

CONTOURS OF THE WORLD COMMUNE

1.

For years, the only claims that a different world was possible came in the form of messages from the Lacandon jungle or from those who thought creating a new world meant nothing more than introducing a financial transaction tax. When the 2008 financial and economic crisis hit the markets, all that quickly changed. Since then, sketches of a post-capitalist society have emerged in abundance, some even becoming best-sellers. Radicals have also increasingly renewed their efforts to think through how things could be otherwise. All the alternatives currently being discussed share one thing in common, namely, the fact that they've been drafted at desks rather than being hatched in the streets. To the extent that such conceptions have been shaped by recent struggles (the Occupy movement, the Arab Spring or the protests against mass immiseration in Southern Europe), they have been shaped mostly in a negative way. Not so much because these struggles were ultimately unsuccessful, but because they took place largely outside the sphere of production and instead fixated on achieving "real democracy". As a result, they hardly broached the question of a new society.

While both the mass strike debate of the Second International and the theory of council communism were more than mere reflections of real struggles, they did refer to such struggles—"The soviet was not a theoretical discovery" (Guy Debord). Today's musings on a new society, however, seem to be mere abstract utopianism, exactly the kind rejected by an entire lineage of critical theorists, from Marx to the famous *Bilderverbot* of Frankfurt's late Marxists. This line of thought saw utopias as presumptuous phantasies and held that it should be left to the people liberating themselves to determine the new forms of their collective life. Against ready-made outlines of a "liberated society", counterposed to the status quo in a purely abstract way, the Frankfurt School rightly insisted on working from concrete social contradictions: only the proletarians themselves, through lengthy class struggles, might eventually be able to build a new society. Communism should not be an ideal but a "real movement".

However, "scientific socialism" itself—which did acknowledge the utopians' "stupendously grand thoughts and germs of thought that

everywhere break out through their fantastic covering" (Engels)—ultimately took on an ideological character to the extent that it cited historical laws as a guarantee for victory. This historical optimism, completely discredited by 1914 at the very latest, nonetheless continues to inform contemporary theories. Unimpressed by all the catastrophes past and present, they either still hope that future struggles will unfold automatically and that everything else will follow, or declare the development of the productive forces to be the motor of history, which will ultimately lead to a happy ending. The partisans of revolutionary spontaneism never lost their faith in the growth of the global working class, while the delusion that technical development will somehow lead to liberation has now made a comeback in the guise of the exaltation of the digital.

If one does not think of revolution as being a complete miracle, as something that proletarians will achieve in the heat of the moment, almost accidentally, spontaneously, and without any goal set in advance, and if one does not delegate the project of human emancipation to the machines, then it would appear reasonable to try and reach some sort of understanding concerning the basic features of a classless society. Several objections to this have been raised: it's premature ("the struggles aren't quite there yet, the time isn't ripe"), unnecessary ("people will take care of it eventually"), pretentious ("you can't just predetermine it"), or simply impossible ("you can't anticipate that"). But there's never been a continuous movement defying the existing order without an idea, however vague, of what could take its place. A purely negative critique of the status quo, which some radical leftists invoke, is ultimately impossible. For example, aiming for "a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common" (*Capital*) follows necessarily from the critique of private property. But because this leaves a lot of room for imagination—including scenarios that have little to do with freedom and happiness—revolutionaries should state clearly what they want. Not in order to peddle recipes for redemption, but as a contribution to the necessary discussion on how to leave the old world behind. The commune shouldn't be conceived as something that will put an end to all of humanity's problems. On the contrary, only after the relations of production have been revolutionized will everything that is today "solved" by blind mediation, domination, and force even begin to appear

as a problem requiring a solution. It is in this sense that Walter Benjamin rejected the accusation that he absolutized communism as "the solution for humanity". On the contrary, he soberly described it as the possibility to "abolish the unproductive pretensions of solutions for humanity by means of the feasible findings of this very system; indeed, to give up entirely the immodest prospect of 'total' systems and at least to make the attempt to construct the days of humanity in just as loose a fashion as a rational person who has had a good night's sleep begins his day".

2.

Many recent outlines of post-capitalist society tend to "freeze" the social imagination at a level corresponding to the year 1875, a time when trains had already started chugging around the world, and the European workers' movement had reached a certain degree of organization; but the productive forces then were minuscule compared to those of today. In most regions of the world, the modern class of wage labourers did not yet exist, even Europe was mostly inhabited by peasants and illiteracy was widespread. One may or may not see why Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, divided communism into two phases. In the first phase, one's share of social wealth would still be determined by the working hours one had contributed, while only in the second phase (with the productive forces reaching ever higher levels) would the principle of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" be implemented and the state abolished. Whether such a "first phase" is necessary or even desirable today needs to be reconsidered given the enormous changes that have taken place since 1875. The orphans of Soviet Marxism aren't the only ones who still cling to the concept of the distribution of goods according to working hours: many anti-authoritarian leftists do as well. Even in pointedly modern conceptions, in which councils go by the name of *hubs*, each and every communard without question has a "timesheet" to fill in.

This model cannot simply be dismissed as the mere continuation of wage labour by other means: Private property in the means of production would be replaced by social planning, labour power would no longer be a commodity bought and sold haphazardly in a competitive

market. It also presupposes strict equality: each hour is worth the same, whether it belongs to a brain surgeon or to a mason. And yet, this first phase of communism is still visibly stamped with the “birthmarks of the old society” insofar as the distribution of goods follows the principle of the exchange of equivalents. Each worker “receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labour cost.” (Marx) Only under socialism would the exchange of equivalents, reduced to a farce under capitalism, be truly realized. Of course, not everyone would receive exactly as much as they’ve contributed—part of the total product would have to be spent on new means of production, general public projects, and care for children, the elderly, and the sick—but there would be no more exploitation. To this day, even the most elaborate models of “a new socialism” based on computerized planning remain on this level.

One could object that wherever there is still the exchange of equivalents, communism does not exist. Already in 1896, Peter Kropotkin rejected the idea that “all that belongs to production becomes common property, but that each should be individually remunerated by labour checks, according to the number of hours he has spent in production”, arguing that this model was just a “compromise between communistic and individualistic wage remuneration.” Marx deemed it “inevitable” at a certain stage, but never denied its imperfection, and consequently, in the long run, he aimed for a society that would finally break free of the horizon defined by the exchange of equivalents. But isn’t holding on to such a two-phase model anachronistic today, given that the “springs of co-operative wealth” would flow much more abundantly after the revolution? At a time when, generally, the world is populated by decreasing numbers of peasants and increasing numbers of unemployed people with college degrees, why cling to such a view? This is the fundamental question.

Scenarios involving an intermediate stage seem to at least bring to bear a certain realism. Instead of taking for granted that there will be complete social harmony from day one after the revolution, they take people as they actually are today as their starting point, namely, as generally selfish, taking too much and giving too little. But the

apparent realism of said model quickly collapses as soon as one thinks it through. Of course, any reasonably planned production in the commune would require at least a vague understanding of how much work goes into something. For example, the construction of an apartment building requires a certain number of people working for a certain number of months. Tying individual consumption to the number of working hours performed, however, is a different story, because it assumes that one could quantify the exact amount of time that has gone into making each product. Even with the most fastidious book-keeping—which already requires a ridiculous amount of time and effort—counting the working hours embodied in even the simplest of products would be an extremely difficult task. Take a bread roll, for example. One would have to know not only how many hours of labour went into the making of the oven (into which a whole chain of preliminary products went as well) but also, how many years the oven will be in operation, and how many rolls it will churn out in that time. Plus, the more one takes into account things like the means of transportation and all the other general preconditions of production, the more difficult the task becomes. And it becomes downright impossible, when one takes into account the increased application of science in the production process. How many seconds, for example, would one budget for the writing of software that is used at different points in the production chain, and how many for the body of common social knowledge that went into the totality of all production processes? Something that might still work for the petit-bourgeois concept of bartering clubs—where A would mow B’s lawn for an hour, and B would wash A’s Volkswagen in return—turns out to be completely impossible when applied at the level of social production based on an advanced division of labour and technology; any such attempt would require continuous time-tracking and would still be bound to fail. Communism, thus understood, would be a poor imitation of the capitalist market, in which the law of labour-time reigns in a blind and disorderly fashion.

What’s more, the model also rests on a strict separation between work and non-work which not only seems fairly unappealing, but would also require an administrative regulation of something that today works through blind force. Work, by definition, is that which is remunerated, and it will be remunerated only insofar as it appears profitable or is deemed necessary by the state. In said “first phase”, therefore,

the commune would have to sort every social activity into one of two categories in order to measure working time. This sorting would bring with it all sorts of arbitrary decisions. While the brewing and drinking of beer, for example, may easily be distinguished from each other as work and leisure activities respectively, things would be a lot harder with regard to intellectual activities. When it comes to the reproductive sphere, this would be nearly impossible, for it is not by chance that this sphere, historically assigned mainly to women, has sparked endless debates about the very concept of work. Would anyone who takes care of a child for an hour have that hour credited to their “timesheets”, or would that only be the case for those who take care of larger groups of kids on a regular basis? More generally, how desirable is it to divide life according to such categories? Furthermore, the mentality inherited from bourgeois society, upon which this model largely rests, would most likely fail to discourage people from cheating when taking account of their working hours. An apparatus that monitors the performance of each individual would be indispensable, even though proponents of this model are reluctant to admit to that necessity. Even if “timesheets” are not the same as the wage system, they are still backed by coercion. Such coercion is diametrically opposed to the declared objective of a change in consciousness, which cannot be taken for granted from day one of the revolution, but must rather orient all revolutionary activity from the outset.

The allegedly realistic designs of a “first phase” of socialism hinge upon contradictory assumptions: on the one hand, it presupposes people who are partial to free association, but on the other hand, these same people would still be animated by the good old shopkeeper’s spirit, wanting to take advantage of everyone else. A social revolution would once again risk missing out on creating a free society if it did not from the get-go act according to its new principles: making all work voluntary and transforming it—as much as possible—into *travail attractif*, free access to all goods, and the re-absorption of state power by society. Marx’s “first phase” of communism, therefore, was specific to a certain historic era, literally born out of necessity. Rejecting the idea of a transitional society, however, does not mean dreaming of a commune that magically appears overnight. Of course, this transformation would be a tedious and lengthy process, marked by adversities and setbacks. Still, rather than clinging to a century-old model with nothing

going for it but Marx’s seal of approval, revolutionaries would be better off charting the conditions for a revolution today, not least of all with respect to the development of the productive forces.

3.

Traditionally, communist critique of existing social relations would begin from the premise that the technical productive forces developed by capitalism, reified into machinery, simply need to be freed from the fetters of private property by overthrowing the relations of production, so that the productive forces can then enter into the service of a self-conscious humanity. Yet as early as the 1840s, Marx and Engels had noticed that capital-driven development would eventually reach a stage “when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being which under the existing relations only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces.” (*German Ideology*) Just as Herbert Marcuse noted that certain “purposes and interests of domination are not foisted on technology ‘subsequently’ and from the outside,” but that they “enter the very construction of the technical apparatus,” the Operaist Raniero Panzieri, with reference to Marx, criticized existing technology as a means of subjecting living labour to the commands of capital. The purpose of generating surplus value is not external to machinery, but constitutes and shapes every fibre of it just as it shapes the totality of the labour process.

This idea should be taken up. On the one hand, the “automatic factory potentially establishes the domination of the associated producers over the labour process” (Panzieri) and is therefore a precondition for a free society without scarcity. On the other hand, machinery in the modern factory system appears as “the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton, and together with the latter subordinated to the central moving force”. The capitalist use of machinery then does not appear to be a mere distortion of or deviation from an “objective”, basically rational development, but rather this use determines the development of technical progress itself. This was true when chimneys were still smoking and machinery was used to replace muscle power as much as for the age of bits and microchips, where code is supposed to replace the intellectual capacities of workers. Under existing

conditions, digital technology and analogue machinery both serve as a means in the class struggle from above: their purpose is not to improve living conditions, but to effect the most efficient exploitation of human labour. Specifically, they determine the rhythm of work and the organization of production, ensure the conformity of employees, and finally serve to destroy all interpersonal contact. By enforcing the Taylorist program of an extremely fragmented work flow in all areas of production, they contribute significantly to the devaluation of the commodity labour-power and consequently to the weakening of workers' bargaining power. In addition to this weakening, it also subjects those dependent on wages to the "despotism of the factory," as Marx described it. Workers are even more demoted to being mere appendages of the — now "intelligent" and networked — machinery. Driven by process-optimizing software, they primarily experience emptiness, stress, overwork, they are robbed of even the smallest amount of freedom and sometimes of any knowledge of the production process at all.

Where left-wing computer enthusiasts find "cell forms" of a new mode of production, which can already be seen in today's Industry 4.0, there is above all a triumph of capital over labour. The idea that new, digital "options for action expand the workers' disposition over the conditions of their activities" (Stefan Meretz) must sound like a sick joke in the ears of every Amazon worker. This circumstance, and the fact that just a handful of capitalists would be enough to secure the status quo given the present state of development of destructive forces, even if only at the expense of destroying the world, is familiar to those critics who see in this development nothing but a *technological attack* by elites on social movements and the allegedly insubordinate lower classes. One weakness of this theoretical tendency is that rather than making capitalism responsible for the current forms of technological development, it lays the blame on a small group of powerful people whose sovereign ability to act is overestimated, even if such individuals and their strategies undoubtedly do exist. Nonetheless, this position does accurately interpret one *function* of (digital) technologies. The consequence, however, is a predominantly defensive program aimed at sabotage and destruction, in which the potentials of new technologies for a communist society are hardly considered.

That a revolutionary transformation of existing conditions would

also mean the occasional organized sabotage of machines results from the fact that not all currently available technology can be used for a reasonable purpose; but only the productive forces developed under capitalism make a consciously organized mode of production conceivable in the first place. Undoubtedly, the wealth of contemporary society includes many things for which a liberated society would no longer have any use. Certain forms of work organization, energy and food production would have to be abolished alongside technologies invented solely for the supervision, control and regulation of human labour and the freedom of movement. However, a distinction should be made between the technical elements of contemporary machinery by themselves, and the arrangements they assume for the purpose of producing surplus value. Machinery as it exists today is more than the sum of its parts. Gears, rollers and belts, as such, do not make an assembly line. Although modern scientific progress and technical inventions have been subordinated to the imperatives of profit maximization, liberation will have no other forms of knowledge, technology, and machinery (or at least not in sufficient quantities) to start from. The notion that the machinery and science left behind by capitalism would be of absolutely no use after the revolution then seems ideological.

The crux of the matter is a widening gap between the consequences of the development of the productive forces for wage-labourers today and their possible uses for the commune. This is true especially when it comes to recent developments, which, despite any distrust one might have of pompous corporate talk of "technological disruption" and "Industry 4.0", do constitute a profound change. Just as the wheel and belt don't naturally form an industrial production line, the circuit integrated microchip doesn't necessarily serve to surveil the wage-dependent. A headset, a camera and Java code, as individual technical components, are not surveillance systems for logistics, and it is not for nothing that socialist hopes have been linked to the emerging digitization. The — often fetishized — figure of the hacker, for example, embodies qualitatively new possibilities for sabotage, diffusion and seizure of technologies of domination. Certain goods (operating systems, software, music, texts and so on) can be digitally duplicated without much effort and loss, and as a result they do not fit easily into the commodity form. This has made it possible to conceive

of new, non-proprietary forms of distribution and collaboration. Even the Internet, despite its military origins, nourished early ideas of cyber-socialism, where people's needs would be evaluated on a global scale in real-time, and production would be adjusted accordingly.

Under the label "the internet of things", which means nothing more than the fact that different devices (things) are connected to the Internet and can respond according to predetermined criteria, this potential for satisfying needs in real-time has expanded to the sphere of tangible products. This does not just refer to "smart" refrigerators or to cybernetic housing units, that is to say, the often overemphasized consumer side of things, but to the changes brought about in production, maintenance and transport by networked machines. Here, automatically monitored and demand-oriented maintenance cycles unleash a great potential for saving time. The principle of just-in-time production can be implemented much more efficiently this way than by warehouse workers, simply because the warehouses can communicate directly with the suppliers, bypassing human intervention. Storage robots receive, sort and register the orders directly. Once put into operation, such fully automatic feedback loops replace a considerable number of workers, since the only human intervention they require is to be serviced from time to time. Under currently existing conditions, where potential free time and leisure manifest themselves as unemployment, this is indeed a technological attack on workers' power, but it also points to the possibility of a world that makes physical labour superfluous on an unprecedented scale. For these reasons, the digitalization of labour and distribution processes should be welcomed as steps towards a well-functioning planned economy and the actual abolition of toil. Even if it only serves to exploit human labour power more intensively, it would be a fetishization of technology to blame technological progress as such for the misery of the current situation: though ascribed to technology, the forces at work are in fact social in origin.

Like every new productive force, the "digital revolution" can at times point beyond what currently exists and come into conflict with the given relations of production and ownership. Capital has responded with "innovations" that curtail the potential of ever-increasing computing power. In the software industry, a large portion of the research has gone into enforcing the commodity form in the digital sphere for

many years. Furthermore, personal computers are no longer "universal machines": their possibilities are limited by their assigned interfaces and programs so that they function only as the terminus of digital capitalism. This is justified as "user-friendliness": anyone who uses a computer for reasons outside of research, development and production today is no longer *supposed* to understand what is going on in the device, and is instead made dependent on digital services. As with most productive forces within capitalism, the development of the computer is characterized by the fact that in dealing with them, the user does not learn any of the skills proper to the productive force. On the contrary, we find ourselves in a situation in which the widespread usability of computers is paired with an extensive digital illiteracy. Technological progress has become a source of social regression; the culturally pessimistic suspicion that smarter phones require ever dumber people is not that far-fetched.

A revolutionary movement must advocate neither for the socialist mass-production of computers and smart objects as they are today, nor for a blind destruction of technologies. Instead, it would have to work towards the potentials latent in these technologies. On the one hand, this means spreading the knowledge necessary to use them and on the other hand, identifying those elements of the machinery whose sole purpose is to serve the mandates of surplus-value production and rendering them harmless. The point is not just to abolish titles of ownership, but to reclaim social control over technology, which would also mean profoundly transforming the existing machinery to meet people's needs.

4.

Scarcity is no longer the result of an insufficient means for producing wealth; it is caused solely by the existing property relations. Monitoring individual labour performance becomes even more questionable with that in mind. Despite the immense scale of productive forces that the commune will acquire, it is certainly possible that bottlenecks will still occur. However, these will not be eliminated by adopting timesheets. A control system of that sort would actually unnecessarily tie up energies and hinder the transformation of consciousness necessary for the creation of an "association of free individuals" and "social

individuals.” The success of the communist revolution may ultimately depend on this change of consciousness. People themselves must be added to the list of productive forces whose potential can only fully develop in a free society. Here, it is apt to recall thinkers from Fourier to Marcuse, who theorized a liberated society in which ‘passion’ would become productive without coercion.

According to various sociological studies, the top priority of employees in technologically and economically developed regions of the world is that their work be interesting, meaningful, and that it carry responsibility. As David Graeber shows by pointing to *bullshit jobs*, jobs so stupid that their completion would fill any half-sane person with shame rather than with pride or satisfaction, capitalism is unable to satisfy these needs. In the commune, these jobs will be eliminated. Others will be automated. What remains will be transformed as much as possible into *travail attractif*; work that is done in free cooperation with others instead of under the command of a boss, work that helps develop the workers’ “senses, capabilities, and faculties of reflection” (Meinhard Creydt) rather than just aiming at maximum output. And finally, even boring jobs could become bearable if they are rotated and thereby only performed for short periods of time.

Of course, steel production cannot simply be turned into play. But even there, automation booms have resulted in global overproduction despite a shrinking workforce. However, ‘passion’ will become productive not so much when it comes to monitoring mostly automated processes, but in solving tricky problems. Rather than establishing a control regime that prevents people from shirking their work duties, the communards ought to dedicate themselves to organizing and imparting practical and theoretical knowledge, education, and skills in all sectors of society in an egalitarian manner. Even today, skilled workers are more productive than the unskilled, and communism can be less than ever a communism of factory workers. Instead, everyone’s capabilities would be developed so that fields like mechanical engineering, medicine, transportation services or computer science would be available to them. Overcoming the division between manual and intellectual labour as quickly as possible would have to be a guiding principle for the revolutionary movement from the start: the noticeably high amount of manual labour performed as a hobby—the arts and crafts boom, urban gardening, model making, fixing up old cars, etc.—

indicates a ‘productive’ passion to do something with one’s hands. The goal should not be the most fair distribution of work and free time, but rather the humane abolition of this very separation along with the greatest possible automation of production.

5.

Despite the unprecedented potentials for eliminating stupid jobs, humanity’s old dream of a technological abolition of work won’t be fulfilled even in the so-called digital age. Sceptics most commonly reference care work to demonstrate the limits of automation. However, an equally important example is agriculture, where the commune would first have to undo a number of productivity advances which have had catastrophic consequences. This exemplifies the unpleasant fact that the commune would inherit from capitalism today not only sci-fi-esque productive forces, but also a mountain of unresolved problems. The Communards of 1871 certainly did not know about computers, but they also didn’t have to worry that the planet would be irreversibly destroyed. The trajectory of critical theory in the 20th century reveals how alongside relations of production, there is an increasing focus on *what* is produced and with *what* consequences. The Situationists in the 1950s were probably the first revolutionaries who attached importance to the destruction of cities by automobile traffic and whose program called for the abolition of the “parasitic sectors”.

For the commune, the infinite list of pointless or even harmful activities which determine everyday life in the metropolis seem to be a gift at first, since their abolition would immediately free up huge amounts of time; entire industries could be shut down and therefore many more people could work on tasks that can neither be automated nor transformed somehow to be enjoyable. But in the course of its development, the irrationality of capitalism has impregnated humanity’s entire metabolism with nature and materialized itself concretely in space. As more than mere examples, see the completely unsolved energy problem and the “fragmentation of cities into the countryside” (Debord)—those notorious urban sprawls whose bleak non-places only exacerbate the former through small scale development and by making the use of cars unavoidable. The commune would not only have to invent a new energy supply, it will most likely have to work for a long time demolishing

such non-places and rehabilitating slums in the global south, reshaping agriculture and restoring degraded areas, without being able to count on too much help from robots for these tasks. This is no reason not to exhaust the possibilities of automation in other fields — especially in poorer areas of the world where cheap labour power has hitherto made it unattractive — indeed automation would free up forces for cleaning up. But it reduces expectations that a real cornucopia has fallen into the lap of humanity with the advent of new technologies, merely because digital goods can multiply infinitely and now the hair dryer can communicate with the toaster via the internet.

6.

The wealth of the commune will hardly be the same as the wealth we know, only produced under different relations. Nor is the point to give metropolitan residents more of what they already have: more flights, cars, cell-phones, and ugly, cheap t-shirts. And not because those needs could be denounced as “artificial” and juxtaposed with so-called natural ones. As the late Marxists from Frankfurt demonstrated, distinguishing between artificial and natural needs tends to be arbitrary in an authoritarian sense, because nature, as manifested in individuals’ drives, and society are inextricably intertwined in every need. As products of the existing *class* society, however, needs are not innocent nor should they always be projected into a classless society. Adorno answered this dilemma on the one hand with the dialectical core of his argument: reorganizing production towards the satisfaction of “even and especially those [needs] produced by capitalism — then the needs themselves would be decisively transformed”. It would “quickly emerge” that the masses don’t need the “trash” forced upon them today. On the other hand, he answered with ideas of equality and solidarity: “The question of the immediate satisfaction of need is not to be posed in terms of social and natural, primary and secondary, correct and false; rather, it coincides with the question of the *suffering* of the vast majority of all humans on earth. If we produced that which *all* humans now most urgently need, then we would be relieved of inflated social-psychological concerns about the legitimacy of their needs.”

Due to the extent of those most urgent and unsatisfied needs, especially in the southern hemisphere, and additionally the limits of

nature’s resilience, a *world* commune would have to completely re-shape many things on a global scale. This would not be in order to make everything look the same everywhere; there would surely be regions that would be considered to be “lagging” by today’s standards, in other words less technically and industrially developed. But, in order to redress the prevailing lack of almost everything in poorer regions of the world — housing, hospitals, even sewer systems — without destroying any prospect of the planet’s recovery, energy and resource consumption will have to sink drastically in the old centres of capitalism. Despite a certain tendency for proletarian conditions of existence to homogenize worldwide, those on social welfare in Germany are still materially better off than any textile worker in Asia, and the average Western European still causes several times more carbon dioxide emissions than the average resident of the African continent.

Without posing the question of ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs and far from any austere anti-hedonism in a green guise, a social revolutionary movement would aim at a different kind of wealth in the capitalist centres. While wealth today presents itself as an ‘immense accumulation of commodities’, being not so much social, but a mere sum total of private, unequally distributed possessions, the commune would have to aim not only for maximal socialization in the sphere of production, but also in the spheres of use and consumption. Contrary to any cult of community, the “right to solitude” (Marcuse) and the retreat into private life would be inviolable. However, unlike in the profit economy, built on bulk sales and planned obsolescence, the private sphere in the commune would no longer be primarily the space in which a steadily increasing flow of accumulated commodities must be devoured in order to keep the machine running. If canteens and laundromats became spaces of encounter beyond their bare functionality, it would no longer be necessary to have a dishwasher and washing machine in every apartment. With a few immediate measures, the commune would be capable of solving problems in a flash that technocrats endlessly grind their teeth on. Rather than continuing with the unmitigated disaster that is “e-mobility” — electric cars consume the same amount of labour, resources, streets and space in cities as cars that run on gas, and instead of exhaust gas pollution there is the highly toxic production of batteries — the commune could simply build a few tramways (with cars gone, there is no need to expend huge amounts

of effort to dig tunnels into the earth). With no harried tourists and managers, air traffic could be reduced drastically in order to let the planet breathe a little.

Even those proletarians who live in the better-off regions of the world would still have much to gain from a revolution. The notion of *communal luxury*, which first appeared during the Paris Commune in 1871, denoting efforts to abolish the separation between profane material production and art in a new way of creating urban space, would be worth taking up again. Communal luxury would have to be the leitmotif of any new society. At best, luxury for all exists today in the form of public libraries that the state has to operate since they are not profitable. The more the commune develops its social wealth, the more the question of keeping track of individuals' consumption will be obviated.

7.

The irrationality of the status quo on the one hand and the potentials it has given rise to on the other give us a rough idea of what a free society might look like: reconstruction of existing machinery in accordance with the needs of producers; elimination of senseless occupations, with necessary tasks automated or reorganized to be enjoyable, or, if this is not possible, job rotation for onerous, yet indispensable tasks; the elimination of wage labour with access to goods no longer being contingent on one's own contributions; the development of a truly social form of wealth. But this says little about the social forms that would make all these things possible.

Such forms are the key: no matter how obvious the destructive and irrational character of the current mode of production has become and no matter the potentials which new technology presents, nothing will change as long as the current social forms are the only conceivable ways for billions of people to coexist. Just as one rejects the left-wing realism that merely perpetuates aspects of the existing misery, so too one must reject a pseudo-radicalism that gushes over isolated revolts, preaches the greatest possible destruction, but can only answer questions concerning a new society with vague platitudes about the total freedom of the individual. Those questions ask for a new form of social mediation, one in which what is general is not inimical to what is particular, but is its deliberate creation. Real socialism,

though born out of the October Revolution, turned Marx's program of the "reabsorption of state power by society" into its gruesome opposite by enthroning a state power with totalitarian traits. This underscores the enormity of the challenge in overcoming the unfettered particularism of the bourgeois market economy by means other than state coercion, a solution which assigns every individual her place. A free society would have to overcome both. That is, on the one hand, it would have to shape the vital material processes in a planned, cooperative and deliberate manner, processes which today take place blindly and haphazardly as a result of competition and crises. On the other hand, it would have to "reabsorb" those functions previously performed by the state but which continue to be necessary, yet do so without being an instrument of coercion apart from society. The first is the necessary condition for the second: only an egalitarian society in control of the material essentials of life is capable of making the state — an external nexus (Marx: *Zusammenfassung*) holding together a disjointed society — superfluous. The separation of the economic and the political, typical of capitalism, is then eliminated.

Historically, sketches of this sort, far from being utopian, were informed by the actual practice of the proletariat. Only after the Paris Commune of 1871 did Marx and Engels conclude that their 1848 program of taking state power was obsolete, while the workers' councils that arose repeatedly from 1905 onwards inspired a decidedly anti-state communism. In the first case, what led Marx to speak of a "revolution against the state" was primarily "the suppression of the standing army by the armed people", the fact that elected municipal councillors were recallable at any time, and that the commune was a "working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time". The communards' uprising was geared towards smashing the old centralist state power and replacing it with a network of communes ruled by the local "self-government of the producers". In the later council model, most elaborately described by Anton Pannekoek, the idea of a "working body" with recallable delegates was extended, but here it was to be strictly based within and coupled with *production*. Society was to be built like a pyramid from the ground up with the factory plant as the decisive unit: "There is no separation between politics and economy as life activities of a body of specialists and of the bulk of producers.... The councils are no politicians, no government. They are

messengers, carrying and interchanging the opinions, the intentions, the will of the groups of workers". "Not even the most central councils bear a governmental character", for they "have no organs of power". There is no longer a state as a centralized force separate from society.

For decades, workers' councils would remain the alternative to Eastern state socialism for many radicals. The "remarkable persistence of the *real tendency* toward *workers councils*", which gave the Situationists some of their optimism, is now long gone. Yet, no other form of organization has emerged in the struggles of the last decades which hints at a stateless society. The recent occupations of city squares are a *means of struggle*, arising from—and appropriate to—the fragmentation of the working class; but unlike councils, they do not *anticipate a new organization of society*. With their horizontal self-organization, the occupied squares of Greece, Egypt, and Spain followed in the footsteps of councils, to a certain extent. However, they not only remain detached from production, that is, from the decisive lever for the dissolution of capitalist relations, but they also had no clearly defined practical foundation other than general discontent. The mass assemblies on some of these squares, in which everyone simply represented themselves—distrusting official politics, for good reason, but nonetheless latching onto their identities as citizens all the more strongly—resulted in endless idle talk that bored everyone fairly quickly. Everyone simply meeting on a lawn to discuss anything and everything is hardly a model for the commune.

In many ways, the old conception of the council certainly seems old-fashioned, if not obsolete. In Pannekoek's sketch from 1947, every worker is assigned to a single workplace, her entire life is centred on production, and the entire social fabric appears as a conflict-free organism. If a council, however, is simply understood as everyone who lives or works in a certain place discussing matters of common interest, putting the results of those discussions into practice, and consulting with other councils by means of delegates recallable at any time, then this form would likely be the backbone of a new commune. That is, if it should come into existence at all, and only until something completely different is invented. The basis on which councils, grass-roots assemblies—or whatever one may want to call them—organize and how they interface with one another would differ from place to place in accordance with local conditions and would certainly change

frequently. According to Horkheimer, "the instability of the constitution would be a characteristic trait of a classless society: the forms of free association do not condense into a system."

The conditions, particularly in the global North, for such a free association have improved considerably in several respects over the last few decades. First, there is the increase in free time. Only those not overly absorbed by the realm of necessity are able to take part in public affairs. Secondly, the general level of education is higher today than it was when the first councils emerged. More people can now read and write and speak foreign languages, many have travelled a bit of the world, and have been able to pursue personal interests beyond wage labour. Thirdly, information technology presents completely new opportunities to coordinate production and gauge needs without a central planning authority. What is needed can likely be determined much more easily with computers and the internet than using the postal service and commissars, just as it would be easier to communicate at which points of production additional help may be required. Just as today people arrange "events" electronically, agricultural communes could signal when help with the harvest would be welcome and anyone could check whether or not they could contribute. Factories could coordinate their workloads, regulate the circulation of goods, and exchange knowledge born out of experience. At each node there would have to be responsible teams, but people could move extensively between occupations in accordance with their interests and talents. Goods would not rot in one place while they are needed in another, as they did under real socialism. Production and distribution would not be the only things facilitated by technology. The ecologically mindful collective utilization of goods, today just another branch of capitalist business known as the *sharing economy*, would also be made easier. Anyone could track any process in which they were interested. The transparency which Pannekoek expected from the dissolution of the individual plant ("now the structure of the social process of labour lies open before man's eyes") would be realized to an extent he could hardly have imagined in 1947. Moreover, the "abundance of telecommunications techniques" which the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem expected twenty years later to be put into the service of "constant control of delegates by the base" has since grown considerably. Because sociologists keep rambling on with buzzwords like "communication",

“networks”, “knowledge society” and so forth, one could almost be ashamed for entertaining notions like this. Such notions do suggest themselves, however, and the many opportunities that digital technology could present in a free society underscore the narrow-mindedness of those for whom they are merely a perfected way of measuring working hours.

As a result, councils or assemblies today would not have to grapple with a number of trivial tasks. What remains would be the problem of making certain decisions that affect many and hence cannot be made at a local level or by mere technical coordination. Decentralization, as envisaged in the 1871 program of the communards and still desirable to this day, has its limits. For example, it does not make any sense and it is not even possible in some cases to produce everything locally. A global commune, or one encompassing only large regions for a time, would face questions concerning the use of limited resources that can only be answered centrally. Such a commune, based on non-authoritarian structures whose central organs merely follow directives “from below”, could be easily overwhelmed by its tasks. For everyone to be involved in every decision may be utopian in the *negative* sense of the word. Such limits would have to be dealt with in some fashion to prevent the emergence of a political sphere populated by specialists.

Hence, the disappearance of the state would not yield an amorphous condition, but rather require a highly developed form of social self-organization. The “re-absorption of state power by society” would demand an entirely new way of dealing with problems for which the law, criminal justice and prisons are responsible today. Much, even most, of what is now crime, like property crimes, is the product of material necessity and would automatically disappear with said want, but some problems would remain. We must build on the critique of the Soviet legal scholar Evgeny Pashukanis who deemed “criminal law, like law in general” to be “a form of the relationships between egoistic and isolated subjects” and rooted in the bourgeois principle of equivalence. Retribution must be replaced by a practice of betterment and rehabilitation which will “render the court case and court verdict totally superfluous”. Instead of building prisons — “a social crime and failure”, according to Emma Goldman — and wasting time with a legal system, which today is growing out of control, the communards of

the future would have to work towards a new method of resolving conflicts which helps “ameliorate” violent individuals. This may even involve some coercive measures. Fundamentally, the challenge is to make sure that the dissolution of legal relations does not amount to a regression to a condition worse than the status quo, in which at least the very abstractness of the law ideally protects the individual from state despotism. The “re-absorption of state power by society” cannot mean that the individual is entirely at the mercy of the caprices of their neighbours or that a bourgeois society governed by abstractions is replaced by the immediacy of small communities. For this, there is no guarantee. It is one of the many great but not unsolvable challenges that humankind would face.

8.

The changes outlined here would affect gender relations in a number of ways, but they would not necessarily put an end to the misery that comes with those relations, which range from the gendered division of labour and gender stereotypes to violence against women. Gender relations would likely play a central role in the class struggles which create the commune, and female communards would certainly insist on concrete and immediate changes. The complete elimination of established gender relations would likely remain a task for several generations. In other words, no immediate harmony would be established, and in fact struggles around gender would actually intensify as they did in most modern upheavals, like in 1871, 1917 and the subsequent years, 1936/1937, and in 1968. Despite being intimately entangled, gender relations and the capitalist mode of production are not one and the same. That is why today many feminists make do without any critique of capitalism and why, conversely, there could be male communards who would be unwilling to relinquish their gender roles and who would be more drawn to writing software than changing infants’ diapers. Still, attempts to overcome the ways of the old world in this respect would find much more favourable conditions.

Firstly, the end of wage labour would do away with a factor which contributes to (but does not necessarily create) the stability of this peculiar gendered division of labour in spite of the tendential erosion of classical patriarchy. As we wrote in another text: “The ability to bear

children is generally a disadvantage on the labour market for women, whether they actually intend to have kids or not; if and once they actually have children, this almost directly leads to women, as they earn lower wages, being the ones who take care of them." If the labour market is replaced by a deliberate division of social tasks, this would somewhat improve the chances of overcoming this archaism. Where everything is subject to collective discussion, men would at the very least have to think up a few good reasons for not contributing to mundane things like child rearing and housework.

Secondly, many of the tasks assigned to women today could be dealt with collectively. In this respect, the next revolution would not have to invent all that much; this idea is as old as the practical attempts to implement it—one need only think of Alexandra Kollontai's advocacy for collective living arrangements and communal child care in the early Soviet Union. This is not even necessarily incompatible with capitalism: when women are to be mobilized for wage labour, government institutions sometimes take care of children. However, this interest in female labour appears, in light of mass unemployment, to be rather limited in most parts of the world; even where it exists, child care remains a private endeavour left to grandparents and neighbours (in China there are entire villages inhabited only by the elderly and children), since it is cheaper. Liberated from financial considerations, the commune could reshape, according to existing needs, all that is neglected in today's world because it is not productive.

Thirdly, the married couple and family would disappear, if not as a way of life, then as an economic unit, since there would be no private wealth, no bank accounts, no real estate, no inheritance. The unholy fusion of material interests and intimate human relationships would be eliminated. This would almost certainly be beneficial to the relationships between parents and children and between genders. No woman would be forced to suppress her wish for a divorce for fear of sliding into poverty because she no longer has access to her husband's income or a roof over her head. Moreover, the private and the social would take on an entirely new character through changing their relationship. The hope for happiness placed in the family today, often only to be greatly disappointed, is mostly a reaction to inhuman conditions; the homey existence in the small family collective is the polar opposite of a society in which no one can feel at home. If people still want

to live in nuclear families after the revolution, certainly no one would be inclined to forbid this, but the desire to live this way would diminish. And if it does not disappear entirely, it would still yield less tragic results than today, as individuals would have a completely different place within society, and the economic function of the family would be gone.

To the extent that today's gender relations are enmeshed with a certain opposition between wage labour and housework, including child rearing, a social revolution would fundamentally facilitate the emancipation from those relations. There is, however, no guarantee of any progress whatsoever. Even if child rearing is organized rationally and socially, it could still be left to women; thus, all those facets of gender relations outside of a certain division of labour would be even less likely to disappear by themselves. The historical link between classical gender stereotypes—which continue to exist, though they are in flux in late capitalist, liberal countries—and the partition of the social process into a market economy and private reproduction is quite obvious. Nevertheless, they have thrust deep roots even in the most hidden corners of people's inner lives and continue to be a source of identity. If only because these gender roles are developed and lived *subconsciously*, their complete elimination will take time: "Whereas particularly the destruction of state power can be thought of as a concentrated 'overthrow', the necessary transformation and self-transformation of (one's own) gender subjectivity can hardly be thought of as anything but a lengthy, culturally revolutionary process, that can become eruptive from time to time but will generally only take place little by little in everyday interpersonal relationships and new cultural production" (Lux et al).

9.

The transition to the commune can neither be thought of as the conquest of state power nor as the result of a gradual expansion of an allegedly already burgeoning new logic of production, and not even as a combination of both, that is, as a joint venture of a left government and alternative practices from below. Not much needs to be said about the Marxist-Leninist understanding of revolution: conquest of state power, nationalization of the economy followed by a patient waiting

game as the state “withers away”. In rejecting this view, however, the necessity of a rupture has given way to an alternative gradualism under titles like Commons or *Wertkritik*, an allegedly ground-breaking renewal of Marxist thinking that, after its farewell to the working class, moved increasingly closer to the green, alternative ideology of the 1970s. Embellished as a decoupling from the “commodity-money system”, islands with a different way of living and producing are to be established in order to undermine that system step by step. To the extent that it is possible to create a livelihood outside of the market, there is certainly no reason not to do it. Not much can be done, however, without putting an end to property, understood not just as the expropriation of those who currently control the means of production (the first decisive confrontation), but also ending the separation *between* enterprises, which would be abolished as such and replaced by mere nodes in the flow of social production. Without a revolutionary mass movement, it is not possible to attain sufficient resources for a different kind of life and, if they were available, they could hardly maintain their independence from market relations in the long term.

The transition to the commune is only conceivable as an *unstoppable movement of occupations*, appropriating whatever is of use for it—housing, public buildings, factories, farmland, means of transportation—while blocking or sabotaging anything that must be shut down. The key is to use anything that is captured to keep expanding the movement, otherwise the whole thing would collapse. Goods must simply be distributed, services like medical care or transport provided for free; money would not be “abolished” by decree as in Soviet war communism, but would become superfluous, likely having already been devalued by the deep social crisis. Such a practice has appeared in all the great uprisings as the common goal makes petty questions of ownership irrelevant; in May 68, farmers brought the fruits of their fields to the occupations in Paris; in many of the square occupations of recent years food was given out freely, the injured were treated, tasks that needed to be done were shared voluntarily.

The challenge, however, which can hardly be overstated, is to go beyond the looting and distribution of goods and to start producing in a new way. How a factory works is best known to those who work in it; nothing happens without their cooperation, even in the age of high-tech; supported by anyone who is interested in this endeavour,

they could begin immediately to adapt work processes to their needs, and, if necessary, to convert production in accordance with the requirements of the movement and give their products to the embryonic commune. Even the social revolution in Spain in 1936/1937 already faced the problem of being economically dependent on regions that were *not* in upheaval. More so today, the global division of labour would quickly doom any purely local attempt at revolution. This does not mean that the revolution would have to break out on the same day everywhere in the whole world, but rather that everything would be lost if it does not quickly spread to large areas which, at the very least, are able to furnish it with the bare necessities. A deep crisis spreading to a number of countries could turn out to be the catalyst for such an expansion.

The course of such a movement would obviously depend to a large extent on the reactions of the powers that be. Whether they attempt to militarily annihilate the focal points of the uprising, like in the Bloody Week of 1871, or if they abdicate—tired and resigned—as the aging bureaucrats did in the East in 1989, could prove to be decisive. The key would be “splitting the armed forces along class lines” and weakening the military apparatus by denying it its “supply of essential goods and services” (*Angry Workers of the World*). Although achievements would likely have to be defended with arms, the revolutionary movement’s most potent weapon would be its ability to satisfy people’s material needs and to create new human relationships even in the course of the uprising. The point is to combine both elements in such a way that it suddenly seems self-evident to masses of people, despite all the risks, to desert the existing order. Not even tanks can save what the working class no longer keeps going.

The crux of the matter is that, in its present state, the production apparatus that today spans the entire globe is a terrible starting point for an upheaval, no matter its potentials. There is a deep chasm between the present state and the possible commune, and the leap over that chasm suggested here may appear in some respects quixotic. Politically, this is reflected in the aforementioned turn to the localized *Commons* and to a kind of neo-anarchism that sees “infrastructure” as the enemy and which aimlessly destroys railway tracks. But it is also there in the postulate of the indispensability of the state: the world has become so complex, it is claimed, that the transition to a postcapitalist

society cannot do without the leadership of the great helmsman. That both extreme positions are wrong can be shown quite easily. The first surrenders without hesitation before the enormous challenge of re-appropriation, while the second overestimates the controllability of the capitalist economy. Drafting any kind of counterproposal is all the more daunting. Precisely because the commune is not predetermined by the objective course of history, an outline of what it might look like should be discussed today. The more that the working class discusses it across the globe today and the more clearly a completely different world can be visualized, the more likely it is that another revolutionary movement could arise after all.

Annotated references

"The socialization of knowledge has reached such a high degree", notes Johannes Agnoli in 1975, "that 'authors' in reality merely take up and edit collectively produced material, information and reflections as well as collectively experienced results of practice." (Introduction to *Überlegungen zum bürgerlichen Staat [Reflections on the Bourgeois State]*, Berlin 1975). It is in this sense that we do not lay claim to any originality. Rather than proclaiming new "approaches", "paradigms" or "theoretical schools", we try to make use of the wealth of thought that approximately two centuries of modern class struggles have produced; almost everything has already been said, we merely say it somewhat differently in the face of the current situation.

More specifically:

1.

Quotes are from Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*; Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1; Benjamin, Letter to Werner Kraft, July 26th 1934, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*. Common objections to posing the question of what communism should be have been refuted by the German circle Paeris: "Spinner, Utopisten, Antikommunisten. Gegen das Festhalten am Bilderverbot und für eine Verständigung über Kommunismus" ["Freaks, Utopians, Anticommunists. Against Adherence to the Ban on Images, for Clarification about Communism"] *Phase 2*, no. 36. Proponents of the "Frankfurt School" were in fact not too pedantic when it came to the *Bilderverbot* or "ban on images". According to Horkheimer, to acknowledge that it is not isolated theoreticians but only people engaged in practical emancipation who can decide about the new society "would keep no

one who accepts the possibility of a changed world from considering how people could live without politics of genetic regulation and penal authority, model factories and repressed minorities" ("Authoritarian State", 1940). Adorno noted: "The ban on imagining how things should be, the scientification of socialism, has not always been beneficial for the latter." ("Introduction to *Quatre Mouvements* by Charles Fourier"). Shocking examples of left-wing faith in technological progress are currently provided by Paul Mason, *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to our Future* (2015), and the so-called "accelerationists" (Nick Srnicek / Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future*, 2016), who by propagating the mirage of "guaranteed basic income" merely accelerate the decay of class consciousness. A devastating critique of Mason has been formulated by Rainer Fischbach, a left-wing Keynesian for some funny reason: *Die schöne Utopie. Paul Mason, der Post-kapitalismus und der Traum vom grenzenlosen Überfluss* [A Beautiful Utopia: Paul Mason, Post-Capitalism and the Dream of Infinite Abundance], (Cologne 2017).

2.

Marx advanced his idea of two stages of communism, the first still linking individual consumption to labour time performed, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), a text that at the same time was very prescient in its attacks on the deification of the state by German social democracy. This conception is today taken up by the neo-leninist Dietmar Dath, advocating "labour time accounts" (*Klassenkampf im Dunkeln* [Class Struggle in the Dark], Hamburg 2014), by the anti-authoritarian Marxist Peter Hudis (*Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*, Leiden 2012), by W. Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell (*Towards a New Socialism*, 1993) and way too many others. Our critique mostly follows the excellent contribution by Raoul Victor, "The Economy in the Transition to a Communist Society", *Internationalist Perspective* 61 (2016); The quote by Kropotkin is from *Anarchism* (1896).

3.

Quotes from Marx/Engels, *The German Ideology*; Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber" (1964). A still brilliant critique of machinery, following Marx's chapter on the issue in *Capital* vol. 1, is provided by the Italian adherent of *operaismo* Raniero Panzieri: "The capitalist use of machinery: Marx versus the objectivists" (1964). Important proposals for discussions in the framework of critical theory can be found in Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* (1964), as well as Hans-Dieter Bahr, *Kritik der "politischen Technologie"* [Critique of "Political Technology"], Frankfurt 1970. The so-called germ form theory is documented on the blog keimform.de. An account of new technologies—including, of course, a call for a guaranteed income—is given by the two spokespersons of the Chaos Computer Club, Frank Rieger and Constanze Kurz (*Arbeitsfrei. Eine Entdeckungsreise zu den Maschinen, die uns ersetzen* [Off work: An exploration of the machines that replace us], Munich 2013). Much more critical and taking into account current working conditions: Matthias Becker, *Automatisierung und Ausbeutung: Was wird aus der Arbeit im digitalen Kapitalismus?* [Automation and Exploitation. How Does Digital Capitalism Transform Labour?], Vienna 2017. A good presentation of a workers' inquiry at Amazon is Georg Barthel/Jan Rottenbach, "Reelle Subsumtion und Insubordination im Zeitalter der digitalen Maschinerie. Mit-Untersuchung der Streikenden bei Amazon in Leipzig" ["Real Subsumtion and Insubordination in the Era of Digital Machinery. A Co-Inquiry of Striking Workers at Amazon Leipzig"], PROKLA 187. An academic study of the increasing deployment of robots in China is Yu Huang and Naubahar Sharif, "From 'Labour Dividend' to 'Robot Dividend'. Technological Change and Labour Power in South China" (2017).

4.

See David Graeber, "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs"; quote from Meinhard Creydt, *46 Fragen zur nachkapitalistischen Zukunft. Erfahrungen, Analysen, Vorschläge* [46 Questions on the Post-Capitalist Future: Experiences, Analysis, Proposals] (Münster 2016).

5.

In "Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management" (*Internationale Situationniste* 12, 1969), a scenario for revolution still worth reading, Raoul Vaneigem names as examples for "parasitical sectors, whose assemblies decide purely and simply to suppress them" somewhat vaguely "administration, bureaucratic agencies, spectacle production, purely commercial industries". Living in a late capitalist service sector metropolis like Berlin, one wonders what, apart from hospitals and public transport, does *not* fall into this category. On suburbia as a non-place: Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, ch. VII. On the unresolved problem of energy production: Rainer Fischbach, *Mensch-Natur-Stoffwechsel* [Man-Nature-Metabolism] (Cologne 2016). Fischbach shows that renewable sources of energy are hopelessly overestimated and that a drastic reduction in energy consumption is needed in order to at least curb global warming. He attacks the green-alternative fetish of small-scale and local production with respect to both the energy sector and industry (only a grid extending over vast areas can balance out the ups and downs of renewables while standardized mass production requires the least energy, resources and labour power; we refer to this in section 7, though somewhat reluctantly—we do not have any green-alternative inclinations, but decentralization, it seems to us, still has certain advantages).

6.

Adorno's "Theses on Needs" (1942) constitute a revolutionary agenda in four and a half pages. On the "right to solitude", see Marcuse, *Über Revolte, Anarchismus und Einsamkeit* [On Revolt, Anarchism and Solitude] (Zurich 1969). On "communal luxury": Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (New York 2015). Ross unearths aspects of the Paris Commune of immense actuality: The separation of mental and manual labour, hierarchical gender relations, art as a luxury good separated from everyday life, the state and the nation were practically challenged already in 1871. If we use the term commune more often than communism in this text, then this is not only because the latter term has maybe irredeemably been contaminated by the history of state socialist regimes in the 20th century, not seldomly engaging in mass murder, but also to make visible a hidden thread leading from the still pre-industrial Paris of 1871 to contemporary high-tech capitalism.

7.

Marx, *The Civil War in France*; Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*. A surprisingly good contribution is Alex Demirovic, "Rätedemokratie oder das Ende der Politik" [Council Democracy or the End of Politics] (PROKLA 155), questioning in particular the complete absorption of politics by economics as envisaged by Pannekoek. On the critique of law: Evgeny Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law and Marxism* (1924). On prisons: Emma Goldman, "Prisons: A Social Crime and Failure", in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (Stilwell 2008).

8.

Quote from Kat Lux/Johannes Hauer/Marco Bonavena, "Der halbierte Blick. Gedanken zum Geschlechterverhältnis im Kommenden Aufprall" [The Bisected View. Thoughts on the Gender Relation in *The Coming Collision*], *diskus* 216 (2017).

9.

The key text by the proponents of *Wertkritik* on how to overcome capitalism is still Robert Kurz, "Anti-economics and anti-politics", published in *krisis* no. 19/1997. Whereas Kurz still had a vague idea about the limits of evolutionary change, contemporary proponents ascribe to parties "like Syriza and Podemos, which after all emerged from social protest movements, a truly important function" for overcoming commodity society (Norbert Trenkle, "Gesellschaftliche Emanzipation in der Krise" [Social Emancipation in Crisis] (2015)). The contribution "Insurrection and Production" (2016) by the Angry Workers of the World (London) should be widely discussed. Using the British isles as an example, they reflect in an unusually concrete manner on how a proletarian revolution could unfold today. We hope their proposal for a 9-hour working day is limited to the very early stages of this process.