

# 1. Communists Like Us

The project: to rescue “communism” from its own disrepute. Once invoked as the liberation of work through mankind’s collective creation, communism has instead stifled humanity. We who see in communism the liberation of both collective and individual possibilities must reverse that regimentation of thought and desire which terminates the individual.

Bankrupt: the collectivist regimes have failed to realize socialist or communist ideals. Capitalism too has played fast and loose with promises of liberty, equality, progress and enlightenment. Forget capitalism and socialism: instead we have in place one vast machine, extending over the planet an enslavement of all mankind. Every aspect of human life – work, childhood, love, life, thought, fantasy, art – is deprived of dignity in this workhouse. Everyone feels only the threat of social demise: unemployment, poverty, welfare.

Work itself defaults on its promise of developing the relations between humanity and the material environment; now everyone works furiously, to evade eviction, yet only hastening their own expulsion from the mechanical process that work has become.

Indeed work itself – as organized by capitalism or socialism – has become the intersection of irrational social reproduction and amplified social constraints. Fetters – irrational social constraints – are thus at the foundation of all subjective consciousness formed in the work process. And establishing this collective subjectivity of restriction and surveil-

lance is the first imperative of the capitalist work apparatus. Self-surveillance and doubt prevent any intimations of escape, and preempt any questioning of the political, legal or moral legitimacy of the system. No one can withdraw from this capitalist legality of blindness and absurd goals.

Each instance of work, each sequence, is overdetermined by the imperatives of capitalist reproduction; every action helps to solidify the hierarchies of value and authority.

And yet – why is it that the discussion of communism is taboo? This discourse is defamed and banished by the very people it pretends to liberate from their chains. Could it be due to the seductive, “progressivist” rationality of capitalism and its organization of work?

After all, capitalist work arrangements have succeeded in appropriating the discourse of communism – an analysis of labor and its liberatory power – and reduced it to techniques of manipulation: “Arbeit Macht Frei.” Even the socialist varieties trumpet recovery and reconstruction as though these were instrumental goals attainable through technical means. The “ethic” of social revolution has become instead a nightmare of liberation betrayed, and the vision of the future is freighted with a terrible inertia...

Not so long ago, the critique of capitalism was directed at its destructive, penetrating market. Today we submit to its traumatization of our souls, passively assuming that reinvestment strategies are the least oppressive form of planning – and socialism or capitalism becomes a moot point.

So now everything must be reinvented: the purpose of work as well as the modalities of social life, rights as well as freedoms. We will once again begin to define communism as the collective struggle for the liberation of work, that is, at once, an end to the current situation!

Empty-headed economists dominate all over the globe – and yet the planet is devastated, perhaps inexorably. We must affirm first of all that there is more than one path: the path of capitalist imperium and/or socialist/collectivist work forms whose persistence and vitality depend to a large part

on our own incapacity to redefine work as a project and a process of liberation. We will define communism as the assortment of social practices leading to the transformation of consciousness and reality on every level: political and social, historical and everyday, conscious and unconscious. Recognizing that discourse is action, we will forge a new discourse in such a fashion as to initiate the destruction of the old way. But our communism will not for all that be a spectre haunting the old Europe... We rather envisage an imaginative, creative process at once singular and collective, sweeping the world with a great wave of refusal and of hope. Communism is nothing other than a call to life: to break the encirclement of the capitalist and socialist organization of work, which today leads not only to a continuing surplus of repression and exploitation, but to the extinction of the world and humanity with it.

Exploitation has advanced, on the basis of nuclear accumulation, to become a threat of execution; the cycles of war and the danger of destruction are well known. Now we are not determinists – but today it is not only determinists who recognize that the end is, if not near, certainly close by, especially if we abandon power to the capitalist and socialist juggernauts of labor. Preventing catastrophe will require a collective mobilization for freedom. Why does everyday life tremble with fear and loathing? This fear is not the state of nature as described by Hobbes – that old excuse of the war of all against all, individual wills fragmented in a thirst for power. Rather what we have now is a transcendental, yet actually man made fear which seeps into every mind with immobilizing, catastrophic dread. Indeed hope itself has fled this hopeless, hapless, grey world. Beyond malaise, life sinks into sadness, boredom and monotony, with no chance to break out of the morass of absurdity. Communication – speech, conversation, banter, even conspiracy has all been taken in by the discourse of mass media. Interpersonal relations likewise have spoiled, and are now characterized by indifference, disingenuous disgust and self-hatred – in a word, we're all suffering from bad faith.

Amazingly, the fabric of human feelings has itself come unraveled, since it no longer succeeds in connecting the threads of desire and hope. As a result, this pseudo-war has passed over the world for thirty years without its key features being noticed; the Cold War escapes unrecognized as the true culprit.

During that whole time, human consciousness has been ground down into something more manageable, even complicit. As the individual sinks into isolated despair, all the built up values in the world collapse around him. Fear breeds impotence and paralysis of every sort. Only this collective stupefaction prevents onrushing despair from reaching its logical conclusion in collective suicide; apparently there's not enough passion left for such a crisp transformation. But the real tragedy is that exploitation masquerades as fear: individual extensions – of desires and hopes for the future – have been simply prohibited, but under a metaphysical, rather than political guise.

And yet. And yet all the developments in the sciences and in the productive capacities of labor point to the existence of an alternative. Extermination or communism is the choice – but this communism must be more than just the sharing of wealth (who wants all this shit?) – it must inaugurate a whole new way of working together.

Real communism consists in creating the conditions for human renewal: activities in which people can develop themselves as they produce, organizations in which the individual is valuable rather than functional. Accomplishing this requires a movement – to change the character of work itself. And redefining work as creative activity can only happen as individuals emerge from stifled, emotionally blocked rhythms of constraint. It will take more than the will to change, in the current situation; to resist neutralization itself demands desire.

Paradoxical as it seems, work can be liberated because it is essentially the one human mode of existence which is simultaneously collective, rational and interdependent. It generates solidarity. Capitalism and socialism have only

succeeded in subjugating work to a social mechanism which is logocentric or paranoid, authoritarian and potentially destructive. By means of progressive struggles, workers in the advanced industrial countries have succeeded in lowering the threshold of direct and dangerous exploitation; but this has been countered by changes in the character of that domination. Modern exploitation accentuates the disparity between rich and poor countries – now it is unfree workers in underdeveloped nations who bear the brunt of exploitation through violence and the threat of hunger. The relative improvement in the situation of the metropolitan proletariat is balanced by extermination in the Third and Fourth Worlds. As contradictions built into work have proceeded to their limit, it is not an accident that the liberation of work can now be accomplished by workers in the most advanced sectors of science and technology. What is at stake is the fundamental ability of communities, racial and social groups, indeed minorities of every kind to conquer and establish autonomous modes of expression – not just lifestyles, but the work process itself.

There is nothing inevitable about work – no destiny leads work into ever greater repressions. In fact, the potential for liberation inherent in work itself is more visible than ever. How can capital continue to present its work process as natural and unchangeable, when for technical reasons it is changing every day? This unexamined gap in the logic of work is the opening through which new movements of social transformation will charge pell mell.

Traditionally, the refusal to work, as an instance of struggle and as spontaneous action, has aimed at those structures which are obstacles to the real liberation of work. From now on, that struggle involves appropriating a new capital, that of a collective intelligence gained in freedom, the experience and knowledge that comes from breaking down the one dimensional experience of present day capitalism. This involves all projects of awakening and building towards liberation; in short, anything that helps reclaim mastery over work time, the essential component of life time. All the cur-

rent catchwords of capitalist production invoke this same strategy: the revolutionary diffusion of information technologies among a new collective subjectivity. This is the new terrain of struggle, and it is not utopian to believe that consciousness itself is the “swing voter” deciding if capitalist or non-capitalist roads are taken. Once, knowledge and power were stockpiled like so many canon or missiles; now the empowering of a collective consciousness, part of the turmoil of the workplace, threatens to unite small arms into a mass revolt.

From this perspective, communism is the establishment of a communal life style in which individuality is recognized and truly liberated, not merely opposed to the collective. That’s the most important lesson: that the construction of healthy communities begins and ends with unique personalities, that the collective potential is realized only when the singular is free. This insight is fundamental to the liberation of work. Work as exploitation has completed its development of the general, the mass, the production line; what’s now possible is to tap into the potential of individual creative energies, previously suppressed. Nothing less than a genetic breakthrough, this rhizome of autonomy in the workplace can establish itself as a productive enhancement – and a serious challenge to the dead weight of bureaucratic capitalism with its overcoded and de-individualized individual.

Make no mistake about it: communism is not a blind, reductionist collectivism dependent on repression. It is the singular expression for the combined productivity of individuals and groups (collectivities) emphatically not reducible to each other. If it is not a continuous reaffirmation of singularity, then it is nothing – and so it is not paradoxical to define communism as the process of singularization. Communism cannot be reduced in any way whatsoever to an ideological belief system, a simple legal contract, or even to an abstract egalitarianism. It is part of a continuous process which runs throughout history, entailing a questioning of the collective goals of work itself.

Glimpses of these new alliances are already available. They began to form and seek each other out at the time of the spontaneist and creative phase, which of course developed parallel to the big break-up and realignment in capitalist society to which we have been witness over the past three decades. To better locate and appreciate their importance, one can distinguish:

- \* molar antagonisms: struggles in the workplace over exploitation, criticisms of the organization of work, of its form, from the perspective of liberation;

- \* molecular proliferations of these isolated instances of struggle into the outside world, in which singular struggles irreversibly transform the relations between individuals and collectivities on the one hand, material nature and linguistic signs (meanings) on the other.

Thus the maturing social transformations, which in turn affect productive work arrangements, are induced, piecemeal, by each and every molar antagonism: any struggle against capitalist and/or socialist power formations contributes to overall transformation. Social, political and workplace advances condition each other. But, and this is our point, the revolutionary transformation occurs in the creation of a new subjective consciousness born of the collective work experience – this moment is primary, all stakes are won or lost here, in the collective creation of subjectivity by individuals. We need to save the glorious dream of communism from Jacobin mystifications and Stalinist nightmares alike; let's give it back this power of articulation: an alliance, between the liberation of work and the liberation of subjectivity.

Singularity, autonomy, and freedom are the three banners which unite in solidarity every struggle against the capitalist and/ or socialist orders. From now on, this alliance invents new forms of freedom, in the emancipation of work and in the work of emancipation.