

# The present moment

In the course of revolutionary struggle, the abolition of the state, of exchange, of the division of labour, of all forms of property, the extension of the situation where everything is freely available as the unification of human activity—in a word, the abolition of classes—are ‘measures’ that abolish capital, imposed by the very necessities of struggle against the capitalist class. The revolution is communisation; it does not have communism as a project and result, but as its very content.

Communisation and communism are things of the future, but *it is in the present that we must speak about them*. Communisation is prefigured in the present struggles every time the proletariat comes up against its own existence as a class, in its action as a class against capital—i.e. within the relation of exploitation and in the very course of those struggles. Communisation is prefigured every time the very existence of the proletariat is produced as something alien to it, as an objective constraint which is externalised in the very existence of capital, and which it confronts in its struggles as a class. *It is the class struggle which, within itself, has become the problem*. It is the content of the revolution to come that these struggles prefigure—in this cycle of struggles—each time that the very fact of acting as a class appears as an external constraint, a limit to overcome.

The essential features of a theory of communisation are conjugated in the present. Without this, to speak of communisation is a hollow exercise of political fiction. To conceive of the revolution as communisation flows from the current understanding of the fact of struggling as a class as a limit of class struggle. This is the threshold which must be crossed. To cross this threshold is the only way of talking about the revolution as communisation in a way which relates to current struggles.

## The new centrality of the wage demand: the demand for the wage is illegitimate

With the crisis of the 'Fordist regime of accumulation' and its overcoming in the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production during the 1970s and 80s, wage demands progressively become illegitimate and even 'outside the system' in the relation between capital and proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The restructuring which accompanied the crisis from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s was a workers' defeat, the defeat of workers' identity, whatever the social and political forms of its existence (from Communist Parties to autonomy; from the Socialist State to the workers' councils). This identity rested entirely on the contradiction which developed in the first phase of real subsumption (from the 1920s to the 1960s) between on the one hand the creation and development of labour-power employed by capital in a more and more collective and social way, and on the other the forms of appropriation by capital of this labour-power in the immediate production process, and in the process of reproduction. This is the conflictual situation which developed as workers' identity—an identity which found its distinction and its immediate modalities of recognition (its confirmation) in the 'large factory', in the dichotomy between employment and unemployment, work and training, in the submission of the labour process to the collectivity of workers, in the link between wages, growth and productivity on a national level, in the institutional representations that all this implied, as much in the factory as at the level of the state: in the delimitation of accumulation within a national area. The extraction of relative surplus-value, at the level of the immediate production process just as much as at the level of the reproduction of the whole, is the principle of development and mutation of real subsumption. At both these levels, during the first phase of real subsumption, obstacles appeared to the pursuit of accumulation as it had been structured by the extraction of relative surplus-value itself.

At issue here was everything that had become an impediment to the fluidity of the self-presupposition of capital. We find on one hand all the separations, defences, specifications that are erected in opposition to the decline in value of labour-power, those that prevent the whole working class in the continuity of its existence, of its reproduction and expansion, from having to confront capital as a whole as such on a global scale. On the other hand we find all the constraints of circulation, turnover, accumulation, which impede the transformation of the surplus product into surplus-value and additional capital.

In addition to being an essentially conflictual issue, 'the distribution of wealth' has become *taboo*.

The attack on wages is not a linear constant of capitalism, continually getting worse: if capital is value in process and the exploitation of labour its very definition, the relation between capital and labour, in the whole process of reproduction, is always historically specific. In the previous phase of the capitalist mode of production, until the end of the 1960s, exploitation produced its own conditions of realisation—*a time in which these conditions were optimal from the point of view of the valorisation of capital itself*. That included everything that made the reproduction of the proletariat a determinant of the reproduction of capital itself: public services, the delimitation of accumulation within national areas, creeping inflation 'erasing' the indexing of wages, the 'sharing of productivity gains'. From all this flowed the legitimate construction and recognition of the proletariat in

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With the restructuring that was completed in the 1980s, the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the conditions of this production coincided. Here we mean the articulation between the integration of the reproduction of labour-power on the one hand, and the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital and ultimately the increase of relative surplus-value in the immediate production process, on the other, all of which had become impediments to valorisation on the basis of relative surplus-value.

This non-coincidence between production and reproduction was the basis of the formation and confirmation of a *workers' identity* in the reproduction of capital; it was the existence of a hiatus between the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the social relation, a hiatus which allowed the competition between two hegemonies, two rival modes of managing and controlling reproduction. It was the very substance of the workers' movement.

In its three definitive determinations (the labour-process, the integration of the reproduction of labour-power, and relations between capitals on the basis of the equalisation of the rate of profit), the extraction of relative surplus-value implies the coincidence between production and reproduction and as a corollary the coalescence between the constitution and the reproduction of the proletariat as a class on the one hand and on the other its contradiction with capital. The contradiction between the proletariat and capital now has as its essential content its own renewal, which produces the identity between the constitution of the proletariat as a class and its contradiction with capital. In its contradiction with capital which defines it as a class, the proletariat brings itself into question.

the capitalist mode of production as a national interlocutor (both socially and politically), from the point of view of capital. It was *workers' identity* which modulated from social democracy to councilism.

In restructured capitalism (whose crisis we are now experiencing), the reproduction of labour power was subjected to a *double decoupling*. On the one hand a decoupling between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power and, on the other, a decoupling between consumption and the wage as income.

The first decoupling appears, first of all, as a geographical zoning of the capitalist mode of production: capitalist hypercentres grouping together the higher functions in the hierarchy of business organisation (finance, high technology, research centres, etc.); secondary zones with activities requiring intermediate technologies, encompassing logistics and commercial distribution, ill-defined zones with peripheral areas devoted to assembly activities, often outsourced; lastly, crisis zones and 'social dustbins' in which a whole informal economy, involving legal or illegal products, prospers. Although the valorisation of capital is unified across this zoning, the same is not true for the reproduction of labour power. Reproduction occurs in different ways in each of these zones. In the first world: high-wage strata where social risks are privatised intermesh with fractions of the labour force where certain aspects of Fordism have been preserved and others, increasingly numerous, subjected to a new 'compromise' whose content is *the total purchase of labour-power*<sup>2</sup>. In the sec-

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<sup>2</sup> The capitalist class purchases for its overall use a certain sum of productive labour—through the intermediary of the state or public-private institutions, and increasingly of the private institutions whose function this is—and supplements its value according to the use made of it by this or that capitalist; the wage is no longer the payment for an individual labour-power on its own basis, but an aliquot part of the general value of available labour-power. Labour-power is thus presupposed as the property of capital, not only formally (the worker has always belonged to the whole capitalist class before selling himself to this or that capital), but really insofar as capital pays for its individual reproduction *outside its immediate consumption which is merely accidental for each labour-power*. Capital has not suddenly become philanthropic; in each worker it reproduces something which belongs to it: the general productive power of labour which has become external to, and independent of, each worker—and indeed all the

ond world: regulation through low wages, imposed by strong internal migratory pressure and highly precarious employment, islands of more or less stable international subcontracting, little or no guarantee for social risks and labour migrations. In the third world: humanitarian aid, all kinds of illicit trade, agricultural subsistence, regulation by all sorts of mafias and microscopic wars, but also by the revival of local and ethnic solidarities. This zoning is necessarily a *mise en abîme*: at every scale, from the neighbourhood to the world, this tripartite division is reproduced. The disjunction between the unified global valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power adequate for that valorisation is total. Between the two, the strictly equivalent reciprocal relationship between mass production and the modalities of reproduction of labour power, which used to define Fordism, has disappeared.<sup>3</sup>

Zoning is a functional determination of capital: sustaining the expansion of global markets and the planetary extension of the available workforce, despite the rupture between the two, *outside any necessary relation between the two in any given predetermined area of reproduction*.

The rupture of any necessary relation between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour-power dissolves the regional or even national delimitation of areas of coherent reproduction. This disjunction produces an enmeshing of the different zones that is reproduced ad infinitum. The regions defined as 'intermediate' are the most interesting, because it is precisely there that the different elements are most intermingled. What we have here is *the separation on the one hand of the*

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workers collectively. Conversely directly active labour-power, consumed productively, sees its necessary labour accruing to it as an individual fraction, defined not by the exclusive needs of its own reproduction, but as a fraction of general labour-power (representing the totality of necessary labour), a fraction of global necessary labour. *There is a tendency towards the equalisation of incomes from work and those from inactivity*.

<sup>3</sup> The result of this global expansion of the capitalist mode of production through the mode of zoning has meant the proletarianisation of a vast majority of the world's population and simultaneously the production of large numbers of surplus proletarians (cf. the works of Mike Davis and the older ones of Serge Latouche).

*reproduction and circulation of capital, and on the other hand of the reproduction and circulation of labour-power.*

As for the second decoupling: increasing levels of indebtedness, stimulated by policies of low interest-rates, allow 'household' expenditure to grow more quickly than income. Competition, which only brings down prices on the condition of reducing wages, goes in tandem with the bondage of indebtedness, which has become as indispensable as wage-income in order to live.<sup>4</sup>

It is the increase in the wealth of households, along with rising social inequality, which is the regulator, because it maintains the demand which validates the financial returns on capital. But the increase in this wealth is not possible without the expansion of credit, which raises asset prices. This is why credit excesses have repercussions in terms of the fluctuations in share prices. Tensions in regulation are manifested in financial crises, rather than in hikes in inflation. The stagnation in the great majority of wage-incomes on the one hand, and the deflationary pressures on prices exerted by the competitiveness of emerging countries on the other, restrict the spread of localised inflationary pressures. [...] The viability of indebtedness becomes the focal point of this mode of regulation whose logic consists in displacing macro-economic risk onto households. [...] The whole of the financial system has adapted itself to the functioning of an economy in which household debt is the prime source of demand [or better, it *had* adapted itself—author's note]. (Aglietta and Berrebi, *Désordres dans le capitalisme mondial*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris 2007, pp. 56–57–60–62)

Such a system of relations between income and consumption is founded on huge wage-disparities, and can only reinforce them, but the poor have

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<sup>4</sup> 'Wage-earners have, to cap it all, the opportunity to be tyrannised at their own expense, since the savings instrumentalised by shareholder finance, which demands constant dividends, are actually their own.' (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2008). About 1/3 of American wage-earners work for firms whose principal share-holder is a pension fund.

not been forgotten, as the subprime crisis and the worldwide increase in over-indebtedness have shown. In the succession of financial crises which for the last twenty years or so have regulated the current mode of valorisation of capital, the subprime crisis is the first to have taken as its point of departure not the financial assets that refer to capital investments, but household consumption, and more precisely that of the poorest households. In this respect it is a crisis specifically of the 'wage' relation of restructured capitalism, in which the continual decrease in the share of wages in the wealth produced, both in the core countries and in the emerging ones, is definitive. Among other things, this distinguishes this crisis from the one at the end of the 1960s, which was preceded by a rise in the share of wages.<sup>5</sup> Any 'exit from the crisis' implies a massive devalorisation of capital and an increase in the rate of exploitation, the latter translating into, among other things, the compression of the wage. In the present crisis, this compression of the wage was already structurally included in the phase which preceded it. It is for this reason that in order to designate specifically this crisis, we will speak of the crisis of the wage relation.

The wage is no longer an element of regulation of the whole of capitalism: the reproduction of labour-power is decoupled from the valorisation of capital; income is decoupled from consumption by the massive financial implication of wage-income (debt and pension-funds are supplanting the direct and indirect wage and contributing to their exclusion from the mode of regulation); the segmentation of labour-power is tending to become functional for this regime of wages. Precarity is not only that part of employment that one can *stricto sensu* qualify as 'precarious'. Now integrated into every branch, precarity is of course a 'threat' to all so-called 'stable' jobs. Stable jobs are taking on characteristics of precarity, primarily with flexibility, mobility, constant availability, and subcontracting which

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<sup>5</sup> When, in 1955, in France, the strikes of the metal-workers of Nantes and St Nazaire turned into riots, they culminated in favourable wage agreements. Employers gave their backing to the 'Renault Accords', which introduced significant wage rises, sliding scales for wages, a third week of annual paid leave, the introduction of private pension schemes, paid sick-leave and payment for bank holidays in order to stop the movement from spreading (above all in the Parisian region).

makes even the 'stable' jobs at small and medium-sized companies insecure, and the project-centric character of some work in large companies. The list of symptoms of the contagion of precarity affecting *formally* stable jobs is long.

The wage demand is currently characterised by a dynamic that wasn't previously possible. It is an *internal* dynamic which comes about as a result of the *whole* relation between proletariat and capital in the capitalist mode of production such as it has emerged from the restructuring and such as it is now going into crisis. The meaning of the wage demand has changed. At the high point of the previous cycle of struggles, the operaists saw in the wage demand the self-valorisation of the workers and the refusal of work as a triumph of 'social labour'. This content was nothing but the importance of labour and of the working class, such as it was defined and confirmed in this first phase of real subsumption, being turned back against capital (see the appendix for a note on the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital [available online, ed. note]). It wasn't only a matter of full employment, but it was the location that the reproduction of capital had defined for labour in its own reproduction, which defined the capacity for the proletariat to make this location into a weapon against capital.

Of course, the division of the working day into necessary and surplus labour is still definitive of the class struggle. But in the form that the struggle over this division takes today, it is paradoxically in the proletariat's definition, to the very depth of its being—as a class of this mode of production, and nothing else—that it becomes apparent in practice that the proletariat's existence as a class is the limit of its own struggle as a class. This is *currently* the central character of the wage demand in class struggle. In the most trivial course of the wage demand, the proletariat sees its own existence as a class objectify itself as something which is alien to it to the extent that the capitalist relation itself places it *in its heart* as something alien.

Proletarians find in capital nothing other than the divisions of wage-labour and exchange—i.e. in their relation to themselves, and no organisational or political form, no demand, can any longer overcome this

division.<sup>6</sup> In the previous period in the very dynamic of capitalist development, the demand presented itself as a transaction adequate to the transformations of the relation of exploitation: its legitimacy was founded on the necessary link between the transformations of the process of production and the conditions of reproduction. The restructuring, which determines the form of the relation in the present cycle of struggles, has swept aside this necessity, depriving the demand of the legitimacy conferred upon it by the preceding cycle of struggles. The demand no longer forms a relation to capital comprising the proletariat's capacity to find within itself its own basis, its own constitution, its own reality, on the basis of a workers' identity which the reproduction of capital, in its historical modalities, served to confirm. The proletariat recognises capital as its *raison d'être*, its own existence over against itself, and *as the only necessity of its own existence*. From this moment on, the proletariat sees its existence as a class objectify itself in the reproduction of capital as something which is alien to it and which it is led to call into question.

There is now a structural intertwining between, on the one hand, being in contradiction with capital, which includes the demand and, on the other, the class' calling itself into question as being nothing other than its relation to capital. For the capitalist class, the demand-based strike is no longer legitimate as was the case in the internally conflictual and largely nationally delimited process of accumulation which was dubbed 'Fordist'.

This intertwining between making demands and calling oneself into question *as proletarians*, which is characteristic of this cycle of struggles, can be summarised as follows: class belonging forms the general limit of the

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<sup>6</sup> The relation of the proletariat to itself is never an 'immediate self-consciousness', a self-relation, but always a relation to capital; for the proletariat this is its self-relation. Even 'workers' identity' is a certain relation of the proletariat to capital as a self-relation. The specificity of the current phase of the relation of exploitation resides in the fact that the relation of the proletariat to capital no longer carries within it a relationship of the proletariat to itself confirming it in an identity for itself vis-à-vis capital. One might say that currently the highest form of the 'class for itself' is the riot, i.e. the recognition, through attacking them, of all the conditions of existence and reproduction of the proletariat as being an exteriority in capital. The proletariat no longer recognises itself as a class other than as existing totally outside itself.

struggles of this cycle. This intertwining is even to be found specifically in the demand *par excellence*: the wage demand. Here, the demand does not disappear, it is rather in itself that its change of meaning should be sought. With the current crisis, the wage demand has become a contradictory system: the wage is *both* essential *and* decoupled; it is squeezed as income *and yet* central as consumption and financial circulation. The wage demand is unified as the action of a global social labour-force, which is at the same time segmented and divided into zones in this very unification.

## The crisis

The current crisis must be historically and specifically characterised in its singularity as a *crisis of the wage relation*. It's always possible to relate all crises back to the falling rate of profit and to consider the form in which they appear as mere phenomenal forms that may be left to the side in the fundamental analysis for lack of ideas about what to do about them. This would be to forget that the forms in which they appear are the whole of reality and that the essence (the falling rate of profit) is a concept, the concrete in thought. The very concept of crisis is unthinkable without the forms in which it appears; it is produced in those forms rather than being a 'true reality' hidden behind them.

The current crisis broke out because proletarians could no longer repay their loans. It broke out on the very basis of the wage relation which gave rise to the financialisation of the capitalist economy: wage cuts as a requirement for 'value creation' and global competition within the work force. The exploitation of the proletariat on a global scale is the hidden face and the condition for the valorisation and reproduction of this capital, which tends toward an absolute degree of abstraction. What has changed in the current period is the scale of the field within which this pressure was exerted: the benchmark price for all commodities, including labour-power, has become the minimum world price. This implies a drastic reduction or even disappearance of the admissible profit rate differentials, through the discipline imposed by financial capital which conditions productive capital. The search for maximum profit is not new,

but, with the end of the parallelism between rising wages and increasing productivity, wage norms have changed, as has the area of equalisation within which this pressure for profit maximisation is exerted: the financialisation of capital is above all workers' defeat by capital.<sup>7</sup> This wage reduction is necessary not only because attempts to maximize surplus labour are a general structural necessity (and always a historically specific one) of the capitalist mode of production, but in addition specifically because it is the functional condition, in financialised capital, for the non-propagation of inflationist tensions in a system of accumulation based on a constant supply of liquidity. This functional necessity was what reappeared, but in a negative fashion, within the historical mode of capital accumulation with the detonation of the subprime crisis. Now the wage relation is at the core of the current crisis. The current crisis is the beginning of the phase of reversal of the determinations and dynamic of capitalism as it emerged from the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. What was precisely the system's dynamic—the interpenetration between the financialisation of productive capital and the double decoupling of the wage—is now in the process of exploding, and turning into barriers to and vectors of the tendential fall in the rate of profit.

All the contradictions really take shape after 2005, leading to the detonation of the current crisis. First the growth of consumption, made possible by the growth of debt whilst wages stagnate or grow only marginally; then the growth in fixed investment of companies made possible by the slightly increasing rate of profit after 2002, itself based on the reduction of wages.<sup>8</sup> At the same time there is over-accumulation of capital and over-production of commodities: over-accumulation because of under-consumption; under-consumption because of over-accumulation.

Proletarians never consume a portion of surplus value, as is assumed by theories of under-consumption that oppose the decline or stagnation in wages to the realisation of the increased surplus-value which results from it. The secret resides in the fact that too much revenue is

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<sup>7</sup> This financialisation was not the implementation of a plan, rather it occurred incrementally over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> That is to say after the crisis of 1997 to 2001 which led to some depreciation of capital but not a reduction of excess capacity in Asian factories.

transformed into constant capital, resulting in massive augmentation of production, while the rate of profit tends to fall as does the consumption power of society. Workers' consumption is blocked in relation to increased production because too much revenue has been transformed into constant capital (in the final analysis, the production of means of production can only be in the service of consumption); too much revenue has been transformed into constant capital because the aim of capitalist production is the maximum production of surplus value and the relative reduction of workers' consumption. This reduction then blocks the reproduction of capital. The transformation of an accrued surplus value into additional capital is simultaneously blocked, on the one hand by the limited possibilities for any further increase in exploitation, and on the other hand, by the extent to which workers' consumption has already been reduced. Further reductions could only be pursued by the acceleration of the transformation of revenue into capital.

It is a crisis of the wage relation, both as the capacity for the valorisation of capital and the capacity for the reproduction of the working class. In order not to leave aside the forms of appearance and in order to specifically designate the current crisis, it is necessary to unify the theory of crisis.<sup>9</sup> We are faced with a crisis in which the identity of over-accumulation and under-consumption is affirmed, a crisis of the wage relation and of the reciprocal implication between labour and capital; a crisis in which the proletariat finds itself, within and against the capitalist mode of production, confronted by its own existence and action as a class as a limit to be overcome.

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<sup>9</sup> As far as the theory of crisis is concerned, Marxism split into two broad tendencies. The first of these explains crises in terms of workers' underconsumption and the resulting difficulties in the realisation of surplus-value. The second is founded upon the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and thus on the paucity of surplus-value in relation to the accumulation of capital, whose variable part decreases relative to its constant part; the crisis is one of overaccumulation relative to the possibilities for the valorisation of the accumulated capital. In Marx's texts we can find justification for both theses, but also, most importantly, we can see how both are mutually imbricated there as well. It is only on the basis of the second of these crisis theories that both can be unified. In this sense, it is not properly speaking a matter of 'unification', but rather the total development of the second, taken to its conclusion.

Without using the concept of the 'final crisis of capitalism', which is theoretically meaningless, we can still ask ourselves about the nature of this crisis: are we faced with the final crisis of *this phase of accumulation*? The simple answer to this question is: no.

What we have is a structural crisis of this phase of accumulation, one which we qualify specifically as a crisis of the wage relation. But this structural crisis paves the way for a crisis of money creation (i.e. a crisis of the capitalist mode of production exhibiting the specific forms of the phase of accumulation characterised by the financialisation of valorisation and the structural monetary modifications initiated in 1971) which, in the crisis of the wage relation in which it is inscribed, conserves and supersedes the latter by becoming a *crisis of value*. The latter is a crisis of human activity as commensurable.

The crisis of the creation of money and that of the wage relation develop reciprocally, each within the other. In the capitalist mode of production, value is only the generalised social form of products in exchange because it is value in process, because it never disappears thanks to the exchange with labour-power. The crisis of money creation—the crisis of money as an autonomised form of value—is not only a crisis of circulation, of exchange, but a crisis of the exchange of commodities insofar as these commodities are capital—i.e. bearers of surplus value, of surplus labour time. A crisis of money creation which occurs historically as a crisis of the wage relation, or a crisis of the wage relation as a monetary crisis, is a crisis of value as capital or capital as value—i.e. to synthesise, a crisis of value in process: the only crisis of value. This conjunction was not inscribed for all eternity in the concept of capital, but occurs as a crisis of a specific phase of the capitalist mode of production. The unity, as crisis of value, of the crisis of money creation and the crisis of the wage relation incorporated by it, specifies the crisis of value as the concrete historic content of capital as contradiction in process. As is made clear in the following lengthy quotation, to be a contradiction in process is the very dynamic of capital, but this dynamic becomes, *when grasped in the immediate characteristics of this crisis*, the contradiction of the game which abolishes its own rule.

The exchange of living labour for objectified labour—i.e. the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour—is the ultimate development of the value-relation and of production resting on value. Its presupposition is—and remains—the mass of direct labour time, the quantity of labour employed, as the determinant factor in the production of wealth. But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose ‘powerful effectiveness’ is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production. [...] No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [*Naturgegenstand*] as middle link between the object [*Objekt*] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor.

In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body—it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth.

The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself.

As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of

general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. [...]

Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life or death—for the necessary.

On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. Forces of production and social relations—two different sides of the development of the social individual—appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high. (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1993, pp. 704–706.)

Capital as contradiction in process becomes the most general way to refer to the activity of the proletariat in this crisis, when the latter, in its struggles, produces its own class existence as the limit of its own activity as a class.

### **End of the old formalisation of limits: the end of radical democratism, the end of activism**

To act as a class is the very limit of class struggle: this is the most general determination of the present cycle of struggles in the relation between the proletariat and capital that resulted from the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production through the crisis of the 1970s. If this limit

remains as such, its formalisations are subject to change or may even disappear. The explosive connection between the crisis of the wage relation and the illegitimacy of wage demands, which is at the core of the present moment, brings an end to any alternative, whether in the form of activism (the direct action movement) or radical democratism<sup>10</sup> (the two are historically linked). Another world is no longer possible here and now, neither on the basis of labour making capital conform to it, nor on the basis of the critique of labour as precondition for the abolition of capital. The current crisis, which is specifically a crisis of the wage relation, has made all that obsolete.

Let us take the example of the large ‘anti-summit’ mobilisations from the end of the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s. Even if we cannot label all the tendencies operating there radical-democratic, they find themselves rubbing shoulders and even sometimes merging with each other. Examples of this are: the black blocks, Cobas and Tutte bianche in Genoa, in spite of serious frictions; the material support and infrastructure provided by the Genoa Social Forum; the arrangements made by Ingeg for the black block in Prague, etc. This was only a transitory phase in the course of the current cycle of struggles.

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<sup>10</sup> What we understand by radical democratism is that this does not merely designate an ideology (around citizenship—‘citizen-ism’ [*citoyennisme*]), but rather that it is a practice whose content consists in formalising and ratifying the limits of current struggles in their specificity. That which constitutes the revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles is also its intrinsic limit. The proletariat produces its entire being, its entire existence in the categories of capital, which is why it can also be the abolition of these; but radical democratism also formalises the whole of the limit of the struggles of this period: the ratification of the existence of the class within capital. This is all too real in the class struggle. For radical democratism, the critique of the capitalist mode of production is limited to the necessity for the proletariat to control the conditions of its existence. Thus this social movement finds, in its demands for a radicalisation of democracy, the most general form and content of its existence and its action (i.e. command, control). The proletarian is replaced by the citizen, the revolution by the alternative. The movement is vast: it ranges from forms which merely demand reform, a capitalism with a human face, to alternative perspectives which see themselves as representing a rupture with capitalism, all the while remaining within the problematic of command, of control, of management.

*A page has been turned:*

- The end of the big anti-summit demos signifies the decline of activism while revealing at the same time their intimate connection with radical democratism.
- The success in these milieus of theories of a strategy of withdrawal (withdrawing back to remote bases, preparing and organising the mythical cuts in the flows of circulation) has confirmed their definitive swing towards alternativism.
- During the riots in Greece, these milieus met their intrinsic limit at the very moment when they could no longer be 'alternativists' and 'activists'.
- The violence, which can only increase, with which the crisis has begun to affect '16–25 year olds' is going to 'de-alternativise' the 'alternative milieu', for which the transition from 'posing questions relative to communism' to the struggle against capitalism is going to be reversed.
- More importantly: the general strike and the riots in Guadeloupe and Martinique, and the struggles against layoffs and for the wage everywhere, signify that the wage demand, i.e. exploitation in the most trivial sense, is the terrain on which develops the very process which leads the proletariat to call into question its own definition as a class.

Radical democratism formalised the limits of this cycle of struggles *precisely* by making capital the insurpassable horizon of labour. Alternativist activism autonomised the dynamic of this cycle, making the calling into question of the proletarian condition the premise, the condition, of a critique of capital. For both, 'another world was possible' in opposition to the present world.

Activism was the autonomisation of the dynamic of this cycle, with all the ideological reformulations that this implied. Two terms, inextricably linked in a class contradiction, were dissociated from each other: the class acting as a class, and the class calling itself into question (i.e. finding the fact of acting as a class to be the limit of its own action as a class). The alternative substitutes itself for a contradictory process of the internal

production of the overcoming. The putting into question of class belonging was something to be done in opposition to capital instead of being intrinsic to the contradiction that is exploitation. With both radical democratism and activism, another life was possible to the extent that the overcoming of capital was experienced, actually practised, as the other branch of an alternative whose first branch was capital.

Being a class without confirmation of itself in the reproduction of capital (which often gives rise to the paradigmatic situation of the young unemployed), being a class of this mode of production in contradiction with it, became autonomised into an essence, a mode of being. The limit inherent to this contradictory relation that defines the new cycle of struggles, i.e. the definition of the class exclusively in its contradictory relation with capital, was thus rejected as an exteriority.

In this new cycle of struggles resulting from the restructuring of capital, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is situated at the level of the reproduction of the whole, hence at the level of the reciprocal reproduction of classes. This contradiction no longer comprises any confirmation of the proletariat for itself: it is the end of programmatism, of workers' identity and of what some others call the 'old workers' movement.' In this structure of the contradiction, the proletariat can put itself into question as a class in its contradiction with capital, which is in a reciprocal implication with it (i.e. exploitation). As a consequence, the abolition of capital is its own abolition, it is the abolition of all classes and the communisation of society.

However, this revolutionary (communist) dynamic of the current cycle implies immediately and intrinsically, as its own limit, that which renders its existence impossible. Within this capitalist relation itself, the proletariat produces its entire existence as a class in capital, in a relation to capital that no longer confirms a relation of the proletariat to itself: workers' identity. Until the present explosive connection, this situation was making of the present cycle a constant tension between, on the one hand, *the autonomisation of its dynamic, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class, and, on the other hand, the recognition of its whole existence within the categories of capital.* This tension was

formalised by both activism and radical democratism—these two being hostile brothers but also vitally linked to one another, insofar as each of them, being an autonomisation of the elements of one and the same totality, could exist for itself only through a relation with *its* negative. No matter if in the first element we recognise the revolutionary dynamic of this cycle, and in the second element the formalisation of the limits of struggles as insurmountable barriers for them.

It was in activism that the dynamic of this cycle—the proletariat's calling into question of its own existence as a class—could pose itself and comprehend itself, but only by autonomising itself, with all the ideological reformulations that this implied. Class belonging was practically considered as already superseded, because in activist practice capital itself was already posed as alienation, facticity, symbol, exteriority. Rioters could call themselves 'proletarians' because being proletarian was nothing more than a sign, the name given to a self-defined practice as negating capital: 'we are proletarians because we are against capital'. Hence, all the positivity of activism in its necessary connection and confrontation with radical democratism.

The disappearance of alternative-leaning activism, and of activism in general, is a result of the development of immediate struggles in which the production of class belonging as an external constraint is the very fact of the struggles of the proletariat in its reciprocal implication with capital, rather than as autonomisation in opposition to capital.

### **The current limits: we are nothing outside the wage relation; the police, discipline**

In restructured capitalism, the reproduction of labour power has been subject to a *double decoupling* (see above). This constitutes the wage demand as *structurally illegitimate* in this period of the capitalist mode of production and not only as counter to the maximum valorisation of capital. It is for this reason that the wage demand has become the terrain on which the process develops whereby class belonging is produced as an

external constraint, *to its very core*: the wage relation by which the proletariat depends on capital for its physical and social existence.

The expression of this limit will from now on be twofold: we are nothing outside the wage relation, and that this struggle as a class, as its own limit, is the police.

As for the first expression, we have workers' violence against the decisions of the capitalist class—violence through which the working class demands that capital exist for it. If capital ever arbitrarily decides to no longer exist for the working class, then the latter is no longer anything. In order to exist, the working class demands the capitalist relation; it does this against capital. We are nothing outside the wage relation, this is the limit within class struggle of struggling as a class. For the working class, it will be a case of the most bitter defence of its conditions of existence, rather than staking a claim for their management or control. We could see the development of a very combative base unionism, but one which is very unstable and with an episodic existence, owing to the fact that it can neither develop itself nor stabilise itself in negotiations. Such a base unionism will be very close to all the different forms of self-management; like them, it will express and seek to formalise this limit of the class struggle which is the very fact of struggling as a class.

As for the second expression of the limit: it is also the police that tells us that we are nothing outside the wage relation. Of course it is a question of the force which the relation of reciprocal implication between labour and capital boils down to in the last instance, but there is more to it than that precisely because this is a relation of reciprocal implication. The police is also how we are confronted by our own existence as a class as limit. If the main result of the production process is the reproduction of the encounter between proletariat and capital, it is not self-evident that from this encounter follows *ipso facto* the first moment of the exchange between capital and labour (the purchase and sale of labour power). Everywhere the disciplining of labour-power is the order of the day for the capitalist class as it confronts proletarians, who have once again become poor as proletarians. The reproduction of the encounter between labour power and capital becomes a matter of discipline.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On this second point, see the appendix to this text [available online, ed. note]

In this cycle of struggles, to act as a class has become, in the very activity of the proletariat as a class, the limit of this activity. *Class belonging as an external constraint* is the structure of the contradiction in which acting as a class is the very limit of the proletariat's activity, which is now *what is at stake* in the class struggle. What is now at stake in these struggles is that, for the proletariat, acting as a class is the limit of its action as a class—this is now an objective situation of class struggle—and that this limit is constructed as such in the struggles and becomes class belonging as an external constraint. This determines the level of conflict with capital, and gives rise to internal conflicts within the struggles themselves. This transformation is a determination of the current class contradiction, but it is in every case the particular practice of a struggle at a given moment and in given conditions.

### The rift: definition, examples

If the proletariat, as one pole of the social relation, is no longer ever confirmed in its class situation by the reproduction of this relation, it follows that it cannot triumph by becoming the absolute pole of society. It is because the proletariat is not-capital, because it is the dissolution of all existing conditions (labour, exchange, division of labour, property) in these conditions and not in opposition to them, that the contradiction which is exploitation can take this form of class belonging as external constraint. Class belonging as external constraint is then *in itself* a content, that is to say, a practice. As not-capital, the proletariat finds here the content of its *revolutionary action as communist measures*: the abolition of property, of the division of labour, of exchange and of value. *Communist measures* is nothing other than *communist measures* taken as simple *measures of struggle* by the proletariat against capital. These measures are the very reality of the production, in the struggle against capital, of the class belonging as external constraint.

It is now a fact that revolution is the abolition of all classes, insofar as *the proletariat's acting as a class is, for itself, a limit*. This abolition is not a goal that is proposed, a definition of revolution as a norm to be achieved,

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with the development offered by the Greek comrades from Blaumachen.

but a current content in what the class struggle is itself. This is the 'terrible step to take' in the theoretical understanding and practice of contemporary struggles. To produce class belonging as an external constraint is, for the proletariat, to enter into conflict with its previous situation; this is not 'liberation', nor is it 'autonomy'.

Self-organisation and its content—autonomy—cannot overthrow capitalist relations. When the proletariat is self-organised—and nowadays there are few struggles that are not self-organised, often in a more or less confrontational division of tasks with the unions—it breaks with its previous situation. This break is, however, in practice and above all in the ideology of autonomy, at best only its 'liberation', the reorganisation of what it is, of its activity on the basis of what it is in this society. Such a reorganisation, long the stuff of dreams of the ideologues of autonomy, is always a disappointment to them. They, in common with the ideologues of democracy, justify its failures by the non-coincidence between reality and the concept. Autonomy is the autonomy *of the proletariat* and not the destruction of its previous situation. The autonomy of the proletariat is an oxymoron. If the proletariat remains self-organised, if it does not go beyond this stage, it can only be defeated because it has not gone beyond capitalist relations. The supersession of capitalist relations has nothing to do with an autonomous proletariat. Autonomy centres on the abolition of mediations; the real question lies in that which causes there to be mediation: being a class. It is the content of the revolution that we should be interested in, and that is precisely what the theory which considers self-organisation to be the revolution already in process cannot do, because this is precisely what self-organisation cannot be. This critique of self-organisation and autonomy is only of interest, only puts something at stake, if we are speaking of the class struggle as it is now, that is if, in the same movement, we specify the very fact of struggling as a class as the contradiction and limit of current struggles.

The proletariat finds the capacity to communise society in what it is itself, against capital, when it treats its own class nature as externalised in capital. With the production of class belonging as an external constraint, it is possible to understand *the tipping point of the class struggle*, i.e. its

supersession as a produced supersession, on the basis of current struggles. In its struggle against capital, the class turns back against itself, i.e. it treats its own existence, everything that defines it in its relation to capital (and it is nothing but this relation) as the limit of its action. Proletarians do not liberate their 'true individuality' denied in capital; revolutionary practice is the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-transformation. It is this turning back of the class against itself, and its theory, which are *at present*, the possibility of revolution as communisation.

The restructuring of the contradictory relation between the proletariat and capital means that the current cycle of struggles is fundamentally defined by the fact that the contradiction between classes occurs at the level of their respective reproduction, meaning that the proletariat finds and confronts its own constitution and existence as a class in its contradiction with capital. From this flows the disappearance of a worker's identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital—i.e. the end of the workers' movement and the concomitant bankruptcy of self-organisation and autonomy as a revolutionary perspective. Because the perspective of revolution is no longer a matter of the affirmation of the class, it can no longer be a matter of self-organisation.

For the proletariat, to act as a class is currently, on the one hand, to have no other horizon than capital and the categories of its reproduction, and on the other, for the same reason, it is to be in contradiction with, and to put into question, its own reproduction as a class. This conflict, this *rift* in the action of the proletariat, is the content of class struggle and what is at stake in it. From daily struggles to revolution, there can only be a rupture. But this rupture is prefigured in the daily course of class struggle each time that class belonging appears, within these struggles, as an external constraint which is objectified in capital, in the very course of the proletariat's activity as a class.

The proletariat's action as a class is characterised by a *rift* within itself through practices that externalise their own existence as class practices as a constraint which is objectified in the reproduction of capital. It is no longer possible to do anything more as a worker, while remaining a

worker. This confrontation of the proletariat with its own constitution as a class is now the content of the class struggle and *what is at stake* in it is the putting into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class and of all classes. This is the reason why we can currently talk about communism, and why we can talk about it in the present.

Currently, the revolution is predicated on the supersession of a constitutive contradiction of the class struggle: for the proletariat, being a class is the obstacle that its struggle as a class must get beyond / abolish.

Class unity can no longer be formed on the basis of wage labour and the struggle over immediate demands as a prerequisite for the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. The unity of the proletariat can now only be the activity in which it abolishes itself by abolishing everything that divides it. It is a fraction of the proletariat which, in going beyond the demands-based character of its struggle, will take communising measures and will thus initiate the unification of the proletariat which will be the same process as the unification of humanity, i.e. its creation as *the ensemble of social relations that individuals establish between themselves in their singularity*.

From struggles over immediate demands to revolution, there can only be a rupture, a qualitative leap. But this rupture isn't a miracle. Neither is it the simple realisation on the part of the proletariat that there is nothing else to be done other than making the revolution, given the failure of everything else. 'Revolution is the only solution' is just as inept as talk of the revolutionary dynamic of demands-based struggles. This rupture is produced positively by the unfolding of the cycle of struggles which precedes it, and we can say that it still forms a part of it. This rupture is *pre-figured* in the multiplication of rifts within the class struggle between, on the one hand, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class in its contradiction with capital and, on the other hand, the reproduction of capital which is implied by the very fact of the proletariat's existence as a class. The concept of the rift designates the dynamic of this cycle of struggles, which exists in an empirically verifiable manner.

Two points encapsulate what is essential in the current cycle of struggles:

- The disappearance of a proletarian identity confirmed within the reproduction of capital corresponds to the end of the workers' movement and the concomitant exhaustion of self-organisation and of autonomy as a revolutionary perspective.
- With the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction between classes occurs at the level of their respective reproduction. In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat puts itself into question.

Demand-based struggles display characteristics which were unthinkable thirty years ago.

During the strikes of December 1995 in France, in the struggles of the undocumented immigrants, of the unemployed, of the Liverpool dockers, at Cellatex, Alstom, Lu, Marks and Spencer, in the Argentine social uprising, in the Algerian insurgency, in Greece, Guadeloupe, etc., a particular characteristic of the struggle appears, in the course of the struggle itself, as a limit. This limit is defined by the fact that the specific characteristic of the struggle (e.g. whether the struggle in question is in the public sector, or is over demands for jobs, or defending the means of labour, or fighting outsourcing or financial management, or involves factory occupations, self-organisation, etc.) which the movement comes up against, often in the internal tensions and confrontations during its decline, always comes down to the fact of being a class and of remaining so. Contrary to the previous period, it has become impossible to give a positive content to the fact of being a class, or to see these struggles as heralding the affirmation of the class.

Most often, these are not earthshaking declarations or 'radical' actions but rather all the proletariat's practices of flight from, or rejection of, its own condition. In current strikes over layoffs, workers often no longer demand to keep their jobs, but increasingly they fight for substantial redundancy payments instead. *Against capital, labour has no future.* These

struggles take an open character across workplaces, across companies and across sectors, sometimes in relation with the unemployed over a pool of jobs; they are open as to their aims, and the struggle is waged as much outside as inside the company.

It is already evident in the 'suicidal' struggles of Cellatex, in the strike at Vilvoorde and many others, that the proletariat is nothing if it is separated from capital and that it cannot remain this nothing. The fact that the proletariat demands to be reunited with capital does not close the abyss that the struggle opens up—the abyss being the proletariat's recognition and refusal of itself. It's the de-essentialisation of labour which becomes the very activity of the proletariat: both tragically, in its struggles without immediate perspectives (i.e. its suicidal struggles) and self-destructive activities, and as demand for this de-essentialisation, as in the struggles of the unemployed and the precarious in the winter of 1998 in France.

Unemployment is no longer clearly separated from employment. The boundaries have all been blurred by the segmentation of the labour force—flexibility, subcontracting, mobility, part-time working, training, internships and 'off the books' work. The end of the dichotomy between work and unemployment is an essential moment of the fluidity of the reproduction of the encounter between labour and capital which poses the contradiction between classes at the level of their reproduction. With the struggles of the unemployed and precarious it has become almost self-evident that the struggle of the proletariat no longer comprises any element of self-confirmation. This is not due to unemployment in itself, but to the way it is inscribed in the relation of exploitation.

In the French movement of 1998, and more generally in the struggles of the unemployed in this cycle of struggles, *it is the definition given by the unemployed themselves which sees itself as the starting point for the reformulation of waged employment.* The need for capital to measure everything in labour time and to posit the exploitation of labour as a matter of life or death for it, is simultaneously the de-essentialisation of living labour relative to the social forces that capital concentrates in itself. This contradiction inherent in capitalist accumulation, which is a contradiction in capital in process, takes the very particular form of the definition

of the class vis-à-vis capital; unemployment claims for itself the status of being the starting-point for such a definition. In the struggles of the unemployed and precarious, the struggle of the proletariat against capital *makes* this contradiction *its own*, and champions it. The same thing occurs when workers who have been sacked don't demand jobs but severance pay instead.

Moreover, when it becomes evident that autonomy and self-organisation are no longer the perspective of anything (as in the Italian transport strikes or those at the Fiat plant in Melfi), this is the point at which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is constituted and the ground is prepared for the supersession of the demands-based struggle on its own basis. *The proletariat is faced with its own definition as a class which becomes autonomous in relation to it, which becomes alien to it.*

From December 2002 to January 2003, the ACT strike in Angers (ACT is a computer equipment subsidiary of Bull) was led concurrently by a trade-union alliance and a strike committee which was 'broadly open and relatively grass-roots.' Three production lines were temporarily restarted, which did not prevent the finished products from being burnt, however. It is interesting to take another look at the chronology of events. The factory was occupied following the announcement on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December of the company's definitive receivership 'after multiple manoeuvrings and prevarications.' *The factory was occupied but nobody knows to what end.* On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January the strike committee agreed to take on the production of electronic components for an Italian equipment manufacturer. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 200 components were delivered; on the 23<sup>rd</sup> the occupants burned the components that were in inventory; on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the occupiers were unceremoniously evicted. In the same period, the Moulinex employees who had been made redundant set fire to a factory building, thus inscribing themselves in the dynamic of this cycle of struggles, which makes the existence of the proletariat as a class the limit of its class action. Similarly, in 2006, in Savar, 50km north of Dhaka, Bangladesh, two factories were torched and a hundred others ransacked after workers had not been paid for three months. In Algeria, minor wage demands turn into riots, forms of

representation are dismissed without new ones being formed, and it is the entirety of the living conditions and reproduction of the proletariat which come into play beyond the demands made by the immediate protagonists of the strike.

In China and India, there is no prospect of the formation of a vast workers' movement from the proliferation of various types of demands-based action affecting all aspects of life and the reproduction of the working class. These demands-based actions often turn paradoxically on the destruction of the conditions of labour. Large concentrations of workers in India and China are part of a global segmentation of the labour force. They can neither be regarded as a renaissance elsewhere of what has disappeared in 'the West' in terms of their global definition, nor in terms of their own inscription in the national context. It was a social system of existence and reproduction that defined working class identity and was expressed in the workers' movement, and not the mere existence of quantitative material characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Argentina, people self-organise as the unemployed of Mosconi, as the workers of Brukman, as slum-residents, etc., but in this sort of self-organisation they immediately come up against what they are as an obstacle, which, in the struggle, becomes that which has to be overcome, and which is seen as such in the practical modalities of these self-organised movements. The proletariat cannot find within itself the capacity to create other inter-individual relations without overturning and negating what it is itself in this society, i.e. without entering into contradiction with autonomy and its dynamic. In Argentina it was the

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<sup>12</sup> For China and India to manage to constitute themselves as their own internal market would depend on a veritable revolution in the countryside (i.e. the privatisation of land in China and the disappearance of small holdings and tenant farming in India) but also and above all on a reconfiguration of the global cycle of capital, supplanting the present globalisation (i.e. this would mean a renationalisation superseding / preserving globalisation, and a definancialisation of productive capital). That is to say that this hypothesis is beyond our current conceptual range because it is beyond this cycle of struggles: it presupposes the revolution which has already been defeated; the current cycle bears this defeat within it, as a restructuring of the capitalist mode of production which occurred in and through this defeat.

determinations of the proletariat as a class of this society (i.e. property, exchange, the division of labour, the relation between men and women, etc.) which were effectively shaken by the way productive activities were undertaken, that is, in the actual modalities of their realisation. It is thus that the revolution as communisation becomes credible.

In addition, that self-organisation is a general limit to be superseded becomes apparent in conflicts between the self-organised sectors. It becomes apparent in these conflicts that workers, in defending their current situation, remain within the categories of capitalist mode of production that define them. Unification is impossible without being precisely the abolition of self-organisation, i.e. unification implies that the unemployed worker, the Zanon worker, the squatter can no longer remain the unemployed worker, the Zanon worker, the squatter. Either there is unification, in which case there is the abolition of the very thing which is self-organisable, or there is self-organisation, in which case unification is a dream which is lost in the conflicts which derive from the diversity of situations.

In defending its immediate interests, the proletariat is led to abolish itself because its activity in the 'occupied factory' can no longer remain enclosed in the 'occupied factory', nor in the juxtaposition, coordination and unity of the 'occupied factories', nor indeed in the unification of everything which is self-organisable.

In France in November 2005, in the banlieues, the rioters didn't demand anything. The content of the November revolt was the refusal of the causes of the revolt: the rioters attacked their own condition, they made everything that produces and defines them their target. That this was the case is in no way down to an imagined radicalism intrinsic to the 'hooligans of the banlieues'. It is to be explained rather by the conjunction of two current factors: on the one hand, the particular situation of this fraction of the proletariat; on the other, the fact that, in general, *the demand is not what it once was*. Rioters revealed and attacked *the proletarian situation now*: the worldwide precarisation of the workforce. In doing so they immediately made obsolete, in the very moment in which such a demand could have been articulated, any desire to be an 'ordinary proletarian'.

This interconnectedness, characteristic of this cycle of struggles, between the demands made by proletarians and the way in which they put themselves in question as proletarians, which can be synthesised as class-belonging as the general limit of this cycle, reached the level of paroxysm in the November riots as a result of the particularity of their participants. The demand disappeared.

Three months later, in spring 2006, during the struggle against the CPE, everyone knew what could emerge from the withdrawal of the CPE: at best, if the trade unionist projects had triumphed, a flexicurity *à la française*. Who wanted that? Certainly not the majority of the students, precarious workers and high school students who were on the streets. As a demands-based movement, this would nonetheless have been the only result. A result which the movement could not admit to itself. As a movement of demands, the student-movement could only understand itself by becoming the general movement of the precarious, but then either it would have self-destructed in its specificity, or it would have inevitably been forced to collide more or less violently with all those who in the November riots had shown that they refused to be used as mere foot-soldiers. To achieve the demand through its expansion would in effect be to sabotage it. What credibility was there in a link-up with the November rioters on the basis of a permanent contract (CDI) for all? On the one hand, this link-up was objectively inscribed in the genetic code of the movement; on the other hand, this very necessity of this link-up induced an internal love-hate dynamic, just as objective, within the movement. The struggle against the CPE was a *movement of demands, the satisfaction of which would have been unacceptable to itself as a movement of demands*.

The riots in Greece and the general strike in Guadeloupe are the most recent events which characterise this cycle of struggles.

In the Greek riots, the proletariat didn't demand anything, and didn't consider itself opposed to capital as the foundation of any alternative. Quite simply, through riots that produced class-belonging as an external constraint and the relation of exploitation as pure and simple coercion, the proletariat no longer wants to be what it is.

These riots were a movement of the class rather than a mere agitation by activists (which would itself in any case be a movement of the class), but it wasn't a struggle in what is the very matrix of classes: *production*. It is in this way that these riots were able to make the key achievement of producing and targeting class belonging as a constraint, but they could only reach this point by confronting this *glass floor* of production as their limit. And the ways in which this movement produced this external constraint (the aims, the unfolding of the riots, the composition of the rioters, etc.) was intrinsically defined by this limit. This constituted the ambivalence of this movement.

Students without a future, young immigrants, precarious workers, these are all proletarians who live every day the reproduction of capitalist social relations as coercion. Coercion *is included* in this reproduction because they are proletarians, but they experience it every day as *separated* and aleatory (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself. They struggle at the same time in this moment of coercion as separated, and only conceive of and experience this separation as a lack in their own struggle against this mode of production.

It is in this way that this movement produced class belonging as an external constraint, but only in this way. It is in this way that it locates itself at the level of this cycle of struggles and is one of its determining historical moments. Attacking institutions and the forms of social reproduction, taken in themselves, was on the one hand what constituted the movement, and what constituted its force, but on the other hand, this was also the expression of its limits.

In Greece it was in this configuration and in the ambiguity that it contained that, for the proletarians in struggle, their class belonging, i.e. their own definition as a class in their relation to capital, was produced as, and appeared as, an external constraint. In their own practice and in their struggle, they called themselves into question as proletarians, but only by separating the moments and the instances of social reproduction in their attacks and their aims. Reproduction and production of capital remained foreign to each other.

Currently, the resolution depends on the overcoming of a constitutive contradiction of class struggle: class-being is for the proletariat the obstacle that its struggle as a class must go beyond / abolish. The riots in Greece posited this obstacle, formalised the contradiction, and didn't go any further. This was their limit, but the contradiction is now posed practically for this cycle of struggles in restructured capitalism and in its crisis.

In Guadeloupe, the importance of unemployment, and of the part of the population that lives from benefits or from an underground economy, means that wage-demands are a contradiction in terms. This contradiction structured the course of events between, on the one hand, the LKP, which was centred on permanent workers (essentially in public services) but which attempted to hold the terms of this contradiction together through the multiplication and the infinite diversity of demands, and, on the other, the absurdity of central wage-demands for the majority of people on the barricades, in the looting, and in the attacks on public buildings. The demand was destabilised in the very course of the struggle. It was contested, as was its form of organisation, but the specific forms of exploitation of the entire population, inherited from its colonial history, were able to prevent this contradiction from breaking out more violently at the heart of the movement (it is important to note that the only death was that of a trade-unionist killed on a barricade). From this point of view, the production of class belonging as an external constraint was more a sort of schizophrenia than something genuinely produced in the course of struggle, more a sociological phenomenon than something at stake in the struggle. No conflictual recomposition of the class around unemployed and precarious workers arose—rather a parallel existence between waged and unemployed workers in the movement, at the head of which, the LKP placed itself, for better or for worse. This didn't prevent wage-demands from conflicting globally with the composition of the demonstrators and finding their limit there.

The wage-demand advanced by the fraction of more or less permanent employees found its limit in the mass of the unemployed and claimants who were swept along in the movement. But this wasn't simply an

external limit: the two groupings weren't strangers who found themselves 'side by side' by accident. They were brought together by the total purchase of labour-power, in which the total labour-power is always already bought, whatever its individual (i.e. by fractions) or collective consumption, by capital in general for an income in which wages and other forms of incomes are equalised. Wage-demands are totally modified when the form of free contract is obsolete. Workers can no longer, by means of a liberation of labour, break the chain which links together the terms of the contradictory but reciprocal implication between surplus and necessary labour.

The illegitimacy of the wage demand—its double decoupling—is also present in this 'side-by-side' co-existence. This is a decoupling vis-à-vis valorisation and capital accumulation, for which the wage demand has lost all internal meaning and dynamism; and also a decoupling between the wage on the one hand, and income and consumption on the other, through credit and all different forms of income and benefits. The very composition of the demonstrators and rioters expresses this double decoupling vividly and actively. What wage demands can be raised by the mass of long-term unemployed? It would be wrong to analyse the rage as desperation. In the course of wage demands, unemployment is the contradiction between surplus and necessary labour, it is capital as a contradiction-in-process. It is thus the wage-relation in its totality which is modulated according to unemployment and 'atypical' forms of employment, and this includes the wage demand itself, its course, its participants and its activities.

The confinement of the wage demand to the contradiction between surplus and necessary labour is the very composition of the working class in Guadeloupe and in the other French Overseas Departments. Here, this structural contradiction is the very composition of the class. In Guadeloupe, then, within the wage demands themselves, a more important drama was played out on the basis of the wage, the proletariat's most intimate relation to capital: the production of class-belonging as a limit and exteriority within the proletariat's struggle as a class.

The content of particular struggles constitutes the dynamic of this cycle within, and in the course of, these struggles themselves: thus, the location of unemployment and precarity at the heart of the wage relation; the definition of the situation of the clandestine worker as the generalised situation of labour-power; the posing of the immediacy of the social individual as the foundation, to be produced, of opposition to capital (as is done by the direct action movement); the suicidal strikes at Cel-latex and others in the Spring and Summer of 2000 (Metaleurop—with caveats—, Adelshoffen, la Societe Francaise Industrielle de Controle et D'Equipements, Bertrand Faure, Mossley, Bata, Moulinex, Daewoo-Orion, ACT—ex Bull); the posing of class unity as an objectivity constituted within capital, as in the multiplication of collectives and the waves of temporary and intermittent strikes (in France 2003, and the British postal workers). The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles appears in most of today's struggles as the tendency for the class to produce its existence as class within capital without any possibility of a self-relation, the struggles themselves destroying this possibility. This dynamic then, consists in the proletariat putting itself into question as a class. However this dynamic has its intrinsic limit in the very thing which defines it as a dynamic—acting as a class. That's why we talk of the dynamic (of the rift) within the limit.

The unity of the class can no longer constitute itself on the basis of the wage and demands-based struggle as a prelude to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity in which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it. To abolish capital is at the same time to negate oneself as worker and not to self-organise as such, it is a movement of the abolition of enterprises, of factories, of the product, of exchange (whatever its form).

The proletariat can only be revolutionary by recognising itself as a class. It recognises itself as such in every conflict, and it has to do so all the more in the situation in which its existence as a class is that which it has to confront in the reproduction of capital. We must not be mistaken as to the content of this 'recognition'. For the proletariat to recognise itself as a class will not be its 'return to itself' but rather a total extroversion (a self-externalisation) as it recognises itself as a category of the capitalist

mode of production. What we are as a class is immediately nothing other than our relation to capital. For the proletariat, this 'recognition' will in fact consist in a practical cognition, in conflict, not of itself for itself, but of capital.

### **Exploitation: a game that abolishes its own rule**

The illegitimacy of wage demands in a crisis which is specifically a crisis of the wage relation constitutes *the contradiction and the dynamic of the present moment*. It carries within it, in the very activities of the proletariat as a class, all the ways in which class belonging, as limit of the class struggle, is put into question. The definition of the proletariat and of exploitation as its contradiction with capital thus comes back to the centre.

When the fact of struggling as a class has become the internal limit itself of the class struggle of the proletariat, this means that the question of communisation is posed as a current question, a present one, at the very heart of exploitation and the production of surplus-value. It is not only outside the wage relation that we are nothing, but outside the *contradiction* of the wage relation. This changes everything, and everything can change as a result of this. The pairs exploitation/alienation, reciprocal implication/domination, classes/individuals, productive labour/'diffuse valorisation' are destined to become the subject of polemics and practical and theoretical schisms. Posing the course of the capitalist mode of production as the real unfolding of the contradiction between proletariat and capital is to suppress the ambiguities between the terms of these antinomies. An underestimation, not to say negligence of the subsumption of labour under capital in the process of exploitation, justifies on the one hand theoretical immediatism whose form of expression is denunciation,<sup>13</sup> and on the other hand, a certain conception of practice as intervention (cf. the question of activism).

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<sup>13</sup> Denunciation is the form of theoretical immediatism which is the critique of capitalist society which takes it as it is given. Basing itself on phenomenal categories, theoretical immediatism never reaches the level of the general, because the general does not hide itself in the empirical, in that which is 'clearly given', such that, from the empirical, the general can be arrived at naturally by progression; it

Proletariat and capital form the terms of a contradiction, and as such, they cannot be defined as they are in themselves outside of this contradiction.<sup>14</sup> This contradiction is their unity and their reciprocal reproduction. As a reciprocal *re-production*, the contradiction produces its own temporality which is the historical process of the capitalist mode of production. Time is internal to the contradiction, it is a *durée*, and not an *a priori* which envelops the contradiction and within which it has to unfold or to play itself out.<sup>15</sup> As reproduction, the contradiction does not bring its terms face to face on equal terms—it is an asymmetrical relation: capital subsumes labour. It follows the course of capitalist mode of production is the *real unfolding* of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital; it is *submitted* to its *own* history, and not to conditions. What also flows from this is the identity between that which makes the proletariat a class of this mode of production and that which makes it a revolutionary class. This gives us the critique of any idea of the revolutionary nature of the proletariat, as well as of any idea of the immediatism of communism. This is simultaneously the critique of the liberation of labour and of the affirmation of the proletariat as class which has become dominant, and the critique of activism and alternativism.

The class does not exist twice, once as reproducer of capital, fighting within the limits of this reproduction, and again as tension towards communism. Through the falling of the rate of profit, exploitation is a

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is rather that 'the general' is a product of thought by which thought appropriates reality and reproduces it. A more trivial form of denunciation is provided by *Le Monde Diplomatique* which teaches us each month, with great pertinence and lots of documentation to back it up, that capitalism is run by capitalists.

<sup>14</sup> So when I say that 'the proletariat and capital are contradictory', this statement, which I cannot do without, is always on the verge of being erroneous.

<sup>15</sup> The past is empty, the future too; the present is full. The *durée* is a homogenisation in movement, a fusion, a dynamic interpenetration of the phases of the contradiction. What the contradiction is, is indistinguishable from that which changes. It is not that there is on the one hand the structure of the contradiction, and on the other, its becoming; there is only the contradiction whose substance is change. The *durée* is an uninterrupted flux, an unceasing creation. Both mechanism, on the one side, which considers the chains of causality, and teleologism (teleology), on the other, presuppose time, and thus they presuppose that time has no effect on the real. By contrast, consubstantial 'time' is a *durée*.

constant process in contradiction with its own reproduction: the movement that is exploitation is a contradiction for the social relations of production of which it is the content and the movement. It is the very mode according to which labour exists socially, that is, valorisation, which is the contradiction between proletariat and capital. As defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the necessary social existence of its labour as capital, that is to say, autonomised value, which can remain as such only by valorising itself: the decrease of the rate of profit is a contradiction between classes. The proletariat is constantly in contradiction with its own definition as a class: the necessity of its own reproduction is something it finds facing it, represented by capital, for which it is constantly necessary and always in excess: this is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour<sup>16</sup> (becoming the contradiction of necessary labour), capital as contradiction-in-process (see above). It is the contradiction of productive labour: 'Productive labour is only an abbreviated expression for the whole

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<sup>16</sup> 'In production resting on capital, the existence of *necessary* labour time is conditional on the creation of *superfluous* labour time. [...] It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion—i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population—population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. [...] But labour as such is and remains the presupposition, and surplus labour exists only in relation with the necessary, hence only in so far as the latter exists. Capital must therefore constantly posit necessary labour in order to posit surplus labour; it has to multiply it (namely the simultaneous working days) in order to multiply the surplus; but at the same time it must suspend them as necessary, in order to posit them as surplus labour. [...] At the same time, the newly created surplus capital can be realized as such only by being again exchanged for living labour. Hence the tendency of capital simultaneously to increase the labouring population as well as to reduce constantly its necessary part (constantly to posit a part of it as reserve). [...] Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and the not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist.' (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1993, pp. 398–401.).

relation, and the manner in which labour capacity and labour figure in the capitalist production process.' (Marx, 'Results of the Direct Production Process', in *MECW*, volume 34, p. 483)

Exploitation is this strange game with always the same winner (because it is subsumption); at the same time, and for the same reason, it is a game in contradiction with its own rule and a tension towards the abolition of this rule. It is the object as a totality, the capitalist mode of production, which is *in contradiction with itself in the contradiction of its elements*, because for each element, its contradiction with the other element is a contradiction with itself, insofar as the other is its other. In this contradiction which is exploitation, it is thus its asymmetrical aspect which gives us its supersession. *When we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself, we define the situation and the revolutionary activity of the proletariat.* The class struggle is a game that can bring about the abolition of its own rule, because in the falling tendency of the rate of profit, that is to say, with the contradiction of productive labour, we no longer deal with a process of 'capital on its own' but with class struggle. Communism is the contradictory movement of the capitalist mode of production, the process of its obsolescence. Its overcoming is included as the very content of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, and thus as the most immediate forms of class struggle.

Unproductive workers sell their labour power and are exploited in the same way by their capitalist, for whom their degree of exploitation will determine the share of surplus value that he will be able to appropriate. But it is from the strict definition of productive labour that one can deduce that the proletariat is not limited to productive workers. Indeed, in the first place, it is in the very essence of surplus value to exist as profit, including for productive capitals themselves; secondly, for this very reason, it is the whole of the capitalist class which exploits the whole of the working class, in the same way that proletarians belong to the capitalist class even before they sell themselves to this or that boss. However, the global social labour that capital creates by appropriating it (social labour does not pre-exist in the proletarian or in the class as a whole before its appropriation) is not a homogeneous mass without distinctions, mediations or

hierarchy. It is not a meaningful totality in which every moment contains all the determinations of the totality. One shouldn't skip a central problem: if every proletarian has a formally identical relation to her particular capital, whether she is a productive worker or not, she does not have the same relation to social capital (this is not a matter of consciousness but of an objective situation). If there was not, at the centre of class struggle, the contradiction which productive labour represents for the capitalist mode of production and *for the proletariat*, we wouldn't be able to speak of revolution (it would be something exogenous to the mode of production, at best a utopia, at worst nothing).

If the proletariat is not limited to the class of productive workers (those who produce surplus value), *it is constituted by the contradiction which is productive labour*. Productive labour (i.e. productive of surplus value, that is to say, capital) is the living and objective contradiction of this mode of production. It is not a nature bound to persons: the same worker can accomplish productive tasks as well as some others which are not productive; the productive character of labour can be defined at the level of the collective worker; the same (temporary) worker can pass, from one week to the next, from productive labour to another kind which is unproductive. But the relation of the whole proletariat to capital is constituted by the contradictory situation of productive labour in the capitalist mode of production. The question is one of knowing, always historically and conjuncturally, how this essential (constitutive) contradiction constructs class struggle, at any given moment, knowing that it is in the very nature of the capitalist mode of production that this contradiction does not appear clearly: surplus value becoming by definition profit and capital being value in process. The lonely hour of the last instance never comes.

Productive workers are not, for all that, permanent revolutionaries by nature. Classes are not collections of individuals; the proletariat and the capitalist class are the social polarisation of the contradiction, constituted by the fall of the rate of profit or productive labour, which structures the whole of society. The particular relation of productive labour to social capital (compared to any other form of exploited labour) does not fix

itself as the essence of productive workers. However, in the contradiction of productive labour, which structures the whole of society and polarises it into contradictory classes, productive workers have a singular situation. By blocking the production of value and surplus value, people who live at the core of the conflict of capital as contradiction-in-process do more than just this blocking. In their singular action, which is nothing special, but rather only their engagement in the struggle, the contradiction which structures *the whole of society* as class struggle comes back on itself, back on its own condition; this is because the relation of exploitation doesn't relate productive workers to a particular capital, but rather it relates them immediately to social capital through their relation to a particular capital. What is constantly masked in a real way in the reproduction of capital returns to the surface not only as a contradiction internal to reproduction (understood here as the unity of production and circulation), but as that which makes the contradiction itself exist: labour as the substance of value which, in capital, is only value as value in process. In the contradiction of productive labour—i.e. the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, in other words the contradiction of necessary labour, i.e. the contradiction of productive labour with itself in its contradiction with capital—capital, as contradiction in process, is a contradiction between classes; it is class struggle: the contradiction (exploitation) comes back on itself, *on its own condition*.

The revolution will begin its proper task when workers leave the factories in order to abolish them, attacking the very heart of the production of value; it will come up against self-management, autonomy and all that which could tie itself to 'councilism', all that which could lead us to reorganise production 'responsibly'. Our revolution is that of the epoch in which the contradiction between classes situates itself at the level of their reciprocal implication and at the level of their reproduction. And 'the weakest link' of this contradiction, that is, exploitation, which defines and relates classes to one another, is situated in the moments of social reproduction of labour power, precisely where, far from affirming itself, the definition of the proletariat as the class of productive labour always appears (and more and more in the current shape of reproduction) as contingent and random, not only for each proletarian in particular, but structurally for the class as

a whole. But if class struggle remains a movement at the level of reproduction, it will not integrate its own *raison-d'être*, which is production. *This is currently the recurring limit of all riots and 'insurrections', which defines them as 'minority' struggles.* Revolution will have to penetrate production in order to abolish it as a specific moment of the relation between people and, at the same stroke, to abolish labour through the abolition of wage labour. That is the key role of productive labour and of those who at a specific moment are the direct bearers of its contradiction, because they live this contradiction in their existence which is both necessary and superfluous for capital at the same time. *Objectively*, they have the capacity to make of this attack a contradiction for capital itself, to turn the contradiction that is exploitation back on itself as well as against themselves. The path of the abolition of exploitation passes through exploitation itself; like capital, the revolution is also an objective process.

Even if we define the ongoing crisis, in its becoming, as a crisis of value, the crisis is still a relation of the proletariat to capital; it is the revolution which is the 'blockage' of the capitalist mode of production and not this 'blockage' which is a prerequisite for the revolution. The proletariat abolishes classes in the revolution, through measures that are taken in the course of a crisis that *becomes* a revolutionary crisis and which as such *becomes* a block to accumulation. There is no situation, no crisis, for which, taken unilaterally, there is no way out for capital. The crisis in the relation of exploitation is given both in the proletariat and in capital, as a search for the intensification of exploitation and as resistance to this intensification. It is this resistance that in its specific unfolding reveals that the emperor is naked, that against the proletariat *and, owing to the activity of the latter*, it cannot restructure itself, in order to produce a superior mode of valorisation.

It is historically and qualitatively that we need to approach things. Every crisis is a certain configuration of the relation between classes and their respective practices. This is where the previous cycle of struggles is decisive: it is a type of practice, occurring in the course of the crisis, which is able to block capitalist reproduction. Up to that point, any crisis, even the most violent ones, are always moments of the reproduction of capital. There is never a plan, but from the very fact of what capital

is, i.e. a process of valorisation / devalorisation, the crisis is in itself the overture to a restructuring. It is a type of practices which appears in the crisis which turns this into revolution, i.e. the 'final crisis'.<sup>17</sup> It is at this moment, in the crisis, that the previous conditions of valorisation, and of the cycle of struggles, are determinant: the contradiction between proletariat and capital being defined in terms of reproduction of their relation; the disappearance of a worker's identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital; the identity between the existence of the proletariat as a class and its contradiction with capital. In other words, the activities of the rift within the activity of the class, within struggles.

In the crisis, during the course of these struggles, it is the production of the existence of the class as a constraint externalized in capital which is the quantum leap, the supersession of the situation in which acting as a class is a limit; this, however, is a produced supersession which is far from being unrelated to the preceding course of the cycle of struggles, and which could not even exist without it. It is simply the defence of its immediate interests which leads the proletariat to move on to something else: the abolition of the dominant system.

It is in the moment when the contradiction between classes transforms itself from being a moment of their reciprocal implication to being the externalisation of class belonging, that the activity of the proletariat can become, in its objectives, in the course of its measures of struggle against exploitation, a practical attack on the very determinations of exploitation. There is a moment when all the determinations, all the contradictory processes, all the historical meanings are no longer sufficient, if they do not posit the revolutionary rupture as the struggle of the proletariat, in *its* own dynamic.

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<sup>17</sup> It is for these two reasons that, as we have said, the concept of 'final crisis' is meaningless. First, there is never a 'blocking' of accumulation which results in the proletariat or humanity facing a *tabula rasa*: the crisis is always a relation between valorisation and devalorisation. Secondly, it is a kind of practice of the proletariat, i.e. a particular configuration of the class struggle that destroys the capitalist mode of production. It may be added, thirdly, that 'theoretical reason' cannot go beyond its cycle of struggles, because beyond is where 'metaphysics' begins, as the critic of 'Pure Reason' might have put it.

And yet, the revolution may fail, be defeated: the extension of communising measures cannot be taken as given. These are measures that are taken against capital, which means that its reproduction, or the foundations of its reproduction—the sale of labour power and its purchase, even in ‘heterodox’ forms, exchange, basic forms of welfare organised by states, or other institutional recompositions—are still there in this eminently catastrophic situation which is the revolution (i.e. where nothing coalesces any more to make a system). It is true that the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production is in contradiction with the very thing whose dynamic it is (i.e. it is the game that can put in question its own rule), but it also remains, thereby, its dynamic.

The revolution is inscribed in this dynamic as a probable conjuncture in terms of its future occurrence, but a necessary one in terms of the current consideration of the class struggle, whose result is this conjuncture. Communisation itself is a sum of activities against capitalist reproduction; its victory is not inscribed in the latter, rather it also develops its own contradictions. The simplest of these contradictions is that it develops forms of socialisation that freeze it as local reproduction, as self-managed survival, as bastardised forms of exchange. These forms of socialisation and self-management, which may appear, are not a counter-revolution; they might be an articulation of the counter-revolution, but they are not the counter-revolution itself. The latter is always specifically capitalist: these forms of ‘self-management’ that can serve as its articulation will be swept aside, even violently, by the counter-revolution that they helped usher in.

But there is an even more serious internal contradiction in the revolutionary process which is bound up with the very process of the unification of the proletariat in its abolition. By virtue of its essential capitalist determination as the crisis of productive labour (labour which produces surplus-value), a crisis of value is for the proletariat a struggle against capital, in which it absorbs a large part of society against the capitalist class. This is the process of its abolition in the abolition of exchange, in which all sorts of social strata, which are peripheral and impoverished, but not strictly proletarian, are also constrained to participate. In this process

of unification, enormous masses of proletarians who are not workers are swept along by the movement. That is to say that the contradiction which leads to the abolition of value is the contradiction of capital as a contradiction in process (see above), but this contradiction as a living force is the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, i.e. the proletariat in the strict sense of the working class. And it is on this basis that the proletariat is unified in the abolition of value; it is on this basis that it will have to encompass, or sweep along, a fantastic mass of ruined peasants, proletarians of the informal economy, etc., who certainly belong to the global cycle of capital, and who are exploited, but as *exchangers*. They do not live the contradiction of value as the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, thus they do not immediately live the necessity of its supersession. Misery and extreme destitution do not in themselves constitute the need, or the constraint, to be revolutionary. Here the capitalist mode of production has a terrifying physical and social mass which it can mobilise. Here lies also the possibility of a multitude of small, barbaric wars.

The communist revolution is primarily a situation of entropy; all social configurations (the forms which constituted society) begin to fall into the void, and even earlier situations can recur, contradictions which were thought to be a thing of the past and which were associated with pre-capitalist modes of production. We are currently in a position to anticipate the possible occurrence of practices constituting a revolutionary *conjuncture* in the crisis, because of the characteristics of the cycle of struggle and the specific historical nature of this crisis. The revolutionary conjuncture is the internal transgression of the laws of reproduction of the mode of production, because the laws which drive the development of the capitalist mode of production *only have a finality from the point of view of one actor within these laws*. The laws which drive capitalism to its downfall do not produce an ideal, whose coming is to be awaited fatalistically; this purpose is an immanent organisation of the class struggle which the struggles of the proletariat can decipher *practically*. This deciphering is a revolutionary conjuncture. There is something of the aleatory, of the encounter, something of the order of the *event*, in a

conjuncture: a finality which produces itself and recognises itself in what is merely accidental to it, in this or that practice.

The action of the proletariat in the current crisis is paving the way for the production of class belonging as an external constraint *at its most intimate level*—i.e. in the wage relation. For the proletariat, to make demands and to come up against its own existence as a class as the limit of its action are no longer mutually exclusive. In the current wage struggles (wage struggles in the broad sense of struggles over the wage relation, including both demands over the level of wages and the modalities of the deferred wage, as well as demands over work conditions and job security and over redundancies), it is increasingly difficult for demands not to be destabilised as such in the course of the struggle and to produce the organisational forms that correspond to it without their being challenged. The wage demand is now becoming the privileged site on which the production of class belonging as external constraint can be prefigured.

The *present moment* is defined by the relation and interpenetration between the *crisis of the wage relation* and the *illegitimacy of the wage demand*. This explosive connection is the heart of the present moment.

Now, the rifts in the action of the class (between reproducing itself as a class of this mode of production, and putting itself into question) exist in the course of most conflicts.<sup>18</sup> *As theorists we are on the look-out for these rifts and we promote them*, which is the class putting its own existence as class into question within the class struggle, and in practice, we are actors in them when we are directly involved. We exist in this rupture, in this rift in the proletariat's activity as a class.

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<sup>18</sup> What in this text is designated as the *rift* cleaves apart every struggle considered in isolation, but the terms of this rift may just as well be considered to be represented in different struggles in the same phase of the class struggle (e.g. the riots of November and the struggle of the Marseilles tramway workers or the sailors of the SNCM at the same time). Everything is a question of scale.

## Our wager

Activities of the rift are present, directly challenging the theory and therefore modifying it, fashioning it and these activities are not 'ours' in the narrow sense of individual implications.

The question of intervention and that of the return from theory to practice which is intrinsic to it is only posed when diversity of activity has been made into an abstraction: *Practice* as abstraction. The question of intervention transforms what we do in any given struggle (or what we cannot do), i.e. practices that are always particular, into an abstraction of practice constituting the interventionism/quietism dilemma. The process of abstraction is a very tangible apparatus which is constructed by empirically observable activities and attitudes: 'keeping a watch on practices', the capacity to 'choose' between struggles, 'the part of society above society', the 'everything concerns me', the disappearance of the reproduction of capital in the class struggle, by virtue of which 'anything is possible'—maintaining reproduction as a framework but not as a definition of the actors; the question of strategy and of the revolution as a goal to be achieved; the individual's decision as the methodological starting point rather than the existence of a contradictory process or of a rift which is expressed by activities; the leaping over the reproduction of capital in the name of a situation considered fundamentally common, but beyond the objective diversities (once more, we find here the real development of the contradiction, i.e. the proletariat as class of capital and its contradiction with capital as the course of the capitalist mode of production).

The core of the critique of intervention as a question resides in the abstraction of practice and the objectification of class struggle which infer each other mutually. 'Practice' as such, as an entity, acquires meaning relative to its equally abstract complement, class struggle as *situation*. Specific practices as such are now merely occasional manifestations of Practice as abstraction. This is the very foundation of the question of intervention, i.e. of intervention as a question and its comprehension of theory as a 'weapon' which reflects back on practice. Theory doesn't need to prove its utility. Theory is included in the self-critical character of struggles; the

critical relationship of theory has changed. Theoretical production belongs to a practice which is not 'ours' and to a theory which is likewise not 'ours'.

We are referring to the practice of all those who through their activities create a rift within action as a class and pose it as a limit to be overcome. This is theory in the broad sense, i.e. theory as practical, class struggle reflecting on itself. Theory in a narrow sense is a condensed form of this, i.e. a specific and non-immediate expression, a work of elaboration with its own laws, an expression in thought of this practice. For it, the problem is to give theoretical existence to the communist overcoming in the clearest way possible, and for this we give ourselves the means at our disposal. The existence of this expression in thought is inherent and indispensable to the very existence of practice and theory in a broad sense. It exists and produces itself in multiple ways, continuously or ephemerally. It has no role to the extent that it defines that in relation to which it might be assumed to play a role: it is a moment, to use philosophical terms. Its 'sanction' is internal to it and is not really a sanction, nor does it guarantee it. It is constantly subjected and reworked by that which constitutes it and to which it belongs as a moment: theory in a broad sense, practice. It does not confer any specific attitude or status individually to those who practice it because Practice, in which it would need to justify or apply itself, is not its object. Application of theory exists when, in considering a struggle, we think we could either be part of it or not. The application, then, is 'how to be part of it?'. At this point, theory has been removed from its environment, its ecosystem, and it will have to be reintroduced: it is the militant attitude which creates the question of the application of theory, of its sanction and of its role. This issue is only inherent to theory if the decision to act and the conditions of its application have been separated. Then, practice is not necessary but rather a decision and the individual is the subject of this decision.

Theory has become an *objective* determination of the activities of the rift. We are leaving the endless reflexive back-and-forth between 'theory' and 'practice' (the endless logic of the ideology of 'lessons' of struggle, coming from struggles and returning to them) and consequently also the 'question of intervention'. To escape from this vicious circle it is necessary

to escape from the dialectic of interaction, which has as its moments: i) reality influences thought ii) thought influences reality. As long as we have not seized reality by means of 'concrete human activity'—that is to say, conversely, consciousness as 'conscious being'—we lock ourselves into the debate about consciousness and reality, we fight to give a non-idealist response to the question par excellence of idealism. Thus a 'role' is sought for theory.

The necessarily theoretical determination of the existence and practice of the proletariat cannot be confused with the simple movement of the contradiction-reproduction of the class in its relation to capital. In relation to this movement, the class is abstracted into a theoretical, intellectual formalisation, which maintains a critical relation to this reproduction. Theoretical production is *abstract* and *critical* in relation to the immediacy of these struggles: this is its relative autonomy. No theory can be content to say 'look what's happening', 'it speaks for itself'. When theory says 'it is so' or '*this* is how'—in a word, *sic*—it is a specific intellectual construction. In the capitalist mode of production, the reciprocal implication is subsumption (reproduction); that which we produce as the theory of this in its most formal sense is really a formalisation of the real experience of proletarians, but it is far from being the mass immediate consciousness of this experience: it is the abstraction and critique of this experience.

In the period which is opening, to discern and incite the activities of the rift, playing a part when we are involved as individuals defined at a certain point of society, nothing more, and not as individuals universally summoned by the injunction of 'Practice', means that *it is the critical relation that changes*. It is no longer an exteriority, it is a moment of the activities of the rift, it is invested in them, that is to say that it is a critical relation not *vis-à-vis* the class-struggle and immediate experience, but in this immediate experience.

If acting as a class has become the very limit of class-action, and if this is becoming, in the contradiction of the current moment, the most banal course of struggles, then the theorising character of struggles is likewise becoming *their self-critical grasp of themselves*. Immediate struggles produce an internal distance within themselves, unflinching, practically and in their own discourse. This distance is the communising perspective

as concrete, objective theoretical articulation of the theorising character of struggles and of theory in its restricted sense, the dissemination of which is becoming a primordial practical activity.

It is the becoming commonplace of this theory that allows it to be, more and more, the critical theory of struggles which are ever more theorising in character. *The dissemination of the concept of communisation will be the unification of more and more self-critical struggles and of theoretical production in the formal sense.* This dissemination will make polemics possible, and will allow the emergence in struggles of a possible expression of the perspective of overcoming which will not be, as is often the case now, something implicit to be deciphered.

There's a lot of work to do as regards the affirmation of a revolutionary theory, its dissemination, the constitution of more or less stable nuclei on this basis, and as regards the activities of these nuclei. The becoming-social of the key concept of our theory, communisation, is our affair. This work is the task of partisans of communisation, engaged in class struggles, with the conflicts and rifts that traverse them. In the present moment, theory, as a totality of concrete activities (writing, journals, meetings, dissemination in different forms, etc.) is itself directly becoming an *objective* determination of these activities of the rift and not a discourse about them.

This is our wager.

R.S., July 2010

## Discussions online

The first version of this text, especially the part that is concerned with the old formalisation of limits, including activism, gave way to various comments and critiques from other participants in *Sic*. These led both to modifications of the text and to developments and explanations on the issue of activism/alternativism and the role of police repression. Other discussions regarding formal/real subsumption, the notion of conjuncture (the gender contradiction) and the role of theory arose in relation to ‘The present moment’. For reasons of space, we did not include those in this issue. Nevertheless, these contributions can be read on the website <http://sic.communisation.net> under the heading ‘The present moment—further remarks and discussions’.