

## Liberation Technology

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*Alberto Toscano*

### MARCUSE'S COMMUNIST INDIVIDUALISM

To be an individual is certainly, of course, to be an "Egoist", but it is also at the same time and indeed unintentionally to be a "communist".

Ludwig Feuerbach, *'The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and Its Own'*

This article lies at the intersection of two research projects that hitherto I had regarded as fundamentally distinct. The first is an inquiry into the ontological, epistemological and methodological problem of individuation, with specific attention to the relatively neglected contribution of the French thinker Gilbert Simondon—whose work was crucial to the elaboration of Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and who has recently been the object of discussions about social theory and cognitive capitalism in broadly post-workerist journals such as *Multitudes*, *DeriveApprodi* and *Forme di vita*. I sought to investigate the more speculative aspect of the theory of individuation in my 2006 book *The Theatre of Production*. The second is an investigation into the mutations undergone by the idea of communism in post-war European thought. The occasion for the convergence of these two projects was indeed fortuitous: my surprise at encountering significant references to Simondon's work in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, which in turn led me back to the problematically Marxian bases of Marcuse's identification of the technological rationality at the heart of advanced industrial societies, and ultimately to the recognition of the persistence of certain Marcusean themes in contemporary debates—themes I will for the time being gather under the heading of "communist individualism." I will begin with a brief characterization of this term—which to my knowledge was used only by André Gide, who was duly excoriated for it by Bukharin in a speech delivered at the All-Union Congress of Writers in August 1934—and then try to assess how it might allow us to rethink the relationship between labor, alienation and technology. I will conclude by addressing the possible limitations of such a communist individualism in what concerns a thinking of political organization. More precisely, I will try to suggest what might be the limits of emancipation tout court. So, the object of the exercise is not merely to excavate some tenuous threads linking otherwise disparate intellectual traditions, but to identify a matrix of political-philosophical thought that remains more or less efficacious.

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## COMMUNIST INDIVIDUALISM

Though it pervades Marcuse's writings, this communist individualism is most forcefully exposed in Part II of his 1941 *Reason and Revolution*. There is an intimate link between Marcuse's rare insistence on formulating the lineaments of a non-alienated, or even authentic, form of existence—a feature of his work which is at the origin of the innumerable dismissals and derisions—and his stubborn emphasis on the individualistic content of Marxian theory. As he writes, the “abolition of private property inaugurates an essentially new social system only if free individuals, and not ‘the society’ become masters of the socialized means of production.” To back up his claim, Marcuse quotes Marx: “One must above all avoid setting ‘the society’ up again as an abstraction opposed to the individual. The individual is the social entity [*das gesellschaftliche Wesen*]. The expression of his life ... is therefore an expression and verification of the *life of society*.” This elicits a number of questions, which I will try to flesh out by looking at the role that such a programmatic individualism plays in Marcuse's discussions of labor and technology.

The first and most obvious one is to ask in what regard this “social entity,” this “social individual” differs from the abstract stipulation of the universality immanent in each and every man—a stance that Marcuse himself discerns in both Feuerbach and Hegel and summarizes as follows: “Man's nature lies in his very universality?” Are we not merely confronted with that admixture of an empiricism of the subject (concrete subjects exist) and idealism of essence (each is the bearer of the human essence) castigated by Althusser in his attack on theoretical humanism? Perhaps we could displace the terms of Althusser's criticisms by putting the emphasis on the *social* character of this “individual.” In what respect does characterizing the universality immanent to the individual as the “life of society,” as Marx does, disturb the posing of the problem in terms of essence and, indeed, in terms of the opposition between idealism and empiricism? To answer this question with relation to Marcuse, we will also need to take into consideration the different Marxian sources for what Kellner calls his “radical individualism,” in particular, we will need to draw attention to the possible discrepancy between the sensuous life of society that Marcuse extracts from the 1844 Manuscripts and the definition of the social individual within the technical (or machinic) ensemble of real subsumption that he records in his later reading of the *Grundrisse*'s ‘Fragment on Machines.’

Returning to Marcuse's text, we encounter the following pivotal affirmation: “It is, then, the free individuals, and not a new system of production,

that exemplify the fact that the particular and the common interest have been merged. The individual is the goal. This ‘individualistic’ trend is fundamental as an interest of the Marxian theory. ... Communism, with its ‘positive abolition of private property,’ is thus of its very nature a new form of individualism, and not only a new and different economic system, but a different system of life.” One of my aims here is to try to unpack this passage, which in my view is a unique clue to the peculiarity and mixed fortunes of Marcuse’s social theory—and especially to that idiosyncratic mix of rationalism and romanticism that Michael Löwy has identified as the hallmark of his work. To do this means to explicate in what sense such an intellectual and political project can articulate a political notion of individuality that does not entail the “primacy of the individual and, especially, the fiction of an individuality that could be defined in *itself*, in isolation, whether in terms of biology, psychology, economic behavior, or whatever.”

To begin with, I’d like to indicate the resonance between the work of Marcuse and that of Paolo Virno, an author who, beside having provided some of the more perceptive and provocative political readings of Simondon as a thinker of the ‘social individual,’ has also placed his work under the textual tutelage of the 1844 Manuscripts and the *Grundrisse*. Seemingly echoing Marcuse, Virno writes: “We could say—with Marx, but against the grain of a large segment of Marxism—that the radical transformation of the present state of things consists in bestowing the maximum prominence and maximum value on the existence of every single member of the species. It may seem paradoxical, but I believe that Marx’s theory could (or rather should) be understood, today, as a realistic and complex theory of the individual, as a rigorous individualism: thus, as a theory of individuation.” Behind this common wager for a Marxian individualism, we may nonetheless discern some significant discrepancies. First of all, where Marcuse seems to regard the individual as a normative goal, Virno views it as the product of a sociogenesis which is, at one and the same time, a psychogenesis—and indeed regards this not as a matter of the merger of particular and common (or universal) *interests*, but as the real presence of the collective capacities for cooperation and communication in the very psyche and affective life of the singular human being: “The individual is *social* because within the individual the *general intellect* is present.” This leads Virno to reject any understanding of Marx that would be exhausted by the categories of universality and particularity—preferring, in Simondon’s wake, to consider the individual as inextricable from a pre-individual charge (biological, psychological and productive) which, if it is not to dwell in a state of painful alienation, must itself pass into a collective or, more

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precisely, transindividual dimension. In other words, Virno posits that any thoroughgoing communist individualism must not only abstain from the idolatry of the social, but that it must comprehend how the *process* of individuation is necessarily continued and intensified by its transindividual dimension. It is worth noting that in his reflections on Marcuse, Lucien Goldmann used the very term *transindividual* (with no reference to Simondon) to identify what was missing from Marcuse's critical theory of emancipation. I'll return to this matter in the conclusion.

Remaining with Virno, the crucial debate—which could be instituted with the Marxian tradition in general and Marcuse in particular—has to do with the character of the “common” or “pre-individual” which “precedes” the individuation of the social individual (which is only truly individuated, of course, when it can appear *as* social individual): can we really refer to it as “common, universal and undifferentiated,” as Virno does? Aren't the unconscious drives, the physiological needs, the cultural proclivities and above all, the insertions into the technical apparatus of capitalism perfectly differentiated? More provocatively, could we not argue that in different ways—the one a thoroughly normative presupposition of universality, the other a through under-determination of the pre-individual capacity which is individuated in and through the collective—both Marcuse and Virno miss the crucial aspect of Marx's displacement of the question of human essence, the fact that it comes to be defined in terms of the *ensemble* of human relations? Lastly, and faithfully to the more pessimistic (and perhaps truer) strains in Marcuse, could we not question the limitations of the notion of the social individual when individuality itself goes “from a unit of resistance and autonomy ... to one of ductility and adjustment?”

#### THE CONCEPT OF LABOR BETWEEN ONTOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

At this point, it is necessary to take a step back and assay the philosophical and anthropological parameters of Marcuse's reading of Marx as the foremost thinker of communist individualism. What allows us to think the individual as a social individual? Marcuse's 1932 reading of Marx's then recently discovered Paris Manuscripts unequivocally answers: labor. It is indeed labor—conceived, in the terms of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, as “objectification”—that allows Marx, according to Marcuse, to overcome the sensualist materialism of Feuerbach, or rather, to develop the social, and socially alienated character of Feuerbachian sensuousness.

As Balibar has noted, it is the entanglement between consciousness and labor that defines Marx's relation to philosophical anthropology. For Balibar, this is indeed Marx's key displacement—alongside the move to the transindividual—of both “man” and “essence.” Neither realist nor nominalist, human essence is dialectical. Through labor, Marx confronts us with the *relational* character of philosophical anthropology. From the standpoint of the philosophical treatment of labor, it is then futile to pit relativist and particularizing socio-historical determinations against essence, since such historicism is refuted by the claim, put forward by the young Marcuse, that “the historical experience of man is taken up into the definition of his essence.” This does not mean that existence *absorbs* essence, since the dialectical tension between the two is precisely what the movement of objectification as socialization maintains.

For Marcuse, labor, as a philosophical category, “must be grasped as the real expression and realization of the human essence.” In keeping with the Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts, he depicts labor as *self-creation* and man therefore as an *objectifying animal*. As Feenberg elucidates, grasping things essentially (in light of Marcuse's Heideggerian reinterpretation of Marx's concept of species being) allows man to “produce” them according to their inherent standard. Production is appropriation, transformation, revelation and, indeed, objectification. In his Marxist politicization of the theme of authenticity, the question for Marcuse is not to have done with objectification, but with reification, the obstacle in the way of the sensuous assumption of man's capacity for free and social production.

Note that the link between sensuousness, production and objectification in the early Marx, as identified by Marcuse, also involves an element of passivity—such that it is not merely a matter of possessing objects but also of being an object (this too is part of the definition of man as a social individual), of seeing man as an “affixed, passive and suffering being”—even a being that finds a certain enjoyment in such suffering. As Marx wrote: “To be *sensuous*, i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a *sensuous* object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one's sense-perception. To be sensuous is to *suffer* (to be subjected to the actions of another). Man as an object of sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being, and because he feels his suffering [*Leiden*], he is a passionate [*leidenschaftliches*] being. Passion is man's essential power vigorously striving to attain its object.”

The social dimension is emphasized in Marcuse's early work on labor by the fact that men communicate *via objectification*. This is why, *contra* Virno,

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labor in the early Marx is not merely inter-individual but also transindividual (other men are present to me in their works, and I to them—not merely in the sense of an atomistic and atomizing network of transactions). But in the historical facticity of capitalism “man does not become, in estranged labor, the ‘means’ for his self-realization. The reverse happens: man’s self becomes a means for his mere existence.” Or, man’s dead labor confronts his living labor in the system of objects, knowledge and machines, in the fetishism of relations, in the dominion of dead matter over man.

Despite this valorization of the fundamentally social and creative character of labor qua objectification of man’s capacities and species-being, Marcuse classifies labor—especially in his 1933 attempt at a phenomenological-anthropological foundation of the concept—as a *burden*, as an inevitable remainder of alienation, as man’s submission to the “law of the thing,” in other words, as the persistence of Marx’s “realm of necessity.” The centrality of labor is once again addressed in the last work of what is commonly viewed as Marcuse’s Heideggerian Marxism phase, which had begun in 1928 with the ‘Contribution to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism.’ The essay I am referring to is ‘On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics,’ published in 1933. The starting point of Marcuse’s phenomenological inquiry is “the lack of a definitional determination of a general concept of labor” in economics. Reading this text after Marcuse’s groundbreaking treatment of the *Manuscripts* one is immediately led to ask whether it does not entirely ignore the twofold character of the concept of labor in Marx, in both its anthropological variant (as mapped out by Marcuse himself) and its role within capitalist valorization (the concept of abstract labor that Marcuse himself discusses in *Reason and Revolution*). In the 1933 text, labor is characterized, in terms which openly try to merge the Heideggerian and Marxist terminology, as a *fundamental event of human activity*. But the Heideggerian moment wins out, to the extent that labor is grounded in what Marcuse calls an “existential excess of human existence beyond every possible situation in which it finds itself and the world.”

Despite their considerable differences, which would militate for dating the 1933 text before the 1932 ‘Foundations of Historical Materialism,’ these early writings are marked by Marcuse’s patent desire to keep hold of the *ahistorical* moment of labor. This is precisely the object of Douglas Kellner’s criticisms, both in his *Telos* introduction to the 1933 piece and, at greater length, in *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*. But isn’t labor theorized, both in the interpretation of the early Marx qua synthesis of Feuerbach and Hegel, and in the attempt to provide a Heideggerian foundation for

economic science, as a historicizing form of existence? In this second text, Marcuse writes:

Labor is a specifically *historical category*: a category of human existence as historical existence. Labor presupposes a well-determined *relation to time* which thoroughly dominates human existence and guides its praxis. ... Human praxis is labor on and in the present through the "overcoming" and the transformation of the past while at the same time turned with anticipatory care towards the future. The laborer maintains himself in a stable way in his own temporality and in that of the objective world, and this attitude is expressed in many ways: in creating, handling and evaluating the material of labor, in distributing and administering the means of labor, and especially in partitioning time according to a general rule (both within the individual labor processes as well as in the division of existence into labor and "free time," in the determining of the length of the working day, etc.). Only within very narrow boundaries is the individual free to dispose of his partitioned time. The true "subject" of vital time lies in the various historical communities (or better, those "groups" that have constituted themselves into historical communities as the "dominating class").

But, can labor really be considered as a historicizing capacity which is not itself historical—that is, a kind of historical *a priori*? To put it differently, even if Marcuse defines it as a specifically historical category, it is not yet, even in the sense of the early Marx, a *social* one. This is especially so inasmuch as the measuring and partitioning of time is ascribed to the structure of subjective existence, and the subjectivity of this time to the capitalist class as a historical community—that is, not to capital itself. The passage from an ontology of labor to its Marxist account, from "partitioned time" to "surplus labor" is arguably irreversible. What remains an open question is the possible effect of moving to the question of abstract labor and to the notion of the social individual presented in the *Grundrisse* on the very concept of a communist individualism. Is the ontological and anthropological definition of labor from Marcuse's early writings compatible with the type of social individual that might be conceived *within* the one-dimensional society? What happens when any sense of labor "prior to," or even ontologically "originary" vis-à-vis the full deployment of capitalist self-valorization is undercut by the full theoretical import of the notion of abstract labor?

I think we can identify three breaks in Marcuse's concept of labor. The first involves the seeming regression from his reading of Marx in 1932 to the Heideggerian attempt at a phenomenological foundation of the concept of labor, from 1933. The second is to be found in the serious consideration of

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the two-fold character of labor in *Reason and Revolution*, where Marcuse inserts the anthropology and phenomenology of labor into the abstractive power of capitalist self-valorization. The third is then to be found, with the *Grundrisse* and the third volume of *Capital* as the background, in the discussion of the *technological* possibility of an obsolescence of labor in advanced capitalism, what Marcuse otherwise names, in a 1967 lecture to radical German students, 'The End of Utopia.' We could say that throughout his career Marcuse insists, in different guises, on the following statement from his early writings: "Labor is man's coming-to-be for himself within alienation, or as alienated man." But the nature and content of this alienation is transformed—as it passes from (or oscillates between) an ontological caducity, to the exploitative equalization of abstract labor, to the seemingly hermetically sealed universe of advanced industrial capitalism. The question remains: for the late Marcuse (and for that matter the late Marx) is there an essential domain of labor as objectification that can be wrested away from its reification in the administered fetishism of the one-dimensional society, or are we indeed obliged to invoke—in the realizable utopia of communist individuality—another dimension of practical activity, for example *play*?

As Marcuse had noted in the text on the philosophical foundations of the concept of labor: "Labor could never be totally unalienated," but "in play, one frees oneself from the alien quality of objects by totally determining them;" so that "a single toss of a ball achieves an infinitely greater triumph of freedom over objectification than the most powerful accomplishment of technical labor." Does this not resonate with certain attempts to leave behind the anthropology of labor, to abandon the Marxian paradigm for the sake of an affirmation of human activity beyond objectification, or even with Simondon's attempt to undermine the philosophy and the dialectics of labor with an inquiry into technical invention?

## MACHINES AND TECHNICAL ENSEMBLES IN THE THEORY OF CAPITALISM

The entanglement of ontology and anthropology with the question of capital and alienation is enriched, in my view, if we allow ourselves to speculate on Marcuse's brief but suggestive use of Simondon's writings on technology in his *One-Dimensional Man*.

One of the dominant theses in Simondon's work on technical objects (to my knowledge the only work that Marcuse read or referred to) is that the

activity of invention, within the sciences and techniques, is capable of piercing the substantialist veil that hides the processual character of the social and the operations of individuation—thus contributing, in a proto- or para-political manner, to the emergence of a transindividual dimension in which invention can function as a fulcrum for the formation of collectives that escape the normative rigidity of an *inter*-individual communitarian life. However, the presence of this political, or sociogenetic, dimension within the experience of invention does not eliminate for Simondon the need to think a recasting of the man-technics relationship. In other words, the micro-politics of invention at the level of the technical object must be doubled by a true transformation at the level of the technical ensemble, a transformation which for Simondon is not simply technical, or even psychic, but cultural. It is here that Simondon introduces the theme of a technical finality, understood as the immanent normativity or “self-valorization” that would follow the technical object’s trajectory of concretization.

Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* had germinated during his teaching in 1958–9 at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*—the very year of the publication of Simondon’s thesis on the mode of existence on technical objects—and Simondon’s work had already been the object of citation and commentary in the précis of that course, significantly entitled ‘From Ontology to Technology: Fundamental Tendencies of Industrial Society.’ In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse first borrows from Simondon in order to support the idea of a totalitarian rationality characterizing the technical ensemble, a form of human servitude generated by subjecting machines to the finality of the extraction of power (this is what Simondon calls the “autocratic philosophy of technics” that governs the exploitative and enslaving usage of machines). Marcuse then concentrates on the aforementioned theme of a renewal of political teleology within advanced capitalism. He discerns in Simondon the possibility of thinking a “new technology” that would also represent the advent of a new rationality, an exit from any dialectic of enlightenment or rationality. Marcuse identifies a non-reformist Simondon, a thinker who would introduce us to the possibility of a veritable revolution in what concerns the relation between technics, power and the deployment of human possibilities, a thinker of what Marcuse calls the “catastrophe of liberation.” Relating Simondon’s work on technics to the very real chances opened up by the technological rationality of contemporary capitalism, Marcuse proposes that the only way of turning the political effects of technological transformation into elements of emancipation would be to produce a wholly other idea of technology (and science). It is here that Marcuse, starting out from the idea that the “incompletion” of technics,

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demands from man to “make finality,” calls for a political inversion of technology and a “*political becoming*” of science that would allow a mastery of the transformation of values into needs. One could then eliminate the idea of an ethics supplementary to technological rationality and “translate values into technical tasks—materialize values.”

In order to assess Marcuse’s appropriation of Simondon, it would of course be necessary to delve at greater length into Simondon’s own stance with respect to Marx. Briefly, no usage of Simondon could or can ignore the manner in which his writings on technical culture and the transindividual constitute an effort to *neutralize* the link between antagonism and productivism that marked the politics of the Cold War—an effort grounded on the diagnosis of a repression of *invention* by work, together with a repression of the technical object by what Simondon, echoing Marcuse’s “performance principle,” aptly names the “morality of output.” But, even if Simondon mimics Marx in identifying the invisibility of the “hidden abode of production” (whether in Greek slavery or advanced capitalism) as a chief source of the mystification of production, the very character of Simondon’s project and its fundamental equation of work with alienation *tout court* make its plea for the emancipation of the technical object and the construction of a technical culture ring oddly in Marxian ears. Simondon’s attempt to evade the twin productivisms of the Cold War, and the very subjection of technology to planning—a critique that has been the object of a kind of revival as of late in terms of immaterial labor and cognitive capitalism—ultimately lead him, despite some cautious shows of sympathy, to attack Marxism as a theory which in the last instance colludes with the domination of a putatively unformed nature by a form-giving work; a variant of the Aristotelian theory of “hylomorphism,” in which the centrality of the concepts of antagonism (class struggle) and capacity (whether as human essence or labor-power) do not manage truly to *follow* the complexes of materials and forces, the lineages of inventions and transindividual processes that structure the social. Simondon’s book on the technical object should thus be read as an attempt to withdraw from the discourse *of* capitalism as well as the discourse on capitalism by means of a thought that refuses the paradigm of work, in order to look in the technical and scientific activity of invention for the key to a new vision of collective life. This of course allows us to gauge the limits of Simondon, both for the kind of inquiry undertaken by Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*, and for attempts to deal with contemporary transformations in capital. On the first count, whilst Simondon might help Marcuse to identify the manner in which the technical universe of advanced industrial society is a political universe, and how a politics could

be linked to the transformation of the technical ensemble and the forms of individuation connected to it, he exacerbates Marcuse's tendency, criticized by Paul Mattick, to ignore the crisis-prone and technologically restless character of the capitalist *economy*, as well as the role of antagonism within the development of technical forms. In other words, as Kellner suggests, he exacerbates the attempt to subsume the analysis of capitalism within that of technological rationality. On the second count, we could say that Simondon's strength—the manner in which he has been seen by some to anticipate the transformation of the social individual with the withering away of the national-industrial figure of the working subject—is also his weakness: by isolating a machinic and inventive option, and bracketing out the entire dimension of political economy, it becomes impossible for Simondon (and for those who might follow him) to think the external capture, or the immanent promotion, of invention and machinism in and by capital. For Simondon, the subsumption of technology is always merely formal, extrinsic, and never real or constitutive—so that he has no way to think the tendential indiscernibility between work, play and invention within capitalism—not to mention the political catastrophe of liberation that would be needed in order to even approximate the kind of emancipation of machines which he includes under the rubric of technical culture.

### MARX AMONG THE MACHINES

Before dealing with the political limitations of communist individualism, it might be worth returning briefly to a question introduced at the outset, involving the various uses of Marx in Marcuse. Firstly, we should note that from the very start that Marcuse understood Marx's work not just as a critique of political economy, but fundamentally as a theory of revolution—setting him apart from many of his colleagues in the Frankfurt school and partly explaining certain convergences with the thought emerging out of Italian *operaismo*. As he put it in the 1932 essay 'The Foundations of Historical Materialism,' where he saluted that crucial event which was the publication of the 1844 Paris Manuscripts, political economy in Marx "becomes the science of the necessary conditions for the communist revolution." Unlike those who might have preferred to disjoin the critical from the militant and revolutionary dimension of Marx's thought, Marcuse never flagged, even at his most pessimistic, in maintaining the centrality of revolutionary liberation to Marxist thought.

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Beside the themes of individuality, labor and alienation that we've already broached, Marcuse repeatedly put great stress in the "realm of freedom" beyond the material production and reproduction of the necessary conditions for existence. In the early writings, this theme, drawn from *Capital* volume 3, is the site of an *originary* anthropology of labor which, through Heideggerian lenses, Marcuse reads into Marx as an anthropology before and beyond alienation, to the extent that the latter appears as an "event resulting from the form and fullness of human existence as its realization. Thus, this praxis contains its goal and its end; it lacks that *being-delivered-over* to an 'alien' objectivity, that continuing and stable framing of an *imposed* event to which it must give itself up so that existence can be at all [...] praxis in the 'realm of freedom' is the authentic praxis and 'goal' to which all other labor is directed: the free unfolding of existence in its true possibilities." What would be worth evaluating at greater length is the distance between the conception formulated in the third volume of *Capital* and interpreted on broadly Heideggerian lines by Marcuse, and the remarkably different notion of the socialization of possibilities under the cooperative, technological conditions provided by the *general intellect* as they appear in the Fragment on Machines from the *Grundrisse*.

Though Marcuse often returned to the social individual of the *Grundrisse* in his later works, perhaps surprisingly he was never truly able to give any kind of articulation, dialectical or otherwise, to the relation between the development and suppression of the social individual, on the one hand, and the technical ensemble, on the other. In other words, he seemed incapable of analyzing the technical ensemble as an ensemble of *capitalist* social relations. Such a perspective was elaborated more or less during the same years by one of the key figures in the initial developments of Italian workerist Marxism, Raniero Panzieri. Marcuse had himself argued in 'From Ontology to Technology' that the neutrality of technology was itself a political concept, and that moreover: "Up to the present, technical progress remains the progress of an alienated labor, of a repressive productivity. Technicity became the most efficient method, the most fruitful way, to subjugate man to his instrument of labor." In his seminal 1960 article 'On the Capitalist Use of Machines in Neo-Capitalism,' Panzieri gave far greater substance to this kind of claim through a detailed reading of Marx's *Capital*.

Panzieri writes (the second half of the passage is a quote from Marx's *Capital*): "The automated factory *potentially* establishes the domination over the productive process on the part of the associated producers. But in the capitalist application of machinery, in the modern factory system 'the

automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are *coordinated* to its unconscious organs only qua conscious organs and together with them are subjected to the central motive force.' The capitalist use of machines is, thus, not the simple distortion or deviation of a rational development but "determines technological development," such that it "coincides with the incessant increase in the *authority* of the capitalist." But, given this horizon of increasing *consolidation* of capitalistic power via the "emptying out" (in both senses) of workers and the capitalist control over machines, the only chance for subversion according to Panzieri is to take advantage of the material possibilities of reversal, and to do this at the level of the process of production itself (i.e. on the factory floor), not in terms of the needs produced by automation.

Panzieri's critique, in the Italian context, was aimed at the fatuous separation of the question of technology from that of organization, politics and power (within and without the factory). It too, in a different sense, issued into the demand for a new rationality: "The dimension of *class* is expressed not as progress but as break, not as 'revelation' of the hidden rationality within the modern productive process but as the construction of a rationality that is both radically new and counter-posed to the rationality practiced by capitalism." Thus, it is not just the object or work, or even the relations of production, but the technologically-embodied *rationality* of the productive process itself which confronts the hollowed out workers as alienated. But it is not a latent, liberatory rationality within the technical ensemble that is to be sought out, but rather the partisan rationality of the producers themselves.

Furthermore, Panzieri, relying on quotations from Marx, makes an important argument relative to the question of pauperization, which puts the focus on political slavery rather than material impoverishment, and which is encapsulated in the following statement: "to the extent that the material situation of the worker improves, his social situation worsens"—what Marx famously referred to as the "golden chains" that capture the worker. What is at stake is the political or social abyss between capitalist and worker, not the question of absolute or even relative poverty. In other words, and this is the wager of workerism, *proletarian politics is not necessarily obviated by the capitalist use of affluence and the mollifying forces of consumerism*. Panzieri declares: "The so-called inevitability of the transition to socialism is not of the order of material conflict, but, on the very basis of the *economic* development of capitalism, relates to the 'intolerability' of the social gap, which can only manifest itself as political consciousness. But for this very reason the workers' reversal of the system is the negation of the whole organiza-

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tion in which capitalist development is expressed, and in the first place of technology as tied to productivity ... it is only by investing the roots of the processes of alienation, identifying the growing 'political dependence' on capital, that it is possible to configure a truly general class action." But this involves the break with the link between despotism and rationality and the social control of the process of production, *not the expansion—predicated merely on a different use of automation and a different configuration of needs—of the "realm of freedom."* That is why Marcuse is closest to Panzieri when, in the 'End of Utopia,' he repudiates the distinction between the two realms he had previously made.

By reintroducing antagonism, which is to say class struggle, into the discussion of technology, we can, by way of contrast, see that the passage from the Marxian theme of exploitation to that of domination *tout court*—which found its most thoroughgoing formulation in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—is also the point of convergence between Simondon and Marcuse: in both authors there is a tendency to propose a technological liberation in the context of a general theory of alienation that seems to ignore the very questions raised by the capitalist use of machines—and the way that the latter can only be conceptualized, if we do not simply remove all forms of conflictual subjectivity from the process of production, whether immediate or otherwise.

#### THE POLITICAL LIMITS OF EMANCIPATION, OR THE MISERY OF CRITICAL THEORY

Hans-Jürgen Krahl, a brilliant apostate of Adorno and leader of the German SDS, summarized the uniqueness of Marcuse within the field of critical theory by defining him, in a brief but essential article, as the "critical theorist of emancipation"—indeed the only one among the critical theorists to really insist on the necessity of a theory of revolution—be this a "total revolution," a "catastrophe of liberation" or a "revolution of needs." The nub of the question, which tellingly recurs in Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude*, is this: What, if anything, is a revolution beyond pauperization? Or, to put it in Krahl's terms: "How is it possible to develop the need for emancipation when we are guaranteed a repressive satisfaction of elementary material needs?" This is also, of course, the now ancient question of what revolution becomes, if the intrinsic link between labor and consciousness in the proletariat as subject of history is rescinded. That is, if the link between communism and the working class becomes, as it seems to have for Marcuse, a historical contingency and not a systemic necessity. As I have already noted,

this shift in the notion of emancipation is inextricable from the transformation of the problem of labor in terms of its problematic insertion into the capitalist technical ensemble (qua tendency towards automation)—which is in turn articulated with the capillary psychological, physiological and cultural integration of the consuming monad within the universe of the commodity-form. Whence the intensity of the contradiction, which displays the possibility of an abolition of labor at the same time as it perpetuates, beyond any dialectical rationality, the forms of capitalist domination—but which Marcuse, adding integration at the level of *needs* to the customary figure of capitalist exploitation, imagines can only be undone by the consequences of a Great Refusal from “outside.” Whilst saluting Marcuse’s unique maintenance of a “concrete utopia of communism” that goes beyond the counter-plan of a socialization of the means of production, Krahl, rehearsing criticisms levied with far greater force at Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas (in the essay ‘The Misery of the Critical Theory of a Critical Theorist: Response to Habermas’), nevertheless takes issue with the limitations of such a notion of emancipation. The crucial contribution of Marcuse’s line is to move emancipation beyond the mere transformation in industrial relations of property, a different insertion into the means of production, another submission of men to the “objective conditions of a violated matter.” In other words, Marcuse’s uniqueness would lie in his total repudiation of the “crude and thoughtless communism of generalized labor,” as Marcuse himself put it in ‘The Foundations of Historical Materialism.’ What makes Marcuse the critical theorist of emancipation is the fact that he poses anew the question of the construction and constitution of *communist social relations*—of a communism in which the socialization of the means of production is really just a “condition for organizing relations of solidarity among free men,” that is, to confront men in their sensuous transindividuality, to emancipate what Marx saw as their *social organs* and actually transform them into, or produce them as, social individuals. Where this project falls short—to recall Löwy’s insightful diagnosis in the pages of *Telos*—is in not infusing the romanticism of the Great Refusal (and the demand for a kind of transcendence-in-immanence of “good” needs and happiness) with the rationalism of the Machiavellian Prince, that is, in not asking the question of *organization*. As Krahl notes, Marcuse “does not satisfy the demand for determinate negation, his exhortation to a great refusal remains abstract, incapable of elaborating a political reality principle, that is to say, tactical rules, strategic maxims and organizational imperatives.” Having moved beyond the ultimately stultifying and cynically iconoclastic ban on “images of happiness,” Marcuse nevertheless fell into what Krahl correctly identifies as “one of the infantile extremist maladies that afflict nascent revolutionary movements:

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the initially inevitable confusion between the abstract demonstration of a pure principle of emancipation and its concrete deployment." Against this, in his remarks on Adorno, Krahl proposes "the organized partiality of theory for the liberation of the oppressed."

To conclude, I would like to take issue, despite my sympathies with his insistence on a reevaluation of Marcuse, with Fredric Jameson's identification of Marcuse's work with what he calls "the revival of the Utopian impulse," a revival that he links to Marcuse's delineation of late capitalism as a system of "abundance and total control," in which true happiness can only appear as a kind of "negative happiness," something like an intimation of another world, another society. In my view, this would be to evacuate Marcuse's political sensibility, which prevented him from judging the affirmative moment of '68 in the manner of other critical theorists. Despite the supposed desuturing of Marxism and the proletariat, and despite what he refers to as the "total mobilization of society against its own potential for liberation," Marcuse declares: "[T]he fact that no revolutionary class can be defined in the capitalist countries that are technically most highly developed does not mean that Marxism is utopian. The social agents of revolution—and this is orthodox Marx—are formed only in the process of the transformation itself, and one cannot count on a situation in which the revolutionary forces are there ready-made, so to speak, when the revolutionary movement begins." Thus, integration—into capitalist self-valorization and *its* technical ensemble—is not just an immunization against upheaval, not a mere closure: "The psyche appears more and more immediately to be a piece of the social totality, so that individuation is almost synonymous with apathy and even with guilt, but also with the principle of negation, of possible revolution." Utopia is at an end, as Krahl correctly remarked, when we are faced with the arbitrary withholding of the technological possibilities for emancipation. Or, as Marcuse suggested, an analysis of technological rationality reveals that today, the present is an anachronism.

As a last point, we might wish to note the ambiguity of this concept of revolution in Marcuse—an ambiguity which I think can be related to the tension internal to the very notion of a communist individualism and to the different Marxian (and non-Marxian) sources of the concept. In his early response to the "event" of the 1844 Manuscripts, Marcuse had written: "Capitalism is a catastrophe affecting the human essence," which "unconditionally requires the cataclysmic transcendence of the actual situation through *total revolution*." With the consideration of the failure of revolution, of *psychic and not just political Thermidor* as a problem which, beneath and

beyond labor, affected the individual at the level of the instincts or drives themselves—a consideration famously encapsulated in *Eros and Civilization*—the relative primacy, or anteriority, of the revolution of needs (or “liberation”) over the political revolution seems to have marked many of Marcuse’s post-war writings. If, as a commentator has acutely noted, Marcuse’s singular form of negative philosophy can be encapsulated in the dictum “reality is indicted by its potential,” then the crucial question opened up by the themes of the social individual and of communist individualism is how precisely we might wish to consider this *potential*; how we might begin to individuate a pre-individual (and social) dimension that could be conceived of as biological, psychic, linguistic or productive (the so-called “general intellect”). The insight garnered from Simondon—and which resonates with the criticisms voiced both by Krahl and Goldman in 1969—is that such a political individuation of the pre-individual dimensions of individuality, must necessarily be a transindividual, which is to say collective, task, not merely an imaginary merger between the universal and the particular. And, moreover, that this transindividual must find its own forms of organization, if it is not to collapse into the moral fantasies of a beautiful soul straining towards a non-alienated life.

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