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Species-Being and the New Commonism: Notes on an Interrupted Cycle of Struggles

Sketching in the Ashes

The last decade of the 20th century saw the eruption, in Chiapas, Paris, Seattle, Genoa, Porto Alegre, and countless other sites, of a new cycle of struggles against global capital. But “9-11” has reconfigured the context within which this cycle moves. The “war on terror” draws a dark, scorched line across the horizon towards which so many radical rivulets and transformative tributaries were flowing, marking a likelihood that all types of dissent will be delegitimized and attacked in a context of normalized mass death and social destruction.

In this new situation, it is no longer feasible (if it ever was) to think within the binary framework: Empire vs. Multitudes.¹ The conjuncture requires an analysis that comprehends not just at the World Trade Organization and the Zapatistas, but also Al Qaeda (not to mention all the Christian, Hindu, Judaic theocratic fundamentalisms).

Sketching in the ashes of a global war scenario, I propose a triangulation between three points:

- a) The logic of neoliberal capitalism. I call this the logic of the World Market. It interpellates a planet of market subjects: *consumers*.
- b) The logic of exclusionary ethno-nationalist-religious movements. I call this the logic of Fundamentalist Reaction. It addresses a planet lethally divided amongst *chosen peoples*.

- c) The logic of collective creativity and welfare proposed by the counter-globalization movements. I call this the logic of Species Beings. It speaks to a planet of *commoners*.

A whole series of molecular energies are currently being attracted, apportioned and annihilated between these three molar aggregates.

World Market and Fundamentalist Reaction are apparently opposed, antagonists in the “war on terror.” But they are mutually dependent on and produce each other: Fundamentalist Reaction responds defensively against the universalizing commodification of the World Market. The World Market, having armed and cultivated various “chosen peoples” as agents of destruction of state socialism (. e.g. the mujahadeen) and now legitimizes and vindicates its military expenditures and security apparatus waging war on Fundamentalist Reaction. Indeed, World Market and Fundamentalist Reaction each *contain* one another (e.g. fundamentalist Christianity in Bush’s USA, market dependence of radical Islamic regimes). Each relies on the other to supply the dimensions of social existence (ethico-communal cohesion, economic structure) it cannot realize in its own, inherent logic.²

Neither the World Market nor Fundamentalist Reaction is a unitary force. Both are characterized by competitive, fissiparous tendencies: the hostility of, on the one hand, contending “chosen peoples” (fundamentalist Christians vs. Jews vs. Islam vs. Hindus, etc., etc), and, on the other hand, trade blocs of competing capitals (North America vs. Europe vs. Asia).³

Played out over a planetary field now saturated with the weapons of mass destruction originally spawned by capital in its fight with state socialism, the conflicts of World Market and Fundamentalist Reaction, combined and cross-cut with the conflicts internal to each of these categories, drive towards social and ecological catastrophe, either through the direct effects of war, or the indirect effects of sustained inattention to problems such as HIV/AIDS, global warming, and mass impoverishment.

On the other hand, both Market Subjects and Fundamentalist Identities can be seen as attacking the logic of global commons enunciated by movements of Species Beings.

“The Present Living Species”: 1844-2004

To speak of “Species Beings” is to adapt the young Marx’s term “species-being” –central to his famous discussion of alienation in the *Economic and*

Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Here he describes how private ownership of the means of production results in a four-fold deprivation of human subjects: estrangement from the products of their own labour; from cooperative relations with fellow beings; from the nature that is transformed through their activity; and, from their own historical possibilities of self-development, or “species being.”

“Species being” refers to humanity’s capacity to transform itself through intentional social activity, making make “life activity itself an object of will and consciousness.”⁴ It is more than just existence as a natural, biologically reproductive collectivity with corporeal needs for food, water, shelter, and sex. Marx terms this species-life.⁵ Based in this biological embodied, ecologically embedded existence, species-being is the elaboration and expansion of these life-needs in a process of collective and individual self-development. This entails material capacity, self-consciousness and collective organization, all feeding into each other. Species-being is a constitutive power, a bootstrapped, self-reinforcing loop of social cooperation, technoscientific competencies and conscious awareness. It is an emergent attribute--“life engendering life.”⁶

Elements Marx identified as central to the unfolding of “the present, living species” include not only the cooperative organization of labour, but also the harmonious relation of humans to their natural environment (“nature linked to itself, for man is part of nature”), the emancipation of women from masculine domination (from which one can judge “how much man as a species-being . . . has come to comprehend himself”), the interconnection of people in increasingly “cosmopolitan” collectivities, and the application of science as technology to industry.⁷

The concept of “species being” has often been rejected as tainted with an essentialism held to be foreign to Marx’s thought. However, the defining feature of species being Marx identifies is the capacity of humans to affect change in their collective development.⁸ If it posits an essence, it is paradoxically that of a power of transforming or constructing nature. Thus “alienation” of species-being, the central problematic of the *1844 Manuscripts*, is not an issue of estrangement from a normative, natural human condition, but rather of who or what controls and limits the processes of ceaseless human self-development.

Species-being is realized to the degree that individuals not only contribute to the growth in social powers, but also access these powers as an increase in their own capacities and autonomy—indeed, as the very grounds for their intensifying individuation. Species-being is, we can say, “transindividual,” both the ground and compound of a multiplicity of individual species-beings.⁹

Social forms that block the circular access of social and individual powers by sequestering resources undermine species-being. So too, since, species-being is a

capacity for conscious social change, do forms that hand its direction to blind or out of control mechanisms. Hence the critique of capitalist alienation: the privatization of species-being as property, and its direction by atomized market exchange, forecloses on its wider, universal, development.

The 1844 Manuscripts posit nothing less than a political economy (or perhaps an anti-political economy) of the human. It proposes that to be human is not a matter only of biology. Even less is it a matter of abstract and ideal human rights. To be human is an issue—in the widest sense—of wealth. To be truly human is to have an equitable share in the material surplus generated by species activity, the surplus that makes possible collective and individual development and self-transformation.

“Species being” can be seen as the closest Marx came to positively identifying, transformative agency of communism. The creation of a “working class” as a decomposition of species being inflicted by the “class-ifying,” gridding and divisive operations of capital as it alienates species being: class identity is that which has to be destroyed in struggle so that species being can emerge.

But the implications are more radical than Marx himself may have grasped. For the reverberations of “species being” outrun the classic moment of class oppression—the proletarian reduced to the status of a “beast” or “machine.” It points towards to those other categories -- “woman,” “native,” “black”—whose impoverishment and exploitation has been legitimated by their designation as sub-human. It opens onto analysis of the way world market galvanizes categories not only of work, but also of gender and race in ways that at once excite and constrain the possibility of a far more universal, global, concept of the human than any that had existed before.

Marx’s capacity to theorize the full possibilities of species being theory were, however, stalled by blind spots in regard conditions of domestic and colonial labour. It was also hampered by the tensions in his thought in regard to the biosphere, and its oscillations between a rationalist triumphalism (“mastery” over nature) and what we would term an ecological perspective (“metabolic interaction with nature). Far more than in any of his later work (except perhaps *Grundrisse*) which revives some of these themes-- the *1844 Manuscripts* revolves these issues, so the first enunciation of “species being” is ringed with his best thought about sex and nature. Nonetheless the historical and personal limits of the theorization are apparent.

Louis Althusser’s famous claim that 1844 writings lie on the wrong side of an epistemological break in Marx’s work seems substantiated by the virtual disappearance of “species being” and “alienation” from his mature writings.¹⁰ But we propose Marx abandoned “species-being” not because the concept was flawed, as

because he could not, in his era, go through with it. Early industrial capitalism allowed him a prescient glimpse of the mobilization of planetary life as productive force. The process was, however, insufficiently advanced to engage its full scope, so Marx's analysis subsequently retracted into the famous investigation of waged labor in the mechanized factory. The disclosure of species-being had to await the full commodification of human social and ecological existence via web cast and xenotransplants.¹¹ Given this context, the recent revival of the concept of species being by authors such as David Harvey and Gayatri Spivak articulates some of the deepest concerns underlying the protests of the new movements.¹²

Streets Full of Species Beings

These eruptions have been termed “anti-free trade,” “counter-globalization,” “new internationalist,” “civil society” movements. Suggestive as these terms are, they are inadequate to recognize the scope of the issues at stake in the emergence of these movements. Such mobilizations are not just, or primarily, about work, trade, and social justice—although they are certainly about all these.

They are rebellions generated within and against a capitalism that is ‘global’ both in its planetary expansion and its ubiquitous social penetration, and whose processes generate subjects able to envisage, and willing to fulfill, the universalisms the world-market promises but cannot complete. This suggestion is broadly consonant with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s account of a multitudinous insurgence of “biopower” against “empire,” and with John McMurtry’s analysis of an antagonism between “life sequences” and “money sequences.”¹³ These new activisms are species-being movements, or, perhaps, movements of species-beings. Features that support such characterizations include:

- i) Multiplicity. The diversity of agencies involved reflects a situation of hyper-subsumption, where, while classic forms of exploitation persist—and are often intensified—capital taps the psychophysical energies of species-life at every point on its circuit: not just as variable capital (labor), but also, as a circulatory relay (consumerist consciousness, “mind share”), a precondition of production (the general pool of biovalues and communicative competencies necessary for "general intellect"), and even as constant capital (genetic raw materials). Species-being movements contest the “general exploitation of communal human nature.”¹⁴
- ii) Gender. These movements would be inconceivable without the emancipation of women at once initiated and contained by the world

market. This is evident in the role of women as theorists and leaders, and the enunciation of a feminist critique of political economy around issues such as globalized female work, unremunerated domestic labor, the double shift, procreative rights, and degeneration of the welfare state.

- iii) Ecology. The centrality of concerns such as biodiversity loss, global warming, ozone depletion, water privatization, and felling of rain forest marks the emergence a green critique of capital's "universal poisoning" of the environment.¹⁵ The meeting of "sea turtles" with steelworkers on the streets of Seattle is emblematic of this.
- iv) Cosmopolitanism. "Anti-globalization" is a wild misnomer for movements formed on a terrain of transnational exchanges and communications. The intensified mobility of finance, production and markets has set in motion a series of regional and international interactions amongst activists opposing various facets of global capital. Terms such as "anti-corporate globalization," "counter-globalization," "new internationalism," "globalization from below," "global justice" attempt to capture this: Spivak's "globe girdling movements" is perhaps most evocative.¹⁶

To say these are movements of species-beings is not to deny that the movements of Seattle, Genoa, and Porto Allegre are rife with contradictions. They include nationalist protectionists, liberal market reformists, welfare state nostalgists and isolationist fascists. One reason for the popularity of "civil society" terminology amongst the movements' platform speakers may be that its vagueness covers up these tensions. But to speak of "species-being" movements is to suggest that amongst these heterogeneous elements the genuinely new, and most dynamic, are biopolitical activisms, characterized by cosmopolitan affinities, transnational equalitarianism, implicit or explicit feminism, a strong ecospheric awareness, a practical critique of high technology, opposed to both the world market and reactive fundamentalisms

Materiality, Immateriality, Immization

Pluralizing the phrase—"species beings"—recognizes, to a degree that Marx never fully did, that the constitution of such a "species being" is the task of organizing collectivity across global difference. Attempts to define the new movements in terms of the centrality of a specific stratum of labour may be counter-productive.

Exemplary of such problems is Hardt and Negri's privileging of "immaterial" labor. This gives a pivotal role in the constitution of multitudinous insurgency to forms of biopower involved with information and communication. The paradigmatic figure is the high-tech "cyborg" worker. It thus elevates to a universal status a type of work that, although certainly globally dispersed, nonetheless remains predominantly concentrated in the "advanced" zones of the world market, and are-still-predominantly masculine. Although later iterations of the concept attempt to expand the scope of immateriality to embrace the "affective" labor of the largely female service sector, this expansion hides more difficulties than it resolves.

The problematic of species-being is that of recomposing a wide variety of different types of biopower waged and unwaged. This interaction is complex, intractable, and cannot be ironed out by incrementally expanding the concept of immateriality until it includes everyone from programmers to prostitutes.

Although there are any number of ways of categorizing the diversity of planetary laborers, we could, very schematically, suggest that the attention paid to "immaterial" laborers be balanced by equal attention to at least two other groups—"material" and "immizerated" workers.

If immaterial biopower is characterized according by its communicational and affective activity, then material biopower is that type of work still primarily focused on shaping the physicality of products-- from SUVs to running shoes to semiconductor chips--which obstinately refuse to dematerialize themselves; and immizerated labor is that part of the labor force which, through various gradations of precarious and contingent employment up to the short and long term reserve army of the unemployed, is treated by capital as simply surplus to requirements.

All concrete work is constituted at an intersection of these three abstract categories, which are not mutually exclusive but actualized to differing degrees along a continuum. But it is also possible to identify extremes on these continuums amongst different strata of planetary labor. The spatial concentrations of these extreme forms of labor in particular continents, regions and urban areas now constitute the "North" and "South" of the global order. If the paradigmatic figures of today's immaterial labor are amongst the net-workers of the World Wide Web, then those of material labour are surely in the manufacturing plants of the *maquiladoras*, export processing zones and new industrial areas; and those of immizerated labor in the vast tides of the homeless and itinerant who settle in the doorways and alleys of every rural slum and world-city.

Once we differentiate these sectors of global labor, it is by no means evident that the struggles of "immaterial labor" are the central ones on which those of other groups, as Hardt and Negri claim, "converge."¹⁷ On the contrary it may well be the

insurgencies of “immizerated/material” labor—the revolts of the Haitian maker of Disney T-shirts, or of dispossessed peasants in Chiapas, or South East Asian assembly line workers—that provide the critical points of focus, with which radicalized sectors of immaterial labor “identify” and on which they “converge” in solidarity, propelled both by a basic sense of justice and a self protective resistance against a the global “race to the bottom.”

Thus while immaterial labor *is* privileged in terms of the high-technology capitalist hierarchy of work, the dynamics of struggle against that hierarchy often flow in the reverse direction, from the bottom up. It is tempting to reverse the priority Negri gives to immateriality by saying: in the circuits of capitalism, immizerated labor is discarded, material labor produces commodities, while immaterial labor contributes primarily to their circulation (advertising, media, e-commerce). But in the circuit of struggles, it is immizerated labor that generates spontaneous insurgencies (riots, insurrections, land wars), material labor that gives these struggles organizational form (strikes, unions) and immaterial labor that circulates these struggles (media, netwars etc). In fact, such a formulation would be absurdly over-schematic and hence almost as mystifying as the “immaterial labor” thesis, but it does at least have the advantage of turning our attention to the central problem of mobilization against a world-market, which is that of organizing across the “international division of laborers.”¹⁸

For this reason, too, we should be cautious about too quickly adopting an “end of the third world” discourse. It is quite true that the capitalist deterritorialization enabled by improved communications and transportation has made possible the creation of what Maria Rosa Dalla Costa terms a new “hinterland of communication and liaison” between activists around the world.¹⁹ Movements of the immizerated—still predominantly of the global South—have found ways of by passing the local forces of capitalist and state terror to appeal for support in the North. And the global relocation of work has opened the way for this appeals to meet a response: high-value Northern biopower, losing a position of relative privilege, acquires an interest in raising the living standards of those in previously low-value peripheral zones: “when they win, we win.”

In addition, the affluence of Northern capital, while legitimating and normalizing consumerist greed and acquisitiveness has also, by ensuring a relative material security for many, created the conditions for the emergence of an ethical subject seriously disquieted by the disparity between its own conditions and that of the majority of the planet’s population. This same ethical subject—often young, often a student-- is also, and as it were in the same breath, frightened by what these inequalities mean in terms of the fragility of the world order of which it is a beneficiary, a fragility dramatically demonstrated by “9/11.”

However, these vectors can be pointed in many different directions. Sections of species being movements can fall towards either Fundamentalist Reaction (the nationalist protectionist option exemplified by the neo-fascist Buchanan brigades at Seattle) or toward the World Market (exemplified by the enlistment of NGO's in reformist projects). And fears of global fragility are precisely what are marshaled under a militarist banner by the "war against terror."

Such tensions run through the new combinations as a whole, through its component collectivities, down to the level of social individuals. They add up to an enormous ball of contradictions teetering this way and that, one that could roll in any of a number of directions with enormous force, or split apart like a segmented orange. When struggles at different points on capital's circuit, or in different geographical areas, fail to circulate and combine, the movement decomposes, throwing off fragmentary, and incompatible responses to problems of capitalist globalization.

Cognitive Capital, Cyberactivism & Contestational Biologists

What are at stake in the emergence of species being movements are new forces of production, communication and destruction generated by a high-technology "cognitive capitalism."²⁰ These include digitization and biotechnology and the new weapons potential arising from them. These are effecting what can only be described as "species changing" shifts in techno-social conditions that promise to alter collective conditions at levels that are genetic (corporeal), environmental (habitat), communicative (speech, culture) and survival (war), on a scale that is often glibly referred to a "post-human."

Underlying the movements of "species beings" is an demand that these impending and ongoing transformations be managed—in the sense of being able to say both a "yes" and a "no" to options, or to solutions to problems—from below, in a way to equalization of improvements and burdens.

The World Market attacks Species Being by appropriating and privatizing the collective, cooperative forces that change species-life (i.e. corporate control of new technologies); Fundamentalist Reaction attacks Species Being by forbidding and repressing the changes in species-life that collective cooperation enables (i.e. theocratic censorship and prohibition of new technologies).

In terms of issues of communication: the logic of the World Market is that of the global image empires of Murdoch and Berlusconi; that of Fundamentalist Reaction is that of filtering, censorship and death sentence for dissenting journalists

and artists; that of Species Being movements is peer to peer and open source networks

In terms of the life science and biorevolution: the logic of the World Market is that of patented life forms; that of Fundamentalist Reaction is prohibition of “unnatural” experimentation; and that of Species Being movements is public ownership, the meeting of basic life needs and responsible risk assessment.

Species-being movements contest the corporate trajectory of both digital and bio-technologies. In the case of new media this contestation often, but not always, takes the form of reappropriation. In the case of biotechnologies it often, but not always, takes the form of a refusal of high-technology life engineering. What is common is the attempt to intervene from below in technoscientific life-alteration, and to open channels for it other than those determined by commodification.

In the field of communications networks, an explosion of ‘alternative’ or ‘indy’ media has accompanied a critique of the corporate media’s filtering of social information. This includes the radical press, community radio, tactical television experiments and video activism. Probably the most dramatic innovation, however, has been the widespread use of the Internet for self-organization, circulating news, speeding internal communication, connecting with potential allies, making an “electronic fabric of struggle.”²¹

The picture is different in the area of biotechnologies, where refusal is more apparent. In the global South resistance to biopiracy and bio-prospecting by multinational pharmaceutical companies has been intense. So too is opposition to agribusiness’ coercive marketing of proprietarily controlled seed strains: In Europe and Canada, opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods and products such as bovine growth hormone have been widespread and successful.

The wide rejection of biotechnology may cast doubt on nomination of these new activisms as species-being movements, for it seems to repudiate the nature-transforming capacities about which Marx waxed enthusiastic. And there are certainly many in such resistances who reject the biotechnological in the name of natural or divine essences. Such positions risk falling towards green-tinged forms of Fundamentalist Reaction.

For other activists, however, the issue is not biotechnology per se but the corporate determination of its directions and deployment, and related issues of trustworthy research, testing, and labeling. Thus recent proponents of “contestational biology” declare “the real question” is “how to create models of risk assessment that are accessible to those not trained in biology” so that people can differentiate between innovations that amount to little more than “pollutants for

profit” and those that have a “practical and desirable function.”²² Many theorists and organizations fighting corporations such as Monsanto can envisage a benign role for biotechnologies in a different social context, where their development might take a different direction. Some say their stance is not a rejection of the life-sciences revolution, but the adoption of an alternative path within it, leading not towards the engineering of discrete genes, but to the more ecological analysis of holistic life systems.²³

The stance of today’s species-being movements towards high technology thus mixes appropriation and rejection, invention and sabotage, hacking and neo-Luddism, Web-casters and seed gatherers. It is quite possible today to encounter activists fight genetic patenting via computer networks.

Such practices may seem incoherent, but they may just be discriminating. If species-being entails conscious social choice about human self-transformation, it must involve the capacity to say “yes” or “no” to technological options. In Jurgen Habermas’ terms, species-being movements seem to be saying an emphatic “yes” to the possibilities of enhancing “communicative reason” through high-technology media, a nearly equally emphatic “no” to the “instrumental reason” of genetic engineering, and are using the former to combat the latter.

Global Public Goods and the New Commons

‘Commons’ is a recurrent term in species-being activism. Its signals a focus on access to and regulation of collective resources, around issues ranging from digital culture to plant breeding to atmospheric pollution and the global water supplies. This commons discourse resumes older discussions about ‘public goods,’ but breaks new ground, both in the range of ecological, biogenetic and cultural domains it addresses, and in its interest in the possibilities of organization of resources from below, rather than according to the models of command economies or bureaucratic welfare state.

High technologies, in both their communicational and biological aspects, intensify the socialization of productive activity, both in terms of the social cooperation required for the research and development, and by generating collective consequences that cannot be reckoned in terms of individualized market exchange.

In the case of digital networks, these consequences include new modes of product creation and circulation, such as peer to peer networks and open source networks, which fly out of the orbit of the commodity form. These potentials are expressed in the “creative commons” and “open cultures” movements contesting the intellectual property regime of the world market.²⁴

In the case of biotechnologies, commons aspects are most apparent in the multiplication of possible public harms from irresponsible experimentation and premature application. But public good aspects involving defense against planet-sweeping epidemics are also visible: the transnational campaign against pharmaceutical capital to compel affordable access to anti-HIV retrovirals is a case in point.²⁵

The more capital deploys digital and biological technologies to enclose informational, ecological and biotechnological domains within the market, the more it intensifies market 'externalities.' Commons discourse restores these processes--creative possibilities fettered, destructive dimensions unaccounted for--to view.

The conflict between capital and species-being movements maps very approximately onto rival models of technological development: in media, open source and peer to peer networks versus proprietorial code and closed systems; in life sciences, systemic biology and ecosystemic perspectives against reductive genetic engineering. The tendency of species-being movements is towards the practical realization of what Marx termed "communal activity, and communal mind."²⁶

Alien Powers

The importance of 'commons' movements can only be measured against the counter tendency towards social polarizations that give a new vitality to that most exhausted of terms, "alienation."

The central problem Marx raised in relation to "species being," namely the alienation of these collective human- capacities into the hands of privatized ownership, is, in the age of Monsanto, Bristol-Meyers and Merck, more acute than ever. Alienation takes on a whole new urgency when it reaches up to the creation of "alien" life forms designed specifically and solely for their functionality to capital. Such forms—onco-mice, spider-goats, and terminator seeds—already exist, very concrete expression of the power of money to "a world upside-down-the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities."²⁷

Biotechnologies generate not only designed animal and plants, but also alterations in the most basic givens of the human condition: appearance, health, emotional and intellectual faculties, longevity, and sexuality. Germline interventions might make such changes inheritable. Futurists speak of a moment at which a technologically-transformed humanity would become as 'alien' to its former self as humanity is today from, say, great apes: a post-human singularity.

Marx's account of species-being qualifies apocalyptic accounts of the post-human, for it reminds us that humans have long been forming themselves in a technologically mediated relation with a "second nature," in a series of grafts, symbioses and prosthesis with machines, buildings, altered nutrients and landscapes: in this sense, the species has *always* been post-human.²⁸

But Marx's critique also condemns the direction of this process by an "inhuman power" of accumulation.²⁹ His account of species-being reduced, as labour, to the status of "beasts" or "machines" opens to a consideration of the post-human as catastrophe, not by reason of departure from a supposedly essential nature but from an unequal scheduling of departure times, or because some step onto the train across the backs of others.

Every extrapolation from the present suggests that access to voluntary biotechnological transformations will be deeply income dependent. The combination of powerful biotechnologies with vast differentials in wealth and global health care systems shaped by neoliberal privatization is a recipe for market eugenics very different from its ill-fortuned state-driven predecessors. Positive and negative selection will be left to the survival instincts and pocket book of individuals in system where employment possibilities are dependent on a clean genetic profiles, or even bio-modifications, bringing into site the jaw-dropping possibility of the transformation of "classes" into "clades."

Techno-apartheids and digital divides already contribute to vast differentials in human life chances around the planet. The sovereign power of the market decrees that most of the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, are excluded from anything that the liberal citizenry would consider as a properly human existence, becoming the "homo sacer" of global capital.³⁰

Market driven globalization exacerbates ethnic envy and hatred between "frustrated, impoverished majorities" and "market dominant minorities."³¹ To this situation we may soon add the bio-rifts produced by a neoliberal-eugenics that makes the masters of the planetary economy more and more literally 'alien' from those they rule.

It is the prospect of the post-human made on the basis of the in-human that renders species-being movements' insistence on "the common" vitality. This commonality is not the maintenance of natural state, but an equalitarian order to be achieved. The program that would follow from this is one of equalization of conditions, one that gave a primacy to the meeting of elementary needs of species-life for everyone. Absent this, the technological modifications of species-life will follow an inhuman path towards the war of the post-human against the not-yet-human.

Neo-Exterminism

This situation may already be upon us. ‘9/11’ brings to crescendo what many heard approaching: confrontation between the techno-cultural whirlwind of cognitive capitalism and an array of religious-ethno-nationalist fundamentalisms arising as a defensive response to the immization and disruptions the world market creates: “McWorld versus Jihad.”³²

Marx identified two forms in which species-being is alienated: capital and religion.³³ Each abstracts from, substitutes and imposes over the species’ collective, cooperative capacity for self-organization a fetishized authority—money or divinity. Capital privatizes a material wealth; religious institutions sequester spiritual experience. The world market embraces the dynamic mutation of human technocultural possibilities, at the expense of all collectivity; religious fundamentalisms maintain social collectivity, but on the basis of fixed, divinely sanctioned identities and hierarchies.

In the ‘war on terror’ these two alienated forces turn on each other. Having colluded to annihilate the previously existing socialisms, neoliberal capital and reactionary fundamentalisms face off, fangs bared. The grimace is deceptive, since each partial, alienated antagonist actually requires and internalizes the other. Bush is evangelical, relying on fundamentalist Christianity to discipline the social maelstrom of American turbo-capitalism; bin Laden is a scion of oil capital and lacks any economic program alternative to the world market. But this only intensifies the animosity.

Both are hostile to the forces of Seattle and Porto Alegre, though each sees them as a manifestation of its opponent’s logic, as ‘terrorism’ or ‘decadence.’ Thus the widely felt intuition that the war on terror is somehow aimed against counter-globalization, recently articulated by Slavoj Žižek, requires no conspiracy theory: whoever moved first, CIA or mujahadeen, 9/11 resulted from the interaction of two forces antithetical to species-being.³⁴

What makes this a true “dialectic of disaster,” is an aspect of technology that Marx undoubtedly scanted—its power not as means of production, but of destruction.³⁵ The new technologies of “cognitive capitalism” are rooted in military purposes. They arose from the nuclear confrontation with state socialism. The entire trajectory of computerization, as well as substantial portions of the new life sciences, would be unthinkable without this deadly matrix. The specter of mutually assured destruction can be seen as a *via negativa* to humanity’s practical self—recognition of its planetary unity. The mass anti-nuclear movements of 1960s and 1980s were

perhaps the first species-being mobilizations, predecessors of today's globalization from below.

During the Reaganite Second Cold War, E.P. Thompson coined the term "exterminism" to name the mutual momentum of rival military-industrial -scientific systems apparently spiraling to disaster.³⁶ The collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to vitiate this idea. But the war on terror brings back this dynamic, in revised form.

Neo-extermism presents itself not as the massified confrontation of Pentagon and Kremlin, but rather in flexibilized, diffuse, post-Fordist form, in the frantic attempt of advanced capital to prevent the real or imagined spread of increasingly generalized, miniaturized and handy weapons of mass destruction that might threaten its hegemony. Underlying this metastasizing dynamic, and the surgical strikes with which established power attempt to manage it, lies, once again, capital's inability to control the high-technology it has unleashed, overlaid on the vast global inequalities we have already discussed, and on the confrontation between world market and fundamentalist reaction.

In neo-extermism, the most amazing techno-scientific expressions of species-being powers appropriated by capitalists and fundamentalists alike will not appear as retrovirals and open source software, but instead as swarms of robotized battle-drones chattering to each other in the skies over smoky landscapes searching for mobile weaponized smallpox laboratories.

Neo-extermism does not, yet, offer the 'big bang' conclusion to species-being of nuclear winter; but it does promise slow degradation into persistent war, economic wastage and universal fear, a dynamic that in current conditions of global interdependence may be as mortal. It is an understanding of this possibility that made the forces that in 2000 appeared on streets of Seattle reappear in 2003, as the largest peace movement the planet has ever seen opposing the invasion of Iraq.

The Return of the Plan

Other current manifestations of species being logic include: campaigns for global water access, the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the redirection of medical research towards diseases that afflict the poor, young South, rather than towards the post-human North ; movement to reduce and regulate the unevenly inflicted consequences of global warming; mobilizations against the patenting of life forms and for the proper social control of biotechnologies; and, centrally, against the obscenity of global wealth inequalities.

Such movements against the privatizing power of the World Market need, however, to be more clearly linked with another, parallel, range of struggles against the obscurantist logics of Fundamentalist Reaction. These struggles include women's resistance to re-impositions of patriarchal discipline and the defense of ethnic and religious minorities. Absent a stronger linkage between these two wings of a species being movement, the war on terror will successfully wrap itself in the flag of enlightened liberation even while relentlessly deepening the grip of the World Market.

The task of the Species Beings is to disentangle themselves from and neutralize World Market and Fundamentalist Reaction before these two antagonists bring irreparable planetary collapse, through war and negligence. This is the contemporary inflection of the civilizational choice Marx posed when he said that in the absence of socialism, the options were capitalism or barbarism

Many think the very best to hope for is a system of "cosmopolitan social democracy" that hedges the world market around with a series of globalized welfare state institutions.³⁷ This is a decent, responsible objective for which to struggle, but not enough.

The world market has summoned powers whose consequences it cannot control or even measure. The management of a range global eco-metabolic problems, including not only biotechnological risks but climate and atmospheric change, pandemics and water and energy supply, require institutions of oversight, testing, risk assessment, public resource management and regulation, and collective education—in short, social planning, and on a scale to make previous efforts look retiring.

The new information technologies created by cognitive capital makes such governmentality feasible. The neural networked surveillance and simulation systems deployed to wage the war on terror could be turned to monitoring and avoiding the social and biospheric ruination of the planet

Yet the possibilities of panoptic despotism are obvious. What tempers these risks are the equal potentialities for transparency, creativity and assemblage created by the new mesh of global networked communication, potentialities being so vigorously explored by a host of social movements and individuals.

Realizing the logic of species-being movements thus requires more the romanticism of spontaneous rhizomatic connections. It calls for revival of a very unfashionable idea—global collective planning, but on a basis that avoids the disastrous legacy of the Leninist command state in favor of truly participative processes. The technological possibilities that the world market has itself excited

contain the possibility of a counter-subsumption that will give commodification a declining role in a human future.

Invocations of common humanity have always, rightly, been suspect to Marxists as the weakest of idealizations. Today, however, such invocations by movements of species-beings may just be the starkest of realisms, the only category practically adequate to the concrete productive and destructive dimensions of global capitalism, and the struggles against it.

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000)

² A good basic outline of this dynamic is in *Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together--And What This Means For Democracy* (New York: Times, 1995), which, however, falls down seriously when it comes to alternatives to and counter-powers against this catastrophic reciprocity.

³ Failure to recognize this last point is the weakness of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, whose emphasis on the cohesive logic of capital as a whole comes at the expense of neglecting the rivalrous action of individual capitals that constitute the system. This results in a Kautskian theory of "super-imperialism," which cannot comprehend the possibilities such as an antagonistic split of "Empire" into "Rome (USA) and Constantinople (China).

⁴ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964) 67.

⁵ On this distinction see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) 73-81

⁶ Marx, 113.

⁷ Marx, 112, 129, 134.

⁸ Joseph Margolis, "Praxis and Meaning: Marx's Species-being and Aristotle's Political Animal." In *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Theory and Classical Antiquity*. Ed. George E. McCarthy (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992) 229-352. Stephen Mulhall, "Species-being, Teleology and Individuality: Part 1: Marx on Species-being," *Angelaki* 3:1 (1993) 9-21.

⁹ Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 1995), 19.

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx* (London: Penguin, 1969). On the issue of breaks see Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 1995).

¹¹ This suggestion follows Marx's own intellectual method, which, as Werner Bonefeld puts it, insisted "the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete developments, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone." Werner Bonefeld. "The Specter of Globalization: On the Form and Content of the World Market." In *The Politics of Change: Globalization, Ideology and Critique* (Palgrave: New York, 2000) 36.

¹² Spivak, *Critique*, 73-81, and David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 206-212, 213-232. See also Keith Doubt, "Feminism and Rape as a Transgression of Species Being," in his *Sociology After Bosnia and Kosovo* (Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000) 61-66.

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- ¹³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 25-31, John McMurtry, *Value Wars: The Global Market Versus the Life Economy* (London; Pluto, 2002), 163.
- ¹⁴ Marx, 148.
- ¹⁵ Marx, 85.
- ¹⁶ Spivak, 311.
- ¹⁷ Hardt and Negri 1994, 281
- ¹⁸ Selma James, "Marx and Feminism." *Third World Book Review*. 1.6 (1986)
- ¹⁹ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Development & Reproduction," *Common Sense* 17 (1995): 29.
- ²⁰ On "cognitive capitalism," see the on-line papers from "Class Composition in Cognitive Capitalism," University of Paris, Feb. 15-16, 2002, available at <http://www.geocities.com/CognitiveCapitalism/>
- ²¹ Harry Cleaver, "The Chiapas Uprising," *Studies in Political Economy* 44 (1994): 15.
- ²² Critical Art Ensemble, *The Molecular Invasion* (New York: Autonomedia, 2002,) 4-5.
- ²³ See Jeremy Rifkin, *The Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World* (New York: Putnam, 1998).
- ²⁴ See Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World*. New York: Random House 2001)
- ²⁵ See Ruth Mayne, "The Global NGO Campaign on Patents and Access to Medicines: An Oxfam Perspective," in Peter Drahos and Ruth Mayne, Eds. *Global International Policy Rights: Knowledge, Access and Development*, (London: Macmillan, 2002).
- ²⁶ Marx, 137.
- ²⁷ Marx, 169.
- ²⁸ Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999).
- ²⁹ Marx, 156.
- ³⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1998)
- ³¹ Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*. (New York: Doubleday, 2003) 16.
- ³² Benjamin Barber. *Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together-- And What This Means For Democracy* (New York: Times, 1995).
- ³³ Marx, 111
- ³⁴ Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002).
- ³⁵ Ronald Aronson, *The Dialectics of Disaster* (London: Verso, 1983).
- ³⁶ EP Thompson et al, *Exterminism and Cold War*, (London: Verso 1982). See also Etienne Balibar's revival of the term in "Outlines of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence," *Constellations* 9:1 (2002) 15-19.
- ³⁷ David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002