

From *operaismo* to ‘autonomist Marxism’ A Response

Review article:

***Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* by Steve Wright** (London: Pluto Press, 2002)

***Reading ‘Capital’ Politically* (2nd edn.) by Harry Cleaver** (Leeds: AK/Anti-thesis, 2000)

Introductory Comment by Harry Cleaver: This article was published in issue #11 (2003) of the British Marxist journal *Aufheben*. It purports to be a review of two books, one by Steve Wright on certain aspects of post-WWII Italian Marxist thought, and one by me on reading *Capital* politically. The review essentially uses these two books as foils to attack the current of Marxist thought that I have called “autonomist Marxism”, i.e., the various writings that have recognized and appreciated the ability of the working class to take the initiative in struggle and act “autonomously” vis à vis capitalist power. In the course of carrying out that attack the reviewers ignore the bulk of the substantive material in both books, latch onto and critique a few elements that they don’t like and generally excoriate “autonomist Marxism.” Unfortunately, in the process they not only ignore most of the theory in question but misrepresent and distort much of what they do deal with and thus, inevitably, miss the mark in their attacks.

The “review”, however, does provide an occasion for setting the record straight and elaborating on a few important points. Therefore, I have responded to various statements, characterizations and critiques by inserting comments in the text.

The Italian ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969 was one of the high points of late 20th century revolutionary struggle, and is associated with *operaismo* (‘workerism’), a Marxian approach that focused on rank-and-file struggles in contrast to what was seen as the politics and opportunism of the dominant (Stalinist) left. The wave of social struggles of that year was echoed, although with important differences, in the tumultuous ‘Movement of 1977’. Under the banner of *autonomia*, the workerists’ analysis of class struggle was extended through the actions of groups outside the workplace. Intense street-fighting, self-reduction or outright refusal of bills and fares, the explicit raising of radical demands such as the abolition of wage-labour: all this hinted at a movement for which what counts as ‘political’ had been seriously questioned by struggles around wider desires and needs. Readers will be aware of workerism and *autonomia* today through the works of its most well-known theorists, such as Negri, through the US journal *Midnight Notes*, and perhaps through the aut-op-sy website and discussion list.¹ For many of those dissatisfied with the versions of Marxism and anarchism available to them in the

UK, the notions of ‘autonomy’ and ‘autonomist’ have positive associations. For example, the recent ‘anti-capitalist’ mobilizations of J18 and Seattle both drew on themes and language associated with *autonomia*, such as autonomous struggles and diversity.² However, the history and theory surrounding workerism and *autonomia* are not always well known. The recent publication of two books on *operaismo* and *autonomia* and their theoretical heritage testify to the continued interest in this current. Harry Cleaver’s *Reading ‘Capital’ Politically* was originally published in 1979, and has now been republished, with a new preface. Cleaver’s Introduction, in particular, has been a point of reference to many in grasping the significance of post-war developments, including struggles that don’t necessarily express themselves in traditional forms. Steve Wright’s *Storming Heaven* presents a critical history of the Italian movement’s political and theoretical development in relation to the struggles of the 1950s, 60s and 70s – a history which, we argue, now supersedes the Cleaver presentation.

Comment: I should hope so! Even in Italian there is no satisfactory history of the development of the struggles of this period in Italy or of the innovations in theory that were part of it. I welcomed Steve Wright’s work when it was in the dissertation stage and encouraged him to publish it as a book. *Storming Heaven* provides the most detailed history of those theoretical developments that we currently have available – something that I sketched in only a few pages in the introduction to my book.

The publication of these two books gives us the opportunity for a critical reappraisal of the contributions of *operaismo* and *autonomia*, and Cleaver’s attempt to keep them alive.

Comment: *Reading Capital Politically* was not an attempt to keep those contributions “alive.” They are very much alive both in the sense that there are many who still utilize the ideas generated during those periods and in the sense that there has been an ongoing development of the ideas that has taken us beyond them.

¹ http://lists.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/aut_html/

² The J18 mobilization sought to link up the autonomous struggles of ‘environmentalists, workers, the unemployed, indigenous peoples, trade unionists, peasant groups, women’s networks, the landless, students, peace activists and many more’. See <http://bak.spc.org/j18/site/english.html>

The origin of the book is explained in its preface: it was the by-product of a summer's effort to come up with a theoretical reinterpretation of Marx's value theory that made sense to me. The long introduction that situates that interpretation within the history of Marxism was constructed later at the behest of the book's publisher.

In particular, we will examine five issues. First, there is the question of whether the concept of 'autonomy' is adequate as a basis for a class analysis.

Comment: Right off the bat you know that something is fishy here. No single concept could possibly be "adequate" as a "basis for a class analysis" and therefore you know in advance from the way the question is posed that the answer will be negative.

Second, we argue that the workerists and hence those who have followed them suffered from a lack of an adequate critique of leftism and nationalism.

Comment: Again a charge of "inadequacy". This charge is always a cheap shot because just as no single concept could possibly be "adequate" for the analysis of any complex phenomenon, so too every analysis is always partial and therefore can always be judged "inadequate" for grasping everything there is to grasp. The real issue always is, or should be, whether a theory draws our attention to something that is important and whether it helps us understand something we didn't understand before. Another thing: while the meaning of "nationalism" may be fairly unambiguous, the meaning of "leftism" is not. The term is used recurrently in this text and what it is supposed to denote remains unclear even once it is finally defined in footnote 31.

Third, there is the issue of the ambiguity of those influenced by workerism in their account of the status of the 'law of value'.

comment: As will become apparent below, no general characterization of the position of "those influenced by workerism" on this subject is possible because there are dramatic disagreements. What will be attacked here is the position of the Italian Marxist Antonio Negri, but he has long ago been critiqued by other "autonomist" Marxists, including myself.

Fourth, the failure of workerism and of *autonomia* to theorize retreat in the class struggle can be linked to an implicit (or even explicit) satisfaction among some theorists in this tradition with the current limits of the class struggle.

Comment: As I hope will also become apparent below, this charge is scurrilous. Not only has there been no failure to theorize "retreat" (if what is meant by that is a downturn in a cycle of struggle) but given the intense preoccupation by people in this area with finding ways to go beyond current limits of working class power, the affirmation that they are "satisfied" with those limits is nasty and mean-spirited misrepresentation.

Finally, there is the question of whether the political reading of Marx's *Capital* offered by Cleaver actually works.

Comment: The irony here is that these "reviewers" never take up the political reading that I carry out of Chapter 1 of *Capital* and therefore never have a basis for answering this question.

We conclude that the defeat of the movements that sustained the development of workerism has led both to the abandonment of the project of world revolution and the ideologization of theory among theorists in this tradition.

Comment: This conclusion flies in the face of the explicit dedication of the people in this current to the overthrow of capitalism as a global system and only makes sense as a statement that their approach is different from that of the reviews and thus, in good sectarian manner, they are denounced as betrayers of the proletariat.

1 Promise and limits of an 'autonomist' class analysis

To understand the workerist and the subsequent 'autonomist Marxist' take on class we need to go back to the emergence of the current's key theoretical concepts.

1.1 Classical Workerism

The origins of *operaismo* lie in research carried out on workers' behaviour in the 1950s. The concern of the research was with workers' own needs and perceptions: their definitions of their problems on the shopfloor, and the nature of their struggles. Wright (p. 63) cites the following as the core features of the workerist perspective emerging from this research: the identification of the working class with the labour subsumed to the immediate process of production; an emphasis on the wage struggle as a key terrain of political conflict; and the insistence that the working class was the driving force within capitalist society.³ All these features were a reaction against, and the basis for a developed alternative to, the productivist reformism and (bourgeois) politics of the

³ In political discourse in the UK, 'workerism' is usually a derogatory term for approaches we disagree with for fetishizing the significance of workplace struggles (and dismissing those outside the workplace). Italian *operaismo*, on the other hand, refers to the inversion of perspective from that of the operation of capital to that of the working class: 'We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned.' (M. Tronti, 1964, 'Lenin in England', in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (London: Red Notes/Conference of Socialist Economists, 1979). While the Italian usage is clearly positive rather than negative, as we shall see, one of the eventual limits of (versions of) Italian workerism was precisely the fetishizing of struggles on the factory floor.

traditional (Stalinist) left, i.e. the PCI (the Italian Communist Party, by far the largest Communist Party in Western Europe).

Comment: Not “i.e.,” but “e.g.,”. As Steve points out in *Storming Heaven*, the PCI was not the only object of critique but shared that honor with other parties of the Old Left, especially the PSI.

For the PCI, ‘politics’ was conducted primarily through parliament (and the union bureaucracy). By contrast, in stressing the significance of workers’ own struggles within industries, the workerists rejected the classical Leninist distinction between ‘political’ and ‘economic’ struggles.

Through relating workerist theory to the context of the struggles through which it emerged, *Storming Heaven* examines workerism’s most well-known category – that of *class composition*, which Wright (p. 49) defines as the various behaviours which arise when particular forms of labour-power are inserted in specific processes of production. *Operaismo* also introduced the concept of the *mass worker*, which describes the subject identified through the research on the FIAT and Olivetti factories. What characterizes the mass worker is its relatively simple labour; its place at heart of immediate process of production; and its lack of the bonds which had tied skilled workers to production (Wright, p. 107).

1.2. Workerism beyond workers

As Cleaver points out, the traditional Marxian analysis, and political practice, understands production and work itself as neutral. The aim is to take over the means of production, and run them ‘in the interests of the workers’, to the ends of a fairer distribution. However, the research on FIAT and Olivetti had shown that the division of labour, and the definition of skills, operated as a process of domination rather than being a technical matter. The workerists therefore proposed concepts intended to grasp this non-neutrality of factory organization and machinery. Particularly important here is the work of Panzieri, who had argued that, unlike the reformist Stalinists, the working class recognized the unity of the ‘technical’ and ‘despotic’ moments of the organization of production.⁴ Such concepts pointed to the limitations of workers’ self-management which could be seen to be merely the self-management of one’s own domination.

Tronti developed this line of analysis with the notion of the *social factory*. The idea of the factory as locus of power was extended to the wider society as a whole which was seen to be organized around the same principles of domination and value (re)production.⁵ The implication of this was that, since

⁴ ‘The new “technical bases” progressively attained in production provide capitalism with new possibilities for the consolidation of its power... But for this very reason, working-class overthrow of the system is a negation of the entire organization in which capitalist development is expressed – and first and foremost of technology as it is linked to productivity.’ (R. Panzieri, ‘The capitalist use of machinery: Marx versus the objectivists’ in P. Slater (ed.), *Outlines of a Critique of Technology* (pp. 49-60), London: Inks Links.

⁵ ‘At the highest level of *capitalist development*, the social relation becomes a *moment* of the relation of production, the whole of society becomes an *articulation* of production; in other words, the whole of society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society. It is on this basis that

social organization in society is not neutral, then resistance outside the factory could be a valid moment of the class struggle.

Yet the emphasis on those (factory) workers in the immediate process of production meant that *operaismo* was caught in a tension if not a contradiction. Tronti and others were unable to reconcile their notion of the social factory with the emphasis they wanted to place on what happened in large factories: even as they pointed beyond the mass worker, workerists continued to privilege the role of the factory proletariat.

Comment: Tronti went back into the PCI. Others used the notion of social factory as a point of departure to analyse, and attempt to coordinate, struggles within and without factories. Indeed, the very concept of social factory meant that the “proletariat” and its struggles could be found throughout society. The concept of class composition highlighted the importance of grasping the complexities and interrelationships of actual struggles. This was precisely what made it possible for many to recognize the connection between struggles inside the big factories and those in the larger social factory.

In both footnote #3 and in the above paragraph, the authors of this article emphasize those who were unable to go along with this development and continued to prioritise, *a priori*, factory struggles. The caravan, as it were, passed them by.

Autonomia (the ‘area of autonomy’), a loose network of groupings including and influenced by radical workerists, emerged in the 1970s, following the collapse of some of the workerist groups. This new movement also saw the influx of a lot of younger people; they were often university educated or working in small manufacturing or the service sector. They characteristically emphasized the localized and personal over class-wide struggle, need over duty, and difference over homogeneity (Wright, p. 197). They thus sought to stretch the concept of class composition beyond the immediate labour-process in the factories. They were also less committed to totalizing concepts of class and to their workplace identities; and they had less time for the PCI and the unions. Some of these tendencies found theoretical expression in Bologna’s seminal ‘The tribe of moles’.⁶

The most controversial theoretical development in this period was Toni Negri’s argument that the mass worker had been replaced by what he called the *socialized worker* (*operaio sociale*). Negri’s thesis was that capital, while maintaining the firm as the heart of its valorization process, drives toward a greater socialization of labour, going beyond the simple extension of the immediate process of production towards a complete redefinition of the category of productive labour. The extent of this category, according to Negri, was

the machine of the political state tends ever-increasingly to become one with the figure of the *collective capitalist*.’ (M. Tronti 1971 *Operai e capitale*, Turin: Einaudi).

⁶ S. Bologna (1977). ‘The tribe of moles’, In *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (op. cit.).

now 'relative to the level of the advancement of the process of subsumption of labour to capital... [W]e can now say that the concept of wage labourer and the concept of productive labourer tend towards homogeneity', with the resulting constitution of 'the new social figure of a unified proletariat'.⁷ In short, all moments of the circulation process, and even reproduction, were seen to be productive of value; the distinction between productive and non-productive labour was obliterated.

Comment: Negri made much of the distinction in Marx between the *formal* and *real* subsumption of labor by capital. In *Capital* this distinction is between the subordination of labor being exercised in traditional ways, for example through the putting out system, and the subordination of labor achieved through factories and the development of technology that reorganizes the labor process in ways that give capital greater power of command over workers. Eventually, Negri has argued, beyond the real subsumption of *labor* came the real subsumption of *society* - and thus the subordination of all of life to capital's purposes. It has never been clear how this vision differs, if at all, either from Tronti's social factory or from the vision of cultural hegemony held by critical theorists; but the conclusions drawn for political action certainly differed markedly.

While *Capital* Volume 1 assumes the reproduction of labour-power in the form of the family and education, Negri's theoretical innovation was to focus on this as a locus of struggle.

Comment: This was precisely NOT *Negri's* innovation but rather that of women and students in struggle - struggles which at times pitted the women and students at the University of Padova against Negri. Credit should be given where credit is due: the emphasis on the importance of "reproduction" came with Mariarosa Della Costa and the Italian feminist movement. Unfortunately, because Negri has been translated more than many other Italian writers in this tradition he is often given credit for ideas that he did not come up with, but adopted - sometimes extending or changing their meaning. One would hope that Steve's book will help people to resituate Negri within the torrent of creative ideas and innovative actions from which he took and to which he contributed. This review, unfortunately, by dwelling so much on Negri contributes little to that resituating.

Negri suggested that, historically, there had been a shift in emphasis after the end of the 1960s whereby capital adopted a strategy to avoid exclusive dependence on the traditional working class and to rely more heavily on the labour-power of social groups who were, at that time, marginal and less organized.⁸ Thus he and his followers looked to the

organized unemployed, the women's movement, the practice of self-reduction and the increasing instances of organized looting that characterised the Movement of 1977 as valid moments of anti-capitalist practice; the revolutionary process was understood as a pluralism of organs of proletarian self-rule (Wright, p. 173).

Comment: Right or wrong, this analysis is an example of the attempt to grasp the process of political recomposition, or the way the class composition is changed through workers struggles and to draw conclusions for political strategy.

As Wright discusses, Negri's account was criticized as ultimately too abstract because it identified power as the dimension linking all the social groups and practices referred to as constituting the socialized worker; this emphasis had the effect of flattening out differences between the different groups and practices. The redefinition of the category of productive labour is problematic for the same reason.

Comment: There is no *apriori* reason to think that Negri's redefinition of "productive labor" involves any more of a "flattening out" of differences than Marx's redefinition against the classical economists. To see how categories of labor, hitherto thought to have been "outside" capitalism, had come to function within it does not mean to conflate all kinds of labor that functions to reproduce and expand capital. More serious is the issue of the degree to which Negri, and his collaborators studied and drew useful conclusions from the differences among various sectors of "productive labor". His critics, such as Sergio Bologna, argued that while recognizing such differences, their political dimensions were often ignored and therefore important implications were not taken into account.

Moreover, it led Negri to draw over-optimistic conclusions as to the class composition resulting from the real subsumption of labour to capital. The 'socialized worker' also seemed to change over time. At first, the socialized worker characteristically referred to precarious workers; later, as Negri's perspective wavered with his disconnection from the movement, it was embodied in the 'immaterial worker', as exemplified by the computer programmer.⁹

Comment: Whatever one thinks of the analysis Negri's perspective did NOT "waver". The theorization of the immaterial worker (a term that I really dislike) was based on close study of many sectors of work where workers were increasingly in control of their tools, making more decisions than the mass worker - thus involved in mental labor as well as manual labor - and finding their "off-the-job" creativity and imagination being harnessed by capital on the job. The bulk of this kind of research by those close to Negri was carried out during his exile in France

⁷ A. Negri (1973). 'Partito operaio contro il lavoro', in S. Bologna et al., (eds.) *Crisi e Organizzazione Operaia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974)

⁸ See Negri's (1982) 'Archaeology and project: The mass worker and the social worker', in *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on*

Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis & New Social Subjects 1967-83. (London: Red Notes, 1988).

⁹ See 'Decadence: The theory of decline or the decline of theory? Part two', footnote 83, *Aufheben* 3, Summer 1994.

and much of it is published, and remains untranslated, in the journal *Futur Anterieur*.

The area of autonomy reached its zenith with the Movement of 1977. However, it wasn't just the well-documented massive state repression, in the form of violence and imprisonment, that led to the breaking of *autonomia* and the collapse of workerism. The development of *autonomia* and the emphasis on extra-workplace struggles went hand in hand with the isolation of the radical workerists from the wider working class. It was this isolation and hence pessimism in the possibility of a wider movement that led many ultimately to end up back in the PCI - or to join the armed groups.

Comment: This is a highly misleading simplification of the dynamics of the development and crisis of the movement. Rather than pessimism there was much too much optimism - expressed in part, but only in part, in the over-optimism mentioned in the preceding paragraph - and a failure to deal with the issues of the armed groups, such as the Brigada Rosa, and of the use of violence more generally. In retrospect the BR was successful in its objective of "wiping out the middle" in the sense of creating a public perception that the crucial political contest was one between itself and the state. As a result, not only did the state win, hands down but it was able to use the fear of BR terrorism to actually destroy the "middle" including Autonomia.

The strategy of the Italian state in using the terrorism of the armed bands to attack all of its opponents has been more recently taken up by the US government in using fear of Islamic terrorism to wage war abroad and to assault civil liberties at home. It remains to be seen how successful it will be.

1.3 Cleaver's account of the working class

One problem often raised against the communist project is that of the supposed disappearance of its agent – the working class. Marx's conception of revolution is said to be linked with a class structure that was disappearing. This was a particularly pressing issue at the time Cleaver originally wrote *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, with Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class* and similar sociological analyses becoming fashionable. Cleaver offers a response to this by suggesting that the working class is just changing shape and is in fact everywhere.¹⁰ For many of us, the most influential aspect of Harry Cleaver's *Reading 'Capital' Politically* is less his 'political' account of the relation between value and struggles (which we discuss below) than his Introduction, in which a history of movements and ideas is used to develop an 'autonomist' conceptualization of the working class in opposition to that of traditional Marxism as well as to those who wanted to argue that the working class was disappearing. (In fact, while Cleaver's book was photocopied and passed

around by loads of people, most people we know only read the Introduction!)

Comment: *Sigh* - as this "review" attests.

Cleaver's class analysis can be seen to follow on from Tronti's concept of the social factory and Bologna's 'The tribe of moles'. Thus, in his account of developments in Italy, he suggests that the struggles of non-factory workers - predominantly women in this case - both embodied and clarified the new class composition (p. 71). 'Community' struggles around the self-reduction of rents and food and utility prices, he suggests, enabled these women participants to become more conscious of their own role in value-production. Hence their own autonomous activity could be grasped as an essential part of the class struggle, rather than being limited to the auxiliary role of supporting the wage-based struggles of their menfolk. Cleaver takes the Wages for Housework campaign as the highest expression of this development.

In the new preface to *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, Cleaver (pp. 16-17) elaborates on this account of the nature of class. Descriptively, an essential point here is the extension of the category of the working class to cover not only the waged but also the unwaged. Cleaver claims that this expanded definition is justified by historical research (e.g. Linebaugh's *The London Hanged*¹¹) which, it is suggested, shows in the political culture of artisans and others that the working class predates the predominance of the wage. Conceptually, the crux of Cleaver's argument is in terms of a social group's exploitation by, and hence struggles against, capital.

Comment: Actually I don't put it like this because of the problem of the ambiguity of "exploitation". The way I put it is in terms of the capitalist imposition of work, resistance to it and efforts to go beyond it. Waged workers are under constant pressure to work for capital; unwaged workers are under constant pressure to work for capital. Both struggle against that imposition and for alternative ways of being.

Moreover, the struggles of the social group as such, rather than their subsumption within a general working class struggle, are taken to be significant for their self-transformative potential. For Cleaver, the ability of such social groups to re-create themselves in struggle points to a problem with traditional (narrow) definitions of the working class, which said nothing about this self-re-creation.¹² In line with

¹¹ P. Linebaugh (1991). *The London Hanged*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

¹² Negri introduced the term 'self-valorization' for this process of autonomous self-development (see *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, New York/London: Autonomedia/Pluto, 1991). The attraction of the concept lies in its implication that the working class is an active subject, not just a function of capital's valorization needs, and whose strategy is to take what it needs.

¹⁰ An opposite Marxian response to the 'problem' of the class basis of revolution, as provided by Moishe Postone in *Time Labor and Social Domination* and the Krisis group, is to retain Marx's work as a critique of commodity society and value but disconnect this from class.

Comment: Not really. The attraction of the concept is not that the working class is viewed as an active subject *per se* - that is recognized by "autonomists" who reject the notion of self-valorization - but that its activity includes more than resistance, more even than taking the initiative (as opposed to being purely

the tradition of *autonomia*, Cleaver's account recognizes resistance to capital as an inherent feature of the majority of humanity, rather than - as in sociological and some Marxist accounts of Western class structure - limited to the industrial proletariat.

Cleaver's account of an 'autonomist' tradition of struggles and theories was important for us, as for many people seeking an adequate account of class struggle in the 1980s and 90s. But, re-reading Cleaver's definition of the working class now, and in particular the social groups he seeks to include (*as* social groups) within this definition, leads us to argue that his account is not sufficient as a class analysis. The question is whether exploitation is a feature of the social group he refers to *as such*, and therefore whether resistance is inherent for the group as such. Our argument is that there are differences and distinctions that matter within and between the social categories that Cleaver identifies as part of the working class.

Comment: The notion of "social group" or "social category" which suddenly appears here is conjured up by the reviewers. The real issue is not that of whether some (often ill-defined) "social group" should or should not be classified as "working class" but to recognize how a whole array of people in various unwaged situations find themselves suffering the capitalist imposition of work and how their efforts to resist it, and sometimes move beyond it, can rupture capitalist reproduction.

Wright argues that *operaismo* and *autonomia* employ concepts which serve to flatten out and lose important differences and distinctions in class analysis. Our point is that Cleaver is heir to this tendency.

To flesh this argument out, let us consider each of the social categories that Cleaver wants to (re-)define as part of the working class.

Before doing so, however, we need to stress here the inadequacy of playing the game of treating classes as categories into which we place people. For us, class is not a form of stratification but a *social relation*; rather than

re-active). The "more" that is central here is its ability to move beyond itself qua "working" class and craft new ways of being.

However, in Marx, the concept of 'valorization' refers to capital's own operation - specifically, its use of our activity to expand *value*, that is, our alienated labour. It therefore seems extremely odd to employ it to refer to our activity against capital - unless that activity too is itself alienated in some way. In the preface to the second edition of *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, Cleaver acknowledges that the concept is problematic (as he does in his interview with Massimo de Angelis in *Vis-a-Vis*, 1993). However, he still uses it to explain that, in being *against* capital, autonomous struggles are also *for* 'a diverse variety of new ways of being'.

Comment: Yes, but I don't use the concept "to explain" this, I rather explain how the concept draws our attention to such positive phenomena.

See also his 'The inversion of class perspective in Marxian theory: From valorization to self-valorization' in W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn & K. Psychopedis (eds.) *Open Marxism: Volume II: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto).

attempting to classify people we need to understand how class is formed, as a process, within a relationship of antagonism.¹³ It is true that individuals are situated differently with regards the fundamental social relation of how labour is pumped out of the direct producers (and that identities and perceptions of interests linked with these identities can form around these situations). But our argument with Cleaver's (re)classifications is inadequate in its own right, and needs to be read within a broader argument about class as a relation not (just) a stratum.

Comment: This objection to "classification", to "playing the game of treating classes as categories into which we place people" is one I share and one I have written about in commentaries made available for many years now on the web site for my undergraduate course on Marxian "Economics." See in particular the commentary on chapter two of *Reading Capital Politically*: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/357krcp2outline.html> and the other materials on "class" at: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/357k.html>

Because of this the "reviewers" have essentially set up a straw man, and then proceed to attempt to shoot it down. But as with all strawmen, the shooting ends up being irrelevant to the real issues.

Cleaver states (p. 73):

The identification of the leading role of the unwaged in the struggles of the 1960s in Italy, and the extension of the concept [of working class political recomposition] to the peasantry, provided a theoretical framework within which the struggles of American and European students and housewives, the unemployed, ethnic and racial minorities, and Third World [sic] peasants could all be grasped as moments of an international cycle of working class struggle.

The unemployed

Organized unemployed struggles played a significant role in the Italian experience of the 70s - the Neapolitan movement for example was able to mobilize thousands of unemployed workers, becoming the region's central reference point for militant activity (Wright, p. 165). In these pages and in other

¹³ The point is well put in 'Marianne Duchamp talks to Tursan Polat about class': 'First, there are differences, and not mere differences but oppositions of the first order, between the sociologic conception of *socio-economic categories* on the one hand and the hegelo-communist conception of *social-class* on the other. In the sociological conception, socio-economic categories, including 'class' and an inexhaustible number of constituent sub-strata, are defined: (a) beginning with the particular i.e. the individual, i.e. analytically/inductively; (b) as transtemporal aggregates of individuals who share commonalities of occupation, income, and even culture; (c) as static and normal presence within any society, i.e. biologically. In the hegelo-communist conception, social classes are defined: (a) beginning from the whole i.e. the social form i.e. synthetically/deductively; (b) as active bearers of the mutually opposed historical interests inherent within the social form; (c) with a view toward the abolition of state and economy; i.e. necrologically.' <http://www.angelfire.com/pop2/pkv/class.htm>

publications, we have given much attention to such struggles, which for us are often over benefits, for the very simple reason that benefits are the other side of the coin of the working wage¹⁴ (and because we ourselves have relied on benefits so much!). The unemployed are the lowest stratum of the proletariat - the most dispossessed – and are likely to have a background in the working class as such.

Comment: This reference to waged workers as “the working class as such” is precisely the bias against which I have written. A basic point of the Tronti and others’ work was to point out that in Marx the process of reproduction includes the reproduction of the working class both waged and unwaged. This is explicit in chapter 25 of volume 1 of *Capital*. in which the analysis of the expanded reproduction of capital includes the reproduction of the “reserve army” of the unwaged.

In *Capital* Volume 1, Marx demonstrates that the unemployed are necessary to value-production. Since they are defined as a category by their relationship to the wage, the unemployed are obviously part of the working class.

comment: They are obviously part of the working class not because of the way they are defined but because they suffer the imposition of work: the work of looking for work, the work of reproducing themselves and the rest of the class, and so on.

But Marx also makes clear how the unemployed function to instil discipline in those in work and hence put ‘a curb on their pretensions’.¹⁵ For traditional Marxism, the unemployed as such cannot play the same role as the industrial working class; they lack both the leverage and the potential for revolutionary class consciousness of those in work. In this perspective, unemployed struggles must necessarily be reduced to the role of tail-ending workers’ strikes; any unemployed ‘autonomy’ could too easily take the form of scabbing.¹⁶

However, the functions of a social stratum for capital do not necessarily define the limits of the subjectivity associated with it. Historically, it has often been the least self-organized, or the least autonomous, among the unemployed who have scabbed. The unemployed are, among those Cleaver cites, the social group which can least controversially be defined as part of the working class.

¹⁴ See *Dole Autonomy versus the Re-imposition of Work: Analysis of the Current Tendency to Workfare in the UK* (only available now on our website), ‘Unemployed recalcitrance and welfare restructuring in the UK today’ (in *Stop the Clock! Critiques of the New Social Workhouse*) and ‘Re-imposition of work in Britain and the “Social Europe”’ (in *Aufheben* #8, 1999).

¹⁵ p. 792, Penguin edition.

¹⁶ For example, in the 1930s, the Communist Party, which nominally controlled the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM), saw the NUWM’s role as limited to tail-ending existing industrial strikes. The NUWM leaders, despite their membership of the CPGB, asserted the role of the unemployed movement to act in its own right. See Wal Hannington (1936), *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles Amongst the Unemployed* (Wakefield: EP Publishing).

‘Race’

In the case of ‘race’ and ethnicity, what is being referred to here by Cleaver is the construction by capital of divisions within the working class in order to create and justify competition amongst workers. To the extent that ‘racial’ and ethnic identities are constructed, working class organization itself is ‘racialized’ or ‘ethnicized’. In other words, it is because racialization and ethnicity is part of way that class division is constructed and the working class decomposed that people might use ‘racial’ and ethnic identities as a basis for organizing against capital.

Comment: Yes & no. Yes, capital “constructs” categories of race and ethnicity in ways designed to divide and conquer. But “race” and “ethnicity” have realities that escape capitalist manipulations and have formed the basis for self-definition and self-determination against and beyond capital. It is not just because, let’s say, Mexicans find themselves on the bottom of the wage/unwaged hierarchy in Houston that they cluster and form “barrios” in self defence. It is also because they speak the same language, because they come from the same villages and because they want to craft communities within in which they feel comfortable and can not only survive but enjoy life.

Blacks and those other ethnic minorities who organize and resist autonomously do so because they, as a social stratum, experience class more harshly, and are more often located at the proletarian pole of the class relation; and this is because of the way ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ have been socially constructed (in the USA). Those ethnic minorities which do not engage in such autonomous action tend to be those that are more socially mobile; i.e. in US terms they become ‘white’.

Comment: Once again, this formulation ignores the positive side, or the dimension of self-valorization, of such self-organization. It is not just such phenomena as Black Welfare Rights Organizations - that fight back against terrible conditions of income and reproduction - that is at issue but also the self elaboration of community events, of specific cultural forms - blues, jazz, hip-hop, etc.

Particularly in the USA,¹⁷ blacks are atypical of ethnic and ‘racial’ groups: always at the bottom of the pile, even in relation to other ethnic minorities. Blacks are the prototype of the working class; and the black middle class is the exception that proves the rule.

Women

The emergence of women as collective subjects of social change contributed to a reassessment of *operaismo*’s class analysis (Wright, p. 133). In particular, women’s demands for a universal social wage were seen to point to a solution to the

¹⁷ American black struggles inspired the Italian workerists: ‘American Blacks do not simply represent, but rather are, the proletariat of the Third World within the very heart of the capitalist system... *Black Power means therefore the autonomous revolutionary organisation of Blacks*’ (Potere Operaio veneto-emilano, 1967, cited in Wright, p. 132).

limits of the over-emphasis on the working wage (Wright, pp. 123, 135). Some in *autonomia*, such as the Rosso group, began to talk of the emergence of a 'new female proletariat'; for them, along with the unemployed, feminists were seen as integral components of the new social subject – the 'socialized worker'.

Likewise, for Cleaver, women are a key example of a social category that, through their struggles, should be grasped as part of the working class - in particular 'housewives' demanding wages for their work of reproducing labour-power.¹⁸

Comment: The issue is not the identification of "social categories" but of people in struggle. Moreover, those housewives who demanded wages for their work have been only one manifestation of the struggles of housewives more generally who have been sometimes isolated and sometimes networked and sometimes coming together in movements.

From our perspective, it is clear that it is working class women - defined here in terms of the class position of their family - who are more likely to be involved in such struggles. Better-off women are less likely to need and want the 'transitional demand' of a wage, and can achieve 'autonomy' individually (through pursuing a career) rather than needing to organize collectively.

Comment: Given the earlier remarks about the undesirability of "classification" this is a peculiar statement. Here families are "classified" - assigned to some class, assigned in an unexplained manner. What does it mean to speak of the class position of a family? We are not told. Reference to "Better off women" suggests one approach - classification by income. If that is the criterion then we have moved out of Marxism into conventional sociology. Also the use of "autonomy" here it is at the individual level, rather than at the level of movements - as in autonomy from husbands, or autonomy from housework. There is a relationship between the two levels of course but it is one that requires discussion and shouldn't be ignored. One of the main points of "autonomist" analysis is to clarify what is meant by autonomy in various situations not to characterize all situations with the same adjective and ignore differences. Mariarosa Della Costa and Selma James' book *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* is a good example of being specific about autonomy.

Moreover, the form through which women have challenged exploitative gender relations has varied historically. The identification and questioning of women's roles that emerged in the 1960s was part of a theorization and challenge to the reproduction of capitalist society more broadly, and hence tended to be expressed as a movement of social change.

But, particularly since the retreat of the wider class struggle, feminism has instead tended to be an ideology justifying either a reduction of the political to the personal (with no link to social transformation) or a vehicle for middle class women's careerism. Without being grounded in - rather than trying to form the basis of - a class analysis, the emphasis of the struggles of women as women inevitably risks this dead-end.

Comment: All struggles risk dead-ends. In the case of women's struggles there was a tension from the 60s on between women who were fighting for greater career opportunities and those fighting for broader social transformations - as well as for better income.

The notion of "the retreat of the wider class struggle" is mystifying. What "retreat"? When? If the reference is to the end of the "Movement" of the 1960s - then yes, that cycle ended. But did "class struggle" "retreat"? I don't think so. As capitalist strategy shifted its emphasis from counterinsurgency and cointelpro to the manipulation of money and prices, deregulation and neoliberal economic policies more generally the character of "class struggle" changed with it. But "retreat"? Better perhaps to speak of a shift in initiative: from workers to capital.

The notion that it is better for women's struggles to be "grounded in" a class analysis rather than to be "forming the basis" for one is precisely the kind of *a priorism* autonomists have written against. The point of the analysis of class composition is to recognize changing patterns of struggle and their implications for theory and then to use that theory within the struggles. This is precisely what happened with the work of Mariarosa Della Costa and her comrades and it is the reason why their theory was of interest and of use when it was published.

Peasants

Cleaver's inclusion of peasant struggles as part of the working class differentiates him from statements in classical workerism. Although the early workerists recognised that peasant struggles could contribute to working class internationalism, they also suggested that the two should not be confused, and that the 'salvation' of peasants ultimately lay with their counterparts in the more developed parts of the world (Wright, p. 66).

To state that peasant struggles are in effect working class struggles at least serves to convey something about the social location of the peasant in a capitalist world and the consequences of their actions for the broader class struggle. Despite not depending exclusively upon a wage, peasants' work is often commodified; the way they produce goods is subject to the demands of the world market. Hence some peasants' attempts in some sense to act like 'the working class' - i.e., collectively to resist capital's requirements.

Comment: Whew! Such a city boy's comment. The only peasants that I know of who "attempt" to "act like the working class" (and this way of putting it shows the author doesn't think that they are part of the working class) are those who have learned Marxism-Leninism (usually from urban activists).

¹⁸ An examination (and critique) of the issues around the Dalla Costa & Selma James pamphlet *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, the 'Wages for Housework' demand and more recent discussions (e.g. Fortunadi's *The Arcane of Reproduction*) would be useful, but is beyond the scope of the present article.

Peasant struggles, like other workers struggles, vary enormously with the class composition within which they find themselves and which they struggle to transform. Where many members of a peasant community are waged, part or full time, you will find behaviors that used to be called those of the “agricultural proletariat”. In communities where there are few wages of any sort and people live mostly on subsistence production you will find different kinds of struggle. Where there are clear-cut cultural traditions associated with particular linguistic and historical practices you will find particular forms of struggle. Where these are lacking because the communities were formed through migration and land seizure from diverse communities you will find yet different forms of self-organization.

But Cleaver’s redefinition of ‘peasants’ as part of the wider working class glosses significant differences within this heterogeneous social category. The term ‘peasant’ covers a multitude of economic positions: there are varying degrees of communal relations, varying degrees of production for the market (versus for subsistence), varying extents to which some are moving towards the capitalist class, and varying degrees to which peasants engage in wage labour. It is for this reason that ‘peasants’ as such do not act like and therefore cannot simply be lumped in with a broad working class.

Comment: As my previous comment demonstrates, and it derives from much that I have written elsewhere, this is another attack on a strawman. I do not “gloss” over “significant differences” among peasants anymore than I do among factory workers. The authors here clearly accept the concept of working class although they are well aware that “factory worker” “covers” a multitude of differences among workers. Well the same is true with peasants and to use either term is not to gloss. To gloss would be to ignore differences. But whether they read my stuff on, lets say peasants in India or Chiapas, or that of my students, such as Ann Lucas de Rouffignac’s work on Mexican peasant struggles or that of Ezielen Agbon on Nigerian peasant struggles, or that of Ricardo Salvatore on Argentine gauchos, it is obvious that the preoccupation is with the specificity of struggles not with lumping them all together in some amorphous mass.

Even if we take it that Cleaver simply means the majority of peasants who have no chance of becoming capitalist farmers, there is nevertheless a logic to their struggles which characteristically prevents them from constituting themselves as the negation of capital.

Comment: this is concocted out of the heads of the authors. Even the orthodox Marxist tradition, e.g., Lenin, recognized the process of proletarianization, in which some peasants could not become capitalists and fell into the category of waged labor and some could and became agrarian capitalists. The comment about there being “a” logic to peasant struggles shows that the authors are doing precisely what the accuse me (falsely) of doing: providing a single glossing generalization about peasants.

The peasant is defined by a relationship to the land, and land is characteristically the issue over which peasants struggle. Given this, the successes of peasant struggles are also their limits.

Comment: peasants work the land, they work their own, or they work the land of others, or they work communal land. But they are far more than farmers. They live within communities with specific histories, cultural practices, languages, shared mythologies, etc. They also live in constant interaction with surrounding (often different) communities and with the larger capitalist world. “Successes” of peasant struggle may be won on many terrains, many of which are completely open ended. Peasant struggles have not just persisted (against the expectations of many, perhaps most, Marxists) because they have survived but because they have thrived in dimensions that have escaped capitalist instrumentalization.

In the case of the wage, a quantitative success (more money) preserves the qualitative relationship of alienation but can point to its supersession: victory is still unsatisfactory but any setback for the capitalist class may suggest the vulnerability of the capital relation itself. But a victory in a struggle over land is an end in itself which thereby impels no higher level of struggle. There is no essential imperative in land struggles to abolish land ownership itself.

Comment: The fallacy of this argument is clear to any who are familiar with peasant struggles. Just as a successful wage struggle may (or may not) “point to its supersession”, so too a successful struggle for land may (or may not) point to the supersession of capitalist relationships. A victory in a struggle for land is rarely “an end in itself” as the Zapatistas (and many other peasant groups) have made clear: it is the means for many other ends. Those ends include the ability to resist exploitation, to maintain or renew connections to the earth and the cosmos, the ability to perpetuate/evolve social structures of communal responsibility and rights, and so on. The reference to the absence of an imperative to abolish land ownership can only reflect the old, general Marxist vision of the abolition of private property. But land tenure conditions for peasants vary enormously and peasant struggles over land often involve efforts to preserve or re-establish communal property in land (the commons) as well as to achieve or transform “private” land tenure relationships. I would argue that it is much more common to find struggles over land than struggles over wages threatening capitalist relationships but they are akin: both involve the effort to have access to the material basis of life and of the elaboration of that life: within or against and beyond the social factory. The old Marxist slogan “Abolish the Wage System” was aimed at getting workers to think beyond “more” money and more consumption to a different organization of society. It has had a hard going because modern urban capitalist society is so thoroughly shaped by capitalist commodification and instrumentalization (as the critical theorists have pointed out so often and in such detail). Yet, workers

have often seen beyond (even if they never heard the slogan) and crafted new ways of being that escape, at least temporarily, the logic of capital. And in vast numbers of peasant communities there is a wealth of social relationships that violate the principles of capitalism, bonds that go beyond the economic, linkages that are dysfunctional for the subordination of those communities to capitalist planning and are quite functional for struggles against it.

As we argued in a previous issue of *Aufheben*, while we might acknowledge the revolutionary subjectivity of peasant-based struggles such as that of the Chiapas Indians, the peasant condition entails a conservative stability in social relations.

Comment: The reviewers need to study Chiapas more closely. When they do they will discover that it has more often than not been in the new communities formed by migrants from other places that the Zapatista movement was born and receives support. It is not some abstract "peasant condition" (attachment to the land?) that gives rise to a "conservative stability in social relations" but the particular political history of particular communities. In Chiapas the greatest conservatism is to be found in those communities most thoroughly infiltrated and dominated by the PRIista power structure, i.e., the central political arm of Mexican capital for the last 50 years. Moreover, even in those communities where we find a "conservative stability" in such things as gender relations - usual in Chiapas - we actually find intense conflict and the struggle of women against patriarchy. The Zapatista "Revolutionary Women's Law" originated in those struggles and the demand by women for the Zapatistas to recognize and support those struggles. The reviewers' comments reflect an old view, common among anthropologists for a long time that peasant communities are unchanging - and thus good objects of monographic publication and career building. Today it is much more generally recognized by those who actually interact with peasant communities (including anthropologists) that those communities are involved in dynamic processes of internal conflict and change.

Peasant resistance tends to reflect external threat rather than internal class antagonism.

Comment: Again this view fails to grasp the internal dynamics of peasant communities. It also tends to ignore the way waged worker struggles "reflect external threats" - such as those by multinational corporations to move their plants elsewhere, or state and national government policies that reduce workers ability to struggle.

Consequently, the form of that resistance may often entail alliances between small private farmers and those who depend on communal landholdings - or even between a peasant mass and a leftist-nationalist and urban-based leadership.¹⁹ Thus,

¹⁹ See 'A commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista rebellion', *Aufheben* #9, 2000, especially pp. 20-22. While we took Holloway as the academic Marxist overestimating the working class and

we do not see the resolution of 'the agrarian (i.e., peasant) problem' simply in 'autonomous' peasant struggles, nor, obviously, in the proletarianization of the peasantry; rather, with Marx²⁰ (and Camatte),²¹ we might look to a revolution in which peasant communal possibilities are aided by a wider proletarian uprising at the heart of capitalist power.

Comment: Here is another strawman. Those of us who insist on the autonomy of peasant struggles have never, to my knowledge, argued that peasants can "win" - either in the sense of overthrowing capitalism or even just surviving - all by themselves in isolation from the rest of workers struggles! What much of my writing for the last few years has emphasized is how the success of the Zapatistas in mobilizing support, in Mexico and without, has enabled them to survive the vicious attacks of the Mexican government and local large landowners and their goons. The same is true with any other identifiable group of people in struggle. The power to resist and supersede

revolutionary significance of the Zapatista rebellion, Cleaver represents this tendency even more clearly. His refusal to consider criticisms of the Zapatistas and Marcos come across as just as ideological as previous Marxist defences of 'actually existing socialism'. For example: 'a woman said of the '96 encuentros: "the women [were] doing all the cooking and cleaning, including of toilets, invariably without any footwear (the men had the boots), even after the heavy rainfall... Harry Cleaver said 'Well, maybe they like it'..."' (cited in *You Make Plans - We Make History*, 2001; http://www.webcom.com/maxang/combust/you_make_Plans_We_Ma_ke_History.htm).

Comment: I remember the conversation very well and how amazed I was at both the self righteousness and urban ignorance of the woman who made the comment about who had boots and who didn't. And as I remember the exchange it was not the fact that women were barefoot but that children were running around in the deep mud without boots while the Zapatista soldiers, like Marcos, had them. Moreover, my response to her disdainful criticism was to suggest - from my own experience growing up in the country - that the kids probably liked the feel of mud - on their feet and between their toes - I did when I was a kid, as I liked the feel of dust in summer, and in general the direct contact between my bare feet and the earth. The woman couldn't even imagine what I was talking about and her later account of the exchange (quoted in the document whose URL is given above) shows that she never was able to understand. That the so-called reviewers offer a quote of this woman's ravings as evidence of my "refusal to consider criticisms of the Zapatistas" amazes me. I have repeatedly responded to criticisms of the Zapatistas for the last seven years and those responses are not hard to find on the Internet. As for women doing the "cooking and cleaning" at the Encuentro, that is typical of the patriarchal division of labor in indigenous villages - including those Zapatista base communities that hosted the encuentro. The Zapatistas have been struggling against that patriarchy for years, within their army and within their communities - something I have acknowledged in everything I have written about their struggles.

²⁰ See T. Shanin (ed., 1983) *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (London: Routledge); and T. Shanin (1972) *The Awkward Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²¹ J. Camatte (1972) *Community and Communism in Russia*.

capitalism depends on the circulation of struggle among all of those in struggle.

The notion, suggested above, that there is a “heart” of capitalist power - presumably located in the developed industrial heartland of the North - smacks of the old Trotskyist line put forward by Ernest Mandell in debate with Maoist Martin Nicolas some decades back. Nicolas’ “Third Worldism” that privileged the struggles of workers in the South vs Mandell’s orthodoxy that privileged workers in the North - as these authors seem to do. My work, and that of many others within the autonomist tradition has sought to move beyond such privileging to study, and contribute to, processes of a mutually reinforcing circulation of struggle across such dividing lines. The Zapatistas have survived because of massive international opposition to their repression by the Mexican government; the anti-globalization movement was set in motion by the Zapatista Intercontinental Encounter of 1996 and nourished on the Zapatista vision of “One No, Many Yeses!” etc. The issue should not be “which struggles are the key (the vanguard?)” but rather “how can we accelerate the circulation of struggles so as to strengthen them all?”

Students

For workerist groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Workers’ Power), student struggles had to be subordinated to those of factory workers. But student movements were a part of both the Hot Autumn of 1969 and the Movement of 1977, and were important for workerism’s attempt to theorize the proletarianization of intellectual labour.²² One of the interesting developments of the Hot Autumn was the appropriation of a faculty building at the Turin Medical College for the purpose of a permanent general assembly.²³ The 1977 Movement involved practical attempts to link workers and students both organizationally and in terms of demands such as the generalized wage, which was seen as a way of enabling more working class young people access to university.

Cleaver’s categorization of students as part of the working class might be seen as somewhat prescient since the gulf between university students and others in the labour market has narrowed in recent years. As more students gain degrees, so the value of the degree decreases and the jobs that graduates go into may often be no more privileged or well-paid than those of their more basically-educated counterparts. Graduate unemployment is higher now than ever.

Comment: Here the working class status of students is made dependent on the wage and employment prospects of students after graduation. My analysis - and that of some other “autonomists” - of the working class status of

students is quite differently based. We argue that students are part of the working class because of the work they do producing and reproducing labor power (and to a lesser degree research and its commodity products). Whether they are unwaged (and in the absurd position of paying to work) or partially waged (teaching assistants) or fully waged (fellowship recipients) they are all doing the work of producing labor power. It is secondary that they are preparing to do the work of making the labor market function by looking for jobs and then the work of those jobs themselves.

However, these are only tendencies. Students are overwhelmingly middle class in terms of their family background (income, values and expectations) and their destinations. In line with the notion of the social factory, Cleaver deals with such considerations by defining students’ education as work to reproduce the commodity of labour-power.²⁴ But their work as students is more than, and different from, the simple reproduction of just any labour-power.

Comment: There is no such things as “the simple reproduction of just any labor power”. Not in schoolwork, not in housework, not in job market search. The work of reproduction is as varied and complex as the work of producing all the other (secondary) commodities of capitalism and involves all kinds of manual and intellectual and emotional labor.

In the first place, the end product of the work of the university student isn’t necessarily skills at all but rather a qualification, the point of which is just to provide access to more privileged occupations. What is being reproduced, therefore, is hierarchy within the workforce – a division of labour to enhance competition.

²⁴ An irony of such an approach is that it implies that the right thing for them to do is be bad students, yet Cleaver himself has been a good student and gathers other such good students around him.

Comment: Wrong. I have always been a bad student in the sense of not doing what I was supposed to be doing - as my “report cards” from elementary and secondary school, and my college transcripts make clear. I refused much of the work imposed and channelled my energy, imagination and creativity into extracurricular projects of science, poetry, art, music and politics - depending on the period of my life. During the anti-Vietnam War period, for example, I flunked an entire year of graduate school because all my time and energy went into the movement. I survived in school and the university despite such behavior either because the things I were doing were recognized as having a valuable academic dimension (e.g., scientific research) and thus not entirely outside the logic of school or because political pressures made it difficult to penalize me (graduate school, tenure) by kicking me out. As a university professor I have indeed been penalized in recent years for not playing by the rules through systematic attacks on my real wage but amusingly, the only time I have been actually thrown out because of my refusal was at the New School for Social Research where I was purged by Old Left Marxists (Trots, Maoists, and the like) and Marxologists who didn’t like my interpretation of Marx! (More on school work and the struggle against it at end of the article.)

²² ‘The student was already a proletarian by virtue of a subordinate location within the university division of labour. To the extent that existing stipends became a fully-fledged wage, she would be transformed from an “impure social figure on the margins of the valorisation process” into a fully-fledged “wage worker producing surplus value”’ (Cazzaniga et al., 1968, cited in Wright, p. 95).

²³ See ‘The worker-student assemblies in Turin, 1969’ in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (op. cit.).

Comment: Of course! And this is also true within waged labor of commodity production. Waged workers don't "just produce commodities" they also produce and reproduce the hierarchical relations of work where they work - and beyond. Those hierarchical relations are not maintained from the "outside" but from the very structuring of work itself - that is much of what "management" is all about.

This process is also ideological to the extent that its beneficiaries internalize and identify with the resultant hierarchical division – believing that they deserve their privilege, and that only a talented and hard-working minority can achieve their kind of status. Second, the 'skills' that *are* reproduced through university education are not only those of supervision and management, but also (for those graduating in the humanities and social sciences) those of classifying, bullshitting and playing a role – all of which don't make sense outside of alienated social relations.

Comment: Again, the same is true within waged labor. Job hierarchies are structured, and corporate culture maintains, an ideological dimension designed to convince people that they belong where they are - until they prove otherwise through job performance - and those who are promoted deserve it, etc. Bad management is precisely that which maintains hierarchy in ways that violate such ideology, e.g., favouritism, nepotism, etc.

The "reviewers" have a glorified idea of those who graduate from the university. In the United States where a very high percentage of each age cohort go to "higher" education, very few find themselves with significant roles as supervisors and managers after they graduate. Most will be supervised far more than they supervise and managed far more than they manage. The main "skill" that is fostered at all levels of education -and is ignored in this article - is that of being managed, of accepting discipline, of accepting either to suppress one's creativity and imagination or to channel it into designated work tasks, of accepting a "life sentence at hard labor" whether that labor be manual or mental, and thus a life of alienation.

In focusing on autonomy and its possible consequences for capital, Cleaver's redefinition of student struggles as working class therefore loses some important features of this social category.²⁵ It is an overly cynical point of view, perhaps, to state that 'student radicals' mostly end up pursuing the same well-paid establishment careers as their parents; but the moment of truth in such a claim lies in the fact that there is no equivalent expectation for young working class

²⁵ In fact, a focus on the side of struggle today might lead Cleaver to re-re-define students as middle class after all. With the wider retreat of collective proletarian resistance, and even as more people have entered university from working class backgrounds, so the incidence of overt struggles in the universities has declined.

Comment: Sorry, I am not so led. See comments at end of article.

radicals mostly to end up becoming managers! Unlike students, the young working class (in working class jobs) don't usually have the same choice.

Comment: Not only does my analysis not lose anything that is mentioned here but it includes much that is ignored. The curious reader can examine both the discussion of syllogistic mediation in *Reading Capital Politically* and my various commentaries for my courses. Moreover, as any of my students will be happy to explain, in the classroom I spend far more time applying Marx's analysis to school-as-factory and students-as-workers than I do dealing with manufacturing factories that most of my students have never seen or experienced and therefore in lectures - dealing with virtually every aspect of Marx's analysis of working class struggles in the case of students. For a taste of this see my elaboration on this subject at the end of this article and compare it with the reviewer's cynical dismissal of student struggle on the basis of their so-called "middle class" origins.

It is an overly cynical point of view, perhaps, to state that 'student radicals' mostly end up pursuing the same well-paid establishment careers as their parents; but the moment of truth in such a claim lies in the fact that there is no equivalent expectation for young working class radicals mostly to end up becoming managers! Unlike students, the young working class (in working class jobs) don't usually have the same choice.

Comment: The comments (not cynical but snide) above about university students moving into higher paying jobs does not constitute an argument against seeing students as workers. That the struggles of the student movement created some jobs for activists as professors doesn't change the fact that as both students and professors they were working, at least in part, for capital and are thus part of the working class. What is implicit in these remarks by the authors is the old prejudice that only poorly paid blue collar workers are *really* part of the working class. This is borne out below.

Whatever happened to the middle class ?

The 'middle class' is a label largely absent from *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, which is because for Cleaver it largely doesn't exist, except perhaps sociologically. The 'autonomist Marxist' argument seems to be that, in conditions of the 'social factory', the middle classes are just a sector of the working class.

On the one hand, Cleaver's analysis again reflects real tendencies. In a number of domains, middle class work has been de-skilled and proletarianized. Casualization, once limited only to working class jobs, has now come to many in the middle classes. Moreover, many salaries, particularly in the public sector, have increasingly lost value over the past 20 years or so. At the same time, the salaries of those at the top end of the middle classes, and particularly in the private sector (e.g., accountants, lawyers and the various types of 'consultant'), have continued to rise. Hence, as a shared identity assumed by people whose conditions vary widely - from white-collar workers in insecure jobs with salaries lower than their blue-collar counterparts, to executives and senior

managers - the 'middle class' as a whole is to say the least a problematic category if not a mystification. In the USA, Cleaver's home country, the term is even more problematic due to the (self)description of large sections of the (white) working class as 'middle class'.

On the other hand, to take these disjunctions, anomalies and tendencies to mean that the category 'middle class' can be dispensed with is one-sided. The analytic subsumption of most of the middle classes within the working class is one-sided because it loses the explanatory power of the middle class as a category.

Comment: The preoccupation with identity and self-perception in the above paragraphs reflects, I'm afraid, the old preoccupation with "class consciousness". The recognition of the changing structure of work and of the existence of wage hierarchies does not. I have no problem with dealing with concept of "middle class" as embraced by people who think they belong to it; but for all the reasons given above it is more than problematic, it is an ideological category and not useful for the analysis of class composition - which is why I didn't employ it in my book.

Here again, we would argue, Cleaver's analysis reflects the limits of the approach he is heir to. As Wright argues, for all its vital contributions to our understanding of struggle, one of the problems with *autonomia* and *operaismo* more broadly is the way it misrepresents one tendency as standing for the totality. In the same way, Cleaver misrepresents a particular tendency as a characteristic of the class situation as a whole.

While tendencies to proletarianization might push many of the middle classes toward throwing in their lot with the working class, there are other features of the middle class condition as such which operate in the other direction.

Comment: It is the authors here who identify the working class with the results of the process of proletarianization. I do not. I don't talk about the tendency, nor do I generalize it to the whole. It is an old concept associated with an old view: that the real working class are waged factory workers.

What is absent from Cleaver's class analysis is an acknowledgement of the ties that bind the middle class individual to his role or class position and hence to the alienated world that gives rise to that role and class position.

Comments: This is correct. I did not dwell on this in *Reading Capital Politically*, nor have I dwelt on it elsewhere. And the reason why I have not is because, in general, I have eschewed the discussion of "class consciousness" in favour of an analysis of behaviour: of people's struggles - wherever they may be located within the wage/unwaged hierarchy.

One feature which distinguishes the middle class from the working class, and which has consequences for the possibility of revolutionary practice and subjectivity, is the presence or absence of a career structure. While wages in working class occupations typically rise to a relatively early

peak and then plateau off, middle class salaries more typically develop in continual increments within which the middle class individual can foresee a future of continually rising income and enhanced status. In effect, the longer she carries on and sticks to the job, the relatively less interest the middle class individual has in escaping since the greater comfort the job provides him or her. Because the working class job typically provides no such prospect, the imperative to escape remains a lifespan constant.

Comment: Even assuming the correctness of these characterizations of the distribution over working lives of income and expectations, I don't see how they constitute an argument that the "middle class" tends to be happy and (real) "workers" tend to be dissatisfied (and thus more likely to be revolutionary). The argument assumes an easy correlation between income and satisfaction that doesn't hold up once you factor in all the rest of what we know about alienation under capitalism. Among other things the fact that higher income workers with the possibility (but no guarantee) of promotion up a job ladder results in much more intense competition and alienation among competing workers than that among lower income workers with no prospects for promotion. Yes, such studies as Eli Chinoy's of American automobile workers show that they want "out" - to self-employment where they can manage their own affairs - but that "out" is neither outside of capitalism nor revolutionary *per se*, and moreover most fail and return to standard waged jobs. The description of the "middle class" job prospects is also dated - and recognized earlier in this article by the authors. Today there are few job ladders, many more footstools and greater precariousness and insecurity and anxiety. Ever since the "downsizing" movement in US industry in the 1980s it has been clear, even to middle level managers, that jobs are not secure in the higher reaches of the wage hierarchy. Hierarchy? Yes. Differentiate among situations in the hierarchy? Yes. "Middle class"? No.

Second, while pride in one's role can arise in many types of occupation, middle class jobs often engender an identification of a type which is characteristically absent in the case of working class jobs. Such middle class identification has consequences for the form taken by resistance - and for whether resistance takes place at all. The academic, social worker, lawyer etc. may wish to attack capital but they characteristically do so by premising their resistance on the continued existence of their own role in a way unthinkable to the working class individual. Thus there are radical psychologists, radical philosophers, radical lawyers and so on,²⁶ but not radical bricklayers or radical roadsweepers! The

²⁶ In fact, for many Marxist academics, the prefix 'radical' has now been replaced by 'critical', reflecting the general retreat of the class struggle which for the intelligentsia takes the form of a (still further) retreat into the realm of ideas and arguments.

Comment: Who is being attacked here? Without naming names or collective activities this comes across as being pure anti-intellectualism. The term "intelligentsia" is derogatory. It is quite possible to point to specific groups of self-proclaimed

latter are simply radical *people* who wish to escape their condition.

Comment: I think this is romantic fantasy, not to mention ignorance of working class history. That history includes not only politically radical individuals but groups of workers whose idea of revolution was taking over their means of production. Taking them over and operating them! They were very much "radical" whatever-their-employment-was workers. It also ignores the way in which radical psychologists, philosophers, etc. have reconceptualized their jobs and their roles in society. An obvious case is Ivan Illich's work on "deschooling society" which involved the diffusion of learning out of the school-as-factory throughout the society. Then there is the anti-psychiatry movement with its extensive critique of the institutions (and thus the jobs) of its profession. As a "radical professor" I can testify to repeated discussion with students on alternative ways of organizing learning that do NOT involve the preservation of my job. The distinction drawn, I think, just doesn't hold up. Sure you can find individuals that embody the qualities described -academics who just want a higher place in the academy - automobile workers who want out of work entirely. But you can also easily find automobile workers who just want higher wages; and academics who work steadily at undermining the educational institutions in which they work. (For more on this see my comments at the end of the article.)

By contrast, the former wish to engage in the struggle while at the same time retaining their middle class identities, including their specialized skills and roles. As such, their participation presupposes rather than fundamentally challenges the institutions and social relations that provide the basis of these identities.²⁷ It is no coincidence, it seems to us, that the

"radicals" or "critical theorists" and critique their practice along with their theory. That this is so, however, hardly warrants the blanket condemnation being ladled out here.

²⁷ This point was ably made in *Refuse* (BM Combustion 1978): "The "opposition" by counter-specialists to the authoritarian expertise of the authoritarian experts offers yet another false choice to the political consumer. These "radical" specialists (radical lawyers, radical architects, radical philosophers, radical psychologists, radical social workers – everything but radical *people*) attempt to use their expertise to de-mystify expertise. The contradiction was best illustrated by a Case Con "revolutionary" social worker, who cynically declared to a public meeting, "The difference between us and a straight social worker is that we *know* we're oppressing our clients". Case Con is the spirit of a spiritless situation, the sigh of the oppressed oppressor, it's the 'socialist' conscience of the guilt ridden social worker, ensuring that vaguely conscious social workers remain in their job while *feeling* they are rejecting their role..."

Comment: As for the demystification of expertise, it is hardly surprising nor worthy of critique that those most familiar with the actual character of particular "expertise" will be the ones best able to demystify it. We saw this in the anti-nuclear power movement, how scientists and engineers familiar with the technology came forward to debunk and critique other "expert" claims as well as state efforts to convince people that the management of the technology should be left to those "experts"

leading figures of a post-*autonomia* scene which rejects (or at least neglects) the situationists' critique of roles and academia, and which redefines all areas of life - including academia - as working class, are themselves academics.²⁸

Comment: More snide remarks, more anti-intellectualism of classic vintage. It is the authors here who impute a desire "to retain their middle class identities" to those they define as "middle class." That individuals may wish to continue to carry out the kind of work they have been doing after the revolution (so to speak) is not confined to "professionals". Neither is the desire to do something else confined to blue collar workers. All workers who struggle may or may not challenge the institutions and social relationships within which they find themselves. The category of middle class is not helpful here. What is helpful would be an analysis of the existence and nature of critiques that have been made of various jobs by the people who hold them. A survey of such critiques would reveal, I think, that there are far more produced by people higher up the wage/unwaged hierarchy than by those lower down. The reason is clear. It is not that they are

it had hired to push a technology that it wanted. As for the particular case cited in the quote, it's hard to judge the characterization here without hearing what was originally said. Certainly if the only thing that the quoted worker saw differentiating himself was his knowledge of his role in social control then that's pathetic. On the other hand, if that knowledge becomes the basis for subverting that role, then the critique being made here misses the mark. In my experience most of those who come to understand the repressive aspects of their work do try to subvert it.

The academic counter-specialists attempt to attack (purely bourgeois) ideology at the point of production: the university. Unwilling to attack the institution, the academic milieu, the very concept of education as a separate activity from which ideas of separate power arise, they remain trapped in the fragmented categories they attempt to criticise...

Comment: yes, those who are unwilling to struggle against the institutions in which they work are complicit, but no, many are willing and have elaborated extensive critiques, produced films of critique and have been involved in struggles against repressive aspects of their institutions or fought to create free space within them, or have carried their struggles outside them into other places. Examples of all of the above are easy to find.

In saying social workers are just like any other worker, he [the Case Con social worker] conveniently ignores the authority role that social workers intrinsically have, plus the fact that when they participate in the class struggle they don't do so by "radicalizing" their specific place in the division of labour (e.g. radical dockers, radical mechanics) but by revolting against it.' (pp. 10-11, 23).

Comment: This distinction, once again, between radical-some-particular-worker vs revolutionary is unhelpful. There are many terrains of struggle on both the job site and beyond. The real issue is not the terrain but the nature of the struggle carried on and how it relates to struggles elsewhere.

²⁸ See 'A commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista rebellion', footnote 33, *Aufheben* #9, 2000.

smarter, but just that they have more resources, including time, to elaborate such critiques.

Some groups, such as the professionals – doctors, lawyers, academics – who retain control of entry into their profession, should obviously be defined as middle class.

Comment: Why is this obvious? Should we therefore define dockers who run hiring halls, or any closed shop union situation “middle class”? I think not. Those who control entry do so to defend their wage and position in the wage hierarchy. They do so for their profession the same way workers in general have fought for, and sometimes achieved, controls over immigration to limit competition and keep wages up in the national labor force as a whole. These “professionals” play a dual role of worker and manager within their own segment of the hierarchy. We need to understand that dual role, but labelling it “middle class” does nothing to help us understand it. Moreover, the power of academics and doctors is much more limited than this description suggests. University bureaucracies make the final determination of hiring and firing. Hospitals increasingly control in a similar manner the income and job prospects of doctors (as they do of nurses and everyone else in the “health” industry).

But there are other groups for which the situation is less clear-cut. For the most part dealing with the thorny issue of class, and in particular the status of the middle classes, is inevitable messy. This is because class is a *process* not a box into which we can simply categorize people, as in sociology.²⁹ In Argentina, for example, we are seeing a process where middle class identity breaks down; but to understand this it is necessary to recognise that such an identity exists and has a material basis. As we see it, the problem with the way Cleaver flattens out everything into the working class is precisely the absence of class composition and decomposition as a process. Class (composition) involves a constant dynamic of proletarianization and ‘embourgeoisment’. But if these poles are not recognized – and if the middle classes are understood as already working class - class composition appears only as a static given.

Comment: This is a gross misrepresentation of what I have written. Not only have I opposed precisely the kind of “classification” that the authors are here engaged in, but in my sketch of the theory of class composition I have made it quite clear that the theory includes both moments of political recomposition (workers struggles changing the structure of power relationship in their favor) and decomposition (capitalist power being exercised to change the structure of power in its favour), i.e., as a dynamic process. The assertion here that “class composition” involves a dynamic of “proletarianization” and “embourgeoisment” is just the same old orthodox

Marxist formula for the gradual dissolution of the middle class (peasants included traditionally) into waged workers or capitalists. If such comments are not intellectually dishonest then they can only reflect either a careless reading of what I have written - or not having read it at all. Although the reviewers cite, in footnote 12, my article on “The Inversion of Class Perspective” they seem oblivious here to the extensive discussion in that article of the dynamics of the processes of working class political recomposition and capitalist decomposition. They also ignore the discussion in introduction to *Reading Capital Politically* - that they claim to have read - of the Italian work on class composition, how it changed and the implications for changes in working class organization.

1.4 Autonomy as basis or function of working class composition?

As we have seen, Cleaver's fundamental point is that the unwaged, and hence the other social categories he refers to, are part of the working class only insofar as capital has sought to exploit and alienate their unwaged labour or particular condition, *and* since these unwaged and other categories are now fighting back against capital. It is their *struggle* not their social category membership as such that makes them part of the working class. Thus the key for Cleaver is autonomous action against capital.

As such, Cleaver is again consistent with the tradition that has come out of workerism, which sought to distinguish itself and go beyond the poverty of traditional Marxism through focusing on precisely the independent or autonomous activity of workers in struggle; their collective activity and organization of resistance was shown to occur without the mediation of the party or union – or even in opposition to them. Antagonism itself, in the form of autonomy, was thus the basis of class analysis.

Comment: This is unduly restrictive. Although the reason I have characterized autonomist Marxism as “autonomist” is because of the recognition and appreciation of the way workers can act autonomously, that by no means implies that those who have had this appreciation have believed that workers always act in this manner or that the assumption of autonomy is the basis of class analysis. It has always been obvious that in many instances workers have only *reacted* to capitalist attacks and not taken any kind of autonomous initiative. “Class analysis” needs to recognize both kinds of behaviour and understand when the one obtains and when the other, and why.

In the sixties, the workerists subsumed the specificity of different working class locations and experiences to those of the mass worker.

Comment: No. What was done was to identify and analyse the specific characteristics of the “Fordist” “mass worker” through an examination of the structure of work being implemented in post-war Italy. The argument was that the “fordism” that Gramsci had identified in the United States had finally come to Italy. Like the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the United States and Socialisme ou Barbarie in France, the Italian activists analysed the division of labor and the pattern of struggle in great

²⁹ ‘we cannot understand class unless we see it as a social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period.’ (E.P. Thompson, 1963, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin).

detail. They did not concoct a category and then "subsume" various workers to it.

In the seventies, Negri's work threatened to dissolve even this partially concrete understanding of class into a generic proletariat, the 'socialized worker'. Bologna in 'The tribe of moles' identified new subjective determinations of class: 'Classes have tended to lose their "objective" characteristics and become defined in terms of political subjectivity'.³⁰ For Bologna, questions of social and cultural identity, of acceptance or refusal to accept the norms of social behaviour required by the state, now played a role in the reproduction of classes. These new determinants were said to be evidenced in 'the continuous reproduction and invention of systems of counter-culture and struggle in the sphere of everyday living, which has become ever more illegal'.

In fact, Negri and others abandoned the central investigative approach of the workerists – that of examining the relationship between 'material conditions of exploitation' and 'political behaviours'.

Comment: A reading of Bologna will show that there was no abandonment of the investigative approach at all. His analysis of the "tribe of moles" delineates very material characteristics of an increasingly precarious and mobile kind of working class at the heart of a new kind of politics in Italy with no permanent institutions (such as political parties or trade unions) but with the capacity for rapid and widespread mobilization. At that point Negri did not do this kind of research but was basing his theoretical generalizations on such work done by others. It was precisely the very real "continuous reproduction and invention of systems of counter-culture and struggle in the sphere of everyday living," that Negri theorized in terms of "self-valorization."

As Wright discusses, the radical workerists overemphasized the subjective, the 'will of destruction' (*Potere Operaio*, 1972, cited in Wright, p. 138), as judged, post festum, from an analysis of the struggle rather than location in the labour process. The abandonment of the material determinants of class composition leaves unresolved the question of how the different subjects, or strata of the class, recognize themselves and each other as proletariat, the universal revolutionary class.

Comment: The "overemphasis" on the subjective was not so much the problem suggested - of mutual recognition (i.e., the acquisition of class consciousness) - as one of blindness to what was going on beyond the sphere of movement politics. The rapid development and circulation of struggle within the "tribe of moles" seems to have so focused militants' attention as to have made them oblivious to the broader class composition - that would itself abandon the movement when the crackdown came in 1979. As Negri would admit later they were so caught up in the intensity of the immediate struggle as to

lose perspective and set themselves up for a fall. And they fell hard.

For us, the reason why different groups organize autonomously against capital is because they are already proletarian (or, at least, being proletarianized). Antagonism arises because of class.

Comment: No one has suggested otherwise! The antagonism has always been said to be a "class" antagonism which is one way the autonomist differs radically from the theory of "new social subjects" that relegated class to one category of oppression among others. But the argument about the autonomy of self-organization has gone beyond this. Women, it has been argued, have come to organize autonomously from men in certain periods because of the dynamics of gender relationships within class. In the New Left of the 1960s in particular women rebelled against the reproduction of the patriarchal gender hierarchy within the movement - in both the collective moment of the movement and in the more individual relationships among those active in that movement. Yes the antagonism derives from class; but that antagonism takes specific forms according to the divisions and dynamics of particular composition of class. The formulation offered by these authors here ignores this dimension; the analysis of class composition does not.

It is implicit in our arguments above in relation to the different social categories referred to by Cleaver that the possibility of 'autonomy' may be necessary but it is not sufficient for a class analysis. 'Autonomy' requires, and therefore cannot be the basis of, a proper class analysis: the subjective requires the objective.

Comment: This is an orthodox formula - "the subjective requires the objective" - that mystifies the issue. As I have pointed out above, in every instance - whether of the unemployed, of housewives, of students, of peasants - the argument that they are part of the working class has been based on an analysis of, on the one side, the imposition of work on them by capital, and, on the other, their struggles against that imposition and for alternative ways of being. Debates among the folks that I have called "autonomists" have revolved around the accuracy of the analysis and the appropriateness of the political conclusions drawn from that analysis

For example: during the period of the "tribe of moles" of the late 1970s there was a debate in Italy over the so-called "diffused factory" as to what degree it was a capitalist plot to dismember and control the large factory proletariat and to what degree it was a capitalist adaptation to the growing refusal of young workers to go into the big factories. That debate continued into the 1980s and drew upon both activist research and mainstream economic and sociological studies (such as that of Michael Piori of the "new" industrialization of northern Italy along the Benetton model). Both Negri and Bologna contributed to that research (Negri working on the "sentier" garment industry in Paris and Bologna

³⁰ Op. cit.

working on the transportation industry in Italy) and to that debate - taking quite different positions. The accusation of an abandonment of concrete research on the class composition just doesn't hold. You can dispute their research results or the conclusions drawn from them but you should not ignore the very concrete research upon which they founded their conclusions.

2 Beyond leftism?³¹

It was a vital insight of workerism to see workers' refusal to participate in union-sponsored token strikes not as the absence of class conflict but as evidence of their autonomy. In debates today about the state of the class struggle, the danger is to take such 'passivity' as just a refusal of representation when it might in fact be doubled-edged: at the same time as being an expression of hostility to capital it might also entail a paralysing fatalism.

Comment: What history is being referenced here? What "passivity"? The waged worker struggles in Italy in the 1950s that gave birth to autonomist research and politics were anything but passive. They involved a very active, often violent, confrontation with the union bureaucracy that was collaborating with capitalist development to the detriment of workers. The development of other struggles in the larger social factory also did not involve simple passive resistance but overt collective resistance and new demands (the Civil Rights and Black power movements in the US, the women's movement, immigrant community mobilizations, youth movements and so on). This

³¹ 'Leftism' is a concept we find useful but is perhaps tricky to define. It can be thought of in terms of those practices which echo some of the language of communism but which in fact represent the movement of the left-wing of capital.

Comment: At last a definition of "leftism". And what is it? It is a label applied to anyone who uses the language of Marxism but who is dismissed as really being capitalist. It is a label that bespeaks old sectarian habits of denouncing other sects for not being real revolutionaries but reactionaries in disguise. In the language of earlier sectarians, such people were called the "running dogs of imperialism" or the "lackeys of the bourgeoisie" who hid their subservience to capital behind a Marxist tinged rhetoric. Of course, ironically, those who did such denouncing - most significantly Soviet and Chinese Communists and their followers - were often busy crafting their own versions of state capitalism.

However, for us an important point is to get away from the picture in which there is a pure class struggle only interfered with and prevented from generating communism by the interference of an exterior force (from the bourgeoisie) of leftism. A question arises of why the class struggle allows itself to be so diverted. It is important to recognize that, though some leftists are clearly part of the bourgeoisie or at least of the state, the power of leftism/trade unionism etc. comes from the fact that the working class generates leftism from within itself as an expression of its own current limits.

Comment: Echos of the *Communist Manifesto*. What explained such phenomena as "utopian socialism"? The current limits of working class maturity, of course. How different from either the writings of Marx in the 1860s, or of autonomist analyses of class composition in the 1960s.

characterization of "the vital insight" being a recognition of the class character of passive resistance is totally bizarre.

However, a weakness of workerism was not an exaggerated sense of the significance of workers' autonomous antagonism not only to capital but to the institutional left; rather it was an unwillingness or inability to reconcile their insights with their conceptions of organization. Time and again, the same theorists who provided us with the theoretical tools for a new approach caution us to be modest in our understandings of workers' struggles. For example, Panzieri stressed that sabotage merely expressed workers' political defeat (Wright, p. 61); and *Classe Operaia* ('Working Class') suggested that spontaneous struggles were not enough (Wright, p. 69).

Comment: What is described here is not at all a failure to reconcile insights with conceptions of organization. Quite the contrary. The study of actual struggles revealed both their nature and their limits and the conclusions drawn concerned the need for organization that would move beyond those limits. Because the analysis of the political institutions such as the Italian trade unions and leftist parties revealed them to be instruments of capitalist control, the Italian New Leftists sought, and invented, alternative forms of organization - although sometimes falling back into standard capitalist forms, e.g., parliamentary politics.

While we agree that different particular struggles need to be linked up if they are to go beyond themselves, there is a crucial question of the nature of this organization and how it may arise. For the most part, the workerists tended to fetishize formal organizational structure in a way which reflected their Leninist origins.

Comment: It would be nice to have some evidence that "for the most part" workerists clung to formal organizational structures - especially given their well known embrace of the view that organization must change with the change in class composition, e.g., as spelled out by Bologna in his famous article on workers councils. The two examples of individuals given below hardly make a case for the behaviour of "most" workerists even if we accept the characterizations given of their histories.

In the first place, there was for a long time an unwillingness to cut the ties to the PCI. Thus, Tronti continued to argue for the necessity of working within the PCI in order to 'save' it from reformism. Tronti was not typical and ultimately abandoned workerism; but *Potere Operaio* too maintained links with the PCI until the events of France 1968, and even then still saw itself as Leninist. And Negri, despite having written about the contradiction within *autonomia* between those who privileged 'the movement' and the champions of a 'Leninist' conception of organization, affirmed his commitment to the necessity of the Leninist Party even during the events of 1977 (Wright, p. 214).

Comment: Tronti's return to the PCI, or the return of Lotta Continua to parliamentary politics, manifested the

failure to find or to accept alternative forms of organization. Negri was always known as the most Leninist of the autonomists because of his continued reference to the necessity of a workers' "party" even though he used this term loosely, as Marx did, to refer to workers self-organization. He was NOT committed to a Leninist Party in the usual sense of a Soviet-style communist party of professional revolutionaries. The authors here would do well to read his writings before making such statements.

In part, *autonomia* emerged as a grouping of militants who felt the need to criticize Leninist forms of organization and practice (including the formal party structure), placing emphasis instead on class needs:

Comment: This belies the previous statement that "for the most part" workerists clung to formal organizational forms and is a more accurate description of the general tendency of the autonomist movement in Italy which, historically speaking, originated within the Old Left and struggled to create a New Left of a different nature.

'To articulate such needs, organization was to be rooted directly in factories and neighbourhoods, in bodies capable both of promoting struggles managed directly by the class itself, and of restoring to the latter that "awareness of proletarian power which the traditional organisations have destroyed"' (*Comitati Autonomi Operai*, 1976, cited in Wright p. 153). Ultimately, however, as Bologna argued, *autonomia* failed in this regard, reverting to a vanguardism which forgot that 'organisation is obliged to measure itself day by day against the new composition of the class; and must find its political programme only in the behaviour of the class and not in some set of statutes.'³²

Comment: Those who failed in this regard, and reverted to vanguardism were mainly those elements of *autonomia organizzata* that took on aspects of the behaviour of the armed bands. Bologna's comments were aimed against such tendencies and were typical of those elements of *autonomia* who did not succumb to this tendency. The above characterization recognizes no such splits and thus oversimplifies and fails to understand the differences within the struggle.

Despite their attempt to escape the 'political', the workerists themselves were in fact caught up in a politicism, in that they both constantly tried to express the social movement's needs in terms of unifying *political* demands and were forever trying to reinvent the party. Although they innovated in some ways, with ideas like the armed party, their conception of organization remained Leninist in its fetishism of formal organizational structure, and showed little sense of Marx's quite different conception of the (historical) party.³³

As such, a proper critique of the left and of leftism was still not developed. This problem is reproduced in current versions of the workerist approach.

Comment: Understood in Marx's loose sense, "the party" - see footnote - must be reinvented just as Bologna was suggesting in the quote above. The emphasis on "political" demands was a search for ways to formulate concrete demands that made their political/class content and implications explicit. The suggestion that *autonomia* "innovated" the armed party is bizarre. That was an integral part of Leninism since early in the century. It was the embrace of this old approach that led to BR terrorism and set up the whole movement for state counterattack and decimation. This whole characterization of *autonomia* as unable to move beyond Leninism seems to be based on a preoccupation with one tendency while ignoring all the other countervailing ones.

Our argument is that, if the concept of autonomy is insufficient for a class analysis, it is also inadequate - in the sense of being too open or ambiguous - for a critique of leftism. Whose 'autonomous struggle' is it? The emphasis on autonomy itself, and the consequent absence of an adequate critique of the left, has meant that some of the inheritors of the tradition are uncritical of nationalism.³⁴

Comment: The question "whose autonomous struggle is it?" has been answered again and again with concrete analysis of particular struggles and their linkages. The "emphasis on autonomy" has not been abstract, as it is presented here but throughout the history of "autonomist Marxism" it has been very concrete: from the councilist preoccupation with the very historical reality of soviets and workers councils to the post war focus on struggles that operated outside, and often against, the formal organizations of the class. The charge of being "inadequate" is cheap; any concept or argument can be found to be incomplete in some sense and therefore "inadequate". The concept of autonomous struggles draws our attention to the way various groups of workers have taken the initiative and moved beyond the efforts of either capital or their official "leaders" to organize their own struggles. It does not pretend to do more than that. What seems to be happening in this article is the representation of "autonomy" as a fetish - which it has not been - and then that fetish is critiqued. This is intellectual slight of hand.

of modern society.' Quoted in, J. Camatte *Origin and Function of the Party Form* (http://www.geocities.com/cordobakaf/camate_origins.html). Camatte's discussion there in a sense takes the discourse on the party to the extreme where it dissolves, allowing his later perspectives of this in *On Organization*.

³⁴ Wright (p. 66) suggests that the earlier workerists had no time for the left's Third Worldism and support for nationalist struggles. However, a front cover of *Potere Operaio* magazine from the 1970s called for victory to the PLO-ETA-IRA.

³² 'The tribe of moles', op cit. p. 89.

³³ For Marx formal organizations were only episodes in 'the history of the party which is growing spontaneously everywhere from the soil

Cleaver (p. 25) states ‘The [Vietnam] antiwar movement joined many of these diverse struggles, and its linkage with the peasants of Southeast Asia became complete with the slogan of “Victory to the NLF [National Liberation Front]” and with the flying of Vietcong flags from occupied campus buildings.’ In relation to this, the idea of ‘circulation of struggles’, which refers to how struggle in one area inspires that in another, certainly described something of the social movements of the 60s and 70s (though we’d also have to acknowledge the reverse process whereby defeat of one section after another discouraged the rest).

Comment: The idea of the circulation of struggle has gone hand in glove with that of “cycles of struggle”, i.e., periods of political recomposition in which the working class is on the offensive and periods of decomposition when capital counterattacks. The latter often involves defeats which may involve the circulation of discouragement, or may involve the renewed circulation of struggle to counter those defeats. Which effect dominates can not be decide *a priori* but depends upon historical circumstances. As an example, many of those involved in countering capitalist attacks against the Zapatistas were also involved in trying to prevent the state murder of Ken Saro-wiwa, the Ogoni spokesperson in Nigeria. The failure to prevent his murder circulated not defeat but renewed efforts to prevent such occurrences in Mexico.

But such a concept is inadequate in itself if it means, for example, that the struggles of the Vietnamese peasants are considered without referring to the nationalist and Stalinist frame in which they took place, and if it means treating uncritically the way that an anti-imperialist ideology dominated the minds of the students (i.e. they tended to see the western proletariat as irretrievably ‘bought off’ and themselves as a front for the ‘Third World’).³⁵

Comments: This is a typical example of the cheap use of the accusation of “inadequacy”. What was at issue the international circulation of the struggles of Vietnamese peasants was their resistance to French, then Japanese, then French, then US capitalist efforts to exploit the people of that country. American students involved in the anti-war movement were aware of, and except for the Maoists among them, had no use for the Stalinism of the communists in Vietnam. What was supported was the resistance and the notion of self-determination. To think that that resistance was “framed” by the Stalinism of Vietnamese communists suggests an unfamiliarity with either its breath and grassroots character - it was not reducible to its representation by the Communist Party. The students were involved in their own struggles against that same capitalism at home and studied the linkages between the two areas of class conflict. That was enough for support. It was not enough if the objective was to develop a critique of the communism of the North Vietnamese government. The existence of post-1975 critiques of Vietnamese communism, such as the the article by Philip

Mattera in the second issue of *Zerowork* (1977) demonstrates the understanding of the problems of state capitalism just as earlier work by, say, the Johnson-Forest Tendency of the Soviet Union and China demonstrated such understanding.

As for the tendency within the anti-war movement to see the US working class as bought off and to embrace Third Worldism, this was something cultivated by the *Monthly Review* editors and writers (Baran & Sweezy & Magdoff, etc.) who were probably the most influential Marxists in the US in the 1960s. This critique, however, is not applicable to those “autonomist” Marxists that I have referred to such as those around the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Facing Reality, News & Letters, etc. My comments on the anti-war movement concerned only the issue of the international circulation of struggle. They did not pretend to a comprehensive analysis of that movement. To critique those comments for not providing such an analysis is disingenuous.

Harry Cleaver’s ‘autonomist Marxist’ treatment of leftists and nationalists is reflected currently in his uncritical attitude to the Zapatistas.³⁶ In Cleaver’s texts there isn’t a proper critique of the role of leftism and nationalism in struggles because such expressions are considered - equally with the struggles of ‘housewives’, students, the unemployed and the industrial proletariat - moments of autonomy to the extent that they appear to challenge the capitalist strategy of imposing work within particular national and international frameworks. Any criticism of nationalism in struggles, as in the case of Zapatistas, is dismissed by him as ideological or dogmatic.

Comment: I would like to see some concrete citation of my dismissing “any critique of nationalism in struggles”? This is fantasy. As I have tried to make clear, the Zapatistas’ “nationalism” was born from the concreteness of their political project: survival and indigenous autonomy within Mexico. From the beginning the Mexican government tried to present them as separatists and evoked the horrendous spectre of the ethnic cleansing of the Balkans to whip up public support for their repression. Against this the Zapatistas flew the Mexican flag at their meetings and repeatedly asserted that they were fighting not to separate from Mexico but to achieve rights and autonomy within it through constitutional changes and changes in the behaviour of government agencies. However, alongside this ostensible “nationalism” has gone an internationalist practice and repeated denunciation of the artificiality of national borders and the need to link struggles across them - the only meaningful “internationalism.” Most of the critiques of Zapatista “nationalism” have indeed been ideological and dogmatic, based not on an assessment of the situation in Mexico or the Zapatista political practice but on an *a priori* rejection of anyone who doesn’t explicitly and abstractly denounce nationalism. I haven’t found such critique either useful or revealing of anything other than the ideological biases of the critics.

Given their necessary antipathy to the project of the negation of capital, the ‘autonomy’ of leftist and nationalist

³⁵ This (moralistic) attitude of cheer-leading ‘Third World’ (national liberation) struggles and contempt for the Western working class was an expression of the middle class social relations characteristic of these students.

³⁶ See, for example, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/Zapatistas/INTRO.TXT>

tendencies must mean their subsumption and indeed crushing of proletarian autonomy!

Comment: This is precisely the kind of fantastic *aprior* nonsense I was referring to. After *defining* "leftism" as capitalist, they deduce that leftism has a "necessary antipathy" to the negation of capitalism. Duh. To accuse me, and those in the tradition of autonomist Marxism, of an "antipathy to the project of the negation of capital" is beyond belief. It shows either an utter ignorance of the whole tendency or a willingness to consciously misrepresent what is and has been said and done. And what is this "nationalist" tendency? Does it refer to national liberation struggles of the old Marxist-Leninist variety? If it does, that has been repeatedly critiqued, not least by the Zapatistas (despite the fact that the call their army the Zapatista Army of National Liberation). To argue that the Zapatistas have crushed proletarian autonomy, i.e., the autonomy of the indigenous communities in Chiapas, is absurd.

This analytic gap, through which the forces inherently opposed to working class self-organization can emerge as *equivalents* to that working class self-organization, appears to be a function of the failure of the *autonomia* tendency to make quite the radical break from Leninism which is sometimes claimed for it, and which Cleaver has inherited (despite the fact that, unlike Negri, he has never endorsed any party).

Comment: To be accused of Leninism can only make me laugh and I hope it also amuses many other "autonomists", i.e., those whose work and political activity include the recognition and appreciation of workers ability to take the initiative in struggle. I quite explicitly denounce Leninist approaches to organization and to "socialism" in this book that is supposedly under review. But that is neither recognized nor dealt with here. The "review" has devolved into a rant with no basis in any text..

At its worst, far from being an alternative to a leftism in which political representation and nationalism are supported as vehicles of 'revolution', 'autonomist Marxism' can end up being just another variety of such uncritical leftism. While they may reject the idea of the formal party, the 'autonomists' still seek to formulate political demands for autonomous struggles in a similar way to the leftists.

Comment: And what is its "worst"? Steve's book? My writing? Where have I "formulated political demands" in "a similar way" to capitalists? I find these aspersions so vague as to have no meaning beyond revealing the sectarianism of their authors.

3. Negotiating the 'law of value'

A further workerist tension reproduced in Cleaver's book is that surrounding the status of the 'law of value'.

Comment: It's hard to see how my book could reproduce "a tension" surrounding the status of the "law of value"

when it never makes use of such a construct. Throughout the history of Marxism, not just in workerism, the term "law of value" has been so loose and variegated, so contradictory and used in reference to so many different phenomena, not to mention used again and again with absolutely no clarity about what the author is referring to, that I have systematically eschewed all use of the term. What *Reading Capital Politically* does -and the reviewers here ignore - is give an interpretation of Marx's concept of value, of its substance, magnitude and form, arguing that all of its determinations that Marx discusses are actually determinations, or aspects, of the antagonistic class relations of capitalism.

On the one hand, the very emphasis on workers at the sharp end of the immediate process of production appears to speak of a commitment to the centrality of value-production in the explanation of the dynamic of class struggle. On the other hand, the seeds of a revisionist approach were sewn as early as 1970, when *Potere Operaio* argued that class struggle had broken free of the bounds of accumulation; the mass worker was said to have disrupted the functioning of the law of value, forcing capital to rely more and more on the state (p. 137). *Potere Operaio* cited the Hot Autumn as the turning point, but their analysis was prompted by a revolt in the second half of 1970 among the population of Reggio Calabria against proposed changes to the city's regional status which seemed to speak of a widespread violent rejection of the institutions. This line of reasoning was developed by Negri, who was led by his understanding of the crisis as a product of class antagonism to argue that the law of value was being superseded by relations of direct political confrontation between classes,³⁷ and that money now needed to be understood in terms of its function as 'command'.³⁸

Comment: My rejection of Negri's notion of the capitalist surpassing of value was laid out in an article on Negri and Offe called "Work, Value and Domination: On the Continuing Relevance of the Marxian Labor Theory of Value in the Crisis of the Keynesian Planner State (1989) available at url: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/offenegri.html> A more recent affirmation of the same thesis is "Work is Still the Central Issue!" (1999) available at url: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/workiscentralissue.htm>. One of my central objections to Negri's view of these matters is his notion of value-as-command as something new. The main thrust of *Reading Capital Politically* is that value has always been a concept that denoted labor-as-command in capitalism, that the "labor theory of value" is a theory of the role of labor as the fundamental form of capitalist command. One of the reasons for my eschewing the concept of "law of value" is that in many of its interpretations (explicit or implicit) value appears as a obscure social force that mysteriously regulates markets, the economy and society. This

³⁷ See 'Crisis of the planner-state: Communism and revolutionary organization' (1971) in *Revolution Retrieved* (op. cit.).

³⁸ Though we like his phrase 'money is the face of the boss'.

formulation, to my mind, utterly mystifies value as command-through-work and refocuses our attention away from the central substance of class antagonism to secondary critiques of the market and of economics for not seeing what lies behind them.

Subsequent to this, a distinctive feature of those influenced by the *autonomia* tradition is the stress on the class struggle as a struggle not in relation to value but for *control over work*: imposing it or resisting it.

Comment: Resistance to, or the refusal of, work - a central theme of contemporary autonomist thought - is quite different from “control over work”, either in the sense of the ways workers act to control the labor process within capitalism, or in the sense of the revolutionary objective of the Old Left of taking over the means of production. Moreover, with value understood as a concept denoting the capitalist use of imposed work to command society, the dichotomy between the struggle against work and struggles “in relation to value” perceived by the reviewers completely disappears. The struggle against work *is* a struggle against value - against the most fundamental vehicle for the capitalist organization and control of society.

A major thrust of the whole American ‘autonomist’ scene has been to argue not to follow Negri too far. But it seems to us that Cleaver’s attempt to both embrace certain post-*autonomia* and ‘heretical’ ideas that go ‘beyond Marx’ while at the same time claiming fidelity to *Capital* gives rise to ambiguities in relation to this question of value.

Comment: I do not claim “fidelity” to *Capital*, only that I have found a interpretation of much of its basic theory that makes sense to me. These are quite different things.

Thus, on the one hand, *Reading ‘Capital’ Politically* suggests, at least in a footnote, that control is always tied to value; and in the second edition of the book, against those (‘autonomists’) who forget, Cleaver re-iterates that the labour theory of value is the ‘indispensable core’ of Marx’s theory (p. 11). On the other hand, throughout *Reading ‘Capital’ Politically*, food and energy (Cleaver’s main examples) appear essentially as means to struggle for control itself rather than value-producing sectors; and work appears as a means of control in its own right:

the ultimate use-value of the work, which is the use-value of labour-power, is its role as the fundamental means of capitalist social control. For the capitalist to be able to impose work is to retain social control. But the use-value of labour-power for capital is *also* its ability to produce value and surplus-value. (p. 100)

The use of the word ‘also’ seems indicative of the relative weighting given to control over value as an explanation for the dynamics of class struggle.

Comment: No. The whole point was that these are the same thing; value is social control. The use value of labor power is “also” its ability to produce value and surplus

value only in the sense that these are two ways of talking about the same thing. The book argues systematically - and not just “in a footnote” - that the substance of value is work, work as social control.

We accept that, although capital essentially treats all use-values as arbitrary sources for valorization, capital cannot be unconcerned with the particularities of use-values. Thus Cleaver is right, for example, to point back to the moment of primitive accumulation where capital creates the working class by driving peasants off the land and thus their source of food. Moreover, with contemporary features like the Common Agricultural Policy and similar measures in other countries, it is true that the special use-value of food (and the political significance of classes engaged in food production) has led to it being perhaps more subject to strategic planning measures by capital-in-general in the form of the state and supranational bodies.

Retrospectively, however, it now appears to us that the politicization of the prices of food and energy – their appearance as manipulated instruments of struggle between self-conscious capitalist and working class subjects – was a particular feature of the crisis conditions of the 1970s (e.g. the energy crisis and the focus on inflation state intervention in bargaining between the working class and capital). Cleaver, like others in the post-*autonomia* tradition, uses these historically specific moments in the class struggle to make generic points.

Comment: Yes, the use of increases in food and energy prices in the 1970s to undercut the real wage, etc., was historically specific. But the more general argument about the political character of money and prices is quite independent of that history. It is based on the political reading I have done of the labor theory of value, especially that of the general and money forms of value discussed in part 3 of chapter 1 of volume 1 of *Capitaland* in chapter 5 of my book - a discussion that is ignored in this so-called “review”.

In the present period, there has been a ‘depoliticization’ of these price issues in conditions of low inflation; and the ideological model has been that ‘there is no alternative’ to the ‘globalized’ market.

Comment: I fail to see how low inflation involves a “depoliticization” of prices. On the contrary, the consistent use of monetary, and other, policies to hold down prices (especially wages) is about as political an act as you can imagine. The rise of the neoliberal worship of the market first began to take center stage alongside monetarism in the late 1970s, i.e., the use of monetary policy to attack wages, and both have remained co-actors on the capitalist stage ever since. Moreover, the monetarist use of tight money to attack “inflation” (almost a euphemism for wage increases) beginning with Carter’s unleashing of Paul Volcker at the Fed in the late 1970s can be seen as a response to the failure of the use of inflation as a strategy. In the US in the 1970s workers were able, on the average, to raise money wages almost as fast as prices increased thus defeating an attempt to substantially lower real wages. Their ability to mobilize

enough power to divert petrodollars from capitalist investment to the support of consumption also undermined that aspect of the capitalist strategy of that period. Looking back to earlier the Keynesian period, the capitalist use of monetary (and fiscal) policy to keep wages within the bounds of productivity growth was every bit as political as the more dramatic developments of the 1970s

As we have argued in these pages before, there is a problem with the abandonment of the law of value by theorists identifying with *autonomia*.³⁹ On our reading of Marx, and our understanding of capital, capital as a whole comes to constitute itself as such out of disparate and indeed conflicting elements. The conceptualization of capital as a subject in conflict with the working class subject, each with their distinctive strategies ('imposition of work' versus 'refusal of work'), which Cleaver ultimately shares with Negri,⁴⁰ if taken as more than a shorthand or metaphor, suggests an already-unified capital.

Commentary: Which I share not just with Negri but with Marx. *Capital* is replete with characterizations of capital as a whole as subject. The personification of capital is used to talk about its dominant ways of thinking and policy making in particular periods (see especially the historical discussion in sections 5 and 6 of chapter 10 of Volume I.) It is not just a shorthand or metaphor; it is a way of highlighting those ideas and practices that are guiding capitalist strategy at a point in time or period.

Capital as a subject can have a *strategy* only to the extent that there is a (price-fixing) conspiracy among the different capitals *or* that one particular capital (who? US capital? The World Bank?) agrees to act as capital-in-general in the same way that a national government acts for the national capitalist interest. Capital as a totality of course has its *interests*; but these – all founded on the need to exploit the working class as hard as possible – arise from and operate precisely through its conflicting elements: the competition between individual capitals. Capital may attain more consciousness at times of heightened class conflict, and this consciousness may become institutionalized. But capital is not essentially a conscious subject.

Comment: This both admits and denies the obvious in one breath. What is capital? Obviously it is not a *zeitgeist*, or over-mind; it is a way of organizing society. But that way of organizing society has what Marx called its "functionaries" – those whose work is the work of imposing and maintaining the imposition of this way of organizing society. And those "functionaries", be they corporate executives or politicians or bureaucrats at the International Monetary Fund, are quite conscious about

what they are doing and thinking. They have strategy; they have many strategies – which are often in conflict and competing – both at the level of inter-firm competition and at the level of more general policy making. But in each period some dominate and others are marginalized. And it seems to many of us that it is extremely useful to be clear about what those dominant strategies are and how they threaten us, in order to struggle against them. As a result some our work is devoted to understanding those dominant strategies and changes in them. To refuse to recognize this phenomenon in favour of a focus on the competition among private capitalists is to cripple one's ability to understand, and thus to come to grips with, the coherence of capitalist strategy and policy at any point in time.-

4. Grasping retreat

Tronti famously argued that each successful capitalist attack upon labour only displaces class antagonism to a higher, more socialized level (Wright, p. 37). Following this, Negri, Cleaver and others in and influenced by the *autonomia* current stress the role of working class struggle in driving capital forward. Working class activity is seen not (just) as a response to the initiatives of capital but as the very motor of capitalist development – the prime mover.⁴¹ In this account, capitalist crisis – the shutting down of industries, mass unemployment and austerity – means that working class struggle simply changes form rather than retreats. Class struggle is argued to be ubiquitous and manifold in form.

Comment: True that as Marx argued the working class as living labor (and more than living labor) is the lifeblood of dead labor (capital) in a dynamic sense. Not true that autonomist theories of crisis don't recognize defeat. The theory of cycles of struggles very much recognizes upswings in struggle, capitalist counter offensives and downturns – that may well involve defeats. This is an integral part of the theory of class composition as mentioned before.

This perspective therefore offers a valuable corrective to traditional Marxism's objectivist account of the workings of capital. Traditional Marxism's frozen and fetishized conceptions of class struggle could lead one to wonder where resistance has gone and whether it will ever reappear. By contrast, 'autonomist Marxism' finds it everywhere.

However, we would suggest that workerism in general and Cleaver in particular perhaps bend the stick too far the other way. In arguing that class struggle is 'everywhere' and 'always', there is the explanatory problem of the evidence of historical retreats in class struggle, as well as the 'political' problem of responding to this retreat in practice. These problems are linked.

³⁹ See 'Review: Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-92' (*Aufheben* #3, 1994) and 'Escape from the Law of Value?' (*Aufheben* #5, 1996).

⁴⁰ See Cleaver's useful summary of Negri's position in his Introduction to Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (New York/London: Autonomedia/Pluto Press, 1991).

⁴¹ See for example Toni Negri, 'Keynes and the capitalist theory of the state post-1929' in *Revolution Retrieved* (op. cit.).

Comment: class struggle is “everywhere” and “always” only in the sense that capital is a social relationship of class, of class antagonism and class struggle. To recognize this cause no more “explanatory problem” in dealing with “historical retreats” or “political problem” of responding than any other theory. What needs analysis, and the theory of class composition and cycles of struggle provide a framework for such analysis, are the changing content and forms of struggle over time.

4.1 Confronting the evidence of decomposition

In positing the ‘unity of abstract labour’ as the basis for the recomposition of the class, Negri almost welcomed the ‘disappearance’ of the mass worker and believed the defining moment of confrontation was approaching: ‘At the very moment when “the old contradiction” seemed to have subsided, and living labour subsumed to capital, the entire force of insubordination coagulates in that final front which is the antagonistic and general permanence of social labour’.⁴² At a time which could arguably be characterized as the beginning of capital’s counter-offensive of restructuring which resulted in a decomposition of the class, he gave an account of a massive process of recomposition – a qualitative leap in class unity. Wright (p. 167) concludes that this account did not match up to Italian experience of the time. There appears little evidence of the concrete unification between sectors upon which Negri’s whole argument rested; the fierce industrial struggles in the small factories of the North were cut off from other sectors of the class. Wright suggests that, in 1975-6, it was proletarian youth circles rather than the factory struggles that were making links across the wider working class. The workers of the large factories were in a state of ‘productive truce’ at best, rampant defeat at worst – and subordinate to the official labour movement, which had regained control in the factories after the explosion of autonomous struggles in 1969 and the years after. The unions’ commitment to tailor labour’s demands to the requirements of accumulation was mirrored in the political sphere by the PCI’s ‘historic compromise’ with the ruling Christian Democrats. The historic left, PCI and CGIL were committed to the ‘management’ of the nation’s economic difficulties.

Bologna (1976, cited in Wright, pp. 170-1) accused Negri and *autonomia* of ‘washing their hands of the mass worker’s recent difficulties’. He argued that there had been a ‘reassertion of reformist hegemony over the factories, one that is brutal and relentless in its efforts to dismember the class left’. Negri had failed to come to terms with the disarray and defeat of the mass worker and preferred instead to ‘ply the traditional trade of the theorist in possession of some grand synthesis’. The *Comitati Autonomi Operai*, the Roman wing of *autonomia*, also rejected Negri’s optimistic vision, and criticized his lack of an empirical basis for his abstractions, something which had been so important to the earlier workerists.⁴³

⁴² Negri (1976) *Proletari e Stato* (2nd edn., Milan: Feltrinelli).

⁴³ ‘Your interest for the “emergent strata” (proletarian youth, feminists, homosexuals) and for new, and reconceptualised, political subjects (the “*operaio sociale*”) has always been and is still shared by us. But precisely the undeniable political importance of these phenomena demands extreme analytical rigour, great investigative caution, a strongly empirical approach (facts, data, observations and

Comment: Finally a recognition that Negri was only one figure within the Italian New Left, and one whose analysis, though influential was often critiqued by others. If the authors kept this in mind they would not use Negri as the basis for many of their generalizations about *autonomia* or workerism.

In the intervening quarter of a century, little has happened, it seems to us, to bear out Negri’s optimistic prognosis. The mass worker has been decomposed through the flexibilization of labour, territorial disarticulation of production, capital mobility in the world market, the rationalization of production, decentralization; but the ‘socialized worker’ that has supposedly emerged from the ashes of the mass worker has not been visible as a new universal proletariat capable of fundamentally challenging the capital relation. Decomposition just *is* decomposition sometimes, rather than necessarily being itself a recomposition.

Comment: Decomposition as such, as capitalist counter-attack aimed at restructuring the class relationships of power in its own interests has not been confused with political recomposition as suggested here. The theory of the mass worker was a theory of how Taylorism and Fordism decomposed the old skill-based organization of work and how those deskilled workers learned to reorganize (politically recompose) themselves in a new way across industries rather than across skills, and then across the unwaged as well as the waged. There has been no confusion about this that I am aware of. Negri’s writing sought to understand the crisis of the mass workers - a crisis that derived partly from its own processes of political recomposition beyond its status as mass worker and party from capitalist attempts at decomposition. One can critique his emphasis on the former and neglect of the latter, as the above cited authors have done, but attention to both is always necessary.

One of the basic notions of autonomist theory -discussed above - that living labor drives dead labor, that capitalist development is an adaptation to working class struggle implies that even in the process of decomposition, capital still needs to find direction. How should it seek to decompose the threatening level of working class power in ways that restore its control and permit continued accumulation? What Negri has suggested is that it finds its new direction precisely in the processes of political recomposition that threaten its old methods of control. That is what it means to “adapt” - thus his notion that increasingly capitalist strategies of development have been based on those working class subjectivities that have moved beyond the mass worker. To the degree that this is true - and on the whole it must be true or capital cannot overcome the crisis of its loss of control - decomposition is not *just* decomposition. The only kind of decomposition that I can think of that seems to be purely destructive of working class power is slaughter. But

still more observations, data, facts).’ (*Rivolta di classe*, 1976, cited in Wright, p. 171).

capital cannot be capital (a form of social organization) if it wipes out the working class, so slaughter is always limited (as in the bloody repression of strikes and rebellions and in wars) and always followed by attempts to reorganize the labor force in a better controlled and more productive manner - and thus even this form of decomposition involves some kind of effort to re-compose the working class. On this subject we have an excellent case study unfolding in Iraq: a slaughter now being followed up by the quite conscious capitalist reorganization of that part of the Persian Gulf oil producing proletariat. Such processes in the period following the first Gulf War have been analysed by the Midnight Notes collective in the opening essays of their book *Midnight Oil*.

The 'autonomist Marxism' of Cleaver and those close to his perspective argues that we need to acknowledge the validity of diverse and 'hidden' struggles (absenteeism, theft at work, various forms of work to rule etc.) which are alive and well, despite the decline of the older forms of overt collective resistance.⁴⁴ There is, of course, always resistance to the specific way in which surplus-labour is pumped out of the direct producers. However, the fact that the working class currently tends to resist in a mostly fragmented and individualized form - the fact that resistance *is* so fragmented or hidden - reflects the historic weakness of the class as a whole. The significance of this is that it is not clear how such hidden and individualized forms of resistance can in themselves necessarily take us to the point of no return. Unless they become overtly collective, they operate merely as a form of antagonism that capital can cope with if not recuperate. This is the moment of truth in Tronti and Panzieri's warnings about the limits of autonomous struggle.

Comment: The point of recognizing the content and diversity of day to day struggles is not to hold them up as a satisfying form of organization, but to understand the ferment out of which better organized, more collective struggles can arise. Indeed, they are manifestations not merely of individual resistance but often of small group resistance whose self organization can lead to wider linkages and organization. As to how well capital can cope, that depends on many things, including the breath and intensity of such resistance. Tronti and Panzieri's warnings, cited above, were not about the limits of autonomous struggle as such but about the limits of the existing organization of struggle and their political work was devoted to overcoming those limits - in part through the recognition and appreciation of the real, concrete preoccupations of workers involved in those day to day battles.

4.2 Escaping the harness?

⁴⁴ For a good account of the extent of recent 'hidden' struggles in the US today, see Curtis Price's 'Fragile prosperity? Fragile social peace' in *Collective Action Notes* (available at http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/fragile_prosperity.htm)

Linked to this issue of retreat is the question of whether the working class will be driving capital forward forever. Do the 'autonomists' argue too successfully that class struggle is the motor? If working class struggle is always harnessed by capital, how does it escape the harness?

Comment: What the theory of class composition suggests is that escape depends on the particular configuration of the harness in a given period. Thus the need to analyse that configuration in order to perceive possible lines of rupture and flight, either already in operation or potentially powerful.

The argument that class struggle is alive and well in manifold forms is empowering; but it risks ending up as a satisfaction with the current limits of the class struggle. The focus on the validity and importance of the (plurality of) autonomous struggles themselves can mean the abandonment of revolution as a totality.

Comment: This is, as far as I can see, more fantasy by these authors. They give no example of the realization of such "risks" or of such an abandonment. I know of none that they might have cited. Their argument takes a classical, and misleading form: instead of dealing with what people are actually doing, they conjure up some horrifying image of what they might do and use it to critique them. This of course is exactly what the Bush Administration has just done so thoroughly *vis à vis* Saddam Hussein and his supposed weapons of mass destruction aimed at the US. But just as that administration has to be critiqued for not demonstrating either the existence of WMD or of any plan for their use to attack the United States, so too should we ask whether I, or other autonomists, have ever expressed any complacency with "the current limits of class struggle" or "abandoned" revolution. The answer to both question is no. If the "Revolution as a totality" in the above paragraph, or the "total revolution" in the one below, just means the overthrow and transcendence of capitalism, then the answer is, once again, no.

And as the possibility and necessity of total revolution fades, so reformist campaigns, premised upon the continued existence of the capital relation, become the focus. A symptom of this worst side of post-*autonomia* is illustrated in demands for a guaranteed income, which have allowed those influenced by *autonomia* to link up with other reformists in campaigns which have dovetailed with capital's current needs for welfare restructuring.⁴⁵ Although not all the major figures of *autonomia* or the 'autonomist Marxist' scene would endorse this ultimately conservative view of the adequacy of fragmentation, it is not inconsistent with an understanding of class struggle based around the concept of autonomy.

Comment: So "those influenced by *autonomia*" are now simply branded "reformists"? What "major figures of *autonomia*" do they think have endorsed this demand? Unfortunately, in their rush to smear, they assume rather

⁴⁵ See Wildcat's article 'Reforming the welfare state in order to save capitalism' in *Stop the Clock! Critiques of the New Social Workhouse* (Aufheben, 2000).

than argue the case against the demand for a guaranteed income and therefore wind up as even less convincing than Weston in his attack on wage struggles - an attack that Marx went out of his way to refute.

5. A political reading of *Capital*: From 20 yards of linen to the self-reduction of prices in one easy step

In his attempt to render a political reading of Marx's critique of political economy, Harry Cleaver is again following in the workerist tradition: Negri's 'Marx on cycle and crisis', which was written in 1968, is an earlier example of the attempt to connect Marx's categories with notions of strategy and struggle. However, a sub-text of Cleaver's book is his defence of the importance of *Capital* against the arguments made by (the later) Negri that, for the revolutionary project of our time, *Capital* is superseded by the *Grundrisse*. In *Marx Beyond Marx*,⁴⁶ Negri argues that *Capital* has served to reduce critique to economic theory, that the objectification of the categories in *Capital* functions to block action by revolutionary subjectivity and to subject the subversive capacity of the proletariat to the reorganizing and repressive intelligence of capitalist power. The point of Marx's critique as whole is not 'intellectual' but revolutionary; hence the *Grundrisse*, which is traversed throughout by an absolutely insurmountable antagonism, is, according to Negri, the key text and can even serve as a critique of the limits of *Capital*.

Cleaver's *Reading 'Capital' Politically* argues that the right way to read *Capital* and its fundamental categories such as value is 'strategically', from the perspective of the working class. Cleaver therefore contends that any 'blockage' is due only to the inadequate ways in which *Capital* has been read, and that the solution is to read it politically.

We can agree with Cleaver that, despite the power of the *Grundrisse* and its crucial indications that Marx's theoretical project was wider than the material which appears in *Capital*,⁴⁷ *Capital* is nevertheless the better presentation of the critique of political economy (as Marx himself clearly thought). But this is not the same as arguing that a 'political' reading of *Capital* is useful or even tenable. Our argument is that Cleaver's 'political' reading ultimately fails.

5.1 Aims of Reading '*Capital*' Politically

The focus of *Reading 'Capital' Politically* is the first three parts of Chapter 1 of *Capital* Volume 1. Here, Marx shows how the commodity has two aspects - use-value (a product of the concrete useful labour that creates that particular commodity) and value (a representation of that labour considered as general abstract labour); he shows how value must take different forms; and from this he derives the logical necessity of money as the universal equivalent form of value. Along with the chapter on money, these are undeniably some of the most difficult parts of *Capital*. While a lot of the rest of the book is fairly straightforward, this beginning is often enough to make the reader turn away in frustration. Thus it is

⁴⁶ Op. cit.

⁴⁷ See F.C. Shortall (1994), *The Incomplete Marx* (Aldershot: Avebury).

worth acknowledging the merit of Cleaver's attempt at an accessible commentary.

The central thesis of Cleaver's reading is that the category of value, in its various forms (and aspects), needs to be related to class struggles around human needs - to the subjective - rather than (simply) to the objective workings of capital as a 'system'. In Cleaver's words, to read *Capital* politically is 'to show how each category and relationship relates to and clarifies the nature of the class struggle and to show what that means for the political strategy of the working class' (p. 76). Cleaver's attempt to render the subjective in Marx's account of value operates by short-circuiting most of Marx's mediations, leaping directly from the commodity-form to particular struggles. He relates the material in *Capital* Chapter 1 partly to later material in the same volume over the struggle for the working day and primitive accumulation, but most of all to more contemporary struggles - around energy and food prices - in a way clearly distinct from Marx's own method.⁴⁸ He justifies this by saying 'to the extent then that I bring to bear on the interpretation of certain passages material from other parts of *Capital*, or from other works, I do so with the aim of grasping Chapter One within the larger analysis rather than reconstructing the evolution of what Marx wrote and thought' (p. 94, second edition).

5.2 Aims of *Capital*

A question Cleaver does not address is why it was that Marx said very little about struggles in Volume 1 Chapter 1. If it is so necessary to read *Capital* politically in the way that Cleaver does, then why didn't Marx save us the trouble and simply write *Capital* politically? In promoting *Capital* as a weapon for our struggles, Cleaver wants to stress the moments of de-reification and de-fetishization in relation to Marx's categories. Indeed he claims that this project of a political reading 'is exactly the project called for in Marx's discussion of fetishism' (p. 76). Thus for Cleaver there is no need for a 'separate analysis of Section 4 of Chapter One which deals with fetishism, simply because ... this whole essay involves going behind the appearances of the commodity-form to get at the social relations' (p. 80). Cleaver is right that the section on fetishism is crucial for 'getting at the social relations'; but why did Marx insist on the type of presentation he does despite the

⁴⁸ On the other hand, Cleaver also contends that what he is doing is not so different from Marx: 'Marx illustrates these relations [of use-value and exchange-value] with a variety of apparently innocuous commodities: linen, iron, watches, and corn (wheat). I say apparently because most of these commodities played a key role in the period of capitalist development which Marx analysed: linen in the textile industry, iron in the production of machinery and cannon, watches in the timing of work, wheat as the basic means of subsistence of the working class. To be just as careful in this exposition, I suggest that we focus on the key commodities of the current period: labour power, food and energy. (p. 98). However, while Cleaver is probably right that Marx did not make an arbitrary choice of which commodities to mention in Chapter 1, their function in Marx's presentation is arbitrary. Unlike the political economists, Marx does give attention to the use-value side of the economy; but here in his opening chapter he makes no mention of the concreteness of these use-values in the class struggle. At this point of Marx's presentation of the capitalist mode of production, the precise use-values are irrelevant. Marx's reference to linen, corn etc. is a part of a logical presentation, not a reference to concrete struggles.

possible difficulty it entailed for his intended audience, the working class?

Comment: Marxologists have told us enough about Marx's choice of a method of exposition: he patterned the presentation of the material in *Capital* on Hegel's method in *The Science of Logic*, Bukunin's copy of which he is said to have had in his possession, namely going from the most abstract to the most concrete (concrete in the sense of the number of determinations). Marx used other approaches in his earlier writings, such as *The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but in any case it seemed to me when I wrote the book, and it still seems to me today, that our job is quite different than Marx's. He wanted to lay out an original analysis in a systematic manner. We need to synthesize all the elements of his analysis and grasp them within the world we live in. That is why my reading proceeds differently than Marx's exposition.

Moreover is Cleaver's kind of political reading really the way to understand what Marx deals with as commodity fetishism?

An interesting comparison is Isaak Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*,⁴⁹ which Cleaver mentions only briefly and dismissively, in a footnote.⁵⁰

Comment: The reason I dismiss Rubin in a footnote, is because Rubin dismisses Marx's extended analysis of the form of value in a footnote. That footnote is #1 in chapter 8 ("Basic Characteristics of Marx's Theory of Value") and it reads as follows: "By form of value we do not mean those various forms which value assumes in the course of its development (for example, elementary form, expanded form, and so on), but value conceived from the standpoint of its social forms, i.e., value as form." He repeats this footnote almost word for word in Chapter 12 on the "Content and Form of Value" changing only "value conceived from the stand point of its social forms" to "value itself, which is considered as the social form of the product of labor." All Rubin sees in Marx's 24 pages of analysis is a history of the development of the form of value and so he abandons those pages and returns to his primary objective, namely to argue against some Marxists

⁴⁹ I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (1973, New York/Montreal: Black Rose Books).

⁵⁰ Cleaver's claim (p. 138) that while Marxists have examined the question of the content of value at length almost no work has been done on the issue of the form of value (and hence the necessity for Cleaver's own analysis) includes reference to Rubin. But this in itself suggests that Cleaver hasn't understood (and perhaps hasn't even read) Rubin's book, the whole of which is concerned precisely with the social form of value.

Comment: The problem is not that I haven't read Rubin or understood Rubin, but that these reviewers apparently didn't bother to actually read beyond the introduction to my book. If they had they would have recognized - and might have discussed - the difference between Rubin's notion of value as an expression of the social relations of capitalist production and mine. See comment in main body of the text.

that Marx's theory of value is a theory of the social relations of production of capitalism.

My reading is quite different. I do not see in those 24 pages a history, but rather a quite literal analysis - or a breaking down and examination - of the form of value within capitalism. Therefore, unlike Rubin, I meticulously examine each of the determinations that Marx quite methodically lays out and interpret them as theoretical expressions of particular aspects of the antagonistic class relationships of capitalism. The reviewers follow Rubin's lead here - where he ignored Marx's 24 pages, they ignore my analysis of those pages in Chapter 5 of my book. Given their interest in Rubin's work, this is unfortunate. If they had actually done what they suggested, i.e., carried out a comparison of Rubin's work and my own, they would have been forced to confront these differences (and many others) and might have come to a better understanding of what is new and unique in my interpretation of Marx's theory of value.

While Cleaver does not comment directly on the section in *Capital* Chapter 1 on fetishism, the whole first part of Rubin's book is on this subject. Rubin's book was seminal precisely for systematically grasping the inseparability of commodity fetishism and Marx's theory of value: 'The theory of fetishism is, per se, the basis of Marx's entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value' (Rubin, 1973, p. 5). Thus the value categories are expressions of a topsy-turvy world in which people's products dominate the producers, where people are related through things, and where objects behave as subjects and subjects as objects. Since Rubin's book became available in the English-speaking world through Fredy Perlman's translation, a whole school of Marxism has developed, insisting like Rubin does that Marx's is not a neo-Ricardian embodied labour theory of value but an abstract social labour theory of value;⁵¹ such an analysis

⁵¹ Up until the 1970s, at least in the English speaking world, Marx was seen as having simply developed and refined Ricardo's labour theory of value. In this traditional interpretation, Marx, like Ricardo, was seen to adhere to an embodied labour conception of value. What was common to all commodities, and hence what it was that made them commensurate with each other as manifestations of this common factor, was that they were all products of the 'expenditure of human brains, nerves and muscles', that is of human labour in general. Consequently, the value of a commodity was seen to be determined by the labour embodied in it during its production.

With this physiological, or quasi-physicalist, conception of labour, the Ricardian labour theory of value conceived value as merely a technical relation: the value of a commodity was simply determined by the amount of labour-energy necessary for its production. As such the Ricardian labour theory of value could in principle be applied to any form of society.

For Rubin, what was specific about the capitalist mode of production was that producers did not produce products for their own immediate needs but rather produced commodities for sale. The labour allocated to the production of any particular commodity was not determined prior to production by custom or by a social plan and therefore it was not immediately social labour. Labour only became social labour, a recognised part of the social division of labour, through sale of the commodity it produced. Furthermore, the exchange of commodities was a process of real abstraction through

brings fetishism to the fore and emphasises Marx’s work as a critique of political economy rather than Marxist political economy.

Comment: Unfortunately, Rubin’s interpretation of Marx’s work on value theory shows it to be not only a critique of classical political economy, but a *better* political economy. Despite his analysis of fetishism, Rubin never analyses Marx’s concepts in terms of the dynamics of class struggle. His focus is indeed on the theory of value as a theory of the “social relations of production” (as opposed to the “forces of production” which he views as technical - the kind of view which Panzieri systematically demolished in his rereading of Marx.). But Rubin never confronts those “social relations” as antagonistic social relations of struggle. The working class never appears in Rubin’s essays as an antagonistic subject within and against (much less moving beyond) capital. He thus had no place in my history of the recognition and appreciation of the autonomous power of workers vis a vis capital.

Thus Rubin can be seen to make similar points to Cleaver but to do so by explaining and illustrating value-categories in terms of such basic mediations as social relations, labour and commodity fetishism, rather than through the directly political reading favoured by Cleaver.

Comment: As suggested above Rubin does NOT “make similar points to Cleaver” beyond the general affirmation that Marx’s value theory is a theory of social relationships. It is all very fine and well to say Marx’s theory of value is a theory of the social relations of production (though production needs to be defined more broadly than he does) but what does this mean in terms of class struggle? Answering that question seems to me to require exactly such a detailed dissection to grasp all the various social relationships theorized by the categories of the analysis. For this Rubin is no help.

Moreover, the case of Rubin questions the schema Cleaver develops in his Introduction, summarized in the following table:

Ideological	Strategic
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which the various types of concrete labour were reduced to a common substance - abstract social labour. This abstract social labour was the *social* substance of value. Rubin’s abstract social labour theory of value necessarily entailed an account of commodity fetishism since it was concerned with how labour as a social relation must manifest itself in the form of value in a society in which relations between people manifest themselves as relations between things.

In the mid-1970s the labour theory of value came under attack from the neo-Ricardian school which argued that it was both redundant and inconsistent. Rubin’s abstract social labour theory of value was then rediscovered as a response to such criticisms in the late 1970s. Although Cleaver dismisses Rubin there have been attempts to address his abstract social labour theory of value from the tradition of *autonomia* - see for example the article by Massimo De Angelis in *Capital & Class* 57 (Autumn 1995).

	readings	readings
Political economy readings	From capital’s perspective	From capital’s perspective
Philosophical readings	From capital’s perspective	<i>Empty set</i>
Political readings	<i>Empty set</i>	From a working-class perspective

Approaches to the reading of Marx (Cleaver, p. 31)

Cleaver (p. 30) defines the bottom right box of this table as:

that strategic reading of Marx which is done from the point of view of the working class. It is a reading that self-consciously and unilaterally structures its approach to determine the meaning and relevance of every concept to the immediate development of working-class struggle. It is a reading which eschews all detached interpretation and abstract theorising in favour of grasping concepts only within that concrete totality of struggle whose determinations they designate. This I would argue is the only kind of reading of Marx which can properly be said to be from a working-class perspective because it is the only one which speaks directly to the class’s needs for clarifying the scope and structure of its own power and strategy.

Though the Stalinist state recognized the political significance of Rubin’s ‘abstract reasoning’,⁵² Rubin’s book does not meet Cleaver’s ‘political’ criteria. But neither does Rubin’s book seem to be obviously a political economic or a philosophical reading. We’d contend that one of the reasons that Rubin’s is a seminal work is precisely because it transcends such a distinction. Prompted by the revolutionary wave of the 1910s and 1920s, Rubin, like writers of the same period such as Lukacs and Korsch, was able to go beyond Second International Marxism and to understand *Capital* as a critique of political economy - but without, like the Frankfurt School, retreating into mere philosophy.

Comment: I think that it is actually quite obvious that Rubin’s treatment remains very much within the realm of political economy. Indeed much of it is a demonstration of how Marx “corrected” classical political economy to get the story right. The emphasis in his analysis of fetishism is not a philosophical discourse on illusions but focuses on the “objective” reasons why the social relations of production are manifested in the form of social relations among things in a capitalist society.

I also think that the reviewers improperly slight the Frankfurt School (and here too they ignore what I had to say on the subject) as “retreating into mere philosophy”

⁵² ‘An official Soviet philosopher wrote that “The followers of Rubin and the Menshevizing Idealists ... treated Marx’s revolutionary method in the spirit of Hegelianism... The Communist Party has smashed these trends alien to Marxism.” ... Rubin was imprisoned, accused of belonging to an organization that never existed, forced to “confess” to events that never took place, and finally removed from among the living.’ (Fredy Perlman, About the Author, in Rubin’s *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value* (op. cit.))

when in fact they carried out considerable analysis of the very material forms of capitalist domination in the sphere of culture (not to mention Pollack's work - which I mention - on automation and the modern factory system).

The fourth part of *Capital* Chapter 1, 'The fetishism of the commodity and its secret', is crucial because in it Marx shows how the forms of value are an expression of reification, and hence fetishized in our experience. Rubin's approach is key for drawing one's attention to the inseparability of fetishism and the theory of value. By trying to short-circuit the process, by immediately moving to the de-fetishising aspect of class struggle, Cleaver jumps levels of abstraction.

Comment: I think this charge is silly. Once you understand the nature of fetishism the next step is to apply that understanding to your interpretation of fetishized categories and de-fetishize them. That is, by the way, exactly what Rubin does after explaining his interpretation of Marx's concept of fetishism. It strikes me as absurd to suggest that it is somehow illegitimate to use the concept of fetishism without first going into a lengthy exposition of it (of the sort that Rubin does in his book).

Our argument would be that, analytically, it is necessary to explain reification before examining its reversal. In other words, in order to relate value to the kind of struggles Cleaver refers to, a whole series of mediations must be developed,⁵³ not least the categories of absolute and relative surplus-value, constant and variable capital, and the relation between price and value (which Marx introduces later in Volume 1), circulation (which Marx introduces in Volume 2) and the distributional forms of surplus value - profit, rent and wages (which don't come until Volume 3). Volume 1 concerns capital-in-general, presented as particular examples of capitalist enterprises as an analytic device to derive the later, more developed, categories.

Comment: Here we differ fundamentally. The above prescription seems to me to lead directly to a slavish Marxological reiteration of the entirety of Marx's text while ignoring that each of the determinations of that text is a determination of the whole, i.e., of the class struggle which is capital. While it is desirable to work through and understand all the mediations and interconnections in *Capital* - and I do this each time I teach the book - my project in this little book was more limited: to grasp those particular aspects of the class relationship denoted by the concepts used to analyse value.

For us it seems essential to grasp what Marx was trying to do in *Capital*. If Marx's overall project was 'capitalism and its overthrow' it was nevertheless necessary for him first to show what the capitalist mode of production was, how it was possible; this led him methodologically to make a provisional closure of class subjectivity in order to

grasp the logic of capital as an objective and positive system of economic 'laws' which is apparently independent of human will and purpose.⁵⁴ Objectivist Marxism takes this provisional closure as complete. What Cleaver is doing could be seen to be an attempt at opening up the provisional closure by bringing in the subjectivity of class struggle; but because he does not properly explain the marginalization of the class struggle in the pages of *Capital*, what he does comes across as bald assertion at variance with the flow of Marx's argument.

Comment: Here we are once again treated to the old objective/subjective dichotomy in a way which completely ignores my argument that the so-called "objective" is nothing but the resultant of the interaction of "subjective" forces and once that is understood then the old dichotomy is an obstacle rather than an aid to understanding. In *Reading Capital Politically* I am not "bringing in the subjectivity of class struggle"!! I am showing how Marx's theory is a theory of class struggle. How capital is a social relationship of antagonistic class struggle and *Capital* is an analysis of that struggle. There is no "marginalization" of class struggle in *Capital*; that's what the whole book is about. As I just explained above my project was not to reproduce "the flow of Marx's argument" but to understand the substance of various elements of that argument in explicit class terms. There is no bald assertion but a demonstration of this in the book.

In short, in his understandable quest for the concrete and immediate, Cleaver abandons the analytic rigour needed to make the connections between *Capital* and the class struggle. While we may agree that *Capital* needs to be understood as a weapon in the class war, it does not need to be the crudely instrumental reading offered by Cleaver.

Comment: "Crudely instrumental"? Where did that bit of derogatory fluff come from? Lack of "analytic rigour"? I invite anyone to compare the book with this "review" and decide who lacks "analytic rigour". The failure of this review to come to grips with the detailed concrete analysis of Marx's value analysis provided in the book speaks for itself. In their rush to condemn autonomist Marxism the authors have forgotten to actually deal with much of the substance of the book. Lame.

6. Whither *autonomia*?

6.1 Negri and the retreat from the universal revolutionary subject

The continuing influence of *operaismo* and *autonomia* is evident today in a number of recent movements, most notably perhaps Ya Basta! in Italy, who draw upon some of the ideas of Negri. Negri himself has lately caused interest in some circles. *Empire*, the book he has co-authored with Michael Hardt,⁵⁵ has struck a chord with the concerns of some 'anti-

⁵³ We made this same point in our reply to Cleaver's associate George Caffentzis of *Midnight Oil/Midnight Notes* (see 'Escape from the Law of Value?' in *Aufheben* #5, 1996, p. 41).

⁵⁴ See F.C. Shortall (1994), *The Incomplete Marx* (Aldershot: Avebury).

⁵⁵ Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000.

capitalist/'globalization' activists, academics and even a New Labour policy adviser.⁵⁶ While Negri's ideas were sometimes controversial when he was part of the area of autonomy, after losing his connections to the movement he ceased to produce worthwhile stuff, and instead slipped into an academic quagmire whose reformist political implications are all too clear.⁵⁷

Comment: Unfortunately there is no evidence here of any familiarity whatsoever on the part of the authors with what Negri "produced" while in exile, other than *Empire*. Therefore the "bald assertion" that he ceased to produce worthwhile "stuff" is laughable. Equally unfortunate has been the lack of translation of the many volumes of *Futur Anterieur* that Negri edited in Paris along with Jean-Marie Vincent and others which are full of quite useful "stuff" analyzing various concrete struggles as well as putting forward the now better known - because of *Empire* - idea of "immaterial labor."

The disconnection of ideas from the movement, following the repression which culminated in the mass arrests of 1979, has also meant that there has been to some extent a battle for the heritage of the movement. Through journals like *Zerowork* and *Midnight Notes*, Anglo-American theorists have kept 'autonomist Marxism' going. Through emphasizing the continuing importance of value (albeit ambiguously, as we

⁵⁶ Mark Leonard, 'The left should love globalization', *New Statesman*, 28th May 2001. Leonard is director of the Foreign Policy Centre think-tank and apparently a Blairite.

⁵⁷ This break was, as for a lot of militants of that period, quite physical. Arrested in 1979, Negri went into exile in 1983. However, his particular form of escape (getting elected as a MP) and the warm welcome and relatively cushy position that awaited him in France were based on the different status he held (as a professor) compared with other militants; thus sections of the movement saw him somewhat as a traitor.

Comment: This is a scurrilous personal attack. In the first place, Negri's "escape" only began with being elected to parliament. He was about to have his parliamentary immunity revoked and be returned to prison when he physically escaped Italy to France. Second, the warm welcome he received in France had little to do with his being a professor and a great deal to do with 1) the fact that his writings had been translated and published there and 2) there was a whole mobilization against repression in Italy that welcomed many exiles. Moreover, a great many of those exiles were professors, not just Negri. To the degree that Negri was considered by anyone to be a "traitor" it was because of his finally publishing a critique and repudiation of the Brigada Rosa and such groups. Many of those in the movement, while disagreeing with BR methods, considered critiquing them to be playing into the hands of the state that was using them as leverage in much wider repression. The attitude was akin to those in the US who opposed any critique of the Sandinistas in the 1980s when they were under attack by the Reagan Administration's "contra" war against them.

His return to Italy has not succeeded in redeeming him; nor has his credibility been restored by recent pronouncements, such as his advice to the anti-globalization movement that the '20% of voters' alienated from the political system need to be won back to electoral politics. (See 'Social struggles in Italy: Creating a new left in Italy', <http://slash.autonomedia.org/article.pl?sid=02/08/10/1643246>)

have seen), these and Harry Cleaver among others have distinguished themselves from the late Negri with his embrace of both post-structuralism and the ideas of the (pre-Hegelian) philosopher Spinoza.

Commentary: This is a very confused sketch of the so-called "battle". Not only was I part of the Zerowork collective, and have collaborated with Midnight Notes at various points, but there has been no ambiguity about our disagreement with Negri about value - as a reading of both my and George Caffentzis' writings will show. As to our various relationships to the ideas of people like Deleuze and Guattari or even Spinoza these authors haven't a clue. Negri coauthored *Communists Like Us* with Guattari, and I have, for example, used Deleuze and Guattari's lovely analysis of the rhizome in my writings on the Zapatistas and the anti-globalization movement. Perhaps at some point the authors will read these texts and comment on them but there is no sign that they have to date.

But - and despite his innumerable self-contradictions - a continuity can be traced from the early Negri, through *autonomia* to the late Negri. For example, his recent arguments, along with other reformists, for a guaranteed income can be traced back to the demand for a 'political wage' made by the radical Negri of *Potere Operaio*. It would seem to be significant that, despite his earlier valuable insights, his relatively recent theoretical work can be seen as at one with the arguments of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari justifying fragmented forms of resistance and denying the need to confront the state.

Comment: First, Negri's recent work is not "at one" with Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari even if he has drawn from them - as should we all - and coauthored a book with Guattari (*Communists Like Us*). Second, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari do not "justify" fragmented forms of resistance, they have identified them, explored their logic (in relation to the molecular and molar forms of exploitation and oppression) and shown their power of rupture as well as their dangers. Just because, for example, Deleuze and Guattari argue that what they call the "overcoding machine" of capitalist society is greater than the State apparatus ("a concrete arrangement that puts a society's over coding machine into effect") that doesn't mean that they deny the need to confront the state or to overthrow it. What it does mean is that their understanding of exactly what needs to be confronted and overthrown is much more comprehensive and complex, and therefore requires more subtle revolutionary methods than those conceived by earlier revolutionaries.

Empire contains any number of arguments we see as problematic if not counter-revolutionary and recuperative, including the abandonment of value, the centrality of immaterial labour, the call for 'real democracy' and political proposals for 'global citizenship'. What stirred people's interest, it seemed, was the thesis of 'empire' itself - that of the emergence of a single unified global political-economic capitalist entity - which seemed to offer an alternative to unsatisfactory orthodox theories of imperialism. With the US

war on Afghanistan, however, the notion of imperialism has returned to the forefront of political discourse.⁵⁸

Comment: The fact that imperialism has “returned to the forefront of political discourse” (on the Left) hardly implies that *Empire’s* vision of global capital can now be dismissed. While the rhetoric of the Bush Administration’s neoliberal policymakers emphasizes their desire for a *Pax Americana*, and the maintenance of the sole-superpower status of the United States, it remains to be seen to what degree their policies in support of “American” interests will turn out to be in conflict with those of global capital as a whole.

What we are left with, then, as Negri’s take on *autonomia*, is a celebration of fragmentation. The abandonment of the concept of the proletariat (now replaced by ‘the multitude’), the universal revolutionary subject, is the abandonment of world revolution. Negri’s work might therefore be said to express the profound sense of defeat and disillusion that followed the failure of the Movement of 1977.

6.2 History as ideology

Two different ways of writing history are evident in the books by Steve Wright and Harry Cleaver. Wright’s is a history of the politics of a movement. But it is also critical, from a communist perspective. We therefore thoroughly recommend it as an invaluable resource in helping our understanding of the development, contributions and tensions of workerism and *autonomia* in their historical context of Italy in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

By contrast, for us, Cleaver’s account of the tradition of *autonomia* is far more tendentious. Rather than focusing, as Wright does, on what is clearly a single historical episode, Cleaver selects a number of different movements and theorists, going back as far as C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, which he then designates as representatives of what he calls ‘autonomist Marxism’. Again, here Cleaver is consistent with the tradition of workerist historiography which, looking back, found the mass worker and hence a commonality with its own perspective in earlier struggles, such as the Wobblies and the working class movement in Germany in the 1920s.

In one sense it might seem there’s nothing wrong with Cleaver’s attempt simply to identify what he sees as the revolutionary use of Marx as a particular tradition. And if we look at the groups and theorists that he refers to (both in *Reading ‘Capital’ Politically* and also in his university course on ‘autonomist Marxism’⁵⁹) a very great deal of it corresponds with our own assessment of the most valuable contributions.

However, there are two, related, problems. First, in grouping the various movements and theorists together in the way that he does there is an element of the same homogenizing or flattening out – a neglect of differences – that we saw in Cleaver’s ‘autonomist’ class analysis, as well as in the workerist concepts of mass worker and so on.

Comment: I fail to see how the identification of a common threat of recognition and emphasis running through a diverse body of literature and political practice involves any kind of “homogenisation” or “flattening out” whatsoever. There is an inevitable *relative* neglect of differences in my brief sketch first, because it’s focus was on the identification of similarities, not the differences, and second, because it was brief. Nevertheless I would argue the neglect was only relative, given that in the course of that brief sketch I describe the evolution of the ideas and therefore, necessarily, differences among them, especially about important central issues such as work and crisis. I have already spoken to the supposed neglect of differences in the my analysis of the unwaged and in the automomist treatment of the mass worker and won’t repeat those points here.

Second, it is revealing to consider which tendencies are excluded from Cleaver’s canon, or at least addressed in only a cursory way. How might these neglected tendencies be in tension with the rest of the material? What contradictions might the formulation ‘autonomist Marxism’ suppress?

For us, as an account of developments in theory over the past century, the most notable absences from *Reading ‘Capital’ Politically* are the Situationist International⁶⁰ and the Italian left and those influenced by it, such as Barrot/Dauvé and Camatte.

Comment: Both Situationist texts and those of Camatte are included in the Texas Archives of Autonomist Marxism. I had studied neither at the time I wrote *Reading Capital Politically*. The same was true for many of the writings of the Council Communists and of Anarcho-Communists such as Kropotkin - as I explain in the Preface to the Second Edition. There is nothing to be read into the absence of these authors from my historical sketch other than the simple fact that I had not yet studied them. In the case of Kropotkin, at least, I have subsequently written an appreciation of the similarities and differences between his work and that of autonomist Marxists. He, of course, would reject being labelled a Marxist. See: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/facstaff/Cleaver/kropotkin.html>

We can go so far as to say that the attempt to specify such a thing as ‘autonomist Marxism’ is ideological, with its emphasis on ‘similar’ ideas and its concealments (the glossing of the limits of the ‘good’ theorists and movements, the silence on those that don’t fit).

Comment: These snide remarks are both pathetic and could be, just as snidely, addressed to any effort to identify common threads of ideas. I accept the obvious critique of my sketch of this history that it is brief and leaves much out, and I enthusiastically welcomed Steve Wright’s contribution to providing a more comprehensive

⁵⁸ Of course, it is possible to reject the leftist inanities of ‘anti-imperialism’ while recognizing the realities of imperialist rivalries.

⁵⁹ <http://www.eco.texas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/>

⁶⁰ *The Society of the Spectacle*, at least, appears in Cleaver’s bibliographical history of the ‘autonomist Marxist’ tradition, appended to Negri’s *Marx Beyond Marx* (op. cit.).

history of the Italian New Left - just as I have welcomed comprehensive biographical studies of C.L.R. James and others. "Concealment" implies knowledge of something to conceal, and as I pointed out in my preceding comment, at the time of writing *Reading Capital Politically* I was unfamiliar with those whom I am accused of leaving out, and thus could hardly "conceal" them! As to the charge of "concealing" the limits of those I have treated, or of the movements of which they were a part, this too I deny. I invite the reader of this "review" to read my book and see how I treated the evolution of the theory, the limits of various people's ideas, how others saw further and elaborated new and different ideas, and so on.

This is not unusual or strange. The capitalist counter-offensive which culminated in the defeat of the Movement of 1977 saw a disillusionment with the possibility of mass revolutionary change that was expressed in the destinations of those coming out of the area of autonomy: most went into the PCI or the armed groups. Likewise, the turning of the general insights of the *operaismo* and *autonomia* theorists into 'autonomist Marxism' can be seen as a reflection of the retreat of the movement giving rise to the ideas.

Comment: Nonsense. As I explain in the preface to the book - which these "reviewers" simply ignore - the introduction to the book (and its thesis of the existence of a tradition of "autonomist" Marxist ideas and practices) was a by-product of an effort to rediscover the history of several sets of ideas that came together in the 1970s to generate the journal *Zerowork*. This was not a text crafted in aftermath of the repression of 1979, but one written before it, at a time when these ideas and the political movements in which they were born were very much alive and active.

Ideology is the freezing of theory; theory freezes when the practice on which it is based is halted. 'Autonomism' seems to be non-dogmatic and dynamic because of the emphasis on particular needs and diverse struggles etc.; but the very principle of openness to new struggles has itself become ideological as the wave of struggles has ebbed.

Comment: There has been no freezing in the development of autonomist Marxist ideas as any post-1979 survey of its literature reveals. The attempts to come to grips with the capitalist neoliberal counterattack of the 1980s and 1990s and the reformulation of theory to find new approaches to grasping changes in the class composition have continued apace. Therefore, by the reviewers' own definition, labelling these ideas "ideology" is a misapplication of the term. It reflects only their dislike, not an accurate analysis.

Thus the glossing of the limitations of those currents that Cleaver gives approval to, and even cites as exemplifying autonomous struggle (e.g. Wages for Housework),⁶¹ goes

⁶¹ While Cleaver's decision to leave *Reading 'Capital' Politically* as it was rather than re-write it is understandable, what is perhaps less understandable - unless one wants to suggest that he is simply

hand in hand with the exclusion of those that would contribute to the critique of those same currents. Any radical current needs to critique itself in order to transcend itself, as in the proletariat's self-liberation through self-abolition. Cleaver's identification of a thing with the label 'autonomist Marxism' is ideological in that it is partial and attempts to close off rather than open up a pathway to its own self-critique.

Comment: Statements like the above make me wonder if the "reviewers" actually read the book they pretend to review. Even in my short sketch of the history of these ideas I repeatedly point out limitations of the ideas of various writers and activists. My own contributions to the evolution of these ideas - including the reinterpretation of value theory in *Reading Capital Politically* (that is almost completely ignored in this "review") have been developed because others in this tradition hadn't done something I found necessary. Moreover there is an explicit discussion of self-valorization as involving the self-abolition of the proletariat (though not in those hackneyed words). And what "thing" is it that I am accused of identifying with a "label"? "Close off self critique"? Hardly, in the Preface I even point out how my own early work contained little of the ideas in the book, other than a preoccupation with class struggle.

6.3 Towards a critical appraisal and appropriation of the contributions of the workerists

While Cleaver's book, and particularly his Introduction, has been important to many of us in the past, we would suggest now that Wright's book is more helpful than *Reading 'Capital' Politically* in allowing us to appropriate the best contributions of the workerist tradition. Wright ends his book with the sentence 'Having helped to force the lock ... obstructing the understanding of working-class behaviour in and against capital, only to disintegrate in the process, the workerist tradition has bequeathed to others the task of making

dogmatic - is his failure to use the new Preface to acknowledge the weaknesses in his analysis that have emerged with hindsight. The continued uncritical lauding of 'Wages for Housework' is one example; another is the claims made about the role of inflation made in the 1970s.

Comment: Why should I acknowledge something I don't recognize to be true? The historical contributions of the Wages for Housework movement to the development of Marxist theory are, to my mind, undeniable and durable. Not only did they set off a widespread debate among Marxists but their basic insights into the importance of reproduction in accumulation and of the ability of struggles against reproduction to rupture accumulation are as useful today as they were when they were first laid out. The same goes for the analysis of inflation that was spelled out in *Zerowork* in 1975 and latter in *Midnight Notes* and elsewhere. The recognition of how prices were being wielded against the working class, of how money was being used as a weapon, filled a yawning gap in the Marxist analysis of crisis. Such issues had been largely neglected for years in both theory and the analysis of state policy. There is nothing to apologize for. These reviewers would clearly like me to recant virtually the totality of the ideas spelled out in this book. Sorry but it isn't going to happen. To label me "dogmatic" because I think much of what I wrote before is still accurate is mere name calling.

sense of those treasures which lie within.' In many ways Italian workerist analyses of class struggle promised much, but delivered little. The whole tendency, increasingly divided into separate camps, collapsed at the end of the '70s. Whereas one camp favoured libertarian themes of autonomy, personal development and the subjective determinations of class identity; the other instead turned to debates over the 'armed party' and the feasibility of civil war. Both camps abandoned the traditional workerist focus on the relationship between technical and political class composition – that is, between the class's material structure in the labour process and its behaviour as a subject autonomous from dictates of both the labour movement and capital.

But what can we take from the whole experience? The 'complex dialectic of decomposition and recomposition' of class forces, first elaborated by Tronti and others, was a significant departure from traditional leftist understanding of class struggle; the right questions were being asked: what material determinants are there in understanding the behaviour of the working class as (revolutionary) subject? But if the right questions were being asked, the answers the workerists provided were not always satisfactory; and tendency was often confused with totality. The early workerists were rightly criticized for their unwillingness to theorise moments of class struggle outside the large factories, and perhaps also for seeing the wage as the privileged locus of struggle; however their *autonomia* successors could be equally criticized for their problematic abandonment of the 'mass worker'.

Wright's book focuses on the concept of class composition, workerism's most distinctive contribution. Class composition was important as an attempt to express how the working class is an active subject, and thus takes us beyond the poverty of objectivist Marxism which portrayed the working class as passive and dependent. The concept grew from the experience of autonomous struggle when the working class was on the offensive, but it has come to seem less adequate when relied upon in periods of crisis and retreat. To what extent was there a political recomposition of the class with the decline of the mass worker? Was the 'socialized worker' made concrete by the self-reduction struggles of the 1970s and the student and unemployed movements of 1977? Certainly a multiplicity of struggles erupted on the social level. But did the struggles merge, did the new subjectivities forged in struggle coalesce? Class recomposition would entail the formation of an increasingly self-conscious proletarian movement.

Comment: Class recomposition is here reduced to a new word for an old concept: "the formation of an increasingly self-conscious proletarian movement". And then, because the reviewers see no such movement the concept is dismissed. But the concept of the political recomposition of class power was never so simplistic, not from the beginning. It denoted processes of struggle through which workers were able to recompose the structures of power within their class and between their class and capital. Processes of struggle certainly involve "consciousness" but not necessarily "class consciousness" in the traditional orthodox sense. In periods of decomposition as well as those of political recomposition the root notion of class composition draws our attention to the need to analyse the

content, divisions, and circulation of struggle among workers rather than to "flatten out" (to use one these reviewers' favourite derogatory terms) those complexities into general statements about "a proletarian movement" or "class consciousness".

The dispersal of workers (*operaio disseminato*), and the displacement of struggle to the wider social terrain, because of the fluidity of situations and multiplicity of moments of struggle, make it harder for a self-conscious movement to emerge. But some in the area of autonomy point to the very same factors as having the potential for rapid transmission of struggles to all sectors of the class. But, while the refusal of work and the liberation of needs manifested themselves in many different ways in the struggles of the '70s (proletarian youth circles, riots, 'free shopping' or reappropriations, squatting, organized 'self-reduction' of rent, utility bills and transport fares etc.), they did not develop into the political movement around the wage (redefined as a guaranteed social income) that Negri theorized – let alone into any coherent class movement capable of overturning capitalist social relations.

If this review article has devoted so much space to the problems of workerism and *autonomia* it is only because of the historic importance of this current. Today, ideas such as the non-neutrality of machinery and factory organization, the focus on immediate struggles and needs (rather than a separate 'politics'), and the anti-capitalist nature of struggles outside (as well as within) the workplace are characteristic of many radical circles, not all of which would call themselves Marxist. The workerists were among the first to theorize these issues. The extent to which their arguments have been echoed by radicals down the years (as well as co-opted and distorted by recuperators) is an index of their articulation of the negation of the capital relation.

(Continuation of Comment on footnote 24) The *Aufheben* "reviewers" have chosen not only to critique what they think is my view of the relationship between students and the working class, but to impune the relationship between my views on that subject and my actions, as a student and as a professor. In what follows I elaborate on my analysis of students, professors and the working class and do so, in part, in terms of my own experience.

On Schoolwork and the Struggle Against It

As a university professor I deal continuously with many aspects of the class politics of education. The two aspects that concern me on a day-to-day basis are the nature of what I and students do in the classroom. Beyond that there are the issues of homework, research and publication. I teach Marx because I think that the fundamentals of his analysis are still very useful in coping with today's world - including school and the work of students and professors. As one might expect I regularly bring some elements of his analysis to bear on these issues - a few of which are mentioned in *Reading Capital Politically*. In the light of contemporary autonomist Marxist theory, the university must be seen as one factory

within the larger social factory - one that produces mostly labor power and research results. The dynamics of those elements of the class composition found there can be analysed accordingly.

In what follows at first, I describe and analyse what I (and other professors) am supposed to do, and what students are supposed to do and what our relationship is supposed to be. In other words, as Marx does in *Capital*, I lay out the nature and dynamics of work according to the logic of capital that dominates the way the university is set up and supposed to operate. Later I will discuss how that logic can be and often is ruptured as we - students and professors - struggle against it and struggle to craft alternative uses of our time and energy.

Professors at Work

With respect to my own actions, I am acutely aware that the most fundamental aspect of the job that I am paid to do vis à vis students is the imposition of work and its discipline. The ultimate vehicle for this imposition is grades. The expectation of university officials is that I give high grades to students who work hard and low grades to students who don't, including failing those who refuse a substantial portion of the work they are asked to do. In the language of Marx, as a professor I am supposed to produce and reproduce labor power.

In the language of George Caffentzis' essay on "The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse" I am expected to play the role of "Maxwell's Daemon": sorting low from high entropy students - giving high grades and passing the former along as having demonstrated their willingness and ability to work and giving low grades and holding back the latter who either can't or won't do the work demanded of them. My provision of this information about their level of entropy - of the degree to which they are willing and able to make their energy available for the work capital wants done - is the final element of the work that I am expected to do vis à vis each set of students in each course I teach.

Although it happens that grades can be based on class participation, for the most part they are based on the performance of specific tasks, e.g., papers and tests, but that performance also reflects prior work done without any evaluation (study, research). Because the imposition of grades is absolutely unavoidable - in the sense that if I refuse to give grades I lose my job - I do this. But at the same time, being clear about the alienating consequences of grades, I am as up front and as clear with my students about the class politics of the imposition of work and of grades as I can be. I discuss with them this key component of the work I am supposed to be doing and the problems that it poses both for them and for me.

Along the way to the periodic evaluations that produce grades, I am also expected to impose work in an ongoing manner. The main vehicles for doing this are the assignment of material to be studied outside the classroom and the imposition of work in the classroom.

These involve for the students the prolongation of the working day caused by such homework and the alienations of classroom and homework. The classroom is the primary place where we collectively interact; it is a space (a work site) and a set of behaviors (work) on which I dwell with my students.

The typical university classroom has two important features shaped to structure the imposition of work on both professors and students: first, its physical layout which is most often rigidly fixed to create and maintain a hierarchical and antagonistic division of power between the professor and the students, and secondly, the size of classes which is also shaped to the same end. The physical layout is almost invariably designed around the assumption that the professors will lecture and students will listen. Although professors may or may not have a podium, they almost always have what amounts to a stage upon which they can move freely. The students, by contrast, are organized by chairs and desks, usually screwed into the floor and immovable, to be passive listeners. The typically large number of students assigned to each classroom (mostly varying at the undergraduate level from 50 to 500) is designed for, and almost always leads to, active professor lectures and passive student listening being the dominant overt behaviors.

While at the level of elementary and secondary school an essential day-to-day aspect of a teacher's work is the imposition of order (forcing students to be still, to keep quiet unless granted the momentary right to speak, to request permission to go to the bathroom, and so on), at the university level such order in the classroom is assumed and the primary forms of the imposition of work is the confining of students to a mostly passive listening via lecturing and strictly limited questioning. The lectures, are in turn, organized and ordered by the professor so the content and presentation that the students have to listen to is imposed by the professor. This ordering in each course is a moment in a larger ordering, namely of the curriculum as a whole in which professors, not students, set the content and sequence of studies. Students, therefore, are forced to select from one or another sequence of "studies/lectures" all of which have been designed by someone else.

The size of classes, the organization of the classroom, and the necessity of imposing work and grades all tend - as indicated above - to reduce professors' "teaching" to lecturing, to a performance, or to the performance of a spectacle designed at worst to amuse and at best to inspire. While a few questions may be tolerated or even solicited, the vast bulk of the time in class is taken up delivering organized lectures on the topic of the day to student who sit passively and quietly, listening, taking notes and wondering what of the material covered, if any, will be on the next test. This means that our work is similar to - but worse than - that of any entertainer before a paying live audience.

I walk into a the classroom at the beginning of a semester and find all kinds of students: those who are there

because they are sincerely interested in the subjects to be covered, those who wish they could be absolutely anywhere else, those who are ready and willing to get as much out of the course as possible and those who will do the absolutely minimum amount of work to get whatever grade they deem acceptable. But regardless of their attitudes I know that the situation of active lecturer-test-giver-grader - passive listener-test-taker-graded is structured to create antagonism: I must impose work and grades and they suffer from that imposition whether it be willingly or resentfully.

In terms of ongoing homework, testing and evaluation, the work dynamics can be usefully understood in terms of Marx's analysis of piece wages. Grades, students come to realize, are effectively IOU's on future income/wages (the higher your grades the better certification and higher paying jobs you can get). They are awarded not according to the hours of work put in (like time wages) but according to the production of pieces (e.g., tests, papers) and I play the role not merely of taskmaster but of quality control inspector. As Marx points out in chapter 21 on piece wages their beauty from a capitalist point of view is that not only do they hide exploitation and are conducive to competition but they don't require constant supervision, only quality control. By keeping piece rates low (whether monetary pay per unit of commodity production or grades for tests, papers and courses) workers/students are coerced into imposing work on themselves. Just as the managers of factories prefer piece wages to instill discipline cheaply, forcing workers to work hard and long to produce enough pieces to earn a liveable wage, so the managers of universities find grades a fine vehicle for forcing students to work hard and long on their own, far from any direct supervision (say at home or in libraries or laboratories) to get high enough grades to pass a course or earn a degree.

I know, for example, that the most effective way to impose more work is to give students research papers and take-home tests with virtually no time or page limit. Some of them will spend an extraordinary number of hours crafting the paper or test to get a good grade. Making them take tests in a class period (limited say to one hour) will mean much less work - even though they may spend more time before the test preparing for it.

I also know that the university monitors me (and other professors) to determine just how much work we impose. It does this casually by keeping an eye on course syllabi and it does it methodically by keeping track of how we award grades. Every semester at the university where I work, the university records the grades that we give and generates summary statistics about how many "A's," how many "B's" and so on. When the time comes to allocate wage increases the university committee that makes such decisions hauls out a black binder that contains these statistics for each professor, for each course, for each semester and examines it to see if the professor is imposing enough work. They measure this by the distribution of grades - the more "A's" and fewer "F's"

the less discipline a professor is assumed to maintain. If over time an increase in the percentage of higher grades can be identified, then the professor is branded a "grade inflator" (that professor's "A's" are deemed to be declining in value, like currency during a period of inflation). On the other hand, if a professor is seen to be giving fewer and fewer high-level grades, then that professor is deemed a "grade deflator". One year, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts awarded permanent \$1000 wage increases to a handful of professors that this process identified as "grade deflators." Such practices, obviously, put pressure on professors to be hardnosed disciplinarians, to impose lots of work on their students. The results, also obviously, are to intensify the antagonism between students and professors. Within such contexts it never surprises me that some students go "postal" and kill their professors, nor that so many professors hold so much contempt for students (which rationalizes their own otherwise unpleasant tasks of selection, reward and punishment).

To the above aspects of professoral jobs should be added the additional work for those who try to teach against the stream, to provide students with materials and opportunities for critical thinking and discussion about the limitations of and alternatives to capitalism. One way to minimize the amount of time and energy you put into your job is to just "teach the text book" - however boring it may be for students. (Especially at the introductory or intermediary level there are very few significant differences in textbooks because the editors demand that they be written for the largest possible market.) But teaching the textbook means, for the most part, teaching a set of ideas designed to produce and reproduce the kind of labor power desired by capital. Teaching "outside" the textbook involves at the very least systematic critique of the book itself and more usually the work of seeking out, sorting and sifting through texts and other resources to find materials that will provide points of view different from, and critical of, those provided in standardized textbooks.

I should also mention how, from the point of view of administrators, the whole issue of teaching is entirely secondary at many universities that pride themselves on being "research universities". In such universities - and I am employed by one - promotions and wages/salaries are awarded very little on the basis of teaching but rather overwhelmingly on the basis of research and publication (thus "publish or perish"). As a result, those of us who teach are under constant monetary pressure to divert our energies away from teaching to research, writing and publishing. Concretely this means pressure to devote less time to preparing course materials and lectures, less energy to lecturing, and to find ways to shift the burden of work onto students - all of which increases the alienation and antagonism between students and professors.

It is also useful to note that the form through which such work is imposed on those of us who are professors is at

least partially parallel to the way we are supposed to impose work on students. We are not subject to constant supervision but instead subjected to the logic of piece work and piece wages. Because promotion and wage increases depend on publishing, and publishing is competitive and quality controlled through “peer review”, i.e., other professors evaluate articles submitted to professional journals or books to publishers, we are under pressure to devote lots of time and energy to our research and to crafting publishable articles. As with students we are expected, and things are set up to guarantee, that we impose vast amounts of work on ourselves. Although the current structure of higher education formally provides several months a year of ostensibly free, vacation time (at Christmas, Spring Breaks and Summer), such pressures often have the effect of provoking professors to give up such free time and to continue to work at their research, writing and attempts to get published. This is especially true for untenured assistant professors, although, by the time they have achieved tenure many have entered so deeply into the alienations of professional competition that they continue to work endlessly for further promotion, research grants, and salary increases.

Students at Work

Within the classroom, given its structure and the patterns of behavior associated with that structure, students initially find their only commonality in their participating in what Sartre called a “serial group”, that is to say a group of people with nothing more in common than having to sit through the same lecture and be subjected to the same tests and be graded by the same professor. In Marx’s terms they constitute a moment of the working class in-itself, defined by their common experience of having work imposed on them.

In classrooms students may find themselves collectively amused, or, more commonly, subjected to boring lectures on subjects only superficially of their choosing. While a few professors are entertaining, and even fewer inspiring or thought provoking, a great many - because of the pressures to which they are subject - have done very little to prepare for lectures and merely repeat the material of textbooks making classes a tedious repetition of familiar material - and not even worth taking notes. If students have the initiative to go beyond listening to actually think and query the lecturer (to some small degree taking control over their work process) they can get more out of the class but risk being ridiculed or belittled by an insecure and abusive teacher.

Listening to lectures may be a collective exercise but being tested and graded is almost always an individual experience with collective cooperation considered cheating. Each individual student faces the test alone, and each receives a particular grade. Because such things as the admission to some specialized programs, academic scholarships, admission to graduate school (or Law School, or Med School, etc.) and future job prospects depend, at least in part, on good grades, students rarely

take a relaxed or nonchalant attitude toward being tested and graded. On the contrary, not surprisingly, test time and pre-test time, are often periods of stress and varying degrees of anxiety. Such stress can itself sometimes produce harmful physical side effects, such as migraine headaches, cold sweats, hives, and outbreaks of herpes, It can also lead to behaviors and habits with deleterious results, e.g., the use of drugs (caffeine or speed to stay up to study, nicotine or downers to reduce nervous tension and so on) or eating disorders.

Moreover, because students (and professors) are habituated to the notion of a grade hierarchy, of rank ordering, the structure of evaluation is conducive to competition. It’s not just that students are encouraged to understand the material and get good grades, they are told they must get better grades than their peers. *In extremis* such competition can generate such alienating behaviors as an individualistic refusal to help others for fear of undermining one’s own position in the hierarchy. Another example is the resentment of many students towards those few who, during lectures, ask questions designed to meet their own particular intellectual needs. The resentment derives from the perception that the questions lead to “getting off the subject” that takes time away from the planned lectures that they hope will tell them what they need to know for upcoming tests.

Beyond course specific testing there are the standardized tests to which students are increasingly subjected. In the US these include the SAT necessary to college applications, the GRE necessary to graduate school applications, the LSAT necessary to Law School applications, and so on. These tests, which come at critical moments of transition for students are even more subject to the pressures of competition than those in particular classes.

In all of this we can see the various forms of alienation that Marx first laid out in the *1844 Manuscripts*: alienation from the work itself (studying what you are told to study in the way and order someone else requires - instead of following your intellectual nose to meet your own needs), alienation from the product (labor power or the ability and willingness to work becomes merely something you do because your professor or your future employer requires it - instead of a something you are doing to meet your own needs - individual and social), alienation from other workers (competition among students and antagonism toward professors - instead of cooperation within a framework of collectively self-defined learning) and finally alienation from species-being (the lack of freedom to realize one’s own self-determined social being, both individually and collectively).

As just indicated with respect to test-taking, these alienations can and do cause serious harm to many students. The isolation, lack of control over their own lives and estrangement from their fellows contribute to personal misery, desperate willingness to engage in self- and mutually destructive behaviour to gain social

acceptance, self-mutilation, eating disorders and in some cases suicide or murderous violence. University counseling and intervention centers are regularly swamped by students barely hanging on. While the alienations of school are rarely the only sources of such problems, they often contribute greatly, sometimes being the final bunch of straws that breaks the camel's back.

These alienations involve two obvious forms of antagonism. The first is the antagonism among students associated with the alienation between them - that can take forms ranging from personal animosity to collective racist or sexist behaviors (e.g., Fraternity treatment of women and racial "minorities"). The second is the antagonism of students towards those of us who are professors - who are their immediate taskmasters, who impose alienated work and all the other associated alienations on them, who act as reflexive mediators defining the students to themselves via grades (whether we do this arrogantly - like the abusive teacher in Pink Floyd's *The Wall* - or sympathetically - like the title characters in the films *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and *Mr Holland's Opus*).

These antagonisms, of course, mask deeper ones: namely that between the students and the institutions that impose grades and require those of us who are professors to impose work and that between we professors who find ourselves forced to impose work and incur student antagonism and the institutions that make this an integral part of their jobs. These antagonisms are masked by the mediated organization of the imposition of work such that students rarely see or understand the institutional pressures on professors and such that professors who accept the organization of the university, become blind to its alienations and only see and experience the antagonism of students as irresponsible personal laziness and reproach. (There is more on such syllogistic mediations in chapter five of *Reading Capital Politically* on the form of value.)

In the current period in many countries, including the United States (and from what I have heard Britain since Thatcher), students are subjected to ever greater pressure to work harder and longer, to both extend their working day and intensify it (two classic capitalist strategies usually associated with absolute and relative surplus value). At the level of the length of their entire university work-life they are also subjected to speed-up, not only working faster and harder but with less freedom to change the direction of their studies, to take time off from those studies, etc. They are pressured to choose a single course of study and to complete it as quickly as possible and are penalized (even monetarily) if they deviate from the chosen path.

Because the situation is so full of alienations many students want to minimize their misery by at least being entertained; they prefer lectures to be funny, stimulating and perhaps even inspiring. They would also like, of course, little work to be required, that work to be easily

accomplished and highly rewarded. They want, quite reasonably, the least obnoxious working conditions possible. They don't want me to be a Captain Bligh or Simon Legree but rather a Seinfeld with funny gag lines or a Robin Williams capable of not only funny but dazzling and uplifting rhetoric. Indeed, many will tolerate an outrageously high imposition of work outside the classroom if only I am entertaining enough in the classroom - effectively shifting the workload from themselves (of dealing with boring lectures) to me (producing entertaining lectures). The pressure, therefore, is on me to do the work necessary to meet these expectations, or to do the work of dealing with a classroom full of people whose desires are not being met. In either case I am doing the work of handling what is structured to be an antagonistic situation.

To these general alienations and antagonisms we must add those of gender and race, ethnicity and national origin - as in the rest of society. Some students are subjected to additional pressures either from other students or from their professors. The cruelties of some students are as well known as the predatory behavior of some professors - in both cases it is mainly students who are the targets.

The above are a few observations of the organization of work and its consequences within the university workplace, with a focus on students and professors. (To have a more complete understanding of the class composition in the educational industry and its factories we must also, of course, investigate the work and conflicts among managers and staff within individual institutions - in and of themselves and in relationship to students and professors - as well as the overall hierarchical structure of the collective set of institutions of "higher learning" and their relationship to the rest of the social factory.)

Students in Struggle

I now want to turn from discussing how things are supposed to operate to how students and professors struggle against the work that is imposed on them and against the various institutions and mechanisms of that imposition - to turn, in Marx's words, from an examination of students (and professors) as part of the working class in itself, to their role as part of the working class for itself. Let me begin with students, for the sake of continuity with the previous section. (I spent something over 20 years of my life as a student (12 years elementary and secondary school, five years undergraduate college, and four years plus of graduate school).

At universities students initially confront courses, their professors and the work those professors impose as individuals, individuals very low in the hierarchy of power. As such they generally have very little ability to resist other than through absenteeism (skipping classes - physically or mentally - or dropping out) or other forms of isolated refusal. In my experience it is very rare that an isolated individual student has the courage to openly

challenge the way a professor organizes a course, lectures, grades or treats students (inside and outside the classroom). It is also rare to find a student with enough self-assurance and developed sense of their own intellectual agenda to engage in what the Situationists called “detournement” or the diversion of a mechanism of domination (imposed schoolwork) into a building block of their own autonomous intellectual development.

Not surprisingly, high on many students’ agenda is the acquisition of friends and networks to escape from isolation, to break the alienations of schoolwork and the classroom and to get some enjoyment out of their sojourn at school. Sometimes such network formation takes place in particular courses as students collaborate to help each other cope with the work imposed - by forming study groups and such. (Collaboration that overcomes the alienation among students may be aimed at minimizing the amount of work imposed, but it may also be simply an attempt to form coalitions to improve the competitive edge of those in the group or network - the kind of contradictory phenomena portrayed in the TV series “The Paper Chase” about law students at Harvard - and thus still very much within the capitalist logic of the school.)

Sometimes the escape from isolation takes place within the larger university communities through a great variety of student organizations - from the apparently purely social to the overtly political. Both provide students with backup and support for whatever forms of resistance and crafting of alternatives they may undertake - from organized mutual aid in study through what Doug Foley calls “playing around in the class room” to collective cheating and overt collective challenges to the organization and content of a course (or of curriculum) or to the policies and behaviours of professors.

When such networking becomes sufficiently wide and challenges the power structures of hierarchy and alienation openly we begin to speak of student “movements” - such as the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in the mid-1960s that challenged the power structures of that university and demanded an unheard of autonomy of student control over their own studies and extracurricular activity. Or, more recently, the massive, year-long student movement at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in Mexico City, where tens of thousands of students challenged neoliberal policies aimed at dramatically increasing the imposition of work. They occupied the many university campuses and carried their struggles off campus into the wider community.

Within the overall student movement of the 1960s there were a wide range of interlinked struggles: the attacks by anti-war protestors on university complicity with the Pentagon and capitalist strategy in the Pacific Basin, Black and Chicano Student Union demands for open admission, for more financial aid, and for a transformation of the curriculum to meet their needs, feminist struggles against gender discrimination and for their own needs, demands by all kinds of militant students that various curriculum be changed to meet their needs

(e.g., demands for radical economics, insurgent sociology, bottom-up history). As a student I was involved in some of these struggles and as a professor I sometimes benefited from them, e.g., three years of struggle by radical students in the economic and political science departments resulted in my getting my present job at the University of Texas to teach Marx.

Within this wide array of student struggles we can see both resistance to the imposition of alienating work and efforts at self-valorization via the imposition of alternatives that meet student needs.

In such struggles within the university you can also see examples of the circulation of struggle among autonomous groupings, e.g., from Black student struggles to anti-war protests, from feminist struggles to ecological struggles, as well as such circulation to and from struggles elsewhere in the social factory, e.g., in black ghettos of US cities, in rice paddies and jungles of Southeast Asia.

We can also trace of the rise and fall (or cycles) of struggle, e.g., the anti-Vietnam War protests expanded rapidly in the late 1960s, swelled to a peak at the time of the Cambodian Invasion and then subsided as the US began to withdraw from Vietnam. Black and Chicano student struggles circulated rapidly in the late 1960s and 1970s continuing the momentum of earlier civil and labor rights movements as well as the insurgencies of the great urban centers and subsided with the successes in achieving Black and Chicano Studies. (Such achievements were sometimes lasting and sometimes transitory. At the University of Texas, for example, you can find both Black and Chicano Studies programs - the enduring fruit of those struggles. But it is also true that many “radical” professors hired during the years of struggle were subsequently purged.) Black student struggles then swelled again in the 1980s attacks on university investment policies in international solidarity with the struggle against apartheid in South Africa - to subside once more with the end of apartheid. Just as Piven and Cloward have chronicled the cycles of “poor peoples’ movements”, or Italian Marxists have chronicled the cycles of the struggles of the mass worker, so too is it possible to write a history of the cycles of student struggles and movements.

Every day I can see the struggles of individuals and small groups of students coping with the alienations of school: the physical and mental withdrawals of individuals and the small collective collaborations, in class and outside of class. Some are creative and rewarding; too many are merely self-destructive.

From time to time, I am confronted by efforts at detournement via questions based on students’ own needs or demands for changes in the course materials (e.g., this last Spring the overwhelming desire expressed by students to include in my course on international crisis the case of the Bush Administration’s invasion of Iraq).

From time to time I also see wider student mobilizations: political meetings and protests, the querying of the relationship between materials and ideas covered in class and ostensibly unrelated struggles, critiques of university complicity with business or with the state in the exploitation of people and the earth, or in war profiteering.

Once in a while I see open rebellions - student sit-ins, marches, strikes or rallies - or major collective initiatives, e.g., for next Fall student activists have organized, on their own, a course on the class politics of higher education and student struggles. In that self-organization they asked for my suggestions as to readings and for my collaboration as the "official" teacher but basically they designed the course on their own to meet their needs as activists. They were prepared to do all of this outside any official framework but with a faculty member involved they can get university credit - thus converting institutional arrangements designed to impose work on them into vehicles of their own struggles.

Obviously there are limits to all of these struggles against the imposition of schoolwork and for the achievement of alternative goals. Isolated individuals can often achieve little other than survival. Small groups and networks are better not only at survival but at creating spaces and times for self-valorization beyond resistance. Large-scale movements, of course, often achieve the most marked results - such as fundamental changes in course curriculum as mentioned above - but such movements come and go and students move on, not always leaving even a history of their struggles, much less a living legacy in the form of a new generation of activists. Moreover, even when universities make concessions the institutions do their best to co-opt and instrumentalise such changes and channel ex-student activists into professional careers where their energy may be more effectively harnessed for accumulation. Such efforts to harness can be seen in the formation of Black, Chicano and Women's Studies that are forced to operate using the same hierarchical methods for the imposition of work as those employed elsewhere in the university. The students whose struggles forced the creation of those studies are put to work just like they were in other courses - only the content has changed. The most highly motivated, who work hardest and move on to graduate school and Ph.D.'s may, if all goes well, then be integrated into the system as professors imposing work on the following generation of students.

Professors in Struggle

Which brings me from the struggle of students to those of professors. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, in most universities in the United States professors are so thoroughly divided and conquered as to make collective struggle difficult and rare.

Individual professors cope with the alienations of their jobs - teaching and research/publishing in a variety of ways. As with students some individuals withdraw.

Young professors living under the threat of being denied tenure and told most explicitly that "publish or perish" is the rule, withdraw their energy from their class preparations and lectures and channel it into research and publishing. Older, tenured professors sometimes withdraw from the fierce backstabbing competition for promotions and salary increases and re-channel their energies either into teaching or away from their work altogether.

Other individual professors, again like students, seek out networks of colleagues for mutual aid (e.g., in research, in publishing ventures, in reciprocal citation) both to survive - as in young professors trying to find a protective and productive niche - and to advance their careers. In this we can see both a natural resistance to alienation and, all too often, an embrace of precisely that competition that the university uses to pit professors against each other.

In the classroom individual professors who design their courses, and departmental committees of professors who design curriculum (the sequence of courses leading to a degree) have some leeway or "academic freedom" in their choices - more certainly than the students upon whom they will impose those courses and that curriculum. Within typical mainstream courses professors can structure their presentation of material in a critical manner, challenging received wisdom and even attacking capitalism. A very few of us can craft whole courses, even sequences of courses, that explore bodies of ideas critical of, and struggles against, capitalism, e.g., my courses on Marxian theory.

But that "academic freedom" is usually dramatically overstated. The design of curriculum is overwhelmingly shaped by the styles and fashions of the professions of which the professors in a given institution are but one competitive part. Most feel compelled to teach courses whose content corresponds to the currently dominant approaches in their fields, e.g., in the post-WWII period most economics departments offered core sequences of neoclassical microeconomics and Keynesian macroeconomics. In the present neoliberal period of market-worship microeconomics has come to largely displace macroeconomics as a separate field and most other fields have been reduced to mere applications of microeconomic methodologies. The room for maneuver in such situations is limited - both by the amount of material that has to be covered the courses (leaving little time for critique) and by most professors' adherence to the fashions of their profession. Those of us who move entirely outside such fashions are few and we usually "pay" - quite literally by being marginalized, not promoted and excluded from wage increases and other perks. Some of us, of course, find more than adequate compensation in the satisfactions of working with students willing and able to think critically, including student activists engaged in various struggles, and thus participating in, and contributing to, the circulation of struggle across time, space and experiences.

The pressures that shape research and writing for publication are even more acute. Only peer-reviewed articles, books and research grants are considered significant for promotion or wage increases and the “peers” who control professional journals, the editorial houses and the institutions doling out research monies almost systematically impose the very pro-capitalist fashions of the day as one choice criterion for accepting or rejecting submissions. Within such a situation creativity is sharply limited to crafting variations within a narrow theoretical and methodological sphere. Professors may be somewhat less alienated from their work than students - by having more control over how they teach - but they are also working according to others’ wills, both those of university administrators, those of the trend-setting “leaders” of their professions and those who fund both.

Those who resist such pressures to do what is necessary to get published in such a framework, even more than those who refuse to participate in preaching the dominant theories and policies, usually find themselves either excluded entirely from the university (refused tenure) or sharply marginalized in terms of income, perks and a voice in decision making. In rare instances, a small number of those who refuse to go along with the dominant fashions of their professions are able to carve out spaces for themselves - even becoming a dominant force in a few isolated departments, or creating new departments (e.g., Black Studies). But the price for this is usually submission to the rules and regulations of the larger institution to the point where they become - as I suggested above - just as much functionaries of the capitalist imposition of work and discipline on students as any mainstream group of professors.

As such dynamics suggest, it is extremely rare to find much evidence of collective resistance by university professors to either the imposition of work on themselves or to their role of imposing it on students. In a few instances, where state laws allow it, professors have formed unions to defend their rights and fight for better wages and working conditions. But mostly the intense competition among them effectively undermines such efforts and the best they can do is form such bodies as “Faculty Councils” to “advise” university administrators on faculty points of view - to which administrators may give lip service but are usually under no obligation to heed.

As can be deduced from the above description of the working conditions of professors, they suffer, though sometimes to a lesser degree, from all the alienations that afflict students: alienation from their work (as they find themselves pressured to teach such and such subjects, to research such and such issues, to utilize such and such methodologies, to impose grades and incur the hostile antagonism of students - as opposed to having the “academic freedom” university ideology asserts them to have), alienation from their product (their students’ labor power - which at the graduate level may soon be pitted against them - and their own labor power and research

results that contribute to the system of control that confines them), alienation from their colleagues (in competition for promotion, wage increases, research grants, and other perks) and ultimately alienation from their species-being (the free exercise of their will).

All this is true regardless of how professors feel about their work. It is probably not much of an overstatement to say that most professors identify with their work and only occasionally feel it as an imposition. Indeed, given the dedication required to work as hard as is necessary to compete and win in the academic market place, it is not surprising to find a large number of professors to be workaholics, to have thoroughly internalised the values of the system in which they work. This is a measure not only of their dedication but of the efficacy of a system whose “Maxwell’s Daemons” (“peer” reviewers and university administrators) have carefully selected and promoted those competitors who have demonstrated through their work low levels of entropy and have excluded those less competitive, high entropy professors who have refused to channel as much of their life energy into their work.

At the same time, the contradiction between the conscious dedication of such workaholics to their jobs and the alienations that in fact constrict, narrow and poison their lives often lead to all the nasty consequences common to workaholics in any job category. They often suffer from chronic stress and anxiety with nasty consequences for their health. Endless hours of research may create isolation from and an inability to communicate with or meet the needs of spouses, children and friends that leads to further alienation and sometimes broken marriages, homes and friendships.

Not surprisingly in virtually all widespread resistance and rebellion on university campuses students take the lead and professors are either passive spectators or work with administrators to limit and constrain student actions. In some cases struggle may circulate from students to faculty and a few of the latter may speak up in support of student demands or participate in student organized struggles - as advisors, speakers, sources of information and so on, but the initiative almost always begins with students. In my experience - which runs from the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1960s through the anti-apartheid and anti-intervention (in Central America) movements of the 1980s to the anti-Gulf Wars and anti-globalization movements of the 1990s and current period, participation by faculty, much less leadership, has been the exception rather than the rule.