

"Ten Theses on the Multitude and Post-Fordist Capitalism"

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I have attempted to describe the nature of contemporary production, so-called post-Fordism, on the basis of categories drawn from political philosophy, ethics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language. I have done so not as a professional exercise, but because I am truly convinced that, in order for it to be described clearly, the mode of contemporary production demands *this* variety of analyses, *this* breadth of views. One cannot understand post-Fordism without having recourse to a cluster of ethical-linguistic concepts. As is obvious, moreover, this is where the *matter of fact* lies in the progressive identification between poiesis and language, production and communication.

In order to name with a unifying term the forms of life and the linguistic games which characterize our era, I have used the notion of "multitude." This notion, the polar opposite of that of "people," is defined by a complex of breaks, landslides, and innovations which I have tried to point out. Let me cite some of them here, in no particular order: the life of the stranger (*bios xenikos*) being experienced as an ordinary condition; the prevalence of "common places" in discourse over "special" places; the publicness of the intellect. as much an apotropaic device as a pillar of social production; activity without end product (that is, virtuosity); the centrality of the principle of individuation; the relation with the possible in as much as it is possible (opportunism); the hypertrophic development of the non-referential aspects of language (idle talk). In the multitude there is a full *historical*, phenomenological, empirical display of the ontological condition of the human animal: biological artlessness, the indefinite or *potential* character of its existence, lack of a determined environment, the linguistic intellect as "compensation" for the shortage of specialized instincts. It is as if the root has risen to the surface, finally revealing itself to the naked eye. That which has always been true, is only now unveiled. The multitude is this: a fundamental biological configuration which becomes a historically determined way of being, ontology revealing itself phenomenologically. One could even say that the postFordist multitude manifests *anthropogenesis* as such on a historical-empirical level; that is to say, the genesis itself of the human animal, its distinguishing characteristics. The multitude epitomizes this genesis, it sums it up. Upon reflection, these rather abstract considerations are only another way of saying that the primary productive resource of contemporary capitalism lies in the linguistic-relational abilities of humankind, in the complex of communicative and cognitive faculties (*dynameis*, powers) which distinguish humans.

Our seminar is now over. That which could be said, has been (either well or poorly) said. Now, at the end of our circumnavigation of the continent of the "multitude," we need only to insist upon a few qualifying aspects of our analysis. Towards that end, I propose ten statements

on the multitude and post-Fordist capitalism. I call these statements *theses* only for the sake of convenience. They do not claim to be exhaustive, nor do they seek to oppose other possible analyses or definitions of post-Fordism. They have only the apodictic appearance, and (I hope) the precision of authentic theses. Some of these statements could possibly have converged, making of themselves one "thesis." Furthermore, the sequence is arbitrary: that which figures as "thesis x" would lose nothing if it figured as "thesis y" (and vice versa). Finally, it must be understood that often I affirm or deny with more precision, or less nuance, than what might be correct or (prudent) to do. In some cases I shall say *more* than I

think.

6.2. Thesis 1

Post-Fordism (and with it the multitude) appeared, in Italy, with the social unrest which is generally remembered as the "movement of 1977"

Post-Fordism, in Italy arose from the tumults of labor-power which was educated, uncertain, mobile; one which hated the work ethic and opposed, at times head on, the tradition and the culture of the historical left, marking a clear discontinuity with respect to assembly-line workers, with their practices and customs, with their ways of life. Post-Fordism arose from conflicts centered upon social figures which, despite their apparent marginal status, were about to become the authentic fulcrum of the new cycle of capitalistic development. Besides, it had already happened before that a radical revolution in the manner of production was accompanied by premature political strife among those strata of labor-power, which, a little later, would make up the supporting axis of the production of surplus value. It is enough to recall the dangerousness attributed in the eighteenth century to the British vagabonds, *already* thrown out of the fields and *on the verge* of being let in to the first factories. Or think of the struggles of the unskilled American workers from 1910 to 1920, struggles which preceded the Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor turning point, a turning point based precisely on the systematic removal of skill from labor. Every drastic metamorphosis of productive organization is destined from the start, to conjure up the pangs of the "original accumulation," forcing, all over again, the transformation of a relationship among

things (new technologies, a different allocation of investments, etc.) into a *social* relationship. It is exactly in this delicate interval that, at times, the *subjective aspect*, which will later become an irrefutable course of fact, reveals itself.

The masterpiece of Italian capitalism consists of having transformed into a productive resource precisely those modes of behavior which, at first, made their appearance under the semblance of radical conflict. The conversion of

the collective propensities of the 1977 movement (exit from the factories, indifference to steady employment, familiarity with learning and communication networks) into a renewed concept of professionalism (opportunism, idle talk, virtuosity, etc.): this is the most precious result of the Italian *counter-revolution* ("counter-revolution" meaning not the simple restoration of a previous state of affairs, but, literally, a *revolution to the contrary*, that is, a drastic innovation of the economy and institutions in order to re-launch productivity and political domination).

The 1977

movement had the misfortune of being treated as if it were a movement of marginal people and parasites. However, marginal and parasitical was the point of view adopted by those making these accusations. In fact, they identified themselves entirely with the Fordist paradigm, believing that only a secure job in factories making lasting consumer goods was "central" and "productive. Thus they identified with a production cycle already in decline. Looking at it closely, the 1977 movement anticipated certain traits of the post-Fordist multitude. As angry and coarse as it was, however, the virtuosity of this movement was not servile.

6.3. Thesis 2

Post-Fordism is the empirical realization of the "Fragment on Machines" by Marx.

Marx writes:

"The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one [(the automated system of machines) Virno addition, trans.] created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. (Italics and brackets from Nicolaus's English translation, trans.)" *Grundrisse 705*: In the "Fragment on Machines" from the *Grundrisse*, from which I drew that citation, Marx upholds a thesis that is hardly Marxist: abstract knowledge-scientific knowledge, first and foremost, but not only that-moves towards becoming nothing less than the principal productive force, relegating parceled and repetitive labor to a residual position. We know that Marx turns to a fairly suggestive image to indicate the complex of knowledge which makes up the epicenter of social production and at the same time prearranges its vital confines: *general intellect*. The tendential pre-eminence of knowledge makes of labor time a "miserable foundation." The so-called "law of value" (according to which the value of a product is determined by the amount of labor time that went into it), which Marx considers the keystone of modern social relations, is, however, shattered and refuted by capitalist development itself.

It is at this point that Marx proposes a hypothesis on surpassing the rate of dominant production which is very different from the more famous hypotheses presented in his other works. In the "Fragment," the crisis of capitalism is *no longer*

attributed to the disproportions inherent in a means of production truly based on labor time supplied by individuals (it is no longer attributed, therefore, to the imbalances connected to the full force of the law, for example, to the fall of the rate of profit). Instead, there comes to the foreground the splitting contradiction between a productive process which directly and exclusively calls upon science, and a unit of measurement of wealth which still coincides with the quantity of labor incorporated in the products. The progressive widening of *this* differential means, according to Marx, that "production based on exchange value breaks down" (*Grundrisse*: 705) and leads thus to communism.

What is most obvious in the post-Ford era is the full factual realization of the tendency described by Marx without, however, any emancipating consequences. The disproportion between the role accomplished by knowledge

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and

the decreasing

importance of labor time has given rise to new and stable forms of power, rather than to a hotbed of crisis. The radical metamorphosis of the very concept of production belongs, as always, in the sphere of working under a boss. More than alluding to the overcoming of what already exists, the "Fragment" is a toolbox for the sociologist. It describes an empirical reality which lies in front of all our eyes: the empirical reality of the post-Fordist structure.

6.4. Thesis 3

The crisis of the society of labor is reflected in the multitude itself.

The crisis of the society of labor certainly does not coincide with a linear shrinking of labor time. Instead, the latter exhibits an unheard of pervasiveness in today's world. The positions of Gorz and Rifkin on the "end of work" (Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*; Rifkin, *The End of Work*)

are mistaken; they spread misunderstandings of all kinds; and even worse, they prevent us from focusing on the very question they raise.

The crisis of the society of labor consists to the fact (brought up thesis 2) that social wealth is produced from science, from the *general intellect*, rather than from the work delivered by individuals. The work demanded seems reducible to a virtually negligible portion of a life. Science, information, knowledge in general, cooperation, these present themselves as the key support system of production -- these, rather than labor time. Nevertheless, this labor time continues to be valid as a parameter of social development and of social wealth. Thus, the overflow of labor from society establishes a contradictory process, a theater of violent oppositions and disturbing paradoxes. Labor time is the unit of measurement *in use*, but no longer the *true* one unit of

measurement. To ignore one or the other of the two sides -- that is, to emphasize either the validity alone, or the lack of veracity alone -- does not take us far: in the first case, one does not become aware of the crisis of the society of labor, in the second case one ends up guaranteeing conciliatory representations in the manner of Gorz or Rifkin.

The surpassing of the society of labor occurs in the forms prescribed by the social system based on wage labor. Overtime, which is a potential source of wealth, manifests itself as poverty: wages compensation, structural unemployment (brought on by investments, not by the lack thereof), unlimited flexibility in the use of labor-power, proliferation of hierarchies, re-establishment of archaic disciplinary measures to control individuals no longer subject to the rules of the factory system. This is the magnetic storm which allows, on the phenomenological plane, for the "surpassing" which is paradoxical to the point of taking place upon the very foundation of that which was to be surpassed.

Let me repeat the key-phrase: the surpassing of the society of labor comes about in compliance with the rules of wage labor. This phrase can be applied to the post-Fordist situation in the same manner as Marx's observation regarding the first stock companies. Marx writes: "the joint-stock system is an abolition of capitalist private industry on the basis of the capitalist system itself" (*Capital*, Volume 3: 570).

That is to say: the stock companies assert the possibility of escaping the regime of private property, but this assertion always takes place within the realm of private property and, indeed, increases disproportionately the power of the latter. The difficulty, with reference to post-Fordism as well as to the stock companies, lies in considering simultaneously the two contradictory points of view, that is to say, subsistence and ending, validity and surmountability.

The crisis of the society of labor (if correctly understood) implies that *all of* post-Fordist labor-power can be described using the categories with which Marx analyzed the "industrial reserve army," that is, unemployment. Marx believed that the "industrial reserve army" was divisible into three types or figures: *fluid* (today we would speak of turn-over, early retirement, etc.), *latent* (where at any moment a technological innovation could intervene, reducing employment), *stagnant* (in current terms: working under the table, temporary work, atypical work). According to Marx, it is the mass of the unemployed which is fluid, latent or stagnant, certainly not the *employed* labor class; they are a marginal sector of labor-power, not its main sector. Yet, the crisis of the society of labor (with the complex characteristics which I tried to outline earlier) causes these three determining categories to apply, in effect, to all labor-power. Fluid, or latent, or stagnant, applies to the employed labor class as such. Each allocation of wage labor allows the nonnecessity of that labor and the excessive social cost inherent

in that labor to leak out. But this non-necessity, as always, manifests itself as a perpetuation of wage labor in temporary or "flexible" forms,

6.5. Thesis 4

For the post-Fordist multitude every qualitative difference between labor time and non-labor time falls short.

Social time, in today's world, seems to have come unhinged because there is no longer anything which distinguishes labor from the rest of human activities. Therefore, since work ceases to constitute a special and separate praxis, with distinctive criteria and procedures in effect at its center, completely different from those criteria and procedures which regulate non-labor time, there is not a clean, well-defined threshold separating labor time from non-labor time. In Fordism, according to Gramsci, the intellect remains outside of production; only when the work has been finished does the Fordist worker read the newspaper, go to the local party headquarters, think, have conversations. In post-Fordism, however, since the "life of the mind" is included fully within the time-space of production, an essential homogeneity prevails.

Labor and non-labor develop an identical form of productivity, based on the exercise of generic human faculties: language, memory, sociability, ethical and aesthetic inclinations, the capacity for abstraction and learning. From the point of view of "what" is done and "how" it is done, there is no substantial difference between employment and unemployment. It could be said that: unemployment is non-remunerated labor and labor, in turn, is remunerated unemployment. Working endlessly can be justified with good reasons, and working less and less frequently can be equally justified. These paradoxical formulas, contradicting each other, when put together demonstrate how social time has come unhinged.

The old distinction between "labor" and "non-labor" ends up in the distinction between remunerated life and non-remunerated life. The border between these two lives is arbitrary, changeable, subject to political decision making.

The productive cooperation in which labor-power participates is always larger and richer than the one put into play by the labor process. It includes also the world of non-labor, the experiences and knowledge matured outside of the factory and the office. Labor-power increases the value of capital only because it never loses its qualities of non-labor (that is, its inherent connection to a productive cooperation richer than the one implicit in the labor process in the strictest sense of the term).

Since social cooperation precedes and exceeds the work process, post-Fordist labor is always, also, *hidden labor*. This expression should not be taken here to mean labor which is un-contracted, "under the table." Hidden labor is, in the first place, non-remunerated life, that is to say the part of human activity which, alike in every respect to the activity of labor, is not, however, calculated as productive force.

The crucial point here is to recognize that in the realm of labor, experiences which mature outside of labor hold predominant weight; at the same time, we must be aware that this more general sphere of experience, once included in the productive process, is subordinate to the rules of the mode

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of capitalistic production. Here also there is a double risk: either to deny the breadth of what is included in the mode of production, or, in the name of this breadth, to deny the existence of a specific mode of production.

6.6. Thesis 5

In post-Fordism there exists a permanent disproportion between "labor time" and the more ample "production time."

Marx distinguishes between "labor time" and "production time" in chapters XII and XIII of the second book of the *Capital*. Think of the cycle of sowing and harvesting. The farm laborer works for a month (labor time); then a long interval follows for the growing of the grain (production time, but no longer labor time); and at last, the period of harvesting arrives (once again, labor time). In agriculture and other sectors, production is more extensive than labor activity, in the proper sense of the term; the latter makes up hardly a fraction of the overall cycle. The pairing of the terms "labor time"/"production time" is an extraordinarily pertinent conceptual tool for understanding post-Fordist reality, that is to say, the modern expression of the social working day. Beyond the examples from agriculture adopted by Marx, the disproportion between "production" and "labor" fits fairly well the situation described in "Fragment on Machines"; in other words, it fits a situation in which labor time presents itself as "miserable residue."

The disproportion takes on two different forms. In the first place, it is revealed within every single working day of every single worker. The worker oversees and coordinates (labor time) the automatic system of machines (whose function defines production time); the worker's activity often ends up being a sort of *maintenance*. It could be said that in the post-Fordist environment production time is interrupted only at intervals by labor time. While sowing is a necessary condition for the

subsequent phase of the grain's growth, the modern activity of overseeing and coordinating is placed, from beginning to end, *alongside* the automated process.

There is a second, and more radical, way of conceiving this disproportion. In post-Fordism "production time" includes non-labor time, during which social cooperation takes its root (see thesis 4). Hence I define "production time" as that indissoluble unity of remunerated life and non-remunerated life, labor and non-labor, emerged social cooperation and Submerged social cooperation. "Labor time" is only one component, and not necessarily the most prominent one, of "production time" understood in this way. This evidence drives us to reformulate, in part or entirely, the theory of surplus-value. According to Marx, surplus-value springs from surplus-labor, that is, from the difference between necessary labor (which compensates the capitalist for the expense sustained in acquiring the laborpower) and the entirety of the working day. So then, one would have to say that in the post-Fordist era, surplus-value is determined above all by the gap between production time which is not calculated as labor time and labor time in the true sense of the term. What matters is not only the disproportion, inherent in labor time, between necessary labor and surplus-labor, but also, and perhaps even more, the disproportion between production time (which includes non-labor, its own distinctive productivity) and labor time.

6.7. Thesis 6

In one way, post-Fordism is characterized by the co-existence of the most diverse productive models and, in another way, by essentially homogeneous socialization which takes place outside of the workplace.

Differently from the Fordist organization of labor, today's organization of labor is always spotty. Technological innovation is not universal: more than determining an unequivocal and leading productive model, it keeps a myriad of different models alive, including the resuscitation of some outdated and anachronistic models. Post-Fordism re-edits the entire history of labor, from islands of mass labor to *enclaves* of professional workers, from re-inflated independent labor to reinstated forms of personal power. The production models which have followed one another during this long period re-present themselves *synchronically*, as if according to the standards of a World's Fair. The background and the hypothesis behind this proliferation of differences, this shattering of organizing forms, is established, however, by the general intellect, by computerized data communication technology, by productive cooperation which includes within itself the time of non-labor. Paradoxically, just when knowledge and language become the principal productive force, there is an unrestrained multiplication of the models of labor organization, not to mention their eclectic co-existence.

We may well ask what the software engineer has in common with the Fiat worker, or with the temporary worker. We must have the courage to answer: precious little. with regard to job description, to professional skills, to the nature of the labor process. But we can also answer: everything, with regard to the make-up and contents of the socialization of single individuals outside of the work place. That is to say, these workers have in common emotional tonalities, interests, mentality, expectations. Except that, while in the advanced sectors this homogeneous *ethos* (opportunism, idle talk, etc.) is included in production and delineates professional profiles, this *ethos* strengthens, instead, the "world of life" for those who fall into the traditional sectors, as well as for the *border-workers* who swing between work and unemployment. To put it succinctly: the seam is to be found between the *opportunism at work* and the universal opportunism demanded by the urban experience. The essentially unitary character of socialization detached from the labor process stands in counterpoint to the fragmentation of productive models, to their World's Fair style co-existence.

"Ten Thesis on Post-Fordist Capitalism (Part II)"

Paolo Virno

6.8. Thesis 7

In Post-Fordism, the *general intellect* does not coincide with fixed capital, but manifests itself principally as a linguistic reiteration of living labor.

As was already said on the second day of our seminar, Marx, without reserve, equated the *general intellect* (that is, knowledge as principal productive force) with fixed capital, with the "objective scientific capacity" inherent in the system of machines. In this way he omitted the dimension, absolutely preeminent today, in which the *general intellect* presents itself as living labor. It is necessary to analyze post-Fordist production in order to support this criticism. In so-called "second-generation independent labor," but also in the operational procedures of a radically reformed factory such as the Fiat factory in Melfi, it is not difficult to recognize that the connection between knowledge and production is not at all exhausted within the system of machines; on the contrary, it articulates itself in the linguistic cooperation of men and women, in their actually acting in concert. In the Post-Fordist environment, a decisive role is played by the infinite variety of concepts and logical schemes which cannot ever be set within fixed capital, being inseparable from the reiteration of a plurality of living subjects. The *general intellect*

includes, thus, formal and informal knowledge, imagination. ethical propensities, mindsets, and "linguistic games." In contemporary labor processes, there are thoughts and discourses which function as productive "machines," without having to adopt the form of a mechanical body or of an electronic valve.

The *general*

intellect becomes an attribute of living labor when the activity of the latter consists increasingly of linguistic services. Here we touch upon the lack of foundation in Jürgen Habermas's position. Inspired by Hegel's teachings in Jena (Habermas, *Arbeit and Interaktion*), he contrasts labor with interaction, "instrumental or 'strategic' action" with "communicative action." In his judgment, the two spheres answer to standards that are mutually incommensurable: labor comes straight from the logic of means/ends, linguistic interaction rests upon exchange, upon reciprocal recognition, upon the sharing of an identical *ethos*. Today, however, wage labor (employed, surplus-value producing labor) *is* interaction. The labor process is no longer taciturn, but loquacious. "Communicative action" no longer holds its privileged, even exclusive, place within ethical-cultural relations or within politics, no longer lies outside the sphere of the material reproduction of life. To the contrary, the dialogical word is seated at the very heart of capitalistic production. In short: to understand fully the rules of post-Fordist labor, it is necessary to turn more and more to Saussure and Wittgenstein. It is true that these authors lost interest in the social relations of production; nevertheless, since they reflected so deeply on linguistic experience, they have more to teach us about the "loquacious factory" than do the professional economists.

It has already been stated that one part of the labor time of an individual is destined to enrich and strengthen productive cooperation itself, the mosaic in which the individual serves as one tessera. To put it more clearly: the task of a worker is that of rendering better and more varied the connection between individual labor and the services of others. It is this *reflective* character of labor activity which insists that in labor the linguistic-relational aspects assume an increasing importance; it also insists that opportunism and idle talk become tools of great importance. Hegel spoke of an "astuteness of labor," meaning by this expression the capacity to further natural causality, with the aim of utilizing its power in view of a determined goal. Accordingly, in the realm of post-Fordism, Hegel's "astuteness" has been supplanted by Heidegger's "idle talk."

6.9. Thesis 8

The whole of post-Fordist labor-power, even the most unskilled, is an intellectual labor-power, the "intellectuality of the masses."

I use the term "intellectuality of the masses" for the whole of post-Ford era living labor (not including certain specially qualified industries of the tertiary sector) in that it is a depository of cognitive and communicative skills which cannot be objectified within the system of machines. The intellectuality of the masses is the preeminent form in which, today, the *general intellect* reveals itself (see thesis 7). I hardly need to say that I do not refer in any way to any imaginary erudition of subordinate labor; I certainly do not think

that today's workers are experts in the fields of molecular biology or classical philology. As was already mentioned in the preceding days, what stands out is rather the *intellect in general*, the most generic aptitudes of the mind: the faculty of language, the inclination to learn, memory, the ability to abstract and to correlate, the inclination toward self-reflection. The intellectuality of the masses has nothing to do with *acts* of thought (books, algebraic formulas, etc.) but with the simple *faculty* of thought and verbal communication. Language (like intellect or memory) is much more diffuse and less specialized than what has been thought. It is not the scientists, but the simple speakers who are a good example of the intellectuality of the masses. They have nothing to do with the new "worker aristocracy"; rather, they stand at the opposite pole. Upon close reflection, the intellectuality of the masses does nothing less than prove completely true, for the first time, the Marxist definition of laborpower already cited: "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being" (*Capital*, Volume 1: 270).

With

regard to the intellectuality of the masses, it is necessary to avoid those deadly simplifications that befall those who are always searching for comfortable repetitions of past experiences. A way of being that has its fulcrum in knowledge and language cannot be

defined according to economic-productive categories. In sum, we are not dealing here with the last link of that chain whose preceding links are, as far as I know, the worker by trade and the assembly-line worker. The characteristic aspects of the intellectuality of the masses, its identity, so to speak, cannot be found in relation to labor, but, above all, on the level of life forms, of cultural consumption, of linguistic practices. Nevertheless, and this is the other side of the coin, just when production is no longer in any way the specific locus of the formation of identity, *exactly at that point* does it project itself into every aspect of experience, subsuming linguistic competencies, ethical propensities, and the nuances of subjectivity.

The intellectuality of the masses lies at the heart of this dialectic. Because it is difficult to describe in economic-productive terms, for this reason exactly (and not in spite of this reason). it is a fundamental component of today's capitalistic accumulation, The intellectuality of the masses (another name for the multitude) is at the center of the post-Ford economy precisely because its mode of being completely avoids the concepts of the political economy,

6.10. Thesis 9

The multitude throws the "theory of proletarianization" out of the mix.

In Marxist

theoretical discussion, the comparison between "complex" (intellectual, that is) labor and "simple" (unskilled) labor has

provoked more than a few problems. What is the unit of measurement which permits this comparison? The prevalent answer is: the unit of measurement coincides with "simple" labor, along with the pure waste of psychophysical energy; "complex" labor is merely a multiple of "simple" labor. The ratio between one and the other can be determined by considering the different cost of education (school, varied specializations, etc.) for the intellectual labor-power as opposed to the unskilled labor-power. Little of this old and controversial question interests me; here I would like, however, to capitalize on the terminology used in its regard. I hold that the intellectuality of the masses (see thesis 8) in its totality is "complex" labor -- but, note carefully -- "complex" labor which is *not reducible* to "simple" labor. The complexity, as well as the irreducibility, comes from the fact that this labor-power mobilizes, in the fulfilling of its work duties, linguistic-cognitive competencies which are generically human. These competencies, or faculties, cause the duties of the individual to be characterized *always* by a high rate of sociability and intelligence, even though they are not all specialized duties (we are not speaking of engineers or philologists here, but of ordinary workers). That which is not reducible to "simple" labor is, if you will, the *cooperative quality* of the concrete operations carried out by the intellectuality of the masses.

To say that all post-Ford era labor is complex labor, irreducible to simple labor, means also to confirm that today the "theory of proletarianization" is completely out of the mix. This theory had its peak of honor in signaling the potential comparability of intellectual labor to manual labor. Precisely for this reason, the theory ends up unsuited for accounting for the intellectuality of the masses or, and this is the same thing, for accounting for living labor as *general intellect*. The theory of proletarianization fails when intellectual (or complex) labor cannot be equated with a network of specialized knowledge, but becomes one with the use of the generic linguistic-cognitive faculties of the human animal. This is the conceptual (and practical) movement which modifies all the terms of the question.

The lack of proletarianization certainly does not mean that qualified workers retain privileged niches. Instead it means that the sort of *homogeneity by subtraction* which the concept of "proletariat" usually implies does not characterize all post-Fordist labor-power, as complex or intellectual as it may be. In other words, the lack of proletarianization means that post-Ford labor is *multitude*, not *people*.

6.11. Thesis 10

Post-Fordism is the "communism of capital."

The metamorphosis of social systems in the West, during the 1930's, has at times been designated with an expression as clear as it is apparently paradoxical: *socialism of capital*. With this

term one alludes to the determining role taken on by the State within the economic cycle, to the end of the *laissez-faire* liberalist, to the processes of centralization and planning guided by public industry, to the politics of full employment, to the beginning of *Welfare*. The capitalistic response to the October Revolution and the crisis of 1929 was the gigantic socialization (or better, nationalization) of the means of production. To put it in the words of Marx which I cited a little while ago, there was "an abolition of the capitalist private industry on the basis of the capitalist system itself" (*Capital*, Volume 3: 570).

The metamorphosis of social systems in the West, during the 1980's and 1990's, can be synthesized in a more pertinent manner with the expression: *communism of capital*. This means that the capitalistic initiative orchestrates for its own benefit precisely those material and cultural conditions which would guarantee a calm version of realism for the potential communist. Think of the objectives which constitute the fulcrum of such a prospect: the abolition of that intolerable scandal, the persistence of wage labor; the extinction of the State as an industry of coercion and as a "monopoly of political decision-making"; the valorization of all that which renders the life of an individual unique. Yet, in the course of the last twenty years, an insidious and terrible interpretation of these same objectives has been put forth. First of all, the irreversible shrinking of socially necessary labor time has taken place, with an increase in labor time for those on the "inside" and the alienation of those on the "outside." Even when squeezed by temporary workers, the entity of employed workers presents itself as "overpopulation" or as the "industrial reserve army." Secondly, the radical crisis, or actually the desegregation, of the national States expresses itself as the miniature reproduction, like a Chinese box, of the form-of-State. Thirdly, after the fall of a "universal equivalent" capable of operating effectively, we witness a fetishistic cult of *differences* -- except that these differences, claiming a substantial surreptitious foundation, give rise to all sorts of domineering and discriminating hierarchies.

If we can say that Fordism incorporated, and rewrote in its own way, some aspects of the socialist experience, then post-Fordism has fundamentally dismissed both Keynesianism *and* socialism. Post-Fordism, hinging as it does upon the *general intellect* and the multitude, puts forth, *in its own way*, typical demands of communism (abolition of work, dissolution of the State, etc.). Post-Fordism is the communism of capital.

Following on the heels of the Ford era, there was the socialist revolution in Russia (and, even if defeated, an attempt at revolution in western Europe). It is appropriate to ask which experience of social unrest served as the prelude to post-Fordism. Well, I believe that during the 1960's and 1970's there was, in the West, a defeated revolution -- the first revolution aimed not against poverty and backwardness, but specifically against the means of capitalistic production, thus, against wage labor. If I speak of a defeated revolution, it is not because a lot of people were blathering on about revolution. I am not referring to the circus of subjectivity,

but to a sober fact: for a long period of time, both in the factories and in the lower income urban areas, in the schools as in certain fragile state institutions, two opposing powers confronted one another, resulting in the paralysis of political decision-making. From this point of view -- objective, serious -- it can be maintained that in Italy and in other Western countries there was a defeated revolution. Post-Fordism, or the "communism of capital," is the answer to *this* defeated revolution, so different from those of the 1920's. The quality of the "answer" is equal to and opposed to the quality of the "question." I believe that the social struggles of the 1960's and 1970's expressed non-socialist demands, indeed anti-socialist demands: radical criticism of labor; an accentuated taste for differences, or, if you prefer, a refining of the "principle of individuation"; no longer the desire to take possession of the State, but the aptitude (at times violent, certainly) for defending oneself from the State, for dissolving the bondage to the State as such. It is not difficult to recognize communist inspiration and orientation in the failed revolution of the 1960's and 1970's. For this reason, post-Fordism, which constitutes a response to that revolution, has given life to a sort of paradoxical "communism of capital."