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NOTES ON MOVEMENT AND UNCERTAINTY

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Without movement there is certainty.

The certainty of a world where the drowning of the dispossessed, the miserable and the enslaved, the poor and the hungry, can be watched on television as a 'really existing' reality show. And when they try to get clean water they will be shot. Their desperate attempts to get clean water, food and clothing were deemed a criminal offence against the iron law of private property – they called it looting. New Orleans – the 'Big Easy' – is a symbol of a world where the exception has become the rule. Shoot to kill. And when everything is back to normal, to its civilian best, the poor and miserable who have survived the ordeal will find that the city, its neighbourhoods and dwellings, has been developed and that they are debarred from the development. The developers will have had a good day's taking.

The poor and miserable have been told that they too are citizens with equal rights and freedoms. Their status as citizens was always a precarious promise. Nevertheless, and however inhospitable the conditions of their sacred life, they do indeed partake on the labour market as equals in exchange where labour-power is sold and bought for a wage. It is their liberty and equality as citizens that allow them the freedom to sell their labour-power, and therewith themselves, into conditions that were once described as infernal and that are now celebrated for their flexibility. Flexibility is seen as a form of self-responsibility and self-responsibility is associated with freedom. Those who contract on flexible labour markets

and work in flexible conditions know the traditional and lasting meaning of flexibility: to bend and bow, to comply and work.

Without movement, there is certainty: the certainty of great wealth in the face of poverty, the certainty of exploitation, and the certainty of an economic process where destruction is the accepted means of creation, and conversely, where creation is the accepted means of destruction – as a process of creative destruction. Without movement, the ongoing accumulation of ‘human machines’ on the pyramids of accumulation is certain. Without movement the blind eagerness for plunder and the use of organised coercive force to perpetuate economic progress on the basis of dispossession and misery is certain. Marx’s old description of the state as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie has been born out by so-called globalisation. There are thus no more wars between sovereign states. Wars have become ‘global’ civil wars. Only these civil wars remain.

Without movement there is the certainty of an economic system that produces poverty in a world of plenty, of an economic system whose constituted irrationality requires for its profitable functioning the lengthening of the working day – and this in the face of mass unemployment. Without movement society will suddenly find itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism. Such barbarism will make it appear as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence. Industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Without movement there is indeed certainty – the certainty of a bourgeois society that appears to choke itself up on its accumulated wealth. And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones.

With movement there is uncertainty.

There is no reality outside capitalism. There are no free, autonomous spaces that, as it were, provide bases for anti-capitalist struggles. We criticise the state, demand its transfer into the museum of history, and yet depend on it for all sorts of things. We reject cuts in welfare, and deteriorating welfare provisions, and we demand that the unemployed are paid well by the state in the form of benefits: the unemployed are not really deemed inessential by capital (they are just treated that way). They perform in fact an important social function. As the board member of Toyota, Mr. Shiramizu, helpfully explained recently, ‘in France there are many unemployed people and so [those with jobs] tend to work harder’.¹

We depend on welfare services, health services, educational services, access to welfare benefits, public transport provision and employment: we do indeed exist through the state and we do indeed exist as a wage-labouring commodity. This is a miserable condition – one can indeed not live an honest life in capitalism. We exist in and through and depend upon those same conditions that we reject. Still, it is because of this dependency that we struggle for social autonomy. That



is, an honest and dignified life already begins in the struggle against capital and its state. Social autonomy starts with the struggle against capital and its state, and associated institutions of social integration and incorporation. The struggle for autonomy is the struggle against definitions and categorisations. It is a struggle for diversity in communality – a struggle through a diversity that is at the same time a collective. Like dignity, it is a general human value that only exists concretely in each individual and is recognised as a general human value only in the concrete individual. Dignity is not abstract and cannot be abstracted from the concrete being. Thus, collectivity through diversity, and vice versa, is a form of organisation that exists only in and through the concrete individual. This collective individual is the multitude. It cannot be defined, nor categorised. It can only move and can only move against the time, not with the time. It is the movement of human emancipation that moves against the time. A movement that does not move is not a movement. Its erstwhile dynamic appears now as stasis. Stasis is to a movement what death is to a person: nothing remains – except the memory, itself dimming and prone to be exploited in and through the nationalisation of its legend. Against the dimming of time, the past struggles of the oppressed have to be unfrozen in the struggles of today. The danger is our own stasis – and thus our transport into an historical exhibit, carefully reconstructed to look as real as all the other dead exhibits.

Any attempt at categorising or defining the movement in its movement

reduces it to canon fodder that, led by the Party and under its auspices, is stripped of its negative potential. Instead of melting what seemed solid into thin air, the Party provides the multitude with a programmatic definition that perverts the aim of organisation in the means of resistance. Instead of doing, and learning by doing, the Party cages the multitude and this is indeed what it needs to do – a Party that represents no discernible quantifiable interests and which thus has no captive constituency is not a Party. Thus the multitude of human dignitaries becomes instead commensurate to foot soldiers. Do not think. Do not show humanity. Do not blink. Comply! The Party always knows best. However, the doing has to be learned – it cannot be commandeered. Commandeered doing is not doing; it is slaving. Learning by doing creates a public sphere in distinction from and as an alternative to the well-ordered bourgeois public sphere. For the Party to be the Party, it has to expropriate, contain, and control this alternative public sphere – the sphere where the multitude determines itself in the course of its own democratic becoming. By expropriating this public sphere, by reducing it to a spectacle of Party-political organisation, by taking from it its carnivalistic spontaneity of doing and experimenting, the Party transforms the not-yet of social autonomy in action into a well ordered, thoughtlessly thinking voting bloc.

Capitalism has nothing to fear from this sort of Party. Dignity has. The Party might still accept Trotsky's wish to 'spill blood'. The multitude does not wish to spill blood – it wants the spilling of blood to stop, once and for all, here and now. The Party might no longer favour violence as a means of seizing power. The multitude does not wish to seize power. There is no need for the master of violence – the state – in a classless society. The multitude does not compete with capitalism. Its purpose is the creation of an alternative to capitalism. The multitude's struggle for social autonomy is not conceived as a competition with capitalism. The Party competes – for votes, for participation in the convents of power, for governing responsibility in the palace, for certitude and responsibility in recognition of its own organisational self-interest, which it wishes to preserve at all costs. It competes by incorporating the multitude into a programmatic definition that is at once also pragmatic. Herein lies its usefulness for a political and economic order that it ostensibly wishes to demolish. The purpose and thus usefulness of the Party is that it seeks to make certain what is in fact uncertain. Its declamation of certainty – be it the correctness of its programme, understanding of the so-called laws of history, or tactical manoeuvre – is a mere posture; at best it confuses the struggle for a human society with the humanisation of inhuman conditions – a laudable endeavour that however perpetuates what it wishes to humanise; at worst, it tries to better capitalism in the name and on behalf of labour, collectivity and solidarity! If there were no such Party, the bourgeoisie would have to invent it. And maybe it did.

The negative potential of the multitude cannot be absorbed by the Party –

it either engages in the struggle for social autonomy and thus shows its negative potential in the democracy of the living or it does not and thus sheds its negativity in favour of certainty. The line between struggle and incorporation, between negativity and responsible acceptance of the given, is a fine one. Class struggle exists in and against capital. We all live in bourgeois society. It can however not be left behind by merely living within it. The negation of bourgeois society moves in and against its constituted forms. This is the site of class antagonism and class struggle. Only organised negation is able to transform the existence of class struggle in and against bourgeois social relations into the beyond of human history. This organised negation has however to be a self-organised negation. It learns by doing. The statement that one cannot live an honest life in the falsehood of bourgeois society is therefore only partially correct. An honest and sincere life starts already with the struggle against the falsehood of bourgeois society.

UNCERTAINTY AND NEGATION

The achievement of the society of the free and equal will depend on the sincere and honest struggle against capital and its state. There is no certainty. To speak about the multitude is to embrace uncertainty. Certainty and predictability belong to capitalism's own self-image. The image has little to do with reality. Capitalism depends on making certain, as a resource, and predictable, as a factor of production, our living labour-power, and therewith us. Our struggle against capital and its state is the struggle against the constituted certainty of capitalism – 'there is no alternative'. Our struggle is a struggle of uncertainty. Uncertainty is unavoidable. Uncertainty and the struggle for social autonomy belong together. Uncertainty entails doubt and patience. Since we do not and cannot know what history there will be, we have to make it with critical consciousness, a consciousness that thinks on its feet with dignity and is not corrupted by the sirens of power. Doubt is subversive. And patience? Patience, too, is a revolutionary endeavour. Impatience seeks quick, certain, predictable results; impatience laments – it rejects learning by doing; and prefers definite outcomes. Impatient revolutionaries are bosses in disguise. Impatience knows of only one time, the time of command, and is thus driven by time – the time of the clock – this homogeneous, steady and repetitive tick-tock. Impatience has no conception of how the time of insurrection melts away the time of exploitation. Lastly, we cannot do without irony. Irony helps us to overcome set-backs, defends us against depression and privatisation – this return to the safety of the living room. Irony, doubt, patience: these are the protective means against a life that is indifferent to itself and that therefore accepts without question its capitalist existence as a mere human resource.

In the misery of our time wage levels and income guarantees – be it in terms of money, goods or services – have to be defended and improved conditions have to be demanded. Pressure needs to be asserted to liberate millions of people from conditions of poverty and deprivation. However, the concept of welfare is



not enough. The demand is for human dignity. Dignity entails the human need for time, as against a life consisting solely of labour-time. Dignity entails the need of relations of human integrity, as against the reduction of human existence to a mere resource. Dignity entails the need for collectivity and solidarity, against the isolation of and indifference between individuals. Dignity entails respect and mutual recognition of the human subjects, against a form of existence that reduces humanity to a mere agent of economic rationality. Dignity entails the need for public space, as against enclosure, privatisation and communicative systems driven by development as capitalist freedom. Dignity entails the need for education, pleasure, human significance and mutual recognition. Dignity, in short, entails the equality of individual human needs for food, shelter, clothing, love, affection, knowledge and human significance. Human beings have either a price or a dignity. Price belongs to commodities. Dignity belongs to subjects. For the subject to be a subject, it cannot have a price. It can only have dignity.

The anti-globalisation conceptions of cosmopolitan democratic renewals or the anti-capitalist call for the intensification of economic struggle and building on that struggle, the intensification of political struggle to achieve a shift in the balance of class forces, reduce the struggle for democracy to a struggle for political power. The former sets out to democratise global institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and the UN. The great virtue of democracy that is celebrated here is the peaceful way in which it circulates elites, namely by

means of competitive elections between two rival sets of political managers, each campaigning on the basis of a programme that promises a more effective, efficient and economic use of resources. Then there is the demand for an intensification of struggle to shift the balance of class forces. The idea here it seems is that neo-liberalism is a form of capitalist hegemony and that a shift in the balance of class forces at the expense of capital will lead to a different form of hegemony. It is difficult to say what this hegemony might look like. What is the meaning, say, of a socialist hegemony in capitalism? Is socialist coercion preferable to capitalist coercion? Marx's judgement of similar proposals at his time still rings true: 'Poor dogs! They want to treat you like human beings!' Human emancipation cannot be achieved through coercive institutions. The realism of these conceptions of anti-globalisation lacks emancipatory contents and is, in fact, much more removed from social conditions than the concept of humanity that is based on the following imperative: act in such a way that you recognise humanity in your person and in all other persons always as a purpose, never as a means. Democracy, if taken seriously, entails this conception of humanity in action. It does not belong to coercive institutions. It belongs to subjects.

The struggle for social autonomy is therefore a struggle for the complete democratisation of all social relations. This struggle follows a completely different conception of time from that which says that time is money. In fact, the struggle for human autonomy is also, and fundamentally so, a struggle for different conceptions of time, liberating social time from its reduction to product and cash. Time as measure of social wealth and time as human social self-determination belong to different worlds. The first is the time of the human being as a mere agent or personification of economic categories – price, product, profit; the second is the time of the human being as a self-determining subject.

Self-determining subjects need time. Thus, the struggle for the shortening of the working day is the basic prerequisite of human emancipation. The capitalist form of wealth, and its reduction of time to cash and product, restricts the potential of society as every crisis shows. It is also shown in every commodity that cannot be sold for profit in the face of want; and that is defended by brute force in the face of thirst and hunger. Poverty of conditions is all-too evident in the so-called 'developing' countries, and remains hidden under the cloak of apparent prosperity in the so-called First World. New Orleans showed class politics in action, it showed what poverty and dispossession mean. How much labour-time was needed in 2005 to produce the same amount of commodities that was produced in 1995? Twenty per cent? Forty per cent or fifty per cent? Whatever the percentage might be, what is certain is that labour-time has not decreased. It has increased and it has done so in the face of mass unemployment. What is certain too is that the distribution of wealth is as unequal as never before. The contradiction between the forces and relations of production does seek resolution: destruction of productive forces, scrapping of labour through war and gener-

SHUT THEM DOWN!

alised poverty and misery, and all this against the background of an unprecedented accumulation of wealth.

Struggle for the democratic self-organisation of society entails the politicisation of social relations, and therewith the cancellation of the concentration of the political in the form of the state. Discussion of this issue is beyond the remit of this piece. Suffice to say that such politicisation does entail social conflict, which might succeed or bring to power 'well-meaning dictators... genuinely anxious to restore' the rule of law.² There is no certainty. Against the background of the contemporary transformation of the 'citizen' into a security risk, the democratic personality is a scandal and is thus treated as a subversive element – and rightly so.

1 Financial Times, March 3 2003.

2 Hayek, *praising Pinochet*, quoted in R. Cristi, Carl Schmitt and Authoritarian Liberalism (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998) p. 168.