

28 Theses on Class Society – A Critical Commentary

by *Théorie Communiste*

[Translated by Endnotes and friends. This version of TC's critique appeared in [Kosmoprolet 3](#). The longer French original can be found [here](#). We also include TC's appendix where they critique thesis 11, on gender.]

Kosmoprolet's *28 Theses* emerge from a problematic caught "in-between" the theories of workers' autonomy still linked to *operaismo*, and that of the revolution as "self-abolition of the proletariat," or what can be called the theory of communisation. Thus communisation is defined both very abstractly as "self-abolition" and very concretely as "self-organization", as the recomposition of the "proletarianised" as an historical subject, a collective actor existing for itself, subject *analogous* to that of the great radical days of class struggle up to the 1970s. The first definition functions as an ideological embellishment to mask the triviality of the second. The very use of the term "self-abolition" connects these theses to the 1970s, when this concept represented the extreme point at which theories of self-organization and councilism believed they had found the solution to their impasse.

In the *28 Theses*, "revolutionary communist radicalism" (even minoritarian) can be found throughout history, but its content is never really defined in previous periods. "The proletariat has no revolutionary essence" (Thesis 9), but there is said to be a substantial communist revolutionary practice. Here lies the inconsistency of the text. That which properly belongs to the revolution understood as the promotion of the proletariat as ruling class — the proletariat as a class existing as such for itself against capital — is conceived of as belonging to any revolution. Simultaneously (and contradictorily), the *current* content of the revolution and communism is posited as having always existed, even if only carried forward by a few minorities. The refuted revolutionary essence (which as we will see is refuted only in a tautological manner) continually returns as a historical constant of what the revolution or communism is or should be. But then self-abolition is no more than the autonomous self-affirmation of the class.

1) Essence

In the *28 Theses*, class struggle appears to have two sides. On the one hand, a revolutionary aspect that is constant, what the revolution must be in its "flashes of further-reaching moments" (Thesis 2), namely the "self-abolition of the proletariat". On the other hand, it has an aspect that is subject to the vagaries of the conjuncture and the development of the capitalist mode of production, mainly taking the form of a "statist current" and "reformism". Between the two, no necessary relationship is produced other than the weight of circumstances and the abandonment of "revolutionary principles". This leads theoretically to a revolutionary nature and, historically, it gives these intense moments of class struggle a content and purpose that *was not their own*. In the end this transforms the present moment into an indecipherable hieroglyph. Neither the insurgents of 1848, nor the Communards of 1871, nor the German workers in 1919, nor the Russian workers of 1917

had as their goal the "self-abolition of the proletariat", but rather the autonomous affirmation of the proletariat against capital. If these theses ultimately identify the latter with "self-abolition" by making it a constant of the revolution, they cannot recognize that such a goal, such a content, existed only as the other side of the rise of the class within the capitalist mode of production, expressing itself in currents identified as statist. This was a conflictual, violent, internal relationship, which made this statist current the counterrevolution with an internal relation with the revolution.

"It was the tragedy of the 20th century that revolution broke out in those places where the conditions for communism were the worst imaginable" (Thesis 14). All that is said in this thesis assumes a "revolutionary nature" identical to itself throughout the class struggle, having to put up with conditions under which it is realized. No explanation is given of the reasons behind such attempts at a "dictatorship of the proletariat" other than "the conditions were the worst". So the revolution was really, by definition, "self-abolition of the proletariat" but in such conditions that it was actually "transition period" and "dictatorship of the proletariat". From the moment that the autonomous affirmation of the class became the constant substantive content of the revolution, the problematic masks the fact that the revolution as affirmation of the class has, on this basis, a necessary relation with its counter-revolution.

When the thesis furnishes, in part, the content of what the revolution was—the rising power of the proletariat as the ruling class and the liberation of labour—it defines and describes this content as a "tragedy", i.e. a contradiction vis-à-vis what the revolution *is*, an impossibility for it to *be what it should be*.

Thesis 6, dedicated to the Russian Revolution of 1917, also speaks of a "communist current". The communist current "turned towards taking over production and distribution, and sought to coordinate between different workplaces". But neither "of these two movements [the working class and the revolutionary peasants--TC] was in a position to guarantee the total social reproduction. The task of organizing economic survival fell to the Bolshevik Party, in a despotic form directed against both workers and peasants" (Thesis 6). We are told nothing more about the "communist current" or its relationship to the Bolshevik revolution. Does the appropriation of production and distribution and the coordination of different workplaces constitute the "self-abolition" of the proletariat? Two quotes inserted in the theses, and some historical comments, lead the reader to believe so.

The first is the quote from Henk Canne-Meijer in Thesis 15 that Kosmoprolet presents as a description of the "*movement of communisation*" (emphasis added by the authors), and thus the self-abolition of the proletariat: "So long as the mass movements are still small and still remain a surface affair, the tendency toward the mastery of all social forces does not come so clearly to light. But if these movements become large, then more and more functions are drawn into the province of the struggling masses, — their sphere of action becomes extended. And in this struggling mass there then comes about a completely new grouping of the relations between human beings and the productive process. A new "order"

develops. Those are the essential distinguishing marks of the independent class movements, which are accordingly the horror of the bourgeoisie".

Leaving aside the fact that, contrary to what is said in this thesis, this in no way corresponds to the "scenario of the Parisian May 1968" (cf. Bruno Astarian, *strikes in France in May-June 1968*, Echanges). The content of the Canne-Meijer quote hardly goes beyond any old prophetic texts of the sort revolutionary syndicalism was fond of. Canne-Meijer was at the same time helping to draft the GIK's *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* that *Kosmoprolet* defines as "a communist society based on value". This is therefore a surprising understanding of the quote from Canne-Meijer, which merely expresses that the movement of the revolution is an affirmation of the class. So Canne-Meijer is said to already be a theorist of communisation ... while simultaneously calculating working hours to print his little tokens. Not only is "self-abolition of the proletariat" here posited as what the revolution would have *always* been in itself, it is also nothing more than *the affirmation of the proletariat preserving its autonomy*.

The second quote is from Werner Imhof: "Wage-laborers can only unite at all into a class 'for itself', in order to abolish themselves as a class, through the complete negation of fragmenting private property, through the interest of not only appropriating the operational means of production, but also the social process of reproduction in its entirety (and that necessarily means: on an international scale)" (Thesis 13). "To abolish themselves as a class" is here nothing but the socialization of labour and the means of production, and the abolition of private property: that is, the ABCs of the affirmation of the proletariat and its unification. Again, the quote is preceded by a commentary presenting it as "self-abolition of the proletariat". Nothing in this quote as in the previous one goes beyond the different forms of the organization of production, and questions of management and ownership.

In 1968, the "revolutionary minorities" grasped self-abolition "more exactly than their predecessors" during the revolutionary cycle around 1917 (Thesis 16). So at that time, in 1917, the revolution is said to have *already* been "self-abolition", which would need to be demonstrated. But then, if it was already self-abolition, how is it that "its struggles have to this day not led it beyond class society, but deeper into it" (Thesis 9)? Despite the general proclamation of Thesis 9 ("there is no revolutionary essence," "the proletariat is its struggle"), in each case, the struggle is "self-abolition", and the revolution always substantially identical with itself. It follows that the proletariat is substantially revolutionary, but for various reasons things never go well.

Why was the Russian revolution a "failure"? *Kosmoprolet* captures the aspect of management and taking over of factories in the Russian Revolution during its ascending phase from February to October 17. They do not deny the facts, but baptize them as a "communist current" and give this current as its content the "self-abolition of the proletariat". From there everything becomes incomprehensible. We must overcome this essentialism of the Revolution and Communism, in order to see the essential link between the revolution and the Bolshevik counterrevolution.

The Bolshevik counterrevolution springs from and flows naturally of itself (which does not mean without confrontations) in the course of the workers' revolution. It is, as Trotsky said, "the seizure of power by the proletariat as a whole" and, conjointly, the "workers' control established in the interest of a planned regulation of the national economy" ("Decree on Workers' Control of 14/27 November 1917," in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2 The Economic Order*, p. 77). If the revolution is the control and management of factories, the organization of their relations, the circulation and exchange of products of labour, it has nothing to oppose the state, value, the plan and the renewed capitalist central management, other than its bottom-up Soviet democracy. Meaning, nothing, a pure form and resistance to work that has once again been imposed.

The *Bolshevik counterrevolution* becomes the result of chance, because the revolution is not captured in its historicity, its nature as revolution-as-worker-affirmation: "the Bolsheviks might have remained in the revolutionary camp..." if there had been revolution in Europe. No, beginning at Brest-Litovsk, the Bolsheviks do everything so that there is no revolution in Europe, as any text of the ultra-left vulgate tells us. All we know is that "the dictatorship of the party executed one of the alternatives allowed by the internal and external conditions in 1917" (Thesis 6).¹ But why, what was the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the "communist current" of the Russian Revolution? Here, not only the absence of revolution in the West provides an escape from an analysis of the Russian Revolution and its connection with the Bolshevik counterrevolution, but still begs the question of the relationship of the Bolsheviks to the revolution in Western Europe.

How could the Bolsheviks in their capacity as "statist" (such as these theses call them) have "stay[ed] in the revolutionary camp"? What "revolutionary camp" is it, the one with the power of workers' Councils? It was in fact the "revolutionary camp" of the period, provided you do not think that the real revolution, like the "truly social", has *always been* "self-abolition of the proletariat". But in these Theses, between the "self-abolition of the proletariat" and its affirmation, there seems to be nothing but the difference between *autonomy* and *representation*. If the proletarians act by themselves it is "self-abolition" (or almost, depending on the conditions); if they rely on representations, it is affirmation. Revolution therefore has a constant nature, and it is the problematic of conditions that modulate the forms under which this nature appears. We find this problematic in the form of the development of productive forces and of their contradiction with the relations of production.

Thesis 17 tells us that "taking the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production as a point of departure has fallen into disrepute, and not without reason". However, after the justified criticism of the development of productive forces as being the royal road to socialism, the thesis considers this same development "can serve the producers under other social relations". The essential thing is to consider, in some way or other, this development as an accumulation of usable conditions and not as a kind of contradiction between the proletariat and capital. So much so that any reflection that has not criticized the very concept of productive forces leads to the quote that ends this thesis:

¹ TC's quotation does not correspond to the english version precisely

"Thus, in 1969 the Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera noted that 'the quantity of accumulated science is so great that labor could immediately be reduced to an incidental fact of human existence, rather than being declared the "foundation of human existence"'. Production is posited as an admittedly heavy and unpleasant necessity, but neutral and objective, performed by an equally neutral and objective activity, work. It is only a matter of reducing this curse. But just like the productive forces, work is a social relation. It is not a question of reducing it but abolishing it. If we can hope for a recognition of the possibility of "idleness", it would be based on the development of "productivity" (Thesis 21). Must we believe that in order to ensure one (idleness), it is necessary to preserve the other: productivity?

Even if this is done through a sorting process and a use of the development of productive forces "to our benefit", the fact remains that the proletariat assumes the "dishonorable role of an appendage of capitalist development" denounced in Thesis 16 as characteristic of the "old workers' movement." But the same thesis affirms that "capitalist socialization" is such that it "can *directly* turn over into communism" (our emphasis--TC). Marx, in the quote following this surprising statement, lays bare a moving contradiction and not a tendential progression towards direct transformation.

The proletariat is still so much that "dishonorable appendage" that its options for action and the chances of adequate manifestation of the constant nature of revolution depend on this development, as seen with the Russian Revolution and its "worst conditions" or more generally with "the period of the workers' movement" when there was no "without ever *really being able* to transcend it" (Thesis 3, our emphasis). Here the revolution as transhistorical constant and the problematic of conditions that facilitate or impede the manifestation of this constant are combined.

This contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production, "fallen into disrepute" according to Thesis 17, "intensifies" in Thesis 18. An intensification that makes "the anachronism of capital become tangible." Following Debord, work is judged according to its production in a historical lineage that leads from the utility to the harmfulness of what it produces. This (moral) consideration is purely objectivist and does not consider work as an activity in a certain social relationship.

It is not the development of productive forces closer, but the history of the contradiction that produces this movement, that brings the time of the revolution.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx provides the essence of the critique of the objectivist conception of this contradiction: "Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form".

The relations of production are themselves the constraint on the growth of productive forces. This contradiction is resolved in a contradiction internal to the relations of production,

a contradiction whose content, form and process are exploitation (and on an immediate level, struggle between the classes is not a consequence or is modulated by this "contradiction").

The contradiction between productive forces and relations of production is only the form in which the internal contradiction of the valorisation of capital (a moving contradiction) appears, which is present as much in the development of productive forces as in the relations of production. The productive forces are the material form of the relations of production, it is as social labour separated from individual labour that they have this contradictory power that can bring the shattering of the capitalist mode of production. Ultimately this famous contradiction boils down to the contradiction between the ability for labour to valorise capital and the questioning of this ability that its own action involves.

This contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production does not only act, in these theses, as a condition modulating the constant nature of revolution and communism, it also defines revolution and communism. "However, one should not burden revolution with the false promise of dissolving the realm of necessity into nothing but play and pleasure; just as little will this realm of necessity persist in its current abstract opposition to a realm of freedom emptied of any possibility for shaping the world" (Thesis 13). Fine balancing act, but the two propositions remain two separate propositions that only reveal a great confusion.

If we connect the citation of Thesis 13 to the citation of the workers of Porto Marghera (see above), we must conclude that it is the "necessity" which makes class society and not class society that makes the "necessity". We must strongly affirm that it is not the possibility of abundance that allows communism, but the production of communism that defines, not quantitatively but socially, abundance, by making the production of relationships between individuals as individuals the means and the end of every activity. By exceeding the categories of having, communism gives another content to wealth that cannot be measured. It is the division of society into classes that creates the historical (not natural) notions of necessity, lack, and even abundance, in relation to a particular historical period and not in relation to human needs that are as such indefinable as such (as is their satisfaction).

The activity of man as an objective being is work only to the extent that social activity and individual activity do not coincide in the relations that individual maintain among themselves. This activity becomes the mediation linking them and defining, through the conditions of its being carried out, individual activity as social activity. The abolition of work is the abolition of a social relation. To say that men in a "communist society" continue to maintain organic exchanges with nature and therefore there is work is to make the concept of work something as useless as it is true: that men continue to breathe tells us nothing about either communism or capitalism. Not only is the concept of work used in this way useless, it also contradicts itself, since it includes all activities, including those activities said to be "superior" that result from the free time of some, a conception of work that Marx characterizes as "non-work". If it is true that the abolition of work is not at the core of revolutionary action (for this would amount to formalizing contradictory social relations into

certain types of activities, thereby naturalizing them and reducing them to a question of the relations among individual, nature and society), it is no less the case that the abolition of capital and the production of communism are the abolition of work, even if this does not result from a problematic and a dynamic internal to "working activity".

Perhaps it is not "overnight" that productive activity as a totality will become passionate, but what is sure is that communism cannot allow for the coexistence of two different spheres. There cannot be certain activities that remain non-passionate, and others that have become so.

To say that there are problems that will not be solved "overnight" is true. These problems are indeed real and will not be solved with the wave of a magic wand. That communism will have to resolve in a first step problems inherited from capitalism (unequal development, the qualitative transformation of the instruments of production, elimination of dangerous plants, decreasing population concentration, the suppression of the material forms, inscribed in space, of the opposition city and country, "rehabilitation" of former agriculture or "natural" spaces) does not however create a period or activity where it would not "function" according to what it is, in accordance with its own nature, and would not do so until a certain level of development is attained, a level which is ultimately absolutely impossible to determine.

In capital, society, as the principal result of production, is subsumed under the pole of capital which, as a social relation, is necessarily an object. In the capitalist mode of production, objectivity is the continually reproduced form that the fundamental social relation capital is takes, opposite the subjectivity of the activity that is subjected to it and which as such is the other pole of the mode of production or production process. The abolition of classes signifies just as much the abolition of activity as subjectivity as it does the abolition of its product as objectivity over against it. The abundance created by the communist revolution is not a matter of having but of being together, of community. What happens in the very movement of the revolution itself is the dis-objectification of the world.

The origin of the ambivalence of the approach to communism in these theses lies in the very conception of the "progressive" development of the productive forces. It is above all this development of the productive forces taken in itself that would allow for communism. The revolution is not really a rupture with this development understood as a determination of the class struggle, as a relation of forces between them, but simply a different utilization of these forces.

From the constant nature of the revolution modelled on the development of the productive forces we arrive at the essence of the revolutionary proletariat. Thesis 9 tells us that "the proletariat has no revolutionary essence", but it functions more as a denial seeking to repress what is evident throughout the text than a proposition from which all the consequences will be drawn.

- "The proletariat has no revolutionary essence"

- "The proletariat is its struggle"
- "Its struggles have to this day not led it beyond class society, but deeper into it."
- "It is just as little the case that with the integration of the proletariat the possibility of revolution is extinguished"
- "The materialist conception of history assumes that things could have been different, that class struggles could have had different outcomes"

"The proletariat is what it does," but it could have done something else.

Conclusion 1: the proletariat could be something other than what it is because if the struggles had been of another kind, the proposal "the proletariat is its struggle" leads us to: the proletariat would have had a different definition.

Conclusion 2: thus the proletariat is not what it does because it could at any time be other than what it does.

Conclusion 3: the proletariat could have been different. But if the proletariat had been different, it would firstly be impossible for us to say so, and secondly impossible for us to call it the proletariat.

The development of capital is nothing other than the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, there is no "link" between the two, neither rigid nor fluid nor from one term to the other. There is nothing to construct between determinism and freedom, necessity and possibility, the invariant and the conjunctural, between slightly determined freedom and determinism that is a little bit free, conditions and activity.

Asserting that "class struggle could have been different" is to recognize the development of capital as a framework to which we assign more or less effectivity, but always as a sum of conditions. Overcoming all the variants of determinism means considering the revolution and communism as real historical productions of the only history that exists, that of the capitalist mode of production.

When we define exploitation as the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, we define the contradiction as a history. The stage of accumulation is not an external condition of victories or defeats, and not a conjuncture. Capitalist development is not the realization or the condition of the class contradiction which opposes the proletariat to the capitalist class, it is its real history. This contradiction does not take on different forms; it is nothing but these forms that are the dynamic of their own transformation. Communism is historical and it is *in relation* with the immediate course of each cycle of struggles. *When we say that the revolution can only be immediate communisation, this does not mean that communism will now, finally, present itself as it would have been in reality or as it should always have been.*

Could something else have happened? We don't know and don't give a damn. The question makes no sense. What did not happen leaves the realm of thought to enter the one of belief and faith. The ideology of the possible can look at the past, saying, "this could have been or could not have been", it always consists, from the perspective of the following period, of considering as contingent that which was essential in the previous period. From this substitution arises the belief in the invariance as the substantial core that will result from this movement.

It is theoretically impossible to simultaneously maintain that there is no revolutionary essence and that things could have been otherwise.

The struggles always led the proletariat "ever deeper into class society", yet "the possibility of revolution was not extinguished." If "the possibility of revolution was not extinguished," it is because it existed. Thus the struggles did not "lead the proletariat still deeper into it," or else the "revolution" existed only as a "possibility." But then what is the basis of this possibility if "the proletariat is its struggle" and that "its struggles, etc."?

What brings Kosmoprolet to all these logical impasses is the assumption of a substantial conception of revolution and communism. Revolution, by definition, is for Kosmoprolet always the "self-abolition of the proletariat" and "communisation" (even if this "self-abolition" is confused with *autonomous* affirmation). Yet it did not happen and it is even difficult to identify historically its first steps (the "flashes of further-reaching moments" and "small radical minorities" are never defined with regard to their content). This did not happen, Kosmoprolet tells us, because the proletariat did not do it. The proletariat has no revolutionary essence but the revolution is essential. But if the revolution is essential, what the proletariat does is held to this standard (it could have done something else) because the true revolutionary outcome potentially always exists, it is "*extinguished*". Throughout the period of the "workers' movement" the class struggle had the "misconception" (Thesis 8) that it was going to "transcend capital".

Let's be more simple: *the proletariat of these theses has a revolutionary essence*, but it is also true that "it is its struggle", which means that this essence is subject to conditions.

This essence is a contradiction of the capitalist mode of production of which the proletariat is a personalization. The "social" is here substantialized with relation to its immediate ("unsocial") existence. One cannot make the "social" a determination opposed to an "unsocial" existing in capitalism. What is characterized as "unsocial" in its Theses is in fact the only *existing social*, and it is completely social. By substantializing it, Kosmoprolet can have a constant in the definition of the proletariat which defines it as revolutionary, but against its existence such as it is in the capitalist mode of production. This is an internal contradiction that connects two terms that have nothing in common, if not to be the exact opposite of each other. They are opposites that do not pass into the other, just as was the case, in the philosophical communism of the early 1840s, with the separate atomized existence of individuals and "communal existence".

The revolution is then the bringing in line of the social with itself. Here we rediscover the normativism and the revolutionary essence of the class within a duality that is never explicitly and formally constructed in these theses. What is missing is the transition from one to the other terms of this duality: the absence of a growing-over between economic struggles and revolution Thesis 13) becomes a fault-line whose traversal is an absolute reversal dependent on all that is developed from the "communist perspective" and "consciousness" in the last four theses.

The production of this passage (Thesis 13) seems to result from the fact that "socialization through capital remains contradictory". When the theses distinguish and oppose in the capitalist mode of production "the production for others" and the production that only acquires a "social validity with the act of exchange" (Thesis 13), they ignore the fact that it is this "validity" which *is* "production for others," its very existence. The theses explicitly presuppose a "truly social" and "false community" (Thesis 13), which leads for example to the fact if proletarians "took over their respective workplaces", it would not be really social. the workers' revolution that had for its content the affirmation of the proletariat is presented and criticized relative to this standard: it was not "truly social".

This socialization involves a contradiction, but the socialization itself is not contradictory in relation to itself, in relation to what is "truly social." There is in the capitalist mode of production no contradiction relative to "socialization" *in itself*. In the Theses the contradiction of classes is folded back onto a contradiction of the concept of socialization, from which any kind of slip is possible relative to "proletarianised individuals".

In Thesis 15, "atomized wage-workers transform themselves into social individuals". This is the "movement of communisation".

As if workers were not social individuals. At the foundation of this thesis there is a whole dialectic of the "social," of a "social contradiction" (Thesis 13). Work is not at the same time "social" and "unsocial" (Thesis 13). As if the "social" at last arrived with communism in its adequate form of the "really social".

This "social" in these Theses is the "revolutionary nature" always constructed as the negative of what the proletariat is in the capitalist mode of production ("unsocial"). It can thus only be revolutionary in its the "self-abolition". But this "self-abolition" is the overcoming the contradiction of the "social".

It should be clearly stated that work is *social* as producer of value and more precisely as valorisation of capital, as division of labour, and as commodity production. This socialization does not need any reference to a "truly social" to be a contradiction; but this contradiction does not oppose the "unsocial" to the "truly social", it is a contradiction between classes. If we do not say that, then under current "social" forms we presuppose a *true social*.

In Thesis 16, the social as content of the self-abolition of the proletariat appears (unlike in philosophical communism) as the result of the development of the productive forces.

The *social* is the "rational universality", one in which we find "a form of production whose purpose we can recognise as ours" "ability to recognize the purpose of production as ours" (Thesis 13). Here we have nothing but "the society of associated producers", the abolition of the market as a rational organization of production, such that "private property has yielded to the collective organisation of life". Kosmoprolet has a constant substance of the revolution and of communism which cannot fail to become a revolutionary essence of the proletariat, but Kosmoprolet no longer has the proletariat as bearer of the communist project, as embodying this revolutionary essence. Kosmoprolet wants simultaneously revolution as self-abolition of the proletariat and a proletariat as "collective actor" similar to the "proletarian milieu". Of course it will not be the same, but with the former it will appear as a class "for itself" against capital, a class recomposed and unified as a "well-defined collective actor".

2) Class

Until the restructuring of the contradictory relationship between the classes in the 1970s and 1980s, the class struggle as well as the workers' movement were based on *the contradiction between on the one hand the creation and development of a labour-power put to work by capital in an increasingly collective and social fashion, and on the other hand the forms of appropriation of this labour-power by capital in the immediate process of production and in the process of reproduction*. This is the conflictual situation which developed in this cycle of struggles as workers' identity — an identity which found its distinguishing features and its immediate modalities of recognition in the "large factory", in the dichotomy between employment and unemployment, work and training, in the submission of the labour process to the collectivity of workers, in the link between wages, growth and productivity within a national area, in the institutional representations that all this implied, as much in the factory as at the level of the State. There was indeed a self-presupposition of capital, in conformity with the concept of capital, but the contradiction between proletariat and capital was located at this level by production and the confirmation, within this same self-presupposition, of a worker identity through which the class struggle, as workers' movement, was structured. This identity was the flesh and bones of all practices, and brought everyone from certain fractions of social-democracy all the way to worker autonomy together.

Thesis 1 recognizes the disappearance of something, but does so in an inadequate way: "The provisional result of the history of capital in its advanced zones presents itself as a classless class society, in which the old workers' milieu has been dissolved into a generalized wage-dependency: everywhere proletarianised individuals, nowhere the proletariat, not as a recognizable group of people and certainly not as a collective actor, as the negative, disruptive side of society". The object Kosmoprolet would like to speak to us about is the current relation between the classes; what it in fact speaks to us about is merely the negative of the previous period. Which ends up at an oxymoron: "the classless class society". Kosmoprolet does not try to explain the content and form of the class struggle --

which can no longer be the same as they were in the previous period -- through the current class relation. It simply tells us that what existed no longer exists, and that this absence defines the current period. But something that exists cannot be explained by what does not or no longer exists.

Unless you contend that capital no longer valorises itself through the exploitation of labour-power, then there are still classes and Thesis 12 defines this class relation in an unambiguous way: "The class relationship is a relationship between capital and proletarians, between self-valorising value and labour-power". There would be "proletarianised individuals" but "nowhere the proletariat, not as a recognizable group of people and certainly not as a collective actor" (Thesis 1). The explanation for this would be that "Proletarian existence appears to be nowhere visible precisely because it is just about everywhere" (Thesis 12). Who would this "collective actor" be? It would be whoever would lead the struggles in which "the future of society is at stake", whoever would be the "the negative, disruptive side of society" (Thesis 1). These theses give one the impression that the current class struggle is being seen in a rear-view mirror. The "proletarian milieu" (Thesis 2) that is the absolute reference point for this "collective actor" as "the negative, disruptive side of society" has for a long time been definitively dead and buried, and Kosmoprolet knows this. But what Kosmoprolet is waiting for by looking toward the precarious and the "excluded" is the rebirth of an identical actor, and up to this point there could be no classes in this class society. But there will never again be an identical collective actor and it is above all not the unemployed, the precarious and the "excluded," *such as these theses conceive them, that can be the catalyst for this "recomposition", unless you imagine a world of people living parallel to capitalist society, which was certainly not the case with the proletarians of the "proletarian milieu". Despite what Thesis 1 says, this "proletarian milieu" did not constitute a "independent society within bourgeois society" (Thesis 2) since, if its "heart was the factory", this was because these proletarians went there each day to sell their labour-power.*

There will never again be such a thing, and so much for the better.

Currently, the revolution is dependent upon a contradiction that is constitutive of the class struggle: being a class is, for the proletariat, an obstacle that its struggle as a class should overcome/abolish.

This cycle of struggle is the action of a recomposed working class. It is a matter, in the central areas of accumulation, of the disappearance of the great worker bastions and the proletarianisation of employees, the tertiarisation of work (maintenance specialist, machine operators, truck drivers, deliverymen, warehouse workers, etc.-- such is the type of job that is now done by the majority of workers), work in companies or smaller sites, a new division of labour and the working class with the outsourcing of low value-added activities (young workers paid the minimum wage, often temporary, with no professional prospects), the generalization of just-in-time production, the presence of young workers for whom formal education has broken the thread of generations and who reject en masse factory work and the condition of the worker in general.

The large concentration of workers in India or China forms a part of this global segmentation of labour-power. Both in terms of their global character as well as their own national belonging, these concentrations cannot be considered a rebirth in another place of what has disappeared in the "West". Worker identity was defined by a social system of existence and reproduction and was expressed in the workers' movement. It was not defined simply by the existence of quantitative material characteristics.

The paradox of this new class composition is that it makes the recognition of the existence of the working class disappear at the very moment its condition has been extended and this "disappearance" is itself only the effect of this new composition and its segmentation. The working class could not be more present and class struggle is the axis around which history turns. But on the one hand this class is no longer confirmed in the reproduction of capital and, on the other, for the proletariat its contradiction with capital contains its own putting into question. The unity of the class can no longer be constituted on the basis of the wage and demands-based struggle, as a stage preliminary to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity by which it abolishes itself by abolishing everything that divides it. A fraction of the proletariat will, in overcoming the demands-based character of its struggle, take communising measures and will in this way broach the unification of the proletariat which in turn will be nothing other than the unification of humanity, that is, its creation as *the ensemble of relations that individuals establish among themselves in their singularity*.

What is specific about the current relation of exploitation is the fact the relation of the proletariat to capital no longer involves the proletariat's relation to itself, confirming its identity for itself over against capital. One might say that, today, the most elevated form of the "class for itself" is the practical, active, conflictual recognition that all the conditions for the existence and reproduction of the proletariat are an exteriority within capital. The proletariat no longer recognizes itself as a class, save as a class existing totally outside of itself. And this has for a long appeared in the "labour conflicts" involving both production as well as the continuity of the cycle of labour-power's reproduction. It is here that "the future of society is at stake".

It is not a matter of saying "*despite* appearances classes exist", but that classes now exist in a contradictory relation that gives rise to this appearance, and that they exist in this appearance. This appearance of disappearance (the "proletarianised individual" of Thesis 1) is itself largely contestable from the moment the class is no longer necessarily seen (assimilated) as "the collective actor" that was to carry out the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production in the affirmation of its present situation, the affirmation what it was in this mode of production and such that this latter confirmed it: the class of productive labour.

In Thesis 12, the class would no longer describe anything more than "the generalized imperative to sell one's labour-power"; we would therefore no longer have "two well-defined camps, but instead a vast diversity of situations". Here, Kosmoprolet does not include (does not consider) in the sale of labour-power *for the valorisation of capital* the fact that this sale, in this relation, is defined as a contradiction for capital and for itself. If the contradiction that

is productive labour was not at the heart of this generalized proletarianisation, this proletarianisation itself would not exist. This is the contradiction between necessary and surplus labour; it is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall understood as a contradiction between the proletariat and capital; it is, by the same token, capital as moving contradiction. We have, then, *the unity of the class definition as situation and as practice* (as "in itself" and "for itself", if you like).

In Thesis 24, the content of self-organized struggles is criticized as bearing within them no more "emancipatory content per se" than struggles led by trade unions. One would have to define what the "emancipatory content" of a struggle might be. A non-normative analysis of the current period would specifically answer the question concerning *this* period (the production of class belonging as external constraint) by showing that while there is a rupture and overcoming between demands-based and revolutionary struggles, the latter are neither miraculous nor an antithesis and negative of the former. In these theses the opposition between these two forms of struggle has no connection, the revolutionary struggle being understood, starting from demands-based struggles, *as a deduction of their negative*. If the question of emancipatory content does not have to be posed in the problematic of these theses, it is because the answer is implicitly presupposed: there is something we know that is the revolution. In contrast (pure contrast) with the "emancipatory" such as we find it in "the narrowness of struggles", also completely undefined.

In fact what is implicit, what is not-said, what presents itself as so self-evident that it does not need to be stated, is that "emancipatory content" means "what workers themselves do", while "narrowness" refers to the fact that they rely on a "representation." But if one starts out from this scale of values, it is impossible to conceive "the self-abolition of the proletariat" (if you want to use this expression), which has no sense unless it refers to the revolutionary nature of the proletariat. The revolution and communism as constants that are explicitly denied nevertheless form the armature of these theses, their sole coherence, since it is through this revolutionary nature that the two terms of an oxymoron can be connected: on the one hand, revolution as self-abolition, and on the other hand, the carrying out of such a practice by a class expected to be formally similar to the one defined by the contradictory relation between capital and proletariat in which the revolution was as an affirmation of the class.

The entire dynamic of the history of class struggle is reduced in this way to the conflict between two principles: *autonomy* and *representation*. On the one hand, "revolutionary principles" (Thesis 2), on the other, the statist tendency of the workers' movement and the figure of the citizen as the completed, achieved form of representation. For the proletariat, escaping representation, "stepping out of existence as a bourgeois legal subject" (Thesis 24), means "asserting its own interests". However, throughout these theses the "statist current" was also a representative of "its own interests". These "own interests" have as such no value of their own. The "own interests" have in and of themselves so little value of their own that, in order to arrive at their "emancipatory content", proletarians should "transcend their otherwise *necessary* egoism" (Thesis 24; emphasis added).

Proletarians have no "common aims" as proletarians. It is in a relation to capital (the relation defining capital as it has existed since the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s) that their class belonging is produced as an external constraint such that, in a particular struggle, they can be led to formulate a common aim that has as its content not their common *given* situation, but what in this given situation produces its abolition.

The current and explosive connection between the crisis, defined in its specificity as a crisis of the wage relation, and the illegitimacy of wage demands, allows us to think that particular struggles in the most internal relation that makes the proletariat a class of this mode of production can pass over into a generality that would no longer be abstract to the extent that the content of this generality makes these particularities its own as a putting into a question by the proletariat of its definition as a class, or as the production of class belonging as an external constraint. Particularity is no longer something preliminary that must be overcome: the overcoming is, in particular, its own movement because the generality now in play is not a general class situation but its abolition.

The overcoming of the otherness of each class segment is not the bringing up to date or the realization of a pre-existing in-common. The categorical struggle can assume a general scale and significance not on the basis of a categorical demand but on its negation. That is to say, this signification and this scale are not a unity of the proletariat. There is no longer anything general save in its suppression. It is not possible to envisage, in the way Wildcat-Kolinko does, the reconstitution of a sort of autonomous, radical workers' movement.

If you are not content with seeing the importance of self-organization solely in the radicalism it confers on demands-based struggles, but instead consider it an "experimental ground for the future society", as a sort of apprenticeship, self-organization becomes a form without content, a pure pedagogy. It is not that undefined individuals would experiment, outside of every social configuration, with other social relations; proletarians will have to undertake the revolution against how they "learned" to govern themselves, their own class position in this society. What is there in common between the subject of an activity that consists in respecting the law of the wage and the subject of an activity that abolishes the wage relation? Between a subject that remains what it is, that *self-organizes itself*, and a subject that suppresses capital by suppressing itself?

The autonomy of struggles as the capacity to pass from demands-based struggle to the revolutionary struggle is a construction that has no interest in the content of this passage. It remains a formal approach to class struggle.

The struggles at the end of the 1960s and the 1970s are of course the obligatory reference for every revolutionary theory of autonomy. These struggles "terminating the beautiful dream of the classless class society": "more wages and less work" (Thesis 19). No explanation of this wave of struggles, of its content and its form, is furnished through

reference to the relation of exploitation of the moment. Unless it is, perhaps, as at the end of thesis 18, a certain social development of the productive forces.

But the most important part of Thesis 19 is found in the reasons offered for the end of autonomy: the automation of the "worker bastions", outsourcing, and rising unemployment. Which *a contrario* suggests that the wave of autonomous struggles in the 1970s was to be rooted in the existence of these worker bastions, the confining of accumulation to the national arena, a certain type of cooperation in the labour process, and full employment. In other words, on worker identity. But then where is the self-abolition of the proletariat? In autonomy itself. *And we once again encounter the recurring identification, in these theses, of self-abolition with autonomous affirmation. If autonomous class struggle can be defined as "the decoupling of the wage and productivity", this does not, all the same, make for a "self-abolition of the proletariat".*

Once the awaited "recomposition" of the class takes place, the current period will witness this identification undergo a final facelift that will make it more adequate as "self-abolition". It is the content of this recomposition that must be examined, as well as its function in overall economy of the theses.

With globalization and with the emergence of a "global working class" "lies the hope that after a century of anti-imperialist mythology, a new era of proletarian internationalism is dawning" (Thesis 20). This affirmation seems, however, to contradict what was said in Thesis 13: "Socialization through capital remains contradictory, since that which connects people also separates them", since their segmentation was inherent to the proletariat's relation to capital. All the more so since, in this process, each worker is in "global competition with one another" (Thesis 20). This contradiction is solved in a formal manner by the fact that in this "global working class" the "'precariat' is therefore the global normality of the proletariat." Similarly, if "what unites workers and the unemployed is permanent fear" (Thesis 21), one could say just as legitimately that, to the contrary, it is also what separates them. It does not "unite" them, it places them in a relation of exploitation, a contradiction with their own definition in capital, such that the abolition of their condition can be their unification.

It is in Thesis 22 that this apparent contradiction is resolved: "the future of the class as a whole" depends "decisively upon the ability of the superfluous to make their situation the point of departure for a generalized social movement". Here is where the hope for a recomposition of the class "as a whole" lies, a recomposition necessary for the class to achieve the status of a revolutionary subject against capital. It is the nature of this generalized social movement that, in current conditions, is not produced, nor are any of its determinations. The recomposition involving the precarious, the unemployed, the "superfluous" and the "excluded" saves autonomy, since they are not lodged "deep in the classless class society", they cannot struggle to "ratify their status as seller of labour-power." The presentation of "exclusion" and "superfluity" in these theses preserves self-abolition as autonomous affirmation of the class and makes it simultaneously more adequately a "class against itself" than the mass worker of the large Fordist factory. In this

way, the analysis of "exclusion" is completely skewed by the political necessity of these theses.

That "the proletariat finally commences its worldwide triumphal march" in the form of this precariat, this "global normality of the proletariat", goes uncontested. But in this case it is necessary to define the class relation, among other things, that results from this: end of worker identity; identity of the contradiction between proletariat and capital with the contradiction of the proletariat with its own existence as a class, in other words, the identity of the contradiction of its own definition as a class with its contradiction with capital; the asystemic character of wage demands; struggling as a class becomes the internal limit of the class struggle; the double disjunction between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour-power; the *mis-en-abyme* of global zoning between "centre" and "periphery". Some of the features of the restructuration are stated, but all of this is never synthesized as a restructuration, as a transformation of the relation of exploitation between proletariat and capital. For the most part the period is described negatively as an accumulation of features of the previous period that have disappeared. At best, the restructuration becomes a series of "counter-reforms".

The "rage" of the "excluded" that results from immiseration in the "old [capitalist] centres" is seen simply as "rage". This "rage" is analysed only as a result of a negative situation: the state, capital, can no longer integrate them, can no longer transform them into labour-power, if only a potential one. "Nothing can be offered".

The "rabble" mentioned in Thesis 22 does not "embody the tendency of capital to generate a gigantic surplus population". It is the current form of globalization, that is, of the disjunction in each zone between the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of labour-power. This "rage" is, along with a number of other activities in the class struggle, the production, in the current relation of exploitation, of class belonging as an external constraint, the contradiction with its own condition in the contradiction with capital, and its putting into question (the putting into question of its condition).

If the theses insist on these segments of the proletariat, it is because in the individuals that make up this segment they will have found the paradigmatic existence of the "proletarianised individuals" that, throughout the theses, has replaced the proletariat. Model of proletarianised individuals and no longer making up a class, they would be the autonomous embodiment of the contradiction of the "classless class society". As in philosophical communism, the absolute "unsocial" can be turned into the "really social".

Faced with this hoped-for future, the collapse of trade unions and "defensive" struggles are not perceived in terms of the illegitimacy or, better, *asystematicity* of wage demands. Once again, "self-abolition" as overcoming is not produced, but only set side-by-side as a reaction to an impossibility of survival for the proletariat, on the one hand, and for capital an impossibility of using the whole of labour-power for its valorisation, on the other.

In this way of proceeding, you once again encounter the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production. This contradiction says that, once a certain stage has been reached, capital is a constraint, that it is no longer progressive from the moment it begins to make work inessential to the production process. Making work "superfluous" would waste productive forces. The revolutionary character of the proletariat becomes its revolt against its superfluosity, a revolt in the name of productive forces against the relations of production. You save the emancipation of work starting out from its inessentialisation -- quite a feat.

The prospect of self-abolition functions in these theses simply as an *alternative, faced with an impossibility*. All this because "self-abolition" is posited as a constant, and the class relation that can produce it as having putting into play a class similar to the one for whom the revolution was its affirmation. To the contrary, the formula "classless class society" might, in caricaturing things, be understood as the strongest expression of the current class struggle. A period in which, precisely, the struggle of the proletariat as a class contains as its own limit being a class, and in which this class existence is produced as an exterior constraint.

The class struggle produces its own overcoming because the class struggle is nothing other than capital as a moving contradiction. There is an identity between the proletariat as a class of the mode of production and as a revolutionary class.

The current period is oddly christened "A Time without Promise". Oddly, for it should be a time of promise given all that comes before, being the time of the adequate manifestation and appearance of "self-abolition". And yet, no, for we do not have the awaited, hoped-for subject. All of the questions evoked in the final part of these commentaries and which are addressed in the last four theses -- questions concerning consciousness, theory separated from the class, theory and practice, theory that should show its material power -- can be explained by this hiatus that is inherent to the entirety of the theses' problematic. As in all theories with a revolutionary nature and conditions, there is always something missing that would make it so that the terms of the binary would be adequate to one another. Ordinarily, the revolutionaries of autonomy insist on acting as if the proletariat was united for itself by the wage as a potentially revolutionary class. Kosmoprolet knows very well that this is no longer the case, yet they must nevertheless contend that on the one hand the class will be recomposed around the "superfluous" whose relation to capital is inessential, and on the other hand that the proletariat will be united by the wage on the condition that it "transcend the otherwise necessary egoism" of *wage labour*. In the name of what? In the name of consciousness, its revolutionary nature, of theory, of its freedom to act, which become the conditions for the constitution of the subject.

3) Consciousness

When Kosmoprolet write (in Thesis 25) that "the limits of everyday struggle serve as a legitimisation of the vanguard party", we are dealing with a purely ideological critique of Leninism, of the vanguard, of consciousness as something brought to the masses.

As an ideological problematic, these theses respond to the real problem of our time: the relation between everyday struggles and revolution no longer takes the form of a "growing-over", of a mounting class power, but a break, an overcoming (we can put this into a formula: the class is the subject of its communist activity when it enters into conflict with its previous situation). But this genuine problem -- which Kosmoprolet treat through the issue of consciousness -- of the separation of communists from the majority of the class, a subject carrying the revolution is, as we have repeatedly stressed, in contradiction with the content of the revolution.

From this point of view, the first sentence of Thesis 25 (quoted above) is a confession: which question arises now in terms of legitimizing the Leninist vanguard party? None. The proper question, that which does not abandon its object to represent it in another, is that of the analysis of limits in these struggles. These theses note and *represent* these limits in another question that is no longer valid. Responding to a question that is no longer valid, their response is just as obsolete: "the social revolution cannot be a matter of leadership or central direction". This is the response of the ultra-left of the inter-war era. At that time the answer made sense in relation to the content of the revolution (the affirmation of the proletariat in revealing its revolutionary being against all the mediations of its existence as a class of the capitalist mode of production), but it no longer makes sense today.

Nevertheless, there exists for Kosmoprolet a "correct moment of Leninism" (Thesis 25). This "correct moment" of "voluntarism" (ibid.) is based on the fact that "the proletariat will never be compelled to make a revolution". We would expect this proposition to be demonstrated by an analysis of the relationship between the proletariat and capital, of its self-presupposition, the absence of the inevitability of revolution, etc. Well, no. The "proletariat will never be compelled to make a revolution", "because people begin to make their own history consciously". "Voluntarism" would be "correct" because conscious intervention (this problematic requires an understanding of consciousness and its bearer as *one person*, we will return to this) is necessary to remove that which without it would be a contradiction in the terms of the *idea of revolution*. *It's therefore the nature of the result which logically does not exist prior to the process of its production which, while not existing, determines the nature of this process. This is called determination by final causes, or teleology.*

Of course revolution is a voluntary act (it would be better to write here: communising measures to be taken during a wave of struggles), but a voluntary act is not an unknown act. Proletarian activity does not determine itself because *the result must be* "conscious history", it determines itself *by its relation to capital and nothing else, and this relation is a contradiction*. We see determinism there only in the condition of wanting to define the subject of the revolution before the relations in which it exists and which are its definition, the relations in which it acts and which are its consciousness.

If I am compelled as a proletarian, I am not forced against my will ("That thing is called free, which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature [read *necessity of its relations*] and of which the action is determined by itself alone"; Spinoza, *Ethics* I, VII definition).

Communisation as a project does not exist as a “beyond”, already there against capital, it is not the result of a limitless or essential freedom, but the activity of the proletariat *in* the destruction of capital. That is, proletarian activity within the mode of production based on capital is defined within a relationship of reciprocal implication with capital. Communisation is the work of the proletariat as such, that is, as a class of this society, it is then *subjected to the development of class contradictions of this society and to their history*. Consciousness or will do not exist prior to the relation of which they have a consciousness of or in which *they will have to make decisions*. *Revolution does not pose itself in terms of constraint or freedom, as if it were the result of people making moral choices. This would involve considering constituted people as individuals faced with a choice, that is, independent of the relation that constitutes them.*

But it gets even worse, this question appears only in the theorist who, watching a film with others that they have already seen, imagine that only they know the ending (“the communist perspective”). But the class struggle is not a movie. And if “the modern communist perspective does not approach the class from outside . . . nor . . . devotedly expect salvation from it” (Thesis 25) than it is because there is no “communist perspective”. Where would the “communists” get this “perspective” from?

When we speak of communism, we speak of it in the present, that is we speak of class struggle, of what in these struggles can produce the overcoming of classes. The “communist perspective” is the perspective that, knowing the end of history, considers the unfolding which leads to it to be accidental. We arrive, at the end of Thesis 25, at the description of this scene when “proletarians and communists can enter into communication and interaction among one another and with one another”. Who are these communists who aren’t proletarians and these proletarians who are purely proletarian? For there to be “interaction”, “mutuality”, there must be two things distinct in nature. Do the proletarians begin to put into practice the ideas of communists? Are the communists, up to now “spectral” and “unreal”, becoming flesh in the proletariat? All this does, in fact, is provide another response to Lenin's question on the separation of Communists and the class.

“The vanguard is comprised simply by those who do the right thing at the right moment and therefore shine a light upon the possibilities that lie in petrified relations” (Thesis 28). We understand this definition only in relation to “the power of ideology” described in the same thesis: ideology “rationalizes the domination of capital, individuals’ repression of their own needs, as inevitable destiny, therefore making it more bearable. Since other social relations are blocked, everyday consciousness acquiesces to existing conditions”. In other words, the capitalist mode of production is a big deception that so far has managed to “*dominate*” individuals (here the text speaks of needs and individuals and not of class and exploitation — the text continuously shifts theoretical registers) by deceiving them about their fate. Simply pierce the veil and other social relations become visible.

The vanguard says “the emperor wears no clothes”, but this must be said “at the right moment”. One wonders why doing it tomorrow morning wouldn't work. Perhaps because there is one condition: “proletarians must make the first step in order to develop a desire to

understand and ultimately transcend existing relations”. It is quite true that, contrary to the theorists of communism, one can’t make a donkey drink if it isn’t thirsty. Once they’ve taken this first step, a kind of osmosis of communists and proletarians will take place.

There are not two sides, one of the class and another of theory: theoretical production, in the most regular sense of the term, is one class activity among many others.

A communist or revolutionary theory cannot find itself “external” to the course of class struggle. Thus communist theory can only be properly described as such if it is able to condense, even in the most abstract manner, even in a difficult language (it doesn’t matter), the actual experience of real proletarians.

If we now consider theory to be “spectral” vis-à-vis the common course of struggle, it becomes a kind of *latent consciousness of the class*, genuine and effective only in some but potentially activated in all: false in current struggles marked by their limitations, but true in the potential of the effective overcoming, somewhere very far or very near, but always as an anticipation of the thought and practice of the proletariat. Just as there is no growing-over of struggles, there is no growing-over of theory.

If we critique the idea of a growing-over from present struggles to revolution (the fundamental rupture occurs in the questioning by the proletariat of its own definition as a class), the whole question is then one of inscription, within this cycle, of theory from this cycle as its own critique of this. Theory is not external to the course of class struggle, but it is also no longer in a naively positive relationship with it. If theory designates the fact that to struggle as a class is the current limit of the class struggle (that is, if you want to call it such, the only “communist perspective”, that is why one speaks of communisation), this is because it is experienced as such. But, by definition, it is always interior to the fact of struggling as a class that this limit appears — it never acquires a particular existence. The questioning never exists independently for itself. Thus, on the one hand, this theory which designates class belonging as the limit of class struggle refuses to be an ideology of the alternative. And, secondly, because it designates class belonging as a limit, because it designates the terms of the contradiction which are in fact a unity, because by its own method and in accordance with its specific rules, it privileges distinction over unity, while in the daily practice of struggles unity and indistinction predominate (and this theory knows it), it refuses a naive relation to class struggle. In this, it is an abstraction and critical one.

“Theory and praxis, whose mutual embrace is foreshadowed in revolutionary moments of history, today mutually exclude one another in petrified opposition” (Thesis 26). According to the very text of this thesis, this can be explained simply by the fact that we are not in a “revolutionary moment in history”. Furthermore, outside of these moments and even in them, we could proffer all kinds of historical examples of exclusion long before our time. Because in these final theses, theory is the expression of a “communist perspective”, because its *raison d’être* is the goal of the class struggle becoming *disconnected with its course*, because the present content of the revolution as self-abolition is awaiting its bearer, “theory and practice mutually exclude one another”. In these theses, theory is not theory of the

present class struggle, but rather that of the goal from the point of view of present class struggle; and practice is not the contradictory practice of class struggle in its present determinations and in which only the “goal” exists because it is nothing outside of its production, but a practice necessarily inconsistent with the “goal” (the communist perspective) since the goal already exists in theory.

Theory must be considered concretely. Theory is people who speak somewhere, who act, who write journals and texts, who circulate leaflets, produce posters, it is meetings and discussions. Even if we say what the meaning of a particular conflict is, or the general trend of such and such a particular period, we speak of it in the present, so as to participate in the class struggle as it is presently constituted, and no longer to be more advanced than others who would be behind.

Communism is of the present, because it is the content of the current practices of the class struggle. Communism is the contradictory movement of the capitalist mode of production, the process of its decay. It is not a hidden meaning. It is the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, of the law of value and rising organic composition of capital, of the mass of surplus value and the total capital employed, of the universality of productive forces and of its base and content: exploitation. All of these “things” that are directly part of the struggle between the proletariat and capital (the best summary is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall) are interior to the capitalist mode of production and to the necessary course of its overcoming.

It is not the “communist perspective” which “seeks to resolve the objective contradictions of society” (Thesis 28). To speak of the resolution of contradictions and of modern society is to speak of the present class struggle and not of the future. These contradictions are not “objectives”. “Capital as moving contradiction” is the contradiction between classes or, simply put, of the *current* class struggle. It is the condition and the course of its own resolution.

The question of the role of theory should flow naturally from content and not be asked seriously (overbearingly) for its own sake. Let's be innocent again and stop flagellating ourselves. It was in the late 60s and early 70s that this particular object appeared: theory as an object itself, apart from what it recounted. This object has a birth certificate and it is historically dated: this is the era of the end of the revolution as affirmation of the class, the end of worker's identity, the era of the end of any growing-over between demand based struggles and revolution, it's the era which cannot be directly linked to the class struggle because it is the “theorist of the revolution”, but when the revolution receded away the “theorist” came to feel like an orphan. As such, theory are those activities which explain and justify themselves, without posing as an object in itself. “Separation” is only a problem for this object.

This object is becoming obsolete.

When in these struggles the proletariat's own existence as a class appears as an external constraint, that is, the limit of its struggle as a class, struggles seize upon themselves in a self-critical manner. This seizure, like theory itself, becomes a critical abstraction. Across changing activities, riots, strikes without demands in the 70s, riots yet again in the 90s and 2000s, but also in a more ordinary way, struggles show the active refusal — against capital — of the proletarian condition, including here self-organization or ephemeral manifestations and limits of self-management. Immediate struggles, both practically and in their own discourse, are constantly producing an internal distance within themselves. This distance is the communising perspective, as a concrete and objective theoretical articulation between theory and the immediate understanding struggles have of themselves. If this immediate understanding of struggles tends itself to become a critical abstraction, then theory is, inversely, undermined in its very definition.

This activity situates itself within the daily course of real class struggle, concretely productive of its own overcoming as communist revolution, and we must understand these activities as produced through this course as one of its practical determinations, as one of its elements, and in themselves one of its theoretical characteristics. This theoretical production does not exist in itself, as a constituted body, opposing and preceding the course of class struggle. This is why theory should be seen as a real part of struggle and the communising perspective be seen as the articulation of theory, which is the *critical abstraction* of the theoretical character of struggles, the self-critical way struggles grasp themselves.

Appendix on gender

Thesis 11, the thesis concerning women, which is to say concerning the gender distinction, or concerning the contradiction between men and women, the distinction of gender, which is to say the contradiction between men and women strikes us as extremely problematic. Within the general economy of the “Theses”, this thesis is hardly necessary, apparently entering in only because it must be mentioned. This thesis is so extraneous to the larger problematic of the theses as a whole that it is almost impossible to integrate its critique into the larger argument, and yet it reveals the same general limitation of these “Theses.”

The first sentence is, in itself, a confession that this thesis could have just as well have been included or not included: “*Among* (our emphasis) the divisions consolidated by the triumphal procession of capitalism is that between the spheres of production and reproduction, a sexually codified separation which, accompanied by all sorts of ideologies of legitimation bolstered by anthropology or biology, became a social model in the form of the bourgeois family.” Thus, among an array of objects we've chosen this one to discuss, but we could have just as well selected any other.

In this thesis, the “sexually codified separation” is only the form of the separation between production and reproduction. That this separation is “sexually codified” is presented here as if it's obvious and is upheld only by the legitimization of biology and

anthropology. The gender distinction, the contradiction between men and women, is here no more than the name for something else.

“The form of the bourgeois family” became a “social model” to such a degree that “*the model* (their emphasis) of a sexual division of labour, where the role of breadwinner falls to the male, *imposed itself* (our emphasis) within proletarians circles as well”. Gender distinction which is by definition a hierarchical distinction and a contradiction, is here an ideal imposed and maintained by the power of ideology to the extent that “the material basis for maintaining hierarchical gender relations are largely obsolete ...” (Thesis 11). It is true, that with a little “optimism” one would be permitted to “believe that the emancipation of women and the achievement of their status as bourgeois subjects was completed” and being “subject to all the tribulations of existence as owners of labour-power, while on average earning less than men and working part-time more often...” is merely a kind of a regrettable fact. That the gender distinction can be eliminated “on the basis of bourgeois society depends *inter alia* on the tenacity of this ideology (i.e. the “sociobiology”) (Thesis 11). Not only can this distinction not be abolished “on the basis of bourgeois society” for reasons of capitalist relations of production themselves, but even the contradiction between men and women is, within the relation of exploitation, a specific contradiction in which the actresses and actors have to settle their accounts in a revolutionary movement that constitutes itself as such.

This extremely superficial analysis of the gender distinction raises two of the fundamental theories of the 28 Theses: the identification of the autonomous affirmation of the class and “self-abolition”, and the hope for a recomposition of a collective actor, as the disruptive, negative side of society centered around the “excluded” and the “superfluous”.

The first point prohibits the analysis of the gender distinction on the basis of labour, the wage, and surplus labour, since the simple consideration— as a material social relation—of this distinction calls into question the affirmation of any sort class altogether. The second allows us to speak of gender, although only as one “separation” *among others*. That is, to speak of it in such a way that the recomposition [of class] is carried out in an extremely vague relationship with exploitation, in a relation of implicit reciprocity that is already undermined everywhere else, since any other oppression, division, or hierarchy that can be considered could take its place.

In order to understand the social construction that is “women”, we must not start from reproduction (biological) and the specific place of women within reproduction, *but what makes this place unique* and constitutes its social meaning: the modes of production up to and including the present moment. The historically-recurrent character of the appropriation of women expresses the continuity, throughout all modes of production up to today, of *labour and of the increase of the population as the primary productive force*, which is no more a natural relation than any other *economic relation of production* and which cannot occur without the splitting of society between workers and non-workers. If “having children” is the definition of a group of people, women, this is a pure social construction. Taking the

population increase as the primary productive force allows us to consider the biological differences within reproduction as simply something whose *meaning* is constructed by a social relation; it is not something waiting to have meaning, but totally constructed, as difference, socially. This construction presupposes the appropriation of women and their submission to this function.

The appropriation of women as the producer of the primary productive force (*qua* the increasing of the population) implies the appropriation of the person who produces it, and as such it implies the appropriation of everything she does *in the way that determines her exclusion from society*. Domestic labour cannot be appropriated by the capitalist (via the value of labour-power) without a relationship of domination exercised by all men. Reproductive labour is not paid either, although *labour* is never paid for under the capitalist mode of production. It is the reproduction of labour-power that is paid. The payment for labour-power, the wage relation, includes the domestic relation within it (we can not say the opposite, because if the worker does not return to sell his labour power he can not renew the domestic relation).

Women enter the labour market but they enter it on the basis of this exclusion. That women are assigned to the role of domestic work in addition to paid work is purely capitalist. If purely capitalist, these are the same necessities of capital valorisation that adjust the input and output of women's labour within its real location in the domestic sphere, *without ever dispensing of it*. "The reproduction of labour-power in the form of goods, at least in the cities" (Thesis 11) reveals itself as pure "discourse" when faced with the slightest inquiry into the moments of domestic labour.

Within the capitalist mode of production, the exclusion of women from public space is more radical than in prior modes of production. Capitalism defines productive work as absolutely separated from all reproductive activities of the private sphere. The free labour-power that contains productive labour must *travel outside the private sphere in order to be sold*. The split between production and reproduction, the home and the place of production, is absolute, structural, and constitutive of the mode of production based upon free labourer and the sale of his labour power, whose salary serves as the payment for *reproduction*.

The domestic relation is included within the salary, which is both the reproduction of labour power and the "race of the workers". From this follows a disjunction between the labour process in which labour power is productively consumed and the modality of surplus labour expansion represented by domestic labour, whose effects cannot be appropriated by the capitalist *without a relation of domination*.

Male dominance does not mediate capitalist exploitation. If this domination increases surplus labour it is because surplus labour and male domination, the appropriation of women as well as their activities and their time, occur simultaneously, as they both *belong to the same concept of surplus labour*. But it is precisely here that the capitalist mode of production

has a problem with women. The capitalist mode of production is the very first mode of production that has a problem with labour and the increase of the population as the “primary productive force”. It is with the capitalist mode of production that this contradiction “appeared” (that of the population as the primary productive force), but it is impossible to escape without the abolition of this mode of production. The appearance of the contradiction of the gendered reproduction of humankind is identical to the contradictory relation between capital and labour within the capitalist mode of production, which is to say that it’s identical to capital as a contradiction in process.

If all societies up to the present formulate the population increase as the primary productive force, it is because they are class societies. The resulting division of society between workers and non-workers immediately duplicates another division which is *internal* to it, but whose *terms do not overlap*: a gendered division of society. In fact, up to and including capitalism, wherein the thing [i.e. the above contradiction] becomes contradictory, the main source of surplus labour is, of course, work, which points to the need for increasing population. The necessary appropriation of surplus labour, which is a purely social phenomenon (the surplus is not due to any purported super-productivity of labour). is what creates gender and the social relevance of sexual distinction. It is surplus labour that structures the *two* parts (workers/non-workers; men/women). There are not *two* class systems because there are not two modes of production and because there is *only one* form of surplus labour. In fact, *there is no surplus labour without the gendered division of humanity*. The contradiction between workers and non-workers and the conflict between men and women are corollaries, but one cannot be superimposed upon the other. The second, while not defining any specific mode of production, is no less specific a *contradiction which can not be reduced to the first*. "Comrades but women" is attempting to say just this.

As long as the revolution is the affirmation of the proletariat and liberation of labour, it is impossible to question both practically and theoretically the social construction of women. The wage is the value of the reproduction of labour power and the “race of the workers” (*Wages Price and Profit*, p. 46) and not the payment for the “value of labour” or for “the work” (absurd expressions). Nor can we, like *Exit*, blame the law of value for being gendered when it is the thing itself that is. The relation of dependency (the relation of support in which the woman finds herself) is the same product of the wage as the reproduction of labour power and “unpaid labour”. Only a theory of revolution as the abolition of all classes, as abolition of the proletariat and the wage, can take into account the *internal* antagonism included in the wage as the reproduction of labour power and even more, considering that this is an internal antagonism and should be a determinant element for the abolition of wage labour. As long as the fight remains as that of the waged worker or even the fight for the liberation of labour it contains in-itself, within waged labour, the appropriation of women.

The class struggle will only be the abolition of the proletariat through the abolition of capital in the revolutionary confrontation alongside the women’s struggle in its specificity. As long as the revolution is about the emancipation of labour, it maintains the proclamation of

the population as the main productive force. The production of this productive force must itself be emancipated, rationalized, liberated without in-itself being called into question—that which nevertheless cannot be avoided, considering what is contained within this “emancipation”, this “rationalization”: the public appearance of women. Within previous revolutionary periods there has always been a central preoccupation with “putting women back in their place”.