental transformation of ideology, an infra-ideology or déjà vu in which humanity becomes synonymous with the actualization of its labor power, and vice versa. This absolute reification of humanity, humanity as capital, or human capital personified, risks becoming a closed universe, a one-dimensional world, in which there is no outside because it is presented as not just one actualization of human potential but the actualization of human potential as such. This is not to say that there are not dissenters and disaffected in this world of self-exploiting entrepreneurs, just that it is difficult for this dissent to find a purchase in this terrain. This closed universe confronts its own limit in the different figures of humanity that are produced as its necessary precondition. There is the temptation to make the excluded the new universal subject of history, to believe that the future belongs to the surplus populations, and it is most likely that the excluded will produce the most tumultuous resistance to capital in the coming years, the age of riots. However, thinking through the anthropological divisions of contemporary capital means taking as a starting point the fundamental division and antagonism of humanity, to think a divided, and not just nontotalizable, ensemble. The challenge to come is to cross these divides, which are not just divides of classes, nations, and rations, but are also the divides of the human as such.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Althusser, Louis 2013, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, Edited by François Matheron, Translated by G.M. Goshgarian. New York: Verso.
- ____ 201, "The Object of Capital," in *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. New York: Verso
- Balibar, Etienne 1991, "Is there a Neo-Racism?" Translated by Chris Turner in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso.
- ____ 1994, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*. Translated by James Swenson. New York: Routledge.
- ____ 1995, *The Philosophy of Marx*. Translated by Chris Turner. New York: Verso.
- ____ 2002, *Politics and the Other Scene*, Translated by Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner, New York: Verso.
- ____ 2004, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Translated by James Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University.
- ____ 2011, *Citoyen sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- ____ 2012, "From Philosophical Anthropology to Social Ontology and Back: What to Do with Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach?" *Postmodern Culture*, Volume 22, Number 3. Online.
- ____ 2014, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, Translated by James Ingram, Durham: Duke.
- ____ 2015a, "On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" in *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. New York: Verso.
- ____ 2015b, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*, Translated by G.M. Goshgarian, New York: Columbia.
- Bidet, Jacques 2016, *Foucault With Marx*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Zed Books.
- Clover, Joshua 2016, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings*. New York: Verso.
- Crary, Jonathan 2013, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, New York: Verso
- Federici, Silvia 2012, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Oakland: PM Press.
- Foucault, Michel 2000 [1994], "Truth and Juridical Forms," Translated by Colin Gordon in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984: Volume 3*, Edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: New Press.
- ____ 2012 [1994], "The Mesh of Power," Translated by Christopher Chitty, *Viewpoint Magazine*, Issue 2, September 2012, Online.
- ____ 2013, *La Société Punitiv: Course au College de France. 1972 1973*. Paris: Seuil/Gallimard.
- Laval, Christian 2007, *L'homme économique: Essai sur les raciness du néolibéralisme*, Paris: Gallimard.
- ____ 2015, "La productivité du pouvoir," in *Marx & Foucault: Lectures, usages, confrontations*, edited by Christian Laval, Luca Palrinieri, and Ferhat Taylan, Paris: Éditions La Découverte.
- Legrande, Stéphane 2004, "Le Marxisme oublié de Foucault" in *Actuel Marx* 2004, N. 2 36, p. 27-43.
- Macherey, Pierre 2008, *Marx 1845: Les "Theses" sur Feuerbach*, Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.
- ____ 2014, *Le Sujet des Normes*, Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.
- ____ 2015, *The Productive Subject*, Translated by Tijana Okić, Patrick King, and Cory Knudson, Viewpoint: Online.
- Marx, Karl 1978 [1857] *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Translated by Martin Nicolaus. New York: Penguin.
- ____ 1977 [1867], *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, New York: Penguin.
- Ogilvie, Bertrand 2012a, *L'Homme Jetable: Essai sur l'exterminisme et la violence extrême*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.
- ____ 2012b, *La Seconde Nature du Politique: Essai d'anthropologie négative*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Power, Nina 2009, *One Dimensional Woman*, Winchester, UK: Zero Books.
- Virno, Paolo 2004, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Translated by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson, New York; Semiotexte.
- ____ 2008, *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*. Translated by Isabella Bertolotti,

James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson New York; Semiotexte.

_____ 2007, "Post-Fordist Semblance," Translated by Max Henninger, in *SubStance* #112, Vol. 36, No. 1, 42-46.

_____ 2009, "Natural-Historical Diagrams: The 'New Global' Movement and the Biological Invariant," Translated by Alberto Toscano in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, Edited by Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, Melbourne: re.press.

_____ 2015, *Déjà vu and the End of History*. Translated by David Broder. New York: Verso.

Weeks, Kathi 2012, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, Durham: Duke.

C
R
I
S
I
S

&

C
R
I
T
I
Q
U
E

/

Volume 3 /
Issue 3