

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright  
May 21, 2012



*Jacques Camatte*

## Against Domestication

Jacques Camatte  
Against Domestication  
1973

Published: In French in *Invariance* Année VI, Série II, no. 3, 1973. This translation Falling Sky Books, Kitchener, Canada in 1981. Transcription from the John Gray website. Markup by Rob Lucas, 2006. Translation: David Loneragan. Translators note in first edition: *Dedicated to Rose and to all my friends in London*  
Retrieved on December 3, 2009 from [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)

1973



# Contents

The Mythology of the Proletariat .....	11
The Lycée Movement, Paris, 1973 .....	16
The Despotism of Capital .....	20
The Question of Violence .....	23
The Terrain of Struggle .....	27
The Global Perspective .....	34
Revolution and the Future .....	37



a feeling, which is founded on more than just optimism, that the next five years will see the beginning of revolution, and the destruction of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>26</sup>

Jacques Camatte 1 May 1973

<sup>26</sup> “From our present point of view, this prediction seems to be wrong. But we should bear in mind that predictions can never be made with absolute accuracy; the overall process will generally tend to lag behind what we forecast will happen, and there is also the factor that every such prediction is an expression of a particular individual’s, own profound desire. And desire is always in a hurry, it doesn’t know how to wait. We should discuss the future realistically: i.e. in terms of the movement and process towards revolution, and from the standpoint that we must abandon this world. But it cannot be stated as simply as that; it starts to look like equivocation. We ought to be able now to examine the forecast we made and what emerges from it. What is true about it is the fact that in 1978, the refusal we have often spoken about is now more manifest, more definitely present than it has been in the years preceding. This refusal moreover, is heavy with consequences for capital’s destruction.

“What we have said so far has been concerned with the permanent element of the perspective, but it doesn’t clarify particularly the situation at the present, where we find that the concern is no longer with a struggle against capital as such. In 1973, one could already see that the destruction aimed at capital was indirect: it did not come from men and women forming a frontal opposition against it. If the system suffers from instability — the ‘crisis’ as the economists now call it — this doesn’t of itself call capital into question, and the catastrophe is only just beginning to develop its premises (though the pace of events can accelerate quickly).

“One fundamental thing to emerge since 1978 is the fact that we are fast approaching the end of the cycle of capital. It is more intensive now, but also more extensive, and from either point of view this makes it easier for us to abandon capital. Taking up a position about something that is already achieved and finished is easy; it is much harder with something that is still in the process of formation and development.” (from “la separation necessaire et l’immense refus”, 1979)

This is as clear as I was able to get it in January 1979 when that piece was written. In a more recent article (“l’Echo du Temps”, Feb. 1980) I try to describe more accurately how this “destruction” of the community of capital can come about. It is an attempt to take up the question of what I call capital’s potential death, which is due to its movement of anthropomorphization and the capitalization of human beings.

As capital openly installs its community it realizes a project of the human species and at the same time exhausts its possibilities. Being real contemporaries of our period requires a clear realization of the potential death of capital, in order that we may subsequently embark on a new dynamic of life. (Author’s note, March 1980)

The time we are now living through is without doubt the most critical period capitalist society has ever known. All the features which we associate with the classic crisis now exist as a permanent state of affairs, though production itself has not been affected, except to a limited extent in certain countries. Social relations and traditional consciousness are decomposing all around us, while at the same time each institution in society proceeds to ensure its survival by recuperating the movement which opposes it. (An obvious example here is the catholic church, which has lost count of all the “modernizations” it has embraced). One would think that the violence and torture which is now endemic everywhere would have people mobilized and up in arms against it, but instead it continues to flourish on a world scale. Indeed, the situation today makes the “barbarism” of the Nazis seem in comparison rather unprofessional, quite archaic in fact. All the conditions would seem to be ripe; there should be revolution. Why then is there such restraint? What is to stop people from transforming all these crises and disasters, which are themselves the result of the latest mutation of capital, into a catastrophe for capital itself?

The explanation for this is to be found in the domestication of humanity, which comes about when capital constitutes itself as a human community. The process starts out with the fragmentation and destruction of human beings, who are then restructured in the image of capital; people are turned into capitalist beings, and the final outcome is that capital is anthropomorphised. The domestication of humanity is closely bound up with another phenomenon which has intensified even further the passivity of human beings: capital has in effect “escaped”. Economic processes are out of control and those who are in a position to influence them now realize that in the face of this they are powerless: they have been completely outmanoeuvred.

At the global level, capital's escape is evident in the monetary crisis;<sup>1</sup> overpopulation, pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources. The domestication of humanity and the escape of capital are concepts which can explain the mentality and activity of those who claim to be revolutionaries and believe that they can intervene to hasten the onset of revolution: the fact is that they are playing roles which are a part of the old world. The revolution always eludes them and when there is any kind of upheaval they see it as something external to them, which they have to chase after in order to be acknowledged as "revolutionaries".

For a considerable time, human beings have, strictly speaking, been outstripped by the movement of capital which they are no longer able to control. This explains why some people think that the only solution is flight into the past, as with the fashionable preoccupation with mysticism, zen, yoga and tantraism in the U.S. Others would rather take refuge in the old myths which reject the total and all-pervading tyranny of science and technology. (Often this is all combined with the use of some drug which gives the illusion of the rapid arrival of a world different from the horror we are now living through.<sup>2</sup>) On the other hand, there are people who say that only science and technology can be relied upon to provide the answers — which would explain why certain women in the feminist movement are able to envisage their emancipation through parthenogenesis or by the production of babies in incubators.<sup>3</sup> There are others who

---

<sup>1</sup> What we call the monetary crisis involves more than just determining the price of gold or redefining its role; nor is it merely a question of establishing a new general equivalent (a new standard altogether), or setting fixed parities among national currencies, or integrating the economies of the money markets (capital as totality — Marx). The monetary crisis is about the role of capital in its money form, or, more precisely, the superseding of the money form itself, just as there has been a supercession of the commodity form.

<sup>2</sup> Worse than the "heartless world" Marx speaks of in *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>3</sup> The presupposition underlying such an absurd demand is the supposed biological inferiority of women, which is a scientific illusion. Science has discovered a defect in women and decrees that it is up to science to remedy it. If men are no longer needed (because of parthenogenesis) and if women aren't needed either (since embryos and even ovaries may be developed in phials), then we are left with the question

of revolution is being considered, the past is presented as shrouded in darkness, while the future is all shining light. Capital has conquered the future. Capital has no fear of utopias, since it even tends to produce them. The future is a field for the production of profit. In order to generate the future, to bring it into being, people must now be conditioned as a function of a strictly preconceived process of production: this is programming brought to its highest point. Man, once characterized by Marx as "the carcass of time" is now excluded from time. This, together with the domination of the past, the present and the future, gives rise to a structural representation, where everything is reduced to a combinative of social relations, productive forces, or mythèmes etc., arranged in such a way as to cohere as a totality. Structure, perfecting itself, eliminates history. But history is what people have made.

This leads to the understanding that revolution must not only engender another conception of time, but must also assimilate it to a new synthesis of space. Both will be created simultaneously as they emerge out of the new relationship between human beings and nature: reconciliation. We said before that all which is fragmented is grist to the mill of the counter-revolution. But revolution means more than reclaiming just the totality; it is the reintegration of all that was separate, a coming together of future being, individuality and Gemeinwesen. This future being already exists as a total and passionately felt need; it expresses better than anything else the true revolutionary character of the May '68 movement and that of the lycée students in Spring 1973.

Revolutionary struggle is struggle against domination as it appears in all times and places, and in all the different aspects of life. For five years this contestation has invaded every department of the life of capital. Revolution is now able to pose its true terrain of struggle, whose centre is everywhere, but whose place is nowhere.<sup>25</sup> Its task in this sense is infinite: to destroy domestication and engender the infinite manifestation of the human being of the future. We have

---

<sup>25</sup> This is Blanqui's definition of infinity which is itself a slight modification of Pascal's famous phrase. (The French is: "le centre est partout, la surface nulle part" — translators note)

reality only if labour power can appear to be ready and available in a future (a future which can only be hypothetical, and not necessarily very near). If therefore this future isn't there, then the present (or henceforth the past) is abolished: this is devalorization through total loss of substance. Clearly then capital's first undertaking must be to dominate the future in order to be assured of accomplishing its production process. (This conquest is managed by the credit system). Thus capital has effectively appropriated time, which it moulds in its own image as quantitative time. However, present surplus value was realized and valorized through exchange against future labour, but now, with the development of the "future industry", present surplus value has itself become open to capitalization. This capitalization demands that time be programmed, and this need expresses itself in a scientific fashion in futurology. Henceforth, capital produces time.<sup>24</sup> From now on where may people situate their utopias and uchronias?

The established societies that existed in previous times dominated the present and to a lesser extent the past, while the revolutionary movement had for itself the future. Bourgeois revolutions and proletarian revolutions have had to guarantee progress, but this progress depended on the existence of a future valorized in relation to a present and a past which is to be abolished. In each case, and to a degree which is more or less pronounced depending on which type

---

<sup>24</sup> Capital is characterized not so much by the way it emphasizes quantity while denying quality, but rather by the fact that there exists a fundamental contradiction between the two, with the quantitative tending to overwhelm all aspects of quality. It is not a question of realizing the desire for quality by denying quantity (in the same way, one does not arrive at use value by suppressing exchange value). It will require a total mutation before all the logic of this domination can be swept away. For quality and quantity both exist in close affinity with measurement, and all are in turn linked to value. Measurement operates to an equal degree at the level of use value, as well as exchange value. In the former case, it is closely bound up with one type of domination: use values measure a particular person's social position, and are also a measure of the weight of oppression they bear. Use values impose their own despotism which envelops the other despotism (exchange value), and now also that of capital. Marx, in his notes to J.S. Mill's work, denounced utilitarianism as a philosophy in which man is valued only in terms of his use, while exchange tends to autonomize itself.

believe they can fight against violence by putting forward remedies against aggressiveness, and so on. These people all subscribe, in a general way, to the proposition that each problem presupposes its own particular scientific solution. They are therefore essentially passive, since they take the view that the human being is a simple object to be manipulated. They are also completely unequipped to create new interhuman relationships (which is something they have in common with the adversaries of science); they are unable to see that a scientific solution is a capitalist solution, because it eliminates humans and lays open the prospect of a totally controlled society.<sup>4</sup>

We now come to the category of people who feel that they have to "do something": they are now having to realize that their understanding of the situation is totally inadequate, and their efforts to conceal this fact only makes their powerlessness more obvious. The "silent majority", who make up the rest, are permeated with the belief that it is pointless to do anything, because they simply have no perspective. Their silence is not consent pure and simple, but rather evidence of their incapacity to intervene in any way. The proof of this is that when they are mobilized, it is never for something but against it. Their particular passivity is therefore negative.

It is important to note that the two groups referred to above — the activists and the silent majority — cannot be catalogued simply as left and right: the old political dichotomy no longer operates here. The confusion which this raises is nevertheless important in

---

of whether there is any need for the human species after all. Has it not become redundant? These people seem to believe in solving everything by mutilation. Why not do away with pain by eliminating the organs of sensitivity? Social and human problems cannot be solved by science and technology. Their only effect when used is to render humanity even more superfluous. Obviously, no one can make a judgement about the feminist movement as a whole just by reference to that aspect now being discussed. The feminist movement is of great importance in the struggle against capital, and it is a subject we hope to take up on in the future. In its critique of capitalist society and the traditional revolutionary movement, it has made a remarkable contribution.

<sup>4</sup> In the original French the author frequently uses the expressions "men", "man", or "mankind", as well as "humans", or "human beings". Where the false generic "man" etc. does occur it has been changed, even though this must involve a distortion of what was originally intended. [translator's note]

relation to the attitude taken towards science, since in the past it was people on the left who were very committed to science, whereas now it is being condemned by the New Left (in the United States for example). The leftright dichotomy lives on, however, among the old regroupements, the parties of the left and right and all the rackets of the past, but these oppositions have all ceased to matter: in one way or another they each defend capital equally. The most active of all are the various communist parties because they defend capital by espousing exactly the same scientific forms and rational structures which capital uses to maintain itself.

All the movements of the left and right are functionally the same in as much as they all participate in a larger, more general movement towards the destruction of the human species. Whether people stay confined within certain obsolete strategies and forms, or whether they submit to the mechanisms of technology — either way the result is the same. Historically, the categories of left and right seem to emerge as a duality at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the capitalist mode of production was beginning to exert its real domination over the process of production, and was becoming a true social force. Thus certain people like Carlyle found themselves in opposition to the apologists of capital,<sup>5</sup> but it was left to Marx

---

<sup>5</sup> The struggle of people against capital has only ever been seen through the narrow focus of class. The only way to be regarded as a real adversary of capital has been to actively identify oneself with the proletariat; all else is romantic, petit bourgeois etc . . . But the very act of reasoning in classist terms means that any particular class is confined within the limits of class analysis. This is particularly important when one considers that the working class has as its mission the elimination of all classes. It also avoids the question of how that class will bring about its own autodestruction, since this classist analysis prevents any lessons being drawn from the tragic intellectual fate of those people who set themselves in opposition to capital without even recognising or identifying their enemy (as with Bergson, for example). Today, when the whole classist approach has been deprived of any solid base, it may be worthwhile to reconsider movements of the right and their thinking. The right is a movement of opposition to capital that seeks to restore a moment which is firmly rooted in the past. Hence in order to eliminate class conflict, the excesses of capitalist individualism, speculation and so on, the Action Francaise and the Nouvelle Action Francaise (NAF) envisage a community which can only be guaranteed, according to them, by a system of monarchy. (See particularly the chapter on capitalism in *Les Dossiers de l'Action Francaise*).

prevailed under the Czar, and there is also the fact that the holy alliance between the USSR and the USA has been shown to be more effective than the Anglo-Russian alliance of the nineteenth century. The outcome can be delayed but not halted: we can expect the “communitarian” dimension of revolution in the USSR to be clearer there than in the West, and that it will go forward with giant strides.

## Revolution and the Future

During a period of total counter-revolution, Bordiga was able to withstand the disintegrating effect brought about by it because he retained a vision of the coming revolution, but more particularly because he shifted his focus of thinking concerning struggle. He did not look only to the past, which is just a dead weight in such a period, nor did he incline towards the present, dominated as it was by the established order, but towards the future.<sup>22</sup>

Being thus attuned to the future enabled him to perceive the revolutionary movement as it actually was, and not according to its own characterizations. Since that time, the “future industry”<sup>23</sup> has come into its own and assumed an enormous scope. Capital enters this new field and begins to exploit it, which leads to a further expropriation of people, and a reinforcement of their domestication. This hold over the future is what distinguishes capital from all other modes of production. From its earliest origins capital’s relationship to the past or present has always been of less importance to it than its relationship to the future. Capital’s only lifeblood is in the exchange it conducts with labour power. Thus when surplus value is created, it is, in the immediate sense, only potential capital; it can become effective capital solely through an exchange against future labour. In other words, when surplus value is created in the present, it acquires

---

<sup>22</sup> Bordiga once maintained that “we are the only ones to ground our action in the future”. In 1952 he wrote: “Our strength lies more in the science of the future than in that of the past or present.” (*Explorateurs de l’avenir*, *Battaglia Comunista* no. 6)

<sup>23</sup> “L’industrie du futur” e.g. futurology, the technological revolution, marketing, resources planning, space exploration etc. [translators note]



which extends to the horizon of our lives, but young people are rising up against it in a vast movement, and a growing number of older people are beginning to understand and support them.

The revolutionary resurgence is evident everywhere except in one enormous country, the USSR, which could quite easily end up playing an inhibiting role, putting a strong brake on the revolution (in which case our previous forecast would be consigned to the limbo of pious wish fulfilment). But events in Czechoslovakia and Poland and the constant strengthening of despotism in the Soviet republic are an indication (though a negative one) that subversion, of which we hear only faint echoes, is by no means absent there. Repression in the USSR needs to be more violent in order to prevent insurrection generalizing. On the other hand, the process of destalinization is taking on the same role (taking into account considerable historical differences) as the revolt of the nobles in 1825, which made way for the revolt of the intelligentsia and subsequently gave strength to the whole populist movement. This idea leads us to think that there exists at the present moment subversion sufficient to go well beyond the democratic opposition expressed by the dissident academician Sakharov. Certain other historical constants must be kept in mind: for example, generalized revolutionary action appeared in its most radical form in France and Russia, while actually having its origins in other countries. The French revolution subsequently spread the bourgeois revolution throughout Europe. The Russian revolution generalized a double revolution — proletarian and bourgeois — which resulted in the final triumph of the capitalist revolution. The student revolt did not originate in France yet it was there that the revolt was felt most sharply; it was capable of shaking capitalist society, and the consequences of it are still being felt. There can be no revolutionary upheaval in the USSR while the consequences of 1917 — the wave of anti-colonial revolutions — are still to be played out. The most important of these has been the case of China, and now that the Chinese revolution has come to the end of its cycle, we will see in the USSR the beginning of a new revolutionary cycle.

The important historic shift between the French and the Russian revolutions is present also in the rise of the new revolutionary cycle. The despotism of capital today is more powerful than that which

to go further: he affirmed the necessity of developing productive forces (and therefore science and technology as well), and at the same time denounced their negative effects on people in the immediate situation. But he thought that all this would eventually lead to a contradiction such that the development of productive forces would no longer be possible without the destruction of the capitalist mode of production. Thereafter these forces would be directed by people themselves, and alienation would cease to exist. But this was to presuppose that capital would not be able to become truly autonomous, that it could not escape from the constraints of the social and economic base on which it is built: the law of value, the exchange of capital and labour power, the rigorous general equivalent (gold), and so on.

By simply having interiorized the social base on which it is built, capital has become autonomous, from which point it has then been able to make its escape. The headlong plunge of its development over a number of years has now let loose grave dangers for humanity and for the whole of nature. Not even the keen-witted experts and

---

It seems that every current or group which opposes capital is nonetheless obliged to focus always on the human as the basis of everything. It takes diverse forms, but it has a profoundly consistent basis and is surprisingly uniform wherever human populations are found. Thus by seeking to restore (and install) the *volksgemeinschaft*, even the Nazis represent an attempt to create such a community (cf. also their ideology of the *Urmensch*, the “original man”). We believe that the phenomenon of Nazism is widely misunderstood: it is seen by many people only as a demonic expression of totalitarianism. But the Nazis in Germany had reintroduced an old theme originally theorized by German sociologists like Tonnies and Max Weber. And so in response, we find the Frankfurt school, and most notably Adorno, dealing in empty and sterile concepts of “democracy”, due to their incapacity to understand the phenomenon of Nazism. They have been unable to grasp Marx’s great insight, which was that he posed the necessity of reforming the community, and that he recognised that this reformation must involve the whole of humanity. The problems are there for everybody; they are serious, and they urgently require solutions. People try to work them out from diverse political angles. However, it is not these problems which determine what is revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, but the solutions put forward — i.e. are they effective or not? And here the racketeer’s mentality descends upon us once again: each gang of the left or the right carves out its own intellectual territory; anyone straying into one or the other of these territories is automatically branded as a member of the relevant controlling gang. Thus we have reification: the object is determinant, the subject passive.

the droning old bores can remain aloof any longer from the dangers that now confront us. To a certain degree, they are even obliged to join in the company of those who talk in terms of an apocalyptic future. The apocalypse is fashionable because our world is nearing its end, a world in which human beings, in spite of all the evidence of their weakness and degradation, had always remained the norm, the reference point of the world. But having been presented with the fact that God is dead, we now hear the proclamation of the death of the human being. Both God and humans yield in turn to science, which is at once the goddess and servant of capital: science presents itself in today's world as the study of mechanisms of adaptation which will assimilate human beings and nature into the structure of capital's productive activity. All the signs indicate that it is those who are least destroyed as people, and particularly young people, who now find themselves unable to accept this onslaught of adaptation and domestication; hence they are impelled to refuse the system.

The process of domestication is sometimes brought about violently, as happens with primitive accumulation; more often it proceeds insidiously because revolutionaries continue to think according to assumptions which are implicit in capital and the development of productive forces, and all of them share in exalting the one divinity, science. Hence domestication and repressive consciousness have left our minds fossilized more or less to the point of senility; our actions have become rigidified and our thoughts stereotyped. We have been the soulless frozen masses fixated on the past, believing all the time that we were gazing ahead into the future. But at the time of May/June '68, a new life erupted and the movement of growth towards communism was taken up again. No new theory was produced, nor did any new modes of action appear. The important fact was that the struggle had a new aim. It had nothing to do with politics, ideology, science or even social science (the latter having been totally discredited). Rather, it was a specific and vital need asserted against this society and independently of it: to end the passivity imposed by capital, to rediscover communication between people and to unleash free creativity and unrestrained imagination in a movement of human becoming.

human evolution and also the notion that the capitalist mode of production has been progressive for all countries.

Those particular countries which according to the prophets of growth and the "economic miracle" are underdeveloped or on the road to development are really countries where the capitalist mode of production has failed to establish itself. In Asia, South America, and Africa there are millions of people who have not yet fully succumbed to the despotism of capital. Their resistance is usually negative in the sense that they are unable to pose for themselves another community. It is therefore essential to maintain a world wide network of human debate which only the communist revolution can transform into a movement for the establishing of a new community. Moreover, during the revolutionary explosion this network or pole will have a determining influence in the work of destroying capital.

In those countries labelled as underdeveloped, the youth have risen up (in Ceylon, in Madagascar in 1972, and less strongly in Senegal, Tunisia, Zaire etc . . .), and expressed in different ways the same need and necessity that is felt in the West. For over ten years the insurrection of youth has demonstrated that its fundamental characteristic is that of anti-domestication. Without wanting to prophesy any certain outcome, it is important to try to discern in this some kind of perspective. In May '68 we again took up Bordiga's forecast about a revival of the revolutionary movement around 1968, and revolution for the period 1975-1980. This is a "prediction" we remain attached to. Recent political/social and economic events confirm it, and the same conclusion is being arrived at by various writers. The capitalist mode of production finds itself in a crisis which is shaking it from its highest to its lowest levels. It is not a 1929-style crisis, though certain aspects of that crisis can reappear; rather it is a crisis of profound transformation. Capital must restructure itself in order to be able to slow down the destructive consequences of its global process of production. The whole debate about growth shows very clearly that this concern is real. The experts think they can simply draw attention to the movement of capital and proclaim that there must be slackening off, a slowing down. But capital in its turn can only break free from people's opposition by perfecting its domination over them at an ever higher level. It is a domination

able to find themselves and their fellow creatures as well. From this time onwards, the creation of a human community can no longer be halted.

Ideology, science, art and the rest, through the entire range of institutions and organizations act together to instill the belief that human beings are inessential and powerless to act.<sup>21</sup> More than this, they all enforce the idea that if we seem to have arrived at a particular stage of social evolution, it is because it could not have been otherwise from the very beginning when we first appropriated and developed technology. There is a certain fatality which surrounds technology: if we do not embrace it, we cannot progress. All we can do is remedy certain shortcomings, but we cannot escape the workings of the machine, which is this society itself. The trap has been closed, people have been immobilized, and the determining factor here is the representation of capital — it represents itself (i.e. capital) as a rational social process, which gives rise to the feeling that the system can no longer be perceived as oppressive. In order to explain any negative aspects, capital simply invokes categories designated as “outside of capital”.

The long habit of mind which has allowed human intelligence to be a host for the parasitical representation of capital has to be broken down. The mentality and behaviour of the servant (whose master is capital) must be eradicated. This need is now all the more urgent as the old dialectic of master and slave is tending to disappear in the process whereby even the slave — the human being — is becoming redundant.

## The Global Perspective

The struggle against domestication has to be understood at the global level where important forces are also beginning to emerge. The a priori universal rationality of capitalism can be demystified only when we begin to seriously question the unilinear scheme of

---

<sup>21</sup> We are referring here not to the human being as an individual existing in a particular historical period, but as an invariant constant.

## The Mythology of the Proletariat

With the advent of May/June '68 everything changed and everything has kept on changing ever since. This is why it is not possible to understand the lycée insurrection of 1973 (discussed below) and its possible potential except in relation to this earlier movement.

According to our analysis of it, the activity of May/June '68 was clear evidence that revolution had positively re-emerged, signifying the beginning of a new revolutionary cycle. But our argument here proceeded according to a classist analysis: thus we went on to declare that the May movement would result in the proletariat being recalled to its class base. More than this, we found in the events of that period confirmation of our belief that the revolution would follow a course of development along lines laid down by Marx. But in point of fact, the first classes to rise up in 1968 were the social strata closest to the established society, made up of people whose objective interests were closely aligned with those of the state. The oppressed classes followed on later, and it was they who radically resolved the contradictions that the other social strata wanted only to reform. Now the course of development followed by the English and French revolutions provided the underlying substance from which Marx's thought was moulded. Thus in the case of the French revolution, the nobility intervened in the situation in the very early stages, this being the famous nobles' revolt which took place some years before 1789, which picked up and aided the struggle of the bourgeoisie (at the same time preparing the way for enlightened despotism). There then followed the bourgeois strata less tied to the state, which formed, as Kautsky remarked, a kind of intelligentsia. Only then, with the failure of reform, the internal collapse of the system and the fall of the monarchy, were the peasants and artisans drawn in (the fourth estate, the future proletariat), and it was they who created the final decisive break and ensured that there would be no turning back. Without them, the revolution, in as much as it involved a change in the mode of production, would have taken much longer. In Russia there was similar pattern of development. The suggestion here is that those who are most oppressed and have the greatest objective interest in rebelling — and who form, according to some,

the true revolutionary class — can only in fact bring themselves into movement during a period when there has already been a rupture at the core of society, and the state has been considerably weakened. Out of the turmoil there begins to emerge a new perspective, if only through the realization that life is not going to continue as before, that it has become necessary to find some other way. This process is one of those elements that gives every revolution a character that is not strictly classist. It will be more accentuated in the case of the communist revolution, because it won't be the activity of one class only, but of humanity rising up against capital.

At the centre of what we at one time ventured to call the universal class, or more simply humanity (for both are now the slaves of capital), there are social strata which exist in very close affinity with capital, (i.e. the new middle classes and the students) who are rebelling against the system. They see themselves as distinct strata in society to the extent that they claim to be able to detonate a movement which will revolutionize the proletariat and set it in motion — but this is just a caricature of revolution, dragged out for the occasion dressed up in all its old regalia awkwardly going through the same old motions.

The classist analysis which we adopted originally could never do more than interpret real events. The same shortcoming affected the participants of May '68 and made it possible for them to perceive themselves according to the old schemas. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these active participants were men and women who were personally and very intimately involved in the life and functioning of capital, and more especially were having to justify and maintain its representation,<sup>6</sup> who then went into revolt against it. But their revolt is completely recuperable as long as it moves on the worn out road of class struggle which aspires to awaken the proletariat and make it accomplish its mission.

Here we meet a clear impasse. The role of the proletariat has been to destroy the capitalist mode of production in order to liberate the productive forces imprisoned within it: communism was to begin

---

<sup>6</sup> We are speaking here of technicians, intellectuals, politicians and economists, like the members of the Club of Rome, Mansholt, Dumont, Laborit etc.

ready to grow towards communism. It is a long, painful and difficult road to that extraordinary realization that the mystification no longer holds, that the wandering of humanity was leading to its own destruction, and that this was largely due to the fact that it had entrusted its destiny to the monstrous, autonomized system of capital.<sup>20</sup> Men and women will come to realize that they themselves are the determining elements, and that they do not have to abdicate their power to the machine, and alienate their being in the false belief that this will lead to happiness.

The moment this point is reached, it's all over, and going back will be impossible. The entire representation of capital will collapse like a house of cards. People whose minds are free from capital will be

---

<sup>20</sup> A process described as "prosthesis" by Cesarano and Collu in *Apocalisse et Rivoluzione* (Dedalo, Bari, 1973). The book presents itself as "a manifesto for biological revolution" and no resumé could do justice to its great richness of thought. (The authors also take up the question of representation and symbolism in social relations. See note 7). Here are two passages which give a small insight into their position: The progressive thinkers who produced the MIT report (*Man's Impact on the Global Environment*, 1972) and also the propositions put forward by Mansholt all suggest that capital cannot survive unless it continually increases the volume of commodity production (the basis of its valorization process). But they are mistaken in this if their understanding of commodity is restricted to things. It doesn't matter whether the commodity form is a thing or "a person". In order for capital to continue its growth it requires only this: that within the process of circulation there must be a moment when one commodity of whatever kind assumes the task of exchanging itself for A in order to subsequently exchange itself with X. In theory this is perfectly possible, provided that constant capital, instead of being invested mainly in projects to manufacture objects, is devoted to projects designed to create corporate people ("social services", "personnel services"). (p. 82) Fiction (*le fictif*) reaches its final peak of coherence when it is able to present itself as a complete representation and hence as an organization of appearances which is completely unreal; ultimately it is able to separate itself definitively from the concrete, to such a degree that it disappears altogether. (Thus fiction is the essence of all religions). The human species will be able to emancipate itself definitively from prosthesis and free itself from fiction and religion only when it openly recognizes itself as subjectively acting as an indissoluble part of the organic movement of nature in its global process. Biological revolution consists in reversing once and for all the relationship which has been a feature of all prehistory (i.e. all the period preceding the communist revolution), whereby the physical existence of the species is subordinated to the role of the social mechanism; it is the emancipation of organic subjectivity, the taming of the machine once and for all in whatever form it may appear. (p. 153)

as previous revolutions, but if its scope is limited to any degree, it will nonetheless still be part of the content of the post-revolutionary movement. The movement will tend to give new dimensions to the human community, reaffirming and strengthening what will have emerged during the course of revolution. It is at this stage, when things are difficult, that the old institutional forms can reappear, and some elements may want to reassert their privileges in a disguised form, and try to make solutions prevail that favour them. Others might want to reintroduce self-management. They still will not have understood that communism is not a mode of production, but a new mode of being.

This is also the time when the old practice of categorizing everything, so characteristic of all rackets, must be eliminated once and for all. We have to understand that new things can spring up draped in the mantle of the past; it would be a major error to consider only these superficial semblances of the past to the exclusion of everything else. It's not a question of seeing the postrevolutionary movement as the apotheosis of immediate reconciliation, when by some miracle the oppressiveness of the past will abolish itself. Granted that the new mode of being will generate itself through effective struggle, the issue then becomes the modality of that struggle. Any sectarian or inquisitorial spirit is lethal to the revolution — which is all the more reason why the classical dictatorship is out of the question, since this would mean re-establishing a mode of being which is intrinsic to class society. The period of intermediate change cannot be transcended except through a diverse expression of liberation by multifarious human beings. This is the pressure which communism brings to bear. It is a pressure exerted by the great majority of human beings seeking to create the human community which will allow and enable them to remove all obstacles barring their way. This affirmation of life is what Marx had in mind when he said “if we assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love, trust for trust . . .” Violent clashes can only be exceptional.

Those who believe that what is required is a dictatorship have already conceded in their minds that human society will never be

only after this action was accomplished. But far from imprisoning the productive forces, capitalism raises them to new heights, because they exist for the benefit of capital, not humanity. The proletariat therefore, is superfluous. The reversal referred to just now, whereby the productive forces are liberated by capital, rather than by the proletariat, which has been made possible thanks to the development of science, is a development in parallel with the domestication of human beings. Their domestication is their acceptance of the development of capital as theorized by Marxism, which is itself the arch-defender of the growth of productive forces. In the course of this development, the proletariat as producer of surplus value has been denied even this function by the generalization of wage labour and the destruction of any possible distinction between productive and unproductive work. The once revered proletariat has now become the strongest upholder of the capitalist mode of production. What does the proletariat want? And those who speak in the name of the proletariat and happily venerate its name — what do they want? If it is full employment and self-management, this would only ensure the permanent continuity of the capitalist mode of production since it has now become humanized. The left all believe that the process of production, being rationality in action, only needs to be made to function for human needs. But this rationality is capital itself.

The mythology of the proletariat accounts for how the “populism” of May '68, as we called it, became “proletarianism”. People started to say: “We must go to the proletariat, revive its fighting spirit, summon up its capacities for self-sacrifice and then it can kick out the evil bosses and follow the other ‘proletarians’ down the road to revolution.”

May '68 ushered in a period of great scorn and confusion. People were scornful of themselves because they weren't “proletarian”, and they scorned each other for the same reason, whereas they were all confused about the proletariat, the class that had always been considered potentially revolutionary. There is no other way to explain the impasse encountered by the movement which formed itself in opposition to the established society. This impasse did not however become clear all at once, because in the enthusiasm which followed May '68 the movement of opposition took on a certain life of its

own, and the essential questions were allowed to remain on the sidelines. But not only this, the shock of May '68 caused a revival and a re-emergence of the currents of the workers movement which had up to then been held in great disdain by the established parties and consigned to oblivion: the council movement in all its variants, the old German Communist Workers Party (KAPD), the ideas of individuals like Lukacs and Korsch, and so on. This resurrection of the past was a sign that people had not grasped directly the reality of the situation, and that the situation itself was unable to engender new forms of struggle and other theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, to intellectually retrace that path already so well travelled is even still a form of revolt, because it won't bow to the tyranny of what has simply "happened". It can moreover be a starting point in finding out about the origins of the wandering of humanity, and a first step in confronting humanity's fate which is to have been excluded from its own human context and condemned to the productivist sewer.

We were speaking earlier of an "impasse". As an image it is not as suggestive as we would like, but it is nevertheless the heart of the matter. It is like a wall which stands in front of all the different groups of this vast current in society, and this wall is the proletariat and its representation.<sup>7</sup> Militants go from one group to another, and as

---

<sup>7</sup> Human beings are not constantly immersed in nature; existence is not always at one with essence, nor being with consciousness, and so on. This separation brings into being the need for representation. Once time is perceived as irreversible, the subject of the past is seen as distinct from the subject of the present, and thus memory begins to assume a determining role. It is here that representation interposes itself in order to provide a mediation. From such an understanding, the way is open to a re-examination of philosophy and science, a task which will have to be undertaken someday. Perhaps some readers may have been drawn to similar ideas (which are actually different because they leave aside the importance of representation in social contexts) in the work of Cardan and the social-imaginary, the situationists and the spectacle, and in the area of scholarship, Foucault's analysis of representation in the sixteenth century (which we took up in a study of the democratic mystification). We would like to clarify our own position on this: we employ the term "representation" in the same way as Marx did (*vorstellung*) in order to indicate, for example, that value must be represented in a price. In "A propos du capital" (*Invariance* ser. III, no. 1), we discussed very briefly the way capital becomes representation, which then becomes autonomous, and how it can then only exist through being accepted and recognized by everyone as real. This is

revolutionary explosion, begin to be autonomous: since they don't need any leaders, they can gain mastery over their own revolt.

Obviously in the present circumstances people can only go so far in this direction; but the only way it has a chance of true realization is by rejecting that cannibalistic discourse which presents revolution as a settling of scores, as a physical extermination of one class or group of people by another. If communism really is a necessity for the human species, it has no need of such methods to impose itself.

In general, most revolutionaries doubt that revolution will ever come about, but in order to convince themselves that it will, they have to justify it to themselves in some way. This allows them to deal with the waiting, but it also masks the fact that most of the time manifestations of real revolution pass them by. To exorcise their doubt they resort to verbal violence (again a substitute), and are constantly engaged in desperate and obstinate proselytizing. The justification process works like this: as soon as they've made some recruits, this is taken as proof that the situation is favourable, and so the level of agitation must be stepped up, and so on and so on. According to this scheme of things, revolution means agitation which means bringing consciousness from outside. They haven't yet grasped the fact that revolution is accomplished precisely when there is no one left to defend the old order; revolution triumphs because there are no more adversaries. The point is that everything is going to be different afterwards, which is where the problem of violence again becomes relevant. The necessity for communism is a necessity which extends to all people. During the ferment of revolution this is a truth which will become evident in a more or less confused way. It does not mean that people will somehow be rid of all the old rubbish of the previous society overnight. It means that those who will be making the revolution will be people of the right as well as the left; thus when the superstructural elements of the capitalist system are destroyed and the global process of production halted, the presuppositions of capital will remain intact, and the old forms of behaviour and the old schemas will tend to reappear because it seems that each time humanity embarks on a new opportunity, a creation, it tends to wrap it up in the forms of the past and readapt it to the times. Certainly, the communist revolution will not develop in the same way

everything and go on the roads, expressing their desire to leave the vicious circle of struggles that go on in the day-to-day world.

The leftists persist in their well known cycle of provocation-repression-subversion which is all supposed to bring about revolution at some precise time in the future. But this conception of revolution is totally inadmissible because it means sacrificing men and women in order to mobilize others. Communist revolution does not demand martyrs because it does not need to make any demands. The martyr becomes the bait which attracts the followers. What would then be the use of a revolution that uses death as a bait in this way?<sup>19</sup> But then there is always someone who dies at just the right time (or the victim's demise may even be "facilitated"), and someone else goes around shaking the cadaver in order to attract the revolutionary flies.

Since the communist revolution is the triumph of life, it cannot in any way glorify death, or seek to exploit it, since this would be putting itself once more on the terrain of class society. There are some who would compare or substitute "those who fell in the revolution" with those who died in the service of capital: but it's all just the same old carnival of carrion !

Revolution is never presented as having the scope of a necessary and also a naturally occurring phenomenon, and this misunderstanding has serious consequences. It always seems that revolution depends strictly on some group or other radiating true consciousness. We are faced today with the following alternatives: either there is actual revolution — the whole process, from the formation of revolutionaries to the destruction of the capitalist mode of production — or there is destruction, under one form or another of the human species. There is no other possibility. When revolution is unleashed there will be no need to justify what is happening; rather it will be a question of being powerful enough to avoid abuses and excesses. And this is possible only if individual men and women, before the

---

<sup>19</sup> Death has become an essential element in people's coming to consciousness of themselves, but such consciousness is transmitted only with great difficulty. The passage from the exterior to the interior is too laborious, but fortunately the expedients and shortcuts are there.

they do so they "change" ideology, dragging with them each time the same load of intransigence and sectarianism. A few of them manage, extremely large trajectories, going from Leninism to situationism, to rediscover neo-bolshevism and then passing to councilism. They all come up against this wall and are thrown back further in some cases than in others. The wall is an effective barrier against any possible theoretical and practical combination. (In Germany you can even come across antiauthoritarian trotskyists, Korschist trotskyists, etc.)

Admittedly, within these groups, just as with certain individuals, there are aspects which are far from negative, since a certain number of things have been properly understood; but even this understanding is deformed by the jack-of-all-trades mentality which is the spiritual complement of coming together in a groupscule.

In previous articles<sup>8</sup> it has been clearly shown that it is not possible to find the key to the representation of the proletariat without first calling into question the Marxist conception of the development of the productive forces, the law of value, and so on. Yet the proletariat is made into a fetish, and because it raises such strong ethical and practical implications, it is still the one element which weighs most heavily on the consciousness of revolutionaries. But once this fetish is challenged and seen for what it is, then the whole theoretical/ideological edifice just collapses in confusion. And yet there still seems to be this unspoken assumption that each individual must be attached to a group and be identified as a part of it in order to have the security and strength to face the enemy. There is the fear of being

---

why people have now had to interiorize the representation of capital. This whole question of representation is a very important one. From the moment when human beings and nature no longer exist together in an immediate unity (leaving aside for the moment the question of whether an "immediate unity" could ever have been possible), representation becomes necessary. Representation is the human appropriation of reality and our means of communication, and in this sense it can never be abolished: human beings cannot exist in an undifferentiated union with nature. The point is that representation must not be allowed to become autonomous, another expression of alienation.

<sup>8</sup> See the chapter "Growth of Productive Forces: Domestication of Human Beings" in Camatte: *The Wandering of Humanity* (Detroit, 1975). That work also contains a more detailed discussion of other matters raised in the present article, e.g. the Marxist theory of the proletariat, repressive consciousness etc. [translator's note]

alone — accompanied nonetheless by a genuine realization that it is necessary to join together to destroy capitalism — but there is also the fear of individuality,<sup>9</sup> an inability to confront in an autonomous way the fundamental questions of our period. It is another manifestation of the domestication of human beings suffering from the disease of dependency.

## The Lycée Movement, Paris, 1973

Following on this, the real importance of the lycée movement (Spring, 1973) can be better appreciated. It brought into clear perspective something that had only been seen in outline in May'68: the critique of repressive consciousness. Repressive consciousness originated with Marxism in so far as the latter is a concrete formula for the future of the human species: proletarian revolution was supposed to come about when the development of the productive forces allowed it. This legalistic and repressive consciousness operates by explaining away popular uprisings, branding them as premature, petit-bourgeois, the work of irresponsible elements, etc. It is a consciousness which goes to the roots of reification, because it can only be organized consciousness, taking the form of parties, unions and groupuscules. Each of them organizes repression against

---

<sup>9</sup> This point was made clear by Norman O. Brown in *Eros and Thanatos*. The fear of individuality cannot by itself adequately explain the profound phenomenon whereby human beings are pressed into a mould, obliged to identify themselves as a certain type of being and forced to submerge themselves within a group. People are afraid of themselves because they don't know themselves. Hence there is this need for a norm in order to be able to ward off the "excesses" which can afflict the social order as well as the individual heart. It would seem that the organizations within society are too fragile to allow the free development of human potentialities. With the capitalist mode of production everything is possible as an element of capitalization, but what is possible is all the time only what is permitted; this means that the individual is reduced to a modality of being that is either normal or abnormal; the totality meanwhile exists only within the discourse of capital, where it remains perverted and beyond reach. The fear of individuality comes through very clearly in most of the utopias which depict the triumph of a despotic and egalitarian rationality.

mystification that the historical project approaches its truth and its end in capital. That mystification which presents the human being as inessential, not determinant, and useless has to be exposed. In the capitalist system humans have in effect become superfluous, but to the extent that humanity has preserved an unbroken human consistency from its earliest origins, it cannot be said to have been destroyed as long as the idea of revolt remains alive, and provided also that young people are not totally immobilized by domestication. All is still possible. In every case, struggle tends to revive the human essence which is preserved in each individual; struggle takes us out of the trap of perceiving others only as their reified outward appearance. Even where an individual has attained a high degree of reification and been transformed into an organic automaton of capital, there is still the possibility that the whole construction could break apart. Here we would do well to follow an old piece of advice from Marx: It's not enough to make the chains visible, they must become shameful. Each individual should experience a crisis. In conflicts with the police, the impulse should be not only to eliminate a repressive force which presents an obstacle to the communist movement but also to bring down the system, provoking in the minds of the police a sense of human resurgence.

This can never happen if the old methods of direct confrontation continue to be used; we have got to find new methods, such as treating all institutions with contempt and ridicule<sup>18</sup> by leaving them trapped and isolated in their own concerns. It would be absurd to theorize and make generalizations about this. But we can be certain of one thing: it has proved effective in the past, and it will be again, but we must invent a host of other different modes of action. The essential point is to understand that the terrain and methods of struggle must be changed; this necessity has been understood in a limited and sometimes negative way by people who abandon

---

<sup>18</sup> Which is how one would have to regard the actions of those American psychiatrists who voluntarily commit themselves to psychiatric clinics, thereby demonstrating that there is no system of knowledge capable of defining madness. (We might add that the production of actual madness is necessary to the existence of capital).



emergence of communism which is neither a new society nor a new mode of production. Today humanity can launch its battle against capital not in the city, nor in the countryside, but outside of both:<sup>17</sup> hence the necessity for communist forms to appear which will be truly antagonistic to capital, and also rallying points for the forces of revolution. Since the advent of May '68, capital has been obliged to take account of the fact that revolution had presented itself again as a vital imperative, a necessity. In response, the counter-revolution was compelled to adapt and remodel itself (remembering that it has no existence except in relation to revolution). But however much it tries by its usual methods to limit the development of its adversary, it can never totally succeed, because revolution will always present itself as real, and therefore as irrational. This irrationality is its fundamental characteristic. Whatever is rational in relation to the established order can be absorbed and recuperated. If revolution operates on the same terrain as its adversary, it can always be halted. It cannot rise up; it is thwarted in its most passionate desire, which is to realize its own project and to accomplish it on its own ground.

The attaining of a human community must be the goal towards which revolution moves. The revolutionary movement must therefore reflect within itself the same purpose and aim. The methods provided by class society lead us away from this goal; by their very nature they are inhuman, and it is therefore not possible to use them. Thus it is absurd to want to penetrate the structures of the established order to make them function in the interests of the revolutionary movement. Those who operate in this way are labouring under the

---

<sup>17</sup> The old opposition between city and country clearly no longer exists. Capital has urbanized the planet; Nature has become mineralized (made inorganic). We are now seeing new conflicts between urban centres and those parts of the countryside where a few peasants still remain. Urban centres demand more and more water which means building numerous reservoirs at distances of fifty or even a hundred miles from the city. This leads to the destruction of good agricultural land as well as land for hunting and fishing; it also results in the peasants being deprived of water since all the sources are drawn off to fill reservoirs and channels. This conflict can affect the same person from two angles if he/she lives in the town and owns a second "house in the country". We can see now that the problem extends well beyond the question of the traditional peasantry; it now involves the global relationship of people to the natural world and a reconsideration of their actual mode of being.

those who are not organized, or who are not organized according to their particular methods. The difference between these organizations is measured by the amount of repression they are prepared to exercise.

Now the critique of repressive consciousness does not attack the myth of the proletariat directly by arguing over it, but rather more indirectly, by ignoring it and treating it with derision. The young people on this occasion didn't fall into the trap of looking to work-erist organizations in order to form a unified front in the style of May '68. But politicians of all kinds went after them trying to get them "involved": the PCF, PS, PSU, CGT, CFDT<sup>10</sup> and the rest went chasing after high school kids trying to persuade them that they were all somehow under the same banner. When the students broke away from the unitary demonstrations, as they very often did, out came the political masquerade obscenely offering itself for sale: the veteran political hacks and the hardened old temptresses of the PCF and the CCT, discovering five years after May '68 the political importance of youth, marching along demanding deferment for everyone, while the students looked on and jeered. It seemed almost as though the young people had been spirited off and their places taken by their elders !

More ridicule was in store for the politicians of every variety who affirmed once again during these events the primacy of the

---

<sup>10</sup> The abbreviations refer to the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the United Socialist Party and the two big labour confederations: CGT (Communist) and the CFDT ("independent" left). The agitation in the lycées emerged openly on 22 March when 30,000 young people demonstrated in Paris against the Debré law which provided for 15 months military service (previously two years) for all 18 year olds, but with no deferment beyond the age of 21. During the first part of April there were more large demonstrations in Paris (one of them numbering 100,000 according to The Times, 10 Apr 73) and in many other cities in France and also Strasbourg. Strike Committees were formed in the lycées and general assemblies were set up. These were often controlled by political militants (usually belonging to the trotskyist organizations, La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and L'Alliance Marxiste; the young Communists stayed with the existing student organisations), and these leaders succeeded, against some considerable opposition, in forging contacts with the trade unions which had earlier issued long declarations of support for the striking lycéens. This led to the "unitary" demonstrations of 9 April where leaders of the CGT etc. marched at the head of the columns. [translator's note]

proletariat, declaring that the critical revolutionary moment was to be occasioned by a strike of skilled workers. This is because they can't conceive of revolution unless it appears dressed in overalls. Skilled workers do not threaten the capitalist system; the capitalist mode of production has long since accepted rises in wages, and as for working conditions, capital is well qualified to improve them. Thus the abolition of assembly line work is a well recognized necessity in some bosses' circles.

The lycée movement belittled the institutions of society and their defenders. Those who wanted (albeit reluctantly) to bring themselves down to the level of "our valiant youngsters" behaved ridiculously — after all, recuperation has to pay its price. On the other hand, those who wanted to counter the movement from within and didn't succeed, just proceeded to despise it, and in this manner they brought down a similar ridicule on themselves. But then it was the turn of the men of government: out they came, bleating about how we've already got deputies and a parliament and that we should make use of them to sort out the problems that remain unsolved. The young people acted as though none of this existed. Once again, as in May '68, there was no communication, no understanding between the two sides ("We're not closed to arguments, but really I don't know what it is they want" — Fontanet, the Education minister). They fondly imagine that young people want to discuss with them and present opposing arguments. This is a revolution of life itself,<sup>11</sup> a search for another way of living. Dialogue should be concerned only with the plans and ideas for realizing this desire. No dialogue can take place between the social order and those who are to overthrow it. If dialogue is still seen as a possibility, then this would be an indication that the movement is faltering.

<sup>11</sup> In 1964 Cardan saw that youth insurrections were very important, but he viewed them as something exterior which had to be made use of. This is the tribute which ideology pays to the old idea of consciousness coming from outside: "The revolutionary movement will be able to give a positive direction to today's enormous youth revolt. If it can discover that new and true language which the youth is looking for, it can turn their revolt into a ferment of social transformation, and show them another activity for their struggle against the world which they now refuse." *Socialisme ou Barbarie* No. 35, p. 35

police in all their forms, each individual must be violent with him/herself in order to reject, as outside themselves the domestication of capital and all its comfortable self-validating "explanations".

## The Terrain of Struggle

None of this can take on its full meaning unless there is a simultaneous refusal of all obsolete forms of struggle. Like the May '68 movement but more so, the lycée movement emphasized very clearly that staying within the old forms of struggle inevitably leads to certain defeat. It is now becoming generally accepted that demonstrations, marches, spectacles and shows don't lead anywhere. Waving banners, putting up posters, handing out leaflets, attacking the police are all activities which perpetuate a certain ritual — a ritual wherein the police are always cast in the role of invincible subjugators. The methods of struggle therefore must be put through a thorough analysis because they present an obstacle to the creation of new modes of action. And for this to be effective, there has to be a refusal of the old terrain of struggle — both in the workplace and in the streets. As long as revolutionary struggle is conducted not on its own ground but on the terrain of capital, there can be no significant breakthrough, no qualitative revolutionary leap. This is where we must concentrate our attention; it is a question which has to be faced now if revolution is not to stagnate and destroy itself, a setback which could take years to recover from. If we are to successfully abandon the old centres of struggle, it will require a simultaneous movement towards the creation of new modes of life. What's the point of occupying the factories — like car factories for example — where production must be stopped anyway? The cry goes up: "Occupy the factories and manage them ourselves!" So all the prisoners of the system are supposed to take over their prisons and begin the self-management of their own imprisonment. A new social form is not founded on the old, and only rarely in the past do we find civilizations superimposed on one another. The bourgeoisie triumphed because it staged the battle on its own terrain, which is the cities. But in our present situation this can only be helpful to the

exceptions on the ground that certain people are not free, that it is “the system” which produces both cops and revolutionaries alike. If this were correct, the logical conclusion would be either a position of non-violence, or a situation where human beings become reduced to automatons which would then justify every kind of violence against them. If right from the outset certain people are denied all possibility of humanity, how can they subsequently be expected to emerge as real human beings? So it is as human beings that they must be confronted. Now though the majority of people think in terms of the radical solution provided by class society — i.e., repress your opponents — even in this form the revolution would assert itself according to its true nature, namely that it is human. When the conflict comes, as it inevitably will, there should be no attempt to reduce the various individuals who defend capital to the level of “bestial” or mechanical adversaries; they have to be put in the context of their humanity, for humanity is what they too know they are a part of and are potentially able to find again. In this sense the conflict takes on intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The representations which justify an individual person’s defence of capital must be revealed and demystified; people in this situation must become aware of contradiction, and doubts should arise in their minds.

Terrorism also has to be viewed in this perspective. It is not sufficient just to denounce it as abhorrent. Those who accept terrorism have capitulated before the power of capital. Terrorism is concerned with more than just the destruction of some people: it is also an appeal to death in order to raise up a hypothetical revolt. That aspect should be fairly noted, without condemnation or approval, but it must be rejected as a plan of action. Terrorism implies that the “wall” (the proletariat and its representation) is an impassable and indestructible barrier. Terrorism has admitted defeat, and all the recent examples of it are sufficient proof of this.

We must recognize that the crushing domination of capital affects everyone without exception. Particular groupings cannot be designated as “the elect”, exempt from and unmarked by capital’s despotism. The revolutionary struggle is a human struggle, and it must recognize in every person the possibility of humanity. Amid the conflict with the racketeers in their groupscules, the “capitalists” and the

Underlying all this is a profoundly important phenomenon: all human life, from the very beginning of its development within capitalist society, has undergone an impoverishment. More than this, capitalist society is death organized with all the appearances of life. Here it is not a question of death as the extinction of life, but death-in-life, death with all the substance and power of life. The human being is dead and is no more than a ritual of capital. Young people still have the strength to refuse this death; they are able to rebel against domestication. They demand to live. But to those great numbers of smugly complacent people, who live on empty dreams and fantasies, this demand, this passionate need just seems irrational, or, at best, a paradise which is by definition inaccessible.

Youth remains a serious problem for capital because it is a part of society which is still undomesticated. The lycée students demonstrated not only against military service and the army, but also, and just as much, against the school, the university and the family. Schools function as the organization of the passivity of the soul, and this is true even when active and libertarian methods are used; the liberation of the school would be the liberation of oppression. In the name of history, science and philosophy, each individual is sent down a corridor of passivity, into a world surrounded by walls. Knowledge and theory are just so many insurmountable barriers which prevent one individual from recognizing other individuals, making dialogue between them impossible. Discourse must proceed along certain channels, but that’s all. And then at the end of the pipeline, there is the army, which is a factory for domestication; it organizes people into a general will to kill others, structuring the dichotomy already imprinted in their minds by the secular morality of “my nation” and “other people”, all of whom are potential enemies. People are trained and educated to know how to justify the unjustifiable — the killing of men and women.

We do not deny that this agitation before Easter had largely reformist tendencies. The reformist aspects were what attracted recuperation, but that is not what interests us here because it tells us nothing about the real movement of struggle of the species against capital. As with May ’68, this movement was superficial, (though only a more radical agitation from beneath could have raised it to the

surface in the first place), and it will open the door to an improved restructuring of the despotism of capital, enabling it better to realize its own “modernization”.

## The Despotism of Capital

Schools and universities are structures that are too rigid for the global process of capital, and the same thing holds true for the army.<sup>12</sup> The rapid decline of knowledge and the development of mass media have destroyed the old school system. Teachers and professors are, from the point of view of capital, useless beings who will tend to be eliminated in favour of programmed lessons and teaching machines. (In just the same way, capital tends to eliminate the bureaucracy because it inhibits the transmission of information which is the very basis of capital’s mobility.) It is ironic then that many people who argue for the necessity of life turn out to be readily convinced by solutions which entrust teaching to machines and thus eliminate human life. As a general rule, it may be said that all who embrace

---

<sup>12</sup> On the subject of the army, we would insist that those arguments which attempt to distinguish between the volunteer, professional army and the conscript or national army are a fraud, an absurd blackmail. If you end military service, you are still left with a professional army, a praetorian guard and the possibility of a fascist revival. (Certain leftist groups “intervened” during the agitation in 1973 demanding democratic and popular control of the national army [translators note]). In practice, the present system in France is a mixture: a professional army which educates and trains the intake who then go to make up the national army. And where did this national army, much vaunted by Jaurés come from? — the union sacrée of 1914, the sacred slaughter which is venerated to this day. There is a book called *l’Armée Nouvelle* (publisher 10/18) which demonstrates the extent to which “fascism” had no need to invent a fresh theory in this area, since one had already been provided by the social democratic International. Jaurés wanted to reconcile army and nation (which is exactly what Hitler wanted and managed to achieve.) The reconciliation was accomplished in 1914 when the brave Frenchmen gaily set out for the slaughter. How different it all was from Jaurés’ cult of la patrie. “It was rooted in the very foundations of human life, and even, if we can put it this way, in people’s physiology” (*l’Armée Nouvelle*, p.268). And in Germany, at about the same time, Bebel was thinking along similar lines.

them in opposition to one another and then allotting them different roles. When conflicts occur, each side then represents the other as non-human (which is how the Americans saw the Vietnamese). If human beings are to be destroyed, they must first be despoiled of their humanity. And so if, during the revolutionary struggle people choose to proceed according to this view, are they not simply imitating the methods used by the capitalists, and thus furthering the destruction of human beings?

So we might ask what the leftists are playing at when they theorize about the destruction of the dominant class (rather than what supports it), or of the cops (“the only good cop is a dead one”)? One can make the equation  $CRS=SS$ <sup>15</sup> on the level of a slogan, because that accurately represents the reality of the two roles, but it does not justify the destruction of the people involved — for two reasons. Firstly, it effectively rules out the possibility of undermining the police force. When the police feel they are reduced to the status of sub-humans, they themselves go into a kind of revolt against the young people in order to affirm a humanity which is denied to them, and in so doing they are therefore not simply playing the part of killing/repression machines. Secondly, every riot cop and every other kind of cop is still a person. Each one is a person with a definite role like everyone else. It is dangerous to delegate all inhumanity to one part of the social whole, and all humanity to another. There is no question here of preaching non-violence,<sup>16</sup> but rather of defining precisely what violence must be exercised and to what purpose. In this connection, the following points should make the position clearer: firstly, all stereotypes and functions must be revealed for what they are — roles imposed on us by capital; secondly, we must reject the theory which postulates that all those individuals who defend capital should simply be destroyed; thirdly, we cannot make

---

<sup>15</sup> The CRS are the para-military riot police. In May 1979 a new variation on the old slogan appeared when the trotskyists of the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) joined forces with the stalinists and the CRS in the violent repression directed against the “autonomes” during the demonstrations in Paris by the steel workers from Longwy and Denain:  $LCR=CRS$ , or  $LCRS$ . [translator’s note]

<sup>16</sup> Non-violence is itself just an insidious hypocritical form of violence, a sign of certain people’s inability to stand up for themselves as human beings.

“rebound” on capital. But none of them (and this is particularly true of the most extreme elements) ever take into account the fact that they are suggesting the necessity of destroying human beings in order to accomplish this revolution. How can you celebrate a revolution with a rifle butt? To accept the army for one reason, whatever it may be, is to strengthen the oppressive structure at every level. Any kind of argument on this subject serves only to reinstate the despotism of repressive consciousness, according to which people must repress the desire to not kill because killing will be required of them at some stage in the future. (And indeed some people are known to actually rejoice in this prospect). Repressive consciousness forces me to be inhuman under the pretext that on a day decreed by some theoretical destiny, I will at last metamorphosize into a human being.

[The various left and extreme left currents] try to ensure that there is no convergence between the “bourgeois” desire to see military service abolished and the libertarian pacifism which underlies conscientious objection, something that is always more or less latent among the young. (T. Pfister, *Le Monde*, 27 Mar '73)

Violence is a fact of life in present day society; the question now is how that violence can be destroyed. Revolution unleashes violence, but it has to be under our control and direction; it cannot be allowed to operate blindly, and it certainly cannot be glorified and widened in its field of action. Statements like this may sound reasonable enough, but they aren't particularly helpful unless we go on to consider more precisely the actual nature of violence, which is determined in the first instance by its object: thus violence directed against the capitalist system should be praised and encouraged, but not violence against people. But the capitalist system is represented by people, and it is these people who will often be overtaken by violence. This is where the question of the limitation of violence becomes relevant; if it is not raised, we are still living according to the prescriptions of capital. Granted that capital's despotism is maintained through generalized violence against people, it is also a fact that it can only achieve this domination over people by first putting

“modernization” are in fact provoking their own condemnation as individuals with a certain function in this society; they are demanding their own dispossession. But even those others who preach about the need to return to the rigid and authoritarian climate which prevailed before 1968 will not fare any better, because in order for their plans to succeed, they still have to depend on capital, and either way, left or right, capital profits equally.

Capital imposes its despotism on human beings by means of objects and things which are invested with new modes of being appropriate to capital's new requirements. It implies a world of things which are in rapid motion, constantly changing and differentiating themselves (a process which is clearly not unrelated to a feeling of meaninglessness). These qualities inevitably conflict with traditional social relations and previous ways of life, including previous ways of thinking. It is things which are the real subjects. They impose their own rhythm of life and ensure that people are confined to the level of their own single existences. But because objects and things are themselves governed and controlled by the movement of capital, there is always the possibility that this rising new oppression could actually set in motion an insurrectional movement against the society of capital itself. And yet capital in its turn is able to profit from subversion in order to consolidate itself, as it did during the early years of this century. The revolt of the proletariat, confined as it was to the terrain of the factory and emphasizing the ordering of production, was a factor which actually aided capital in its movement towards real domination. The end result was the elimination of strata that were unnecessary for the progress of capital, the triumph of full employment, the abandonment of laissez-faire liberalism, and so on.

We are not suggesting that revolution should rise directly out of the conflict we were speaking of just now, nor are we saying that the instigators of it will be men and women who are ordinarily very conservative. The point we want to emphasize is this: capital must come to dominate all human beings, and in order to do this it can no longer depend entirely for its support on the old social strata which are in turn coming under threat themselves. This is a tendency which Franz Borkenau understood very precisely:

in this tremendous contrast with previous revolutions, one fact is reflected. Before these latter years, counter-revolution usually depended on the support of reactionary powers which were technically and intellectually inferior to the forces of revolution. This has changed with the advent of fascism. Now, every revolution is likely to meet the attack of the most modern, most efficient, most ruthless machinery yet in existence. It means that the age of revolutions free to evolve according to their own laws is over.<sup>13</sup>

We have got to remember that capital, as it constantly overthrows traditional patterns of life, is itself revolution. This should lead us to think again about the nature of revolution, and to realize that capital is able to take control of social forces in order to overthrow the established order in insurrections directed against the very society which it already dominates.<sup>14</sup> Never before have vision and understanding been more vitally necessary; every separate revolt now becomes a further stimulus for the movement of capital. But people have been robbed of their ability to think in a theoretical way and to perceive reality as part of the outcome of an historical process — this has happened as a result of the process of domestication. And in a similar way, this capacity for theoretical thought has been prevented from ever taking root in the material development of our planet and in us as a species due to the existence of a split between the mind and the body, and the old division between physical and intellectual work (which automated systems are now in the process of surmounting to capital's benefit).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Noam Chomsky: *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Pelican, 1969) p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> The Asiatic mode of production experienced quite a number of very extensive insurrectional movements which effectively regenerated it. According to a number of historians, some revolts were even raised up by the state itself Mao's great cultural revolution is only a replay of such revolts. These facts confirm the thesis we have advanced many times before about the, convergence between the Asiatic mode of production where classes could never become autonomous, and the capitalist mode where they are absorbed.

Revolution can no longer be taken to mean just the destruction of all that is old and conservative, because capital has accomplished this itself. Rather, it will appear as a return to something (a revolution in the mathematical sense of the term), a return to community, though not in any form which has existed previously. Revolution will make itself felt in the destruction of all that which is most "modern" and "progressive" (because science is capital). Another of its manifestations will involve the reappropriation of all those aspects and qualities of life which have still managed to affirm that which is human. In attempting to grasp what this tendency means, we cannot be aided by any of the old dualistic, manichean categories. (It is the same tendency which in the past had held back the valorization process in its movement towards a situation of complete autonomy.) If the triumph of communism is to bring about the creation of humanity, then it requires that this creation be possible, it must be a desire which has been there all the time, for centuries. Yet here again nothing is easy, obvious, free from doubts, and indeed one could have legitimate doubts about what it means to be human after the experience of colonialism and Nazism, and then a second colonialism which strives to maintain itself in spite of revolts in the oppressed countries (notorious massacres and tortures having been committed by the British in Kenya, the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam), and in the face of the brutal and deeprooted violence that everywhere continues to rage unchecked. Indeed, could it be that humanity is too lost and sunk in its infernal wandering to save itself?

## The Question of Violence

The movement which developed among the lycée students was an assertion of the communist revolution in its human dimension. The students took up the question of violence (though perhaps not in its full scope) in their refusal of the army, refusal of military service and refusal of the universal right to kill. By contrast, the groups of the left and extreme left, but not the anarchists, preach about the necessity of learning to kill because they think they can make death