

MODERNITY AND CAPITALISM (15 Theses)

By Bolivar Echeverria

Translated by Charlotte Broad (1)

¿Por qué la cuerda, entonces, si el aire es tan sencillo?

¿Para qué la cadena, si existe el hierro por sí solo?

César Vallejo (2)

A century ago, men still thought they were masters of the situation: they thought they (who were already undeniably modern) could do whatever they liked with modernity, either accept it (in whole, in parts or with modifications) or reject it (by closing the door on it or reverting its effects). Their thought sprang from a world in which modernity, though relentlessly pursuing its course, was still some way from achieving planetary reach and could not demonstrate to the collective mind the totalizing range of its aspiration or the radicalism of the changes it was already introducing into human life. The old or traditional, deeply ingrained in every day life, carried still so much weight that even the most all-embracing or daring of modern creations appeared barely to scratch its surface, which otherwise remained unscathed; pre-modern forms were so natural that it was well nigh impossible to contemplate that the claims made by the advocates of modernity might be worth taking seriously.

In these days, however, the rejection or approbation of modernity is apparently no longer under discussion; the modern is no more an external entity that we look upon as a terra incognita. We are modern, or, perhaps I should say, we are becoming permanently modern; the ascendancy of modernity is a fait accompli. Against the dreams of a postmodern condition, we are living within modernity and are immersed in a unique, universal and continual process of modernization. Modernization is, moreover, not a life project we have chosen to adopt; it is more like some form of fatality or unquestionable destiny we must submit ourselves to. "Modern life is good; the bad thing about it is that it takes too long to arrive and when it does it is seldom complete": this was the more or less open slogan for every policy of every national state a century ago, and it might still be in our days. A hundred years have gone by, but social life still seems to have the same objective: modernization, that is to say, self-improvement by making progress on the line of the production techniques, social

organization and political management that began to take shape in Europe during the sixteenth century.

Nonetheless, it is clear that what is understood by "modern" has changed considerably since that time. This is not because what might have been perceived then as an innovation is now considered traditional, but because the sense that triggers the meaning of the word is no longer the same. A quest it had to embark upon greatly changed its meaning. This quest was implied in its assimilation of and subordination to the sense of the word "revolution".

Even though modernity did not give birth to the "spirit of utopia", it did enable it to acquire an independent figure, its own earthly consistency. This spirit haunted modernization from the start of the process, attracted by the implicit possibility that modern progress might free it from the categoricity of the "no" underlined in his name, "utopia", and exchange it for a promising "not yet".

The temptation to "change the world" ("change life") was first active in the political domain. At the end of the eighteenth century, when modernization in the form of the Industrial Revolution had only just started, its presence as a challenge to the ancien régime was already indisputable; it was the historical movement of bourgeois revolutions. Revolution was understood as an activity that had absolute political progress as its goal: the cancellation of the dreadful past and the founding of a future of justice, completely open to the imagination. However, the temptation utopia presented was soon expelled from the political domain and had to seek refuge in the other sphere of absolute progressism, which was the activity engaged in the potentiation of efficiency in the productive life. It was to be rejected once again by the social havoc caused by capitalist industrialization, but while it was there it succeeded in giving a goal and a meaning to the purely technical figure of modernization. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the "spirit of utopia" would make another --final?-- attempt to become embodied within the progressist trend of the modernization process; we are still suffering the effects of its failure.

At the beginning of the century, the elementary political constellation was composed and recomposed around two modes of behavior: approval or reject of modernization as a means by which social life might be reorganized using the technical advances made in the methods of production, circulation and consumption. Modernization was accepted by some as a "gattopardian" conservative stratagem destined to preserve tradition, by others as the basis of the progressionistic rationality of their naive reformist politics.

The reactionary rejection of modernity, which argued that it undermined the immutable essence of Man and that it could be and had to be undone, was somewhat similar though diametrically opposed to its negation as a false alternative to a project of revolutionary transformation of the human. Acute controversies arose within the left as well as within the right on the issue of accepting or rejecting modernization as a historical process governed by technical progress.

Despite the unquestionable practical ascendancy of the right wing and its decisive and devastating political irruptions, it cannot be denied that political life in the twentieth century has been guided by the proposals made by a "left-wing culture"(even if they were disparate and even contradictory).

The essence of left-wing discourse has been inspired by its opposition to the technicistic dynamics of modernization; whether it has taken modernization as a basis for reform or refuted it as an inadequate substitute for revolution, it has adopted "humanism", understood as the quest for "social justice", as its basic ethical proposition. It is for this reason that the realization of a technical utopia reaches its fully significance only when utopia appears as a constitutive but subordinate element of what the word "socialism" means: the realization (through reform or revolution) of the socio-political utopia of absolute progress, of pure innovative substitution of the traditional figure in which the political has existed until now.

Contemporary history, shaped around the destiny of capitalist modernization, appears to have run head on into that dilemma of a "situation on the edge". It can, on the one hand, persist along the course pursued by modernization, in which case it would cease to be a mode (if contradictory) of affirming life to become a means of simple selective acceptance of death; on the other, it can abandon modernization, in which case it would deprive the current level of civilization of its traditional support, thus pointing social life in the direction of barbarism. Disillusioned by progressist "socialism", which was put to the test not only by the figure of the state despotism of the "socialist world (empire)" but also by the social corrected economic policies of the liberal institutions within the "western world (empire)", this history seems to have brought to a close precisely that proposal of an earthly utopia with which it opened, of a world which would radically improve human life and would actually be attainable. Contemporary history, its political creativity frozen as if awaiting a catastrophe, oscillates erratically between policies of somewhat simple-minded defensive pragmatism and those of desperate messianism containing a greater or lesser degree of irrationality.

The theses proposed in the following pages are an attempt to put forward a theory of a possible modernity that differs from that which has been imposed up to the present day, a non-capitalist modernity. They proceed, firstly, by the recognition of one fact: the perennial open-endedness characterizing the significance of historical entities. Secondly, they play with concepts which attempt to dismantle this fact theoretically and which, bearing in mind that "everything that is real can also be thought of as only possible" (Leibniz), distinguish between the configuration or form of the current presence of a historical reality, a reality that follows from the adaptation of its necessary presence to certain ad hoc --and thus always replaceable-- conditions in order to become a sufficient one, and the essence of that historical reality, its form of "permanent" presence, in which its necessity exists in a pure state, like an ambivalent power that never ceases to be so throughout its state of consolidation, beneath the "definitive" appearance of its configured existence that masks all ambivalence. In accordance with this supposition, modernity would not be "an unfinished project", as Jürgen Habermas sees it; instead, it would be a set of possibilities, which are explored and actualized from only one side and in only one sense, and which might be approached from another perspective and have another light cast upon it.

Thesis 1

The Economic Key to Modernity

Modernity should be understood as the peculiar character of an historical form of the civilizing totalization of human life. Capitalism should be understood as a form or mode of reproduction of the economic life of humanity: a way of implementing that set of activities, which directly and preferentially concerns the production, circulation, and consumption of goods produced.

The relation between modernity and capitalism are akin to those between a whole and independent totalization and one of its dependent parts, which has thus far imposed itself on the totalizing action of the whole.

It is probably the predominance of the economic domain of life (with its particular capitalist mode) in the historical constitution of modernity that represents the last major assertion of a kind of spontaneous "historical materialism" which had characterized social existence during the period of "history based on scarcity". The human being ("an

animal expelled from the paradise of animality") has been able to exercise his distinguishing faculty --that of living a physical life as a substratum of a "meta-physical" life, the primary goal of which is to give meaning and form to social life-- but only on the condition that he respects productive work as the fundamental, possibling and delimiting dimension of his activity. Productive work has been at the heart of all projects of human existence. Given the trans-historical condition of the absolute scarcity of goods in demand, that is to say, of the "indifference" and even the "hostility" of Nature, not one of them can be conceived (at least before the Industrial Revolution) in any other way than as a strategy designed to defend human existence itself in a domain always alien; in other words, they could not be conceived, even in the "unproductive expenditure" on the most lavish extravagances, as going beyond the horizon of imagination delimited by the reach of the basic necessities for survival.

The critical theory of capitalism offers a privileged means of understanding modernity for two complementary reasons. On the one hand, no historical reality is so faithfully and typically modern as the capitalist mode of reproduction of social wealth; on the other, no content typifying modern life is so essential to its definition as capitalism.

But the view of modernity as to the problematization of capitalism does not only render it most visible; it also --and it might be said, above all-- awakens in the mind the most pressing need to understand it. It is the quagmires of the modernization of the economy --the counterproductive effects of progress, whether quantitative (extensive and intensive) or qualitative (technical), in the production, distribution and consumption of goods-- that most often, and with the greatest violence, make Man a purely destructive being: a being who destroys the Other, when it does not fit into Nature (defined as the "fond of resources for the human order"), and himself, when he is a "natural" being (too material, too spiritual) and does not fit into the scheme of what has been humanized through "productive" work.

The intricate and unpredictable web of multiple courses pursued by the concrete history of modernity is interwoven in a frequently imperceptible but decisive dialogue with the obscure process of planetary gestation, consolidation and expansion of capitalism as a mode of reproduction of wealth. It treats of a profound dynamic in which history does not take sides on the level of conjunctural events; heedless of the incidents that perturb generations and impassion individuals, nonetheless, it stubbornly makes it its business to indicate avenues, set tempos, and suggest general trends in everyday life.

There appear to be three constants in the history of capitalism, which ought to have been "worked" at by the history of modernity: a) a cyclical reproduction of "absolute artificial scarcity" of nature, on an ever-increasing scale (like a spiral) and satisfying ever-differing human needs; b) a progress of totalitarian reach, both extensive and intensive, (as planetarization and technification respectively), in the "real subsumption" of the productive forces under the accumulation of capital; and c) a unstoppable slippage of the direction in which the tribute that capitalist property --and its mercantile and pacific institutionalization-- pays to monopoly --and its extra-mercantile and violent arbitrariness--: from feeding off the rent of the land-lords, it changes gradually to support the rent of the technology-lords.

Thesis 2

The Grounds, Essence and Figure of Modernity

Modernity, like every other human reality, is also constituted by the game of real presence at two different levels: the possible or potential and the actual or effective. (A distinction should be made between these two, although there is an epistemological impediment in that the former appears to be annulled by the latter, inasmuch as the latter, being the realization of the former, takes its place.)

- There is, on the first level, modernity as an ideal form of totalization of human life. As such, as the essence of modernity, artificially isolated by the theoretical discourse of the configurations that have given it an empirical existence, modernity may be regarded as a reality which concreteness is in suspense, as yet undefined; as a substance at the moment in which it is "seeking" its form or is being "selected" by it (an impossible moment really, since both occur simultaneously); as an "indecisive" yet polymorphous exigency, a pure potency.

-On the second level, modernity may be regarded as an effective historical configuration. As such, modernity is no longer an ideal and imprecise reality; its presence is plural through a series of historical projects and attempts to actualize itself, which endow its concrete existence with highly varied and particular forms, which take the form of one succeeding the other or of one vying the other for ascendancy.

The grounds of modernity are to be found in the unstoppable process of consolidation --which began at a slow pace in the Middle Ages, accelerated in the sixteenth century, and reached an explosive speed from the time of the Industrial Revolution to the present day-- of a technological change which affects the very roots of the multiple "material

civilizations" of the human being. In both the means of production and the work force, the scale of instrumental operability has taken a "qualitative leap"; expansion has been such that it has moved to a higher order and, thus, to a horizon of possibilities for giving and receiving forms, unknown during thousands of years of history. The productive forces are no longer beleaguered by and subjected to the universe beyond the world conquered by them (a universe called "Nature"), but have become if not more puissant than it then more powerful in so far as their specific objectives are concerned; they appear to have eventually appointed man to the promised hierarchy of "lord and master" of the Earth. As early as the "invention of America" (E. O'Gorman), when the Earth finally rounded its figure for Man and conveyed to him a means by which to measure his finiteness in the infinite Universe, an incident of far-reaching and irreversible effect was set in motion in the deep history of slow times and events of long duration. A mutation in the very structure of the "natural form" --the elementary civilizational substratum-- of the social reproduction process gradually began to undermine the bases on which all traditional societies --without exception-- throughout history had founded their original code of life. This raised the age-old suspicion again, now on the strength of much more trustworthy data: if scarcity was not, in fact, the "curse sine qua non" of human reality. The Pólemos model, which has inspired every project of the historical existence of Man, by making it a war strategy that conditions survival in terms of the annihilation or exploitation of the Other (of the human other, of Nature), is not the only possibility; one might, without it being an illusion, imagine a different one, in which the Other is called following the model of Éros.

The essence of modernity is constituted at a crucial moment in the history of Western civilization and consists of a challenge, which it provoked and which only it --in its European concreteness-- was in a position to perceive and recognize as such. This challenge poses the need to choose for itself and for civilization as a whole an historical course radically different from the traditional course, given that it has the real possibility to dispose of an "instrumental field" that is so technically efficient that can make abundance may replace scarcity as the origin and primary experience of the human race on this earth. Just as when a play has, for reasons beyond its control, to rewrite its text in the middle of a performance because the motif of its dramatic tension has unaccountably vanished, so the discovery of the grounds of modernity placed Western civilization in a situation of internal conflict and rupture, and this earlier than other civilizations that would only experience it much later and with a lesser degree of

interiorization. The European western civilization had unexpectedly to give form (or to convert into its substance) to a new state of things --that the fantasy of the human race has always portrayed as the most desirable but the least feasible-- which suddenly went in quite the opposite direction from that of the state of things on which it, like all the other civilizations, was based.

The effective historical configurations of modernity look like the unfolding of distinctive re-formations of itself that the European West can "invent" --some as isolated efforts and others coordinated in ambitious global projects--, from the most elementary level of its own structure, for the purpose of responding to that absolute novelty. These different modernities of the modern age, which were partially if not totally successful depending on the case, do not, by any means, "exhaust" the essence of modernity and thus erase the critical moment of choice, decision and realization that it implies; instead, they are continually alerting it to new perspectives from which it may assert itself and are revitalizing each critical moment in its own way. The many modernities are figures endowed with concrete vitality because they continue to constitute themselves in conflict as attempts to form a matter, which has still not lost its rebellious spirit.

Of all the effective modernities throughout history, the modernity of mechanized industrial capitalism along North European lines has been, up to now, the most functional and the one which appears to have manifested its potentialities to the greatest extent: from the sixteenth century up to the present day, this form of modernity has been fashioned around the radical move of subordinating the production/consumption process to "capitalism", as a peculiar mode of accumulating mercantile wealth.

Any discourse that aspires to say something interesting about contemporary life must be critical. Criticism is brought into play at that moment of reflection when it incises the characteristics of modernity as it "really is" and dis-covers its essence; this is a decisive moment of great significance in that modernity is caught unawares in its polymorphous state of ambivalence and lack of definition by some device which proposes to de-stroy theoretically its concrete capitalist configurations. The back of historical continuity offers an impeccable guide to the senses of touch and sight. However, it hides scars, stumps of mutilated organs and even bleeding wounds, which only come to light when a hand or an eye runs over it "against the grain". For this reason, it is not worth respecting the real; it is better to doubt the rationality that bows down before the world as it "really is", not only as the best (given its reality) but also as the only possible world, and to

trust in another less "realistic" and officious rationality that does not exclude liberty. In this way, it may be shown that what is has no more "right to be" than what was not but could have been; that underlying the established project of modernity there are opportunities for an alternative project, which --more in line with the possibilities for an all-encompassing assertion of life that it has in essence-- have not yet been exhausted.

It is known that history cannot retrace its steps that each step taken runs through the place it stepped on. Even that which is presented as an improvement or correction of a given figure is really a new version of the same: in order that it may be conserved and adopted, it has had, at the same time, to destroy and reject it. The grounds of modernity remains by no means untouched by the history of capitalist forms that, in a succession of enjambments, have converted it in their substance; the imprint is indelible --profound, decisive and definitive. It would, however, do no harm to call into question yet again that old conviction --rejuvenated now with relief after the lesson of "post-68 disenchantment"-- that reduces the course of modernity to this imprint and takes it for granted that modernity and capitalism are equivalent; and, moreover, to address yet again the problem of whether the utopia of a post-capitalist modernity --socialist, communist, anarchist?-- is still realizable.

Thesis 3

Marx and Modernity

Marx's theoretical deconstruction of politico-economic discourse outlines numerous conceptual bridges leading towards the problematization of modernity. The main ones, which emerge from the center of his critical project, may be found in the following moments of his understanding of capitalism.

a) The hypothesis that attempts to explain the characteristics of modern economic life by means of a definition of its structure as a twofold and contradictory event; as the result of forced unification, even though historically necessary, by means of which a formal process of the production of surplus value and accumulation of capital (that is to say, the stratum of the abstract existence of economic life as "forming [bildung] of value") subsumes or subordinates a real process of transformation of the nature and restoration of the social body (that is to say, the stratum of concrete existence of economic life as "forming [bildung] of wealth"). This subsumption or subordination would otherwise present two different levels or states, according to the degree and type of its form-giving effect. In the first, a "formal" state, the capitalist mode, already

internalized by society, only changes the property conditions of the process of production/consumption and still exerts an external influence on the traditional qualitative balance between the system of consumer needs and the system of productive capacities; in the second, a "real" or substantial state, the social internalization of this mode, upsets, by penetrating the technical structure of the production/consumption process, the balance of the inner workings dialectics between needs and capacities without offering any alternative qualitative proposal.

b) The description of the difference and complementarity between the structuring of economic life in "simple mercantile" terms (production/consumption and circulation of the elements of objective wealth) and its configuration developed along "capitalist-mercantile" lines. Likewise, the understanding of the history of this complementarity, from the period in which capitalism appears as the only sound guarantee of mercantile economic life to the period in which mercantile life serves merely as a mask for capitalism. A single process, but two opposite meanings. On the one hand, the capitalist behavior of the market is the instrument for the expansion and consolidation of the mercantile structure as the fundamental and exclusive ordering of all the circulation of social wealth (at the cost of other traditional or "natural" orderings). On the other hand, the mercantile structure is the instrument for the expansion and consolidation of the capitalist form of economic behavior as the dominant mode of production and consumption of social wealth.

c) The derivation of the concept of reification and mercantile fetishism and of that of alienation and capitalist fetishism --as critical categories of modern civilization in general-- based on the theory that contrasts the simple merchandization of the production/consumption process of social wealth (as an external phenomenon which does not dare to touch the human work force) with its capitalist merchandization (which penetrates it through the subordination of the work force). This derivation defines simple mercantile reification as the historical process in which the capacity of self-constitution (and of socialization of individuals), proper to every society, can no longer be accomplished in a direct and voluntary ("necessary") manner but has to be realized in obedience to hazard, that is to say, thanks to the inert unifying and generalizing action of the circulatory mechanism of commodities. Owing to this, autarky or sovereignty is no longer crystallized as an attribute of a personalized social subject --as in ancient history when this crystallization was perceived as a mechanism to protect the threatened collective identity-- and remains as a mere possibility for the same. Included in this

process, the whole of things --now the "world of commodities"-- is not only the series of natural circuits between production and consumption but becomes, at the same time, the sum of relations that "miraculously" unite private individuals, who are defined precisely by their independence from or lack of community. It is now a kingdom of "fetishes": objects which, going "behind the backs" of the producers/consumers, and before either has any concrete dealings with the other, guarantee them the minimum of abstract sociality that their activity requires. In contrast to this simple mercantile reification, capitalist mercantile reification, or alienation, is made manifest as an historical process in which a mechanism interferes with, limits and distorts the activity of hazard, the instance that governs basic mercantile socialization. This mechanism, which is a relation of exploitation mystified as an exchange of equi-valents (the exchange of salary for work) turns the inequality of ownership in the means of production into a guarantee that one social class will rule over another. Consequently, fetishism of capitalist merchandise would also differ from elementary mercantile fetishism; far from being an impartial medium --both "supernatural", between owner and owner, and then "natural", between producer and consumer-- the "world of commodities" determined by capitalism imposes a structural tendency both on the confrontation of the supply and demand of commodities and on the power game which secures the network of abstract socialization; in accordance with its dominant dynamic, of money that becomes commodity that becomes increased money [M-C-(M+m)], it favors every activity and institution that crosses its path and is hostile to any other that attempts to counter it.

d) The differentiation of specifically capitalist productivism in relation to other forms of productivism throughout the economic history, developed in conditions of scarcity. Its definition as the necessity of capitalist economic life "to produce by and for production's sake" and not for either subjective purposes, such as meeting needs, or objective purposes, such as increasing wealth (abstract or concrete). It is only as a result of a production that is its own objective, that is to say, only in so far as it promptly redirects the greatest possible part of the exploited surplus value towards the productive sphere that the wealth constituted as capital can effectively assert itself as such and continues to exist.

e) The discovery of destructiveness which, in essence, characterizes the only channel that the capitalist reproduction of social wealth can open to the inescapable advent of the modern technological revolution, to its adoption and operation in the process of production and consume. The "general law of capitalist accumulation"

--developed as a key theoretical conclusion of Marx's critical discourse on political economy from the elementary distinction between "constant capital" and "variable capital" and the examination of the "organic composition of capital"-- makes manifest the inevitable generation and reproduction of an "industrial reserve army", the condemnation of one part of the social body to the status of a surplus, dispensable and, thus, disposable entity. It portrays economic life ruled by the reproduction of capital as that of an organism possessed by the incurable folly of self-aggressive violence.

f) The localization of the grounds of capitalist technological progressivism in the necessity (alien in itself to the logic of the pure capitalist form) of the multiplicity of private conglomerates of capital to compete with each other for "supplementary profit". Unlike the rent on the land, this profit can only be yielded by a relatively long-lasting monopoly of technical innovation which is capable both of increasing productivity in a given work center and of making the merchandise produced in it more competitive over and above the market norm.

g) The explication of capitalist industrialism --the overwhelming tendency to diminish the relative importance of the non-manufactured (natural and rural) means of production in favor of those means of production whose existence almost entirely depends on manpower (artificial or urban products)-- as the result of the rivalry between the two poles of monopolized property to appropriate "supplementary profit", to which capitalist property owners have to concede rights during the process of determining the "average profit". Land property, which has access to the resources and the most productive dispositions of nature, defends its traditional right to convert the global fund of supplementary profit into payment for this domain, into "rent on the land". The only property in a position to challenge this right, which has consistently imposed its own cause throughout the twentieth Century, is the relatively long-lasting dominion over technical innovation in the industrial means of production. It is this property which forces the conversion of a growing part of the supplementary profits into payment for its dominion over this other "territory", into a "technological rent".

Thesis 4

The Characteristic Features of Modern Life

The many features that facilitate the comprehension of modern life may be organized according to five distinctive phenomena of the existing project of modernity, or better, to five distinctive ambivalences supposedly solved by each of them.

Humanism

Humanism consists of the tendency of human life not only to create an autonomous world for itself (a cosmos), relative independent of the Other (chaos), but to subordinate the reality of the latter to that of the former; its eagerness to constitute itself as Man, as an independent subject or basis of Nature --of all the infra- supra- or extra-human--, which it converts into pure object, a mere counterpart of itself. By means of the permanent annihilation or expulsion of chaos, which implies an ever-renewed elimination or colonization of "barbarism", humanism affirms an order and imposes a civilization that originates in the presumably definitive triumph of rationalized technique over magical technique. This may be called "the death of the first half of God", and it consists of the abolition of the divine-numinous as a guarantee of the effectiveness of the instrumental medium of society. God ceases to exist as the foundation of the necessity for cosmic order, as authentic proof of the pact between the scarifying community and the consenting Other. If productivity was formerly assigned by Destiny, an arbitrary superior attainable through offerings and incantation, it is now the result of hazard, tamed by the power of techno-mercantile reason.

Humanist world-construction implies a hybris, or a anthropomorphist excess --which forces the Other to behave like "Nature", that is, like all the reserves ("bestand") at Man's disposal--, the clue to which is in the practical efficiency of both knowledge exercised as "work of appropriation" of that which it has before it and the mathematical-quantitative pattern of the reason employed as instrument. The economic success of his strategy as a animal rationale in the war against Nature convinces Man of his position as subject, foundation or self-sufficient activity, and encourages him to put himself as master, superior to all the elements (from the simple humanized nature, be it of the individual body or of common territory, to the most elaborate instruments and behaviors), superior to all the functions (from the most material, procreative or productive to the most spiritual, political or aesthetic) and superior to all the dimensions (from the most habitual and automatic to the most extraordinary and creative) of the process of social reproduction.

Modern rationalism --that is the reduction, first, of the specificity of the human being to its faculty of thinking, and second, of these to the mode of its realization in the techno-mercantile praxis-- is the clearest expression of the humanist delusion of capitalist modernity.

Progressivism

Historicity is an essential characteristic of social activity. Human life is only such because it is concerned with the changes to which it is subjected by the course of time; its inevitability is assimilated and mechanisms are created to face it. Two coincidental but opposing processes always constitutes historical transformation: the process of innovation or substitution of the old by the new and the process of renovation or restoration of the old as new. Progressivism consists of the affirmation of a mode of historicity in which the first process prevails over, and dominates, the second. In strictly progressivist terms, all the practical and discursive devices that make possible and shape the reproduction process of society --from the technical procedures of production and consumption through the uses of speech and the conceptual apparatuses, including even the patterns of taste and sociability, to the festive ceremonies-- are immersed in a movement of unavoidable change which will transpose them from the outmoded to the updated, "from the imperfect to the unsurpassable".

Pure "modernist" progressivism venerates innovative novelty as if it were an absolute positive value. It gives access to what is always better: an increase in wealth, an improvement in the principles of freedom and justice, the refinement of civilization. In general, time is experienced as a continuous, linear and qualitatively ascendant flow, subjected to the irresistible attraction of the future as a site of excellence; the present, always surpassed and void of content owing to the speed of time, has an instantaneous, evanescent reality, while the past, lacking a reality of its own, is nothing more than that residue of a present that resisted the pull of the future.

Urbanicism

This is the elemental form in which humanism and progressivism acquire spontaneous concretion. The constitution of the world of life, understood as the substitution of order for chaos and of barbarism for civilization, is channeled through the very special requirements of the process by which the Great City is constructed as the proper site of the human. The civilizing process implies a dialectics between city life and rural life under a clear dominance of the former; urbanicism breaks with this dialectics, its tendency is to destroy rural life.

Urbanicism is the characteristic of a process that tends to concentrate the four different gravitational poles of specifically modern social activity on the geographical plane: a) the industrialization of productive work; b) the commercial and financial potentiation of

mercantile circulation; c) the refunctionalization of the crisis of traditional identities, and d) the nationalization of political activity. This is progressivism transmuted into the spatial dimension; the tendency to construct and reconstruct human territory as the incessant materialization of the time of progress. Outside lies rural space, a stronghold of the past, dependent, dominated and separated from the natural periphery by an unstable boundary; this mosaic of remnants forgotten or established by a web of urban connections is the place of agonizing time hardly even vitalized by contagion. At the center lies the city or downtown area, the site of indefatigable activity and creative restlessness, the "abyss from which the present is hurled" or the place where the future emerges or comes into existence. And, inside, fanning out between the periphery and the nucleus, lies the constellation of urban conglomerates of very different magnitude, function and importance: urban space, the site of living time that, in its repeated spiraling centripetal wake of futuristic acceleration, topographically spreads the hierarchy of independence and domination.

Individualism

Is a certain tendency in the socialization of individuals, in their recognition and inclusion as potentially functional members of the human race; a tendency to privilege that constitution of personal identity which originates in an abstract nucleus: their existence as private owners (producers/consumers) of commodities, that is, as specimens of an anonymous mass, integrated from the outside into it and its qualitative undifferentiation. It treats of the constitution of a person imposed through and yet against all that sources of concrete socialization of the individual --traditional as well as new--, which are awaking in him from the inside qualitative complex communal identities.

This constitution firstly divides the social-natural existence of man in such a way that the individual, as a sovereign power to dispose of things (as a soul untainted by use-value), confronts himself like an object located among his possessions (like a body that can "be own", like an external apparatus made out of drives and desires). It turns, secondly, the opposition between the intimate and the collective everyday life of the individual into the contradiction between its private and its public interests; the need to spare energy for himself and the compulsion to validate himself in the marketplace collide. Created from the death of "the other half of God" --the death of divinity conceived as a cohesive factor of the community-- that is, from the failure of the

religious metamorphosis of the political, individualism strives to replace the divine absence and rectify the deviation of the political by artificially re-synthesizing the social substance in the figure of Nation. As an entity with a purely functional consistency, dependent on state enterprise, the modern Nation is based on the conviction that the concrete identity required will emerge spontaneously from the remnants of the "natural nation" which it denies and ignores, that is, from the mere agglomeration or massification of perfectly free or abstract (that is, detached) individuals as compatriots or countrymen ("volksgenosse").

Cultural relativism --"each version of the human is irreducible and all of them are equivalent"--, the result of the dissolution of the divine guarantee that assimilates human essence to one particular figure, and ethical nihilism --"every norm of behavior is arbitrary and so incapable of supporting any concrete engagement"--, the outcome of the subsequent emancipation from everyday life with respect to the archaic norms of the code of social conduct, characterize the starting point for the modern construction of the social world. Capitalist individualism takes up the cause of both and stages their defense in such a way that their meaning is unexpectedly inverted: relativism becomes the absolute condition for national culture --"apartheid", tolerance that represses the culture of identity differences-- and nihilism --repression of political commitment-- is seen as the *conditio sine qua non* of civilized life.

Economicism

Economicism refers to the decisive ascendancy gained by the civil dimension of social life, in which individuals are constituted as bourgeois or private entrepreneurs, over its political dimension, which positions individuals as citizens or members of the republic. This ascendancy exacts the subordination of all political decisions and provisions to those that specifically correspond to political economy. The majority of the national population is thus involved in the State, an historic enterprise whose essential content is "the promotion of the enrichment of all", understood as an abstract increase in the sum of private fortunes.

Although economicism has its origins in the possibility --only opened by modernity-- of obtaining equality and breaking with the traditionally inevitable transcription of qualitative inter-individual differences as grades in the hierarchy of power, it systematically reproduces inequality and submission. "You are what you own": the pertinence of this abstract and impartial formula, by means of which economicism

claims possession of the secrets to equality, is based on the validity of the "law of value grounded on work" as a device that can guarantee "distributive justice", the equal partition of wealth. However, if the "law of value" is to be imposed, it must be violated by economicism itself; over and above this law, economicism must accept that the possession of things cannot be reduced to what is generated by individual work. The law must be applied --if needed by coercion-- merely as a principle of coherence that is neither all-embracing nor all-powerful; although its sphere of action is central and indispensable for modern economic life, it exists precisely to be overruled and abused by the other powers exerted over wealth which are unrelated to the sphere of action that proceeds from the creation of value through work: the powers related to property based on violence: of money, of land, of technology.

Thesis 5

Capitalism and the Ambivalence of Modernity

The presence of capitalist modernity is in itself ambivalent. Neither its glorification nor its disparagement can be pure: precisely in that which motivates its glorification rests the reason for its condemnation. The ambivalence of capitalist modernity stems from the following: paradoxically, the most radical attempt to interiorize the grounds of modernity registered by history --the conquest of abundance embarked upon by European Western civilization-- could be brought about only by means of the organization of economic life based precisely upon the denial of those grounds. In order to assert itself and remain as it is, the capitalist mode of production of social wealth requires an ever-renewed infra-satisfaction of the corpus of social needs established in each case.

Marx's "general law of capitalist accumulation", the culmination of his theoretical deconstruction of political economy --the modern scientific discourse par excellence concerning human reality-- states this clearly (after demonstrating how the "organic composition of capital" tends to grow, after showing the propensity of capital to invest itself increasingly in the means of production and not in the work force):

“The law in accordance with which a continually increasing quantity of the means of production can, thanks to the advance in the productivity of social labor, be set in motion by a progressively diminishing expenditure of human energy - this law in a capitalist society (where the worker does not make use of the means of production, but where the means of production makes use of the worker), undergoes a complete

inversion, and is expressed as follows: the higher productivity of labor, the greater is the pressure of the workers on the means of employment; and the more precarious, therefore, becomes their condition for existence, namely the sale of their own labor power for the increasing of another's wealth, or to promote the self-expansion of capital. Under capitalism, likewise, the fact that the means of production and the productivity of labor go more rapidly than does the productive population, secures expression in an inverse way, namely that the working population always goes more quickly than capital's need for self-expansion." (3)

Without surplus population, the capitalist mode loses its deviating but possibilizing role as mediator within the process of production/consumption of social wealth. Therefore, the first task of the capitalist economy is to reproduce the conditions of existence of its own form: the incessant construction and reconstruction of an artificial scarcity, and this precisely from the renewed possibilities of abundance. European civilization embarked upon its venture to conquer and assimilate the "new world" promised by the material re-grounding of historical existence; the weapon wielded was capitalist economy. But the behavior of this economy, although effective, was double. This duplicity is repeated in a particularized manner in each and every one of the vicissitudes of the venture: capitalism instigated European civilization to design a schematic way to live human life that is not only desirable but actually possible. It was a project directed towards the potentiation of the possibilities for freedom in human life; but this was done only to compel this design to become, at one fell swoop, a ridiculous composition, a mockery of itself.

The fascinating and yet intolerable facts and things of dominant modernity manifest that which constitutes the unity of capitalist economy under the guise of ambivalence: the irreconcilable contradiction between the concrete sense of the process of work/enjoyment (a "social-natural" sense), on the one hand, and the abstract sense of the process of valorization/accumulation (a "social-alienated" sense), on the other.

Marx's description, explanation and criticism of capital --the "wealth of nations" in its historical capitalist form-- allow for the theoretical deconstruction and the understanding of the ambivalence made apparent in the everyday experience of the distinctive phenomena characterizing dominant modernity.

According to Marx, the capitalist form or mode of social wealth --its production, circulation and consumption-- is the inevitable mediation, the only path found by historical circumstance which turned the possibility of modern wealth into an effective

reality; however, it is a path that deploys its necessity as an imposition and its service as an oppression by excluding ever-increasing possibilities among those which it is called upon to direct. As a donator of form, capitalist mediation implies a denial of the substance that is shaped by it; but it is a weak denial. Instead of working towards the resolution or "dialectic transcending" of its contradiction with the possibilities of modern wealth, capitalist mediation only manages to neutralize it within the figures that resolve it either falsely or wrongly and which preserve it as it is in an increasingly intricate manner.

Indispensable as it is to the concrete existence of modern social wealth, capitalist mediation cannot assert itself as an essential condition for its existence, nor can it synthesize a genuinely new figure for it. The totality shaped by it, even when it really does penetrate the process of reproduction and is expanded as one of the technical conditions of this process, is the result of a forced totalization. It maintains a contradictory polarity: is constituted by the relations of integration or subordination of "natural wealth" under a form imposed on it.

The labor process in itself or the production of objects with use-value generates new qualitative principles of complementation between the work force and the means of production; proposals of adjustment which, running contrary to their traditional compulsoriness and utilitarianism, tend to arouse the ludic and gratuitous dimension repressed by the network of technical connections that unite them. However, this activity cannot be realized unless it obeys a principle of complementation of a different order, which derives from the production (exploitation) of surplus value. According to this principle, productive activity --the conjunction of the two factors of the labor process-- is none other than an investment of capital, which exists only to give "variable capital" (representing, in terms of value, the workforce of the worker) the opportunity to increase the "constant capital" (representing, in terms of value, the capitalist means of production) when it is reproduced.

In this respect, there is a contradiction in the unitary principle of complementation, which rules the conjunction of the labor force and the means of production and which determines the selection of the productive techniques in capitalist economy. It cannot take advantage of the new possibilities of this productive adjustment without reducing both protagonists to mere devices of the valorization of value. Neither can it sustain this conjunction as a coincidence of the factors of capital, which is destined to the exploitation of surplus value, without exposing it to the dangers of the qualitative

resistance that arises from the new technical relations between the subject and the object of production.

Likewise, the process of consumption of produced goods in itself creates new principles of satisfaction, which tend to convert the technical relation between need and means of satisfaction into a game of correspondences. Nevertheless, modern consumption occurs only if guided by a completely opposite principle of satisfaction: that of "productive consumption" which transforms "surplus value" into "surplus capital". According to this principle, the appropriation of both salary and profit has the sole function of giving the value produced the opportunity, when realized in the acquisition of merchandise, to bring about the reproduction of capital (which is forced to expand its scale). The capitalist principle of satisfaction of needs is therefore also intrinsically contradictory: to take advantage of the diversification of the technical relation between needs and satisfiers, it must violate its play of qualitative balances and subject it to the time limits and priorities of the accumulation of capital; in turn, to extend and accelerate this accumulation, it must incite the "chaotic and uncontrollable" effervescence of this diversifying process. To produce anything, be it small or large, simple or complex, material or spiritual, capitalist economy only requires that its production function as a vehicle for the production of surplus value. Likewise, for something to be consumed, be it useable or utilizable, familiar or exotic, essential or a luxury, the only requirement is that the satisfaction it offers be integrated as a part of the accumulation of capital. In both cases, for the technical process to take place it is necessary to make a feasible transformation or "translation" of its principle of "social-natural" realization into a principle of a different "social-alienated" order, that of the principle of the valorizing activity of value which is essentially incompatible with it, since it necessarily restricts or exaggerates it.

By adding production and consumption to circulation, the complete cycle of the reproduction of modern social wealth is constituted as a totalization that forcibly unifies the process of reproduction of "natural" social wealth with the (extended) process of reproduction of capital as one operation (simultaneously and in the same place).

According to the above, the profound dynamic that the capitalist process of the reproduction of social wealth contributes to the course of modern history comes from the itinerary of intermittent repolarization and recomposition, which is the outcome of its inherent contradiction: the exclusion or reciprocal antagonism between its trans-historical substance, that is, the primary or "natural" form in which it is realized or

executed, and an artificial but necessary secondary form according to which it is executed only as a process of "self-valorization of value".

Thesis 6

Modern History and the Realizations of Capitalism

The different modernities or distinct models of modernity that competed before the establishment of capitalist modernity, together with those models that compete now as variations of it, compose their actual concretion in relation to the great variety of possibilities in which the real fact capitalism becomes present.

On the synchronic axis, there seem to be at least three sources of diversification of this reality, which must be distinguished:

-Its amplitude: the relative extension in which the sector subjected to the reproduction of capital intervenes in the global economic life of a society; the exclusive, dominant or simply participatory character of this sector in the reproduction of social wealth.

According to this criterion, the economic life of a socio-political and historical entity may be integrated in differing degrees into the dominant economic life of the planet, globalized by capitalist accumulation; spheres dominated by other forms of economy --not only of production-- may coexist with the capitalist sphere; they can even dominate it, although the capitalist density or "quality" may be very high.

-Its density: the relative intensity with which the capitalist form or mode subsumes the process of reproduction of social wealth.

According to this criterion, capitalism may give shape or modify the "economy" of the society as either a factor exclusive to the sphere of the circulation of the goods produced or as a factor that also deranges the sphere of production/consumption of these goods. In the second of these cases, the effect of capitalism is different depending on whether it is only a "formal" capitalism, or a substantial ("real") capitalism, proper to the technical structure of this process of production/consumption.

-Its differential function: the relative location of the economy of a society within the polarized geography of the world economy.

Whether core or peripheral, the differential tasks of the multiple specific economies within the capitalist scheme of technical specialization or "international division of labor" modify the effectiveness of the laws of accumulation of capital, that is to say, the capitalist model "unfolds" into different complementary versions of itself.

On the diachronic axis, the source of diversification of capitalist reality seems to arise from the correlative changes in the gravitation of the two main poles of monopolistic distortion of the sphere of mercantile circulation through the passage of time: the ownership of natural resources ("land") and the ownership of technological secrecy. Although not justified by work but imposed by force, the possession of these "means of production, which are not produced", or of objects "without value but with a price", has a decisive influence on the conversion of the sum of values of existing social wealth in its form as product into the sum of prices of the existing social wealth in its form as a good.

Whether extensive or restricted, dense or sparse, core or peripheral, the reality of capitalism has hung over the modern history of the last hundred years under the guise of an unequal battle between these two poles of distortion of the laws of the market. Phenomena like the devastation of the actual configuration of nature during this century indicate that the irreversible tendency of the history of capitalist economy is that the ownership of technology takes precedence, in no uncertain terms, over the ownership of land as basis of the right to "extraordinary profit".

Thesis 7

The Quadruple ethos of Capitalist Modernity

The objective form of the modern world which must be inevitably assimilated in practice by all those who agree to live by its terms is dominated by the presence of capitalist reality, by the fact of capitalism; that is, in the final instance, by a permanent conflict between the dynamic of the "social-natural form" of social existence and the dynamic of the reproduction of its wealth as "valorization of value" --a conflict in which the former must be subsumed to and sacrificed to the latter incessantly. The assimilation of the fact of capitalism, the neutralization of its contradiction as a necessary condition for the practical existence of the "world of life" entails developing an ethos or spontaneous behavior capable of integrating and accepting it as the basis for the familiar and secure "harmony" of everyday life.

There are four pure or elementary ethe that construct the diverse complex spontaneities, which human beings develop in their everyday experience of life made possible by modern capitalism.

- The first way to accept the capitalist fact as "natural" is by assuming an attitude of affirmative and militant identification with the claim that the accumulation of capital not

only represents the interests of the "social-natural" process of reproduction faithfully, when in truth it represses or deforms them, but is also at the service of its potentiation. This spontaneity would "denegate" the contradiction and make of the valorization of value and the concrete development of the productive forces not only two coincidental dynamics but a sole, unitary dynamic. This elementary ethos may be called realist due to its affirmation of the unsurpassable efficacy and benevolence of the established or "really existing" world, and of the impossibility of an alternative world.

- The second way of naturalizing capitalism, which is just as militant as the previous one, implies the identification of the same two terms, the denegation of its contradiction, but it does it as an affirmation of the opposite: not of value but of use-value. In this case, "valorization" seems to be entirely reducible to the "natural form". An issue of the "spirit of enterprise", it would be no other than a variation of this form, since this spirit would, in turn, be one of the figures or subjects that convert history into a permanent adventure, both for human beings and life in general. Although probably perverse, like the metamorphosis of the fallen Angel into Satan, this metamorphosis of the "good world" or the "natural form" into the capitalist "hell" would not cease to be a "moment" of the "miracle" of Creation. This peculiar way of living with capitalism, which is affirmed to the extent that it transfigures capitalism into its counterpart, is characteristic of to the romantic ethos.

- A third way, which may be called classical, of spontaneously assimilating the integration of the process of social existence into the history of the "valorization of value" would consist of living it as a transcendent necessity, that is, as a fact reaching beyond the sphere of action which corresponds to what is human. A blessing on the one hand (as the offspring of harmony) and a curse on the other (as the offspring of conflict), the combination of the natural and the capitalist is seen as a metaphysical event, distanced or presupposed as a closed destiny, the closure of which opens the possibility of a world suitable for the human condition. For this ethos, whatever attitude adopted for or against what is established, which is militant either for its enthusiasm or its protest and claims to be effective --instead of recognizing its limits within the dimension of understanding (with equanimity and distance of stoic rationalism)-- appears naive and superfluous.

- A fourth way of integrating capitalism into the spontaneity of everyday life would complete the quadruple elementary system of the prevailing ethos of established modernity. Baroque art may lend its name to modernity because, like him, it is too an

"affirmation of life within death" (G. Bataille) -in its theatrical use of the indisputable formal canon, baroque art found the opportunity to animate all its petrified gestures and to revitalize the situation in which it was constituted as a negation and sacrifice of the Other. This is a strategy of fidelity to the "natural form" which paradoxically originates in the experience of this form as sacrificed. "Obeying without fulfilling" the consequences of its sacrifice, turning the "evil" progress of history into "good", baroque ethos claims to reconstruct the concreteness of the world of life from the remains of devastating abstraction and to re-invent its qualities posing them as "second grade", theatrical qualities, surreptitiously insufflating an indirect breath into the resistance that work and enjoyment of the "use-values" offer to the predominance of the process of valorization.

Needless to say, none of these four ethe that make up the pure system of "habits and customs" or the elementary civilizational "refuge and cover" of capitalist modernity ever exist independently; in the actual life of the different modern "constructions of the world", each one is always found in combination with the others in different ways according to the circumstances. However, one or other may play a leading role in this composition, organize how it combines with the others and force them to translate themselves into it so as to make themselves manifest. Only in this relative sense may one speak, for example, of a "classical" as opposed to a "romantic" modernity, a "baroque" as opposed to a "realist mentality".

Originating in different periods of modernity, that is, in relation to distinct successive impulses of capitalism --the Mediterranean, Northern, Western or Central European-- the different modern ethe configure contemporary social existence from different "archaeological" strata or historical residues. Each one has thus acted upon society in its own way and given preference to one dimension of society where it has expanded its action. For example, "the baroque" was probably the first decisive and generalized watershed in the tendency of modern civilization to revitalize the traditional Western code after each new destructive wave arising from capitalist development. The last watershed, the "romantic", would have a similar effect on the tendency of modern politics to treat the legitimacy of the economic process as malleable material in the hands of great völker or great men. This lack of simultaneity in the constitution and combination of the different ethe is also the reason for which they are systematically distributed unequally, in a complicated play of affinities and aversions throughout the geography of the planet modernized by the European or capitalist West

Thesis 8

European West and Capitalist Modernity

A transposition of what Marx said in a nutshell about gold and the function of money: Europe is not "by nature" modern, but modernity is "by nature" European.

During the Middle Ages, the fact that at least three great historical realities coincided and interacted --the construction of a civilized world of European measure, the subordination of wealth to the mercantile form and the Catholic consolidation of the Christian cultural project-- notably predisposed Europe to accept the challenge that was included in an event which had matured with the course of history: the inversion of the power distribution between the human being and the non-human conditions of his life. In retrospect, Europe appeared constructively proto-modern, predestined for modernity. Indeed, when it became necessary, Europe, her territories and peoples found they were particularly well prepared to give the grounds of modernity a chance to evolve; unlike the East, where it was diffused and submitted to traditional social syncretization, circumstances in Europe were such that it could readily be adopted and interiorized as a principle for restructuring human life as a whole.

First. The degree of complexity ruling the dialectic between scarcity and productivism in the "economy-world" which had been developed in Europe was in the eleventh century undoubtedly the most pronounced in known historical circumstances. There were several "temperate zones" on the planet in which a "exaggerated" high degree of complexity of the system that joins production capacities with consumer necessities in the social metabolism was not an unusual excess but a generalized condition of existence; in other words, there were in the planet plenty of regions in which "the development of man had become a necessity for Nature itself" (4). Of all these, however, only the "small continent" of Europe found itself in the midst of a "civilizational revolution" and involved in the process of constructing itself as a concrete totality of productive forces. At the time, it was the only region that had the appropriate environment for the acceptance and cultivation of an event which consisted primarily of potentiating the productivity of human labor and thus of extending the scale of human "metabolism" with Nature. Above all, as an economic world which was in a position to divide work regionally while maintaining technological coherence within its imprecise but undeniable geographical frontiers, the European continent had the "optimal measure" to be the scenario of such an event.

Second. During the emergence of Europe, the merchandization of the process of the circulation of wealth --accompanied by its fundamental tool, value, and its key operation, exchange by equi-valence-- went beyond the limits of this sphere and penetrated the very structure of production and consumption. Moreover, it became generalized as the real subordination of concrete work and enjoyment to only one of their real dimensions, that in which they existed, in abstract terms, as simple acts of crystallizing and de-crystallizing value. The exchange of equi-valents was no longer just one of the modes of transaction which coexisted, helped and hindered each other on a market that had limited itself to being the means by which goods could "change hands", once they had been produced, and wealth, which was, in the strict sense, surplus, could be circulated. The period during which it could do no more than exert a re-forming or "exterior influence" on the metabolism of the social body was now in the past. It now tended to monopolize the bulk of this "changing of hands" of commodities, to promote and privilege the market of stock still not produced (functioning as a credit mechanism), thus becoming a technical intermediary essential to the reproduction of social wealth.

The merchandization of the economic life in Europe reified the mechanism of the circulation of wealth as the "subject", the "hidden hand" that distributed wealth. Thus, gradually reduced the traditional power of communities and landlords, as archaic political subjects, to interfere in the distribution of goods and in their production/consumption. It also freed or emancipated the individual worker from his regional obligations by inserting him, if only as a principle, in the universalism of the nascent world market.

Third. The Christian transformation of the Jewish identity, which could only be accomplished by re-functionalizing Greco-Roman identity and could only be consolidated by colonizing the Germanic identities, had prepared the mythical structure of practice and discourse of the European peoples --in a counterpoint dialogue with the merchandization of everyday life -- to accompany and boost the flowering of modernity. Human beings were now experiencing in their own lives a conflictive behavior that had a schizoid structure. While they might have a soul, their person was only interested in value; while they might have a body, they only had eyes for its use-value. Above all, as believers in God, as members of the ecclesia and equal in the eyes of God, they realized they had become involved in an historical enterprise that depended on intimacy in order to be collective and depended on the collectivity in order to be intimate. This was none

other than the enterprise of the salvation of the human race --a universal endeavor on the part of that old "people of God" of Jewish religion, once it had been enlarged and universalized-- which could integrate all the individual destinies of autochthonous communities and propose "one sole sense and purpose" and one sole rationality (if not one sole language) common to all.

Without this precedent of the spontaneous cultural proto-modernity of "Europead" Western civilization, capitalism, that old Mediterranean mode of behavior determining the circulation of mercantile wealth, could never have become the dominant mode of reproducing social wealth. The opposite is also true: without capitalism, the grounds of modernity would never have succeeded in converting what were only modern prefigurations and tendencies of European West into a developed form including every aspect of social existence, into an effective modernity.

Capitalism needed the European concreteness in order to become a mode of reproduction of social wealth; once it had been constituted as such (and the European continent had been modernized), it could dispense with this "civilizational humus" and extend all over the planet, improvising ad hoc encounters and coincidences with civilizations that were potentially alien or even hostile to the grounds of modernity.

In order to become an effective reality, the essence of modernity had to be "worked out" in accordance with the "elective affinities" between the proto-modernity of European life and the capitalist form of the circulation of goods. In order that modernity might adopt new effective forms and develop in other directions, it would be necessary that other affinities between civilizational and economic forms intervene to change the purpose of this "work".

It took capitalism, originally a circulatory phenomenon, an entire epoch to penetrate the sphere of production and consumption; once precious metals from the Americas had forced a re-evaluation of European manufactured articles, it was discovered that the real grounds of the potential of capitalism lay not in the ephemeral play with the terms of foreign exchange but in exploiting the work force; in other words, that the real Indies were within the country's own economy ("Correct your maps, Newcastle is Peru!"). During this period, the European economic sphere expanded and contracted until it finally established its definitive boundaries; its nucleus jumped from South to North, from East to West, from city to city, concentrating and assigning functions. For this reason, it is known as the time when the competition concerning the different possible projects of modernity was eventually resolved, if with difficulty, in favor of the one that

demonstrated the greatest firmness in the handling of capitalism as a mode of production. The project decided upon was that which offered, first and foremost, a solution to the problem of the resistance of the individual and communal body to sacrifice its pillars and which guaranteed an obsessively thrifty and productivistic economic behavior; that project which had the ability to accomplish this because the Christian identity, which acted as its support, was freed from the concrete consistency (Mediterranean and Jewish) of its religious ecclesia --perceptible for all in a corporal and exterior manner-- and received a different, purely abstract and individual religiosity (improvised after the destruction of the Germanic communities), that became an imperceptible question for others, a purely inner event in which moral diligence, taking the form of self-fulfillment, coincided with the moral norm, taking the form of a demand made upon one self.

Thesis 9

The Political in Modernity: Sovereignty and Alienation

If what determines the life of human being is his political character --the fact that configuring and re-configuring his sociality is more important to him than the basic activity that reproduces his animality-- Marx's theory concerning alienation and fetishism is undoubtedly the most decisive conceptual starting-point for a discussion of the recognizable links between modernity and capitalism.

In order to survive, human liberty has, paradoxically, had to deny itself as political liberty, sovereignty or the exercise of autarky in everyday social life. It might be said that the association of concrete individuals --that original "group in fusion" which must be taken as the premise-- refuses to govern itself, since it is terrified by the magnitude of the enterprise; or that, on the contrary, it is by nature incompatible with any sense of permanence and does not possess the ability to accept and assert itself as an institution. It is true that human beings have been aware of the existence of their political liberty, sovereignty and power of self-government throughout their history, but only as a legendary idea that is exterior and alien to them and could never be put into practice in their everyday lives; like the motif of a narrative to whose real effects they may only sing the praises or mutter curses.

Without taking into account those moments of singular historical tension, which fall within the brief time span of a unique heroic deed, or those parts of regional history, which are provisionally protected against the larger historical framework (and to this

extent de-realized), one cannot deny that the concrete human individual, as an association of individuals or an individual person, has had been practically no opportunities to exercise his freedom by him self in the form of self-government and to do it positively, that is, by enjoying the physical life that enables him to be self-governing. Whether directly or indirectly, the exercise of the political faculty --as a not granted, delegated, transmitted or reflected exercise-- has always had to be accomplished on negative terms (by sacrificing physical life), as a transgression or a challenge, as a form of rebellion against extra-political conglomerates of established power (economic, religious, etc.). Parasites in concrete social life but necessary to its reproduction, the conglomerates of power have concentrated and monopolized for themselves the ability to reproduce the form social life takes, to cultivate a concrete identity of the community (polis) and to decide among the alternatives of existence that history places before it.

In his theory of alienation Marx deconstructs the political culture of modernity; he starts by sharing this undoubtedly accurate narrative of the history of political life --from its performance in the despotic and theocratic dispositions to his realization in the state-democratic government-- as the implacable history of a vocation destined to be thwarted. According to Marx, the modern extra-political conglomerate of power, which arrogates and wields the right to monitor society's exercise of sovereignty, as well as to intervene in its basic organization, is the result of the Value of capitalist merchandise as an "automatic subject". It is a power wielded against the community as a possible association of free individuals, but utilizing its collective nature which can only perceive the reckless aspect of a project of its own; renouncing its liberty, it becomes installed in the pragmatism of the realpolitik and offers its obedience to whatever instance or caudillo who can assure its survival in the short term.

In accordance with Marx's discovery, the value that acts on the capitalist circulation of social wealth is different from that which is in play in the merely mercantile circulation of the same: in the latter case, it is no more than a third person in the exchange of commodities, while in the former it is the "instigating subject" of the same. To be value here is to be capital, because, as Marx writes:

“Really and truly ... value is here the active factor in a process in which, while continually assuming by turns the form of money and the form of commodities, it at the same time changes in magnitude, gives birth to surplus value, so that the original value spontaneously expands. For the movement in which it adds to itself a

surplus value is its own movement, its expansion, its self-expansion. It has acquired the occult quality of being able to add value to itself ... In simple circulation, the value of commodities acquires nothing more than the independent form of money as confronting their use-values; but now ... in the circulation of capital, this same value suddenly presents itself as substance endowed with an independent motion of its own, a substance of which commodities and money are themselves merely forms. Nay more. Instead of representing relations of commodities, it enters, so to say, into a private relation to itself..." (5)

Installed in the sphere of mercantile circulation, the Value of capitalist merchandise has not only directly usurped (übergrifen) from the human community the location in which it takes decisions concerning the correspondence between its system of consumer demand and its system of production supply but has indirectly usurped the fundamental political location in which it decides upon its own identity, that is the particular form of its sociality or the concrete figure of the social interrelationships prevailing in it.

The deferral of autarky or the "alienation" of the political faculty of the social subject, which is the essence of the "phenomenon of reification", has been seldom radically denounced by Marxist revolutionary policy. And anyway, the act of denouncing has had practically zero effect on the everyday praxis of this policy. The "alienation theory" has not served Marxists as a guide because their concept of revolution has remained bounded to the politician myth of revolution, which reduces the autarky of the social subject to the mere sovereignty of the "political society" and its state. Although the Marxist tradition has developed a number of essential elements, a theory of revolution based on the Marxian concept of alienation is still missing.

The alienation theory as a political theory should be based on the recognition of one thing: the usurpation of social sovereignty by the "republic of the merchandise" and its capitalist "dictatorship" cannot be thought of as the consequence of an act of expropriation on a given date of an object or a quality belonging to a subject, and thus as a state of paralysis or annulment of the political faculty of society (so long as the messianic hour of the revolution does not chime). This usurpation is a permanent event of capitalist society; it is a constant process in which the mystification of political will can only take place parasitically and at the same time, as this will is being formed. Capital is an entity which is in itself alien to the particular sphere of political concerns; far from exercising its political "management" as something imposed on an established political world by an economic exterior, it relies on the construction of a political

interiority itself, on the installation of a peculiar sphere of political life indispensable to society: precisely that of party politics to win the right to govern public affairs within the national democratic state.

The vitality of modern political culture is based on the ongoing conflict between the pulsations that restore and reconstitute the "natural" political faculty of the social subject and the dispositions that the reproduction of capital has seized for the organization of social life.

Although there are differences between the two, the question of autarky and the question of democracy are inseparable. In a revolutionary sense, the former attempts to focus its debate on the possibilities society has of freeing the political activities of the human individuals, starting with society's ability to reconquer its sovereignty or political faculty, which is infested by the destructive (anti-social, anti-"natural") functioning of the accumulation of capital. In a reformist sense, the latter attempts, on the contrary, to focus its debate within the terms of the "really existing" sovereignty on what possibilities the democratic game of the modern state has to increase popular participation so as to nullify the negative effects of economic structural inequality on social life. Nevertheless the arguments produced by the revolutionary and the reformist lines of mutual attack coincide on one point: the idea that the "mode of production" cannot be replaced if society does not become democratic at the same time and the idea that democracy cannot be perfected if the "mode of production" is not radically transformed at the same time.

If the political theory based on the concept of reification accepts that political action is possible within reification, that even though society is deprived of its possible sovereignty, it is not politically immobilized or paralyzed or condemned to await the messianic hour when its political liberty will be returned to it, then the problem is one of establishing the "parapraxis" (fehlleistung) of the mystified politics by fulfilling the imperative of mercantile society of devising a real political scenario and an appropriate democratic game for the transmutation of its civil interests into a political will. Only on this basis will it be able to judge the mode in which and the extent to which the deep vitality of the democratic game can be lead to the point in which revolution may be an actual issue.

Thesis 10

Modern Violence: Corporeality as Workability

Peace, the exclusion of violence conquered by capitalist modernity for quotidian coexistence, is not a fact that relies, as happens in other civilizational orders, on the administration of violence but on its mystification.

Social life has always needed to produce and reproduce within its framework at least a simulacrum of peace, a "limited but permanent cease-fire", a modicum of social harmony, if it is to persist in its form, to be organic or civilized and in a position to assert itself when threatened by instability, fragmentation or savagery --characteristics of sociality "in fusion" (revolution) or falling apart (catastrophe). It is impossible to maintain internal peace in a society that has been constructed on the historical conditions of scarcity. Scarcity must be internalized and functionalized in the reproduction of society, and the only way to do it is by means of systematic injustice in the distribution of wealth. In these circumstances, violence becomes the necessary mode of conduct of the most privileged members of society towards the least harmed. Therefore, the pacified zone (the simulacrum of a generalized internal peace) can only exist when --besides the mechanisms of repression-- there is some pacific dissuasion device, which induces a reaction of self-blockade on the part of the exploited of the violent reaction that is been provoked by exploitation and injustice. Thanks to this, the exploiters' violence is not only tolerated but is accepted by the exploited. The consistency and function of this device are precisely what distinguish the simulacrum of social peace in capitalist modernity from other similar simulacra from former times (or still to be discovered).

Marx states: "On the basis of the wages system even the unpaid labor seems to be paid labor. With the slave, on the contrary, even that part of his labor which is paid appears to be unpaid" (6).

This statement implies another: on the contrary to pre-modern times, when even harmonic interpersonal relationships were under the sign of violence, in modern times even violent interpersonal relationships are under the sign of harmony.

The basic requirement for modern civilized life and its book of rules is that individuals, as workers, should accept, "willingly and not by force", a situation in which their own social ("economic") inferiority is systematically regenerated. This act of acceptance is essential because, paradoxically, it is only in this situation that the social ("political") equality of these individuals may be guaranteed. This situation socializes working individuals in so far as they are private owners impose a "twofaced" identity upon them: on the one hand, as "citizens" of the historical enterprise known as the national State

--as members of a community to which they belong on an equal basis-- and, on the other, as members of the "bourgeoisie" in a shared economic life --as partners in an enterprise that accumulates capital to which they are affiliated as inferior members. It is the desire for equality as a citizen, as somebody who exists in the human universe --and who partakes of the protection offered by the national community, which is, in principle, peaceful and civilized-- that makes the individual worker sacrifice his power of assertion in the distribution of social wealth and his capacity to enjoy it on equal terms. And it is precisely the contract of sale of the working force as a commodity --a paradigmatic act whose sense and meaning is repeated in every corner of the great edifice of modern intersubjectivity-- that is the mechanism by which the individual worker "is simultaneously saved and condemned". By acting as vendor of working force and buyer of means of subsistence, the worker is socialized as a private owner, that is, as an equal with other "citizens", even though this condition condemns him at the same time to an inferior position as part of the "bourgeoisie", to subordination to those non-working individuals who own more than their mere work force. The worker never loses his status as a private owner, even if he has no property, inasmuch as he is in possession of his body, that is to say, he holds the right to hire it out. When he performs as a worker, the modern citizen introduces into history a new kind of relationship between the human person and his natural base, between "spirit" and "matter". As a worker he is not his body but he owns his body, and this body enables him to maintain this human status precisely in so far as it is the object of his violence.

The ancient slave could say: "In truth I am a slave, but I am and I exist in fact as if I were not". The violence implicit in his situation was only concealed or dilated since his will to do as he wanted was always on the verge of being violated: he might be sold, he might be abused in body or soul. His relationship of reciprocal dependence with his master often made him a *servo padrone*; the partial respect his master might show towards him was a kind of payment for his global disrespect towards him (which became almost forgivable), a mask for the profound violence the slave was a victim of. In contrast, the modern "slave" says: "In truth I am free, but I am or I exist in fact as if I were not". The violence implicit in his situation is erased: his will to do, as he wants cannot be violated, but his freedom to exercise it fully (to chose not to sell himself as a piece of work force, for example) is always postponed. Here the "master", capital, is, in principle, impersonal --it does not react to use-value nor to the "natural form" of life-- and in this respect it does not depend on the "slave" nor does it need to understand him;

it may pursue its "whim" (self-valorization) without having to make amends to anything or explain anything to anybody.

One thing is to interiorize and assimilate exterior violence, to accept and administrate the fact of inequality as a violence on the part of the dominator, and to praise it as a necessary defense mechanism when "what is ours" is threatened by "what is alien"; to excuse and justify it as an unavoidable weapon against nature's aggressiveness or God's reticence to act as a mediator between the Community and the Other. It is quite another thing to de-ny the exploiter's violence and to blame mystify and confuse it with a raw presence of an exterior hostility. To de-ny it is to say that it is not necessary within the established social world and to explain its existence as a result of secondary stumbles in the march of progress and the conquest of "the Other", of speed problems in the expansion of productive forces or in the elimination of pre-modern or semi-modern social forms.

Lacking a proper name and a social location in modern everyday life, the violence of capitalist "production relationships" expands its action as much to everyday life as to the political activity that creates its institutions. Overlooked as a human action and not recognized as a real instrument in interpersonal relationships, violence in the form of salary exploitation appears as a kind of punishment the body of the worker has to endure because of his own shortcomings: his lack of technical qualifications or his cultural atavism. It is a punishment that reduces itself to fine particles, finding its home, like parasite, in the most inoffensive modes of behavior of everyday life, twisting them from within, introducing in them perverse effects of estrangement.

The grounds of modernity include the possibility that the humanity of the human person may be liberated and alleviated, that it may be rescued from the ancient mode of acquiring concretion, which binds and limits it owing to the identification of his body with a given social function (productive, parental, etc.). This possibility that the human person may explore his sovereignty over his natural body, which is the "objective promise" of modernity, is precisely that which is betrayed and caricatured in capitalist modernity when the humanity of the person, violently mutilated, is defined in terms of the identification of the human body with its workability. The modern worker, "free on two ways", has sovereignty over his body, but the sovereignty he holds has already been programmed on the basis of his mutilated humanity to be exercised as the repression of his own animal corporeality. Since the body is the set of modes that the human

individual has of existing concretely in the world, it is converted into the animal instrument of one unique and peculiar way of existing in it, which is the appropriation of the body directed towards reproducing it as a means of a productive activity that has no beginning and no end. This helplessly defective set of faculties and productive skills that is the body of the modern individual is rewarded time and again with a great amount of enjoyment but at once punished as the corresponding pleasure is neutralized. The mechanism that seals this interweaving of reward and punishment is that which artificially and painfully dissects and separates the first dimension of corporal enjoyment --its active openness to the world-- converting it into expenditure on a renewable resource during the "working time", from the second dimension of corporal enjoyment --its passive openness to the world-- which is reduced to mere restoring the worker during his "hours of rest and leisure".

Furthermore, the elimination of all trace of human character from the violence in capitalist relationships of coexistence appears to be the reason for the ethical vacuum in political activity. Never as in the modern epoch have the manipulators of "popular will" --those who put into practice the virtually "final solutions" to social, cultural, ethnic and ecological "questions", among others-- been able to perform their functions with such affective detachment and efficiency: they operate as mere administrators of an "imperative" of astral aspirations (the *vorsehung*) which is unaffected by any criterion used to assess human behavior.

Thesis 11

Writing and the Discourse of Modernity

The capitalist re-centering of the reproduction process of social existence regarding the final goal of the valorization of value has a decisive effect on the occasion modernity provides for liberating the symbolic dimension of this existence --man's activity as a producer of linguistic and practical meanings.

The communicative dimension --the group of semiotic systems organized around language-- was undoubtedly the most directly affected aspect of social existence at the end of the Middle Ages in the West on account of the impact caused by the "change of yardstick" used to measure the reproductive process of social wealth, from its "qualitative leap" to a European scale. The process of the production/consumption (encoding/decoding) of practical meaning, which had operated in accordance with a restrictive and conservative standardization ("normation") of the code of

communication throughout the long history of scarcity --making of every project of social life a mere prolongation of the strategy of survival-- eventually found the means to explore zones of that code that had always been closed to it. The taboos concerning numerous ways of granting form to products/commodities (or goods produced) thus began to be lifted. The structure of the instrumental field could finally begin to rebuild itself historically on a larger scale and with unknown qualities. Similarly, the different natural languages, which were also normed by restrictive rules owing to oppressive conventions of their respective mythical structures, embarked upon their process of radical reconstitution, of self-construction as "modern natural languages", upon "growing aware" that the renewed creativity in everyday speech was intensifying and diversifying their capacity of putting-in-code the Other.

Human activity as a reality in which every act is an act of communication is a logo centric reality: linguistic communication is thus given the function of coordinating and representing all other semiotic attempts in the same direction for the purpose of constructing a common ground of meaning for them all. Such a centralizing effort also affects writing practice.

Besides being logo centric, social communication has had to be logocratic; in this respect, it has had to submit its production of meaning to the meaning that originates in purely linguistic communication; furthermore, it has had to defend in its practice the norms that give a singular identity to a civilization, a task that language accomplishes by reducing and confining its mythopoeia function to the hermeneutic cult of a sacred text and its dogmatic corpus. Far from being an overstatement of logo centrism, logocracy --imposed by the need to base politics on religion-- displays its impoverishment and unilaterality. In fact, logocracy represses logo centrism; by favoring only one of the multiple possibilities of discourse (further obstructed by the hieratic process so essential to it), it entails the subordination of all them under the mythic-religious discourse.

Just as modernity primordially freed the constraints on practical and linguistic codes and on instrumental uses of speech, so it did on logo centrism. In the first place, modernity provided logo centrism with the opportunity to eliminate the oppression produced by the absolute power of language from the production/consumption of meaning and, in the second place, it released it from the constraints of self-censure which were formerly imposed by the cultivation of time-honored myths.

However, the liberation of the use of instrumental means, that is, of the ability to invent unheard-of forms for useful products, was only a halfhearted affair, which was controlled and supervised. Not all forms of creativity that are acclaimed by human beings from a social-natural perspective can be so acclaimed by capital from the perspective of the valorization of value. The code for the construction (production/consumption) of practical meanings might gain power --become more dynamic, broaden and diversify itself-- but only by means of a corrective, of a "sub-encoding structure" which would give all meanings the stamp of capitalist meaning. The "natural" semiotic interiorization of the ancient strategy of survival would be replaced by a new interiorization, which might follow another ways but would also tend towards repression: the interiorization of a strategy for the accumulation of capital.

A similar thing took place in the life of discourse. Once the archaic barriers (religious and numinous) of mythical structure, which by standardizing each language gave it its identity, had been destroyed, others were erected in their place. By taking as its starting point a bourgeois epic and mythopoeia styled along capitalist lines, the mythical structure of the modern languages could also reinstate its authority of censorship. The morality of productivistic self-sacrifice --the "corpse of God"-- required for redemption, which made the common entrepreneur the heroic subject of business and adventure and endowed his undertakings with the hierarchy of an activity of metaphysical reach, became the only prism by means of which it would be possible to accede to a sense of the real.

The sphere of discourse, unknown in its traditional logocracy, in its monopoly of access to reality and the truth, and freed from service to the untouchable myth (the Scriptures) of a despotic re-binding (re-ligare) community, was, nevertheless, condemned to a new logocratic refunctionalization. According to this, the predominant moment in the "metabolism between Man and Nature" (now characterized by the capitalist productivism issuing from the former and by the infinitely passive availability of the latter) was located in the cognitive appropriation of the referent, that is, in the activity of "techno-mercantile reason". Recomposed to this effect on the basis of its technical and scientific register, language became the privileged and exclusive site of this logos producer of knowledge; hence, it became, once again but in a different fashion, the site of the truth of all other communication possible.

However, the price language paid for its regained authority over practical semiotics was a process of "deformation", a referential reduction of its communicative functions, an

obsessive fixation with an appropriative exploration of context. The language of capitalist modernity has been adapted simply to privilege only one of its numerous faculties --to unite, express and persuade, play and question--: the faculty of converting the referent into pure (and purified) information.

This modern reconstruction of logocracy has taken place alongside a radical process of the refunctionalization of writing, its principal instrument. From the Scriptures, which have effectively and protectively petrified discourse in so far as the truth it reveals, writing has been converted into the vehicle for an inescapable intervention of instrumental logos in every possible use of language and in every possible linguistic manifestation in other ways of the production/consumption of meaning. When writing was secularized and its techniques perfected, the scope of discourse reached beyond all known bounds. As an independent version of the speech act, written speech is a specialized extension of speech, a mode of realizing it that sacrifices some characteristics of speech in order to enhance others. The enviable and unparalleled communicative conclusiveness of the speech act, which enables it to be ephemeral, pays dearly in the eyes of written speech: it should be elaborated as an incomplete, confused and relatively unproductive act. The speech act is only comfortable when depending on other ways of human body's semiotics (gestures, musicality, etc.), although it produces gaps in its own performance; its resourcefulness in simultaneously transmitting parallel messages makes uncertain its progression and, in continual play with the multiple communicative functions (from the coarsest, the phatic function, to the purest, the poetic function), it becomes unrepeatable.

Written speech arises from the need to compensate for these limitations, even though it pays the price of a loss in communicative force. "Fascinated" by the conclusive, a temporal and efficient spirit of written speech --by its linguistic self-sufficiency, its unifunctional focus and its unilinearity--, certain areas of verbal speech regard it as a promised land.

It is not, however, the unilateral superiority of written speech that enables it to break away from verbal speech and to submit it to its own conventions. (One has to remember that modern natural languages were created from a mode of speech that had subjected the satisfaction of its global needs of communication to the needs of its written version.) The written speech of a modern language --the norms of which are anchored in the referential communicative function, given that its goal is to get information-- offers an unsurpassable model for the rational and productivistic ordering of human activity. The

instrumental field of work and enjoyment --which is the closest objective form of presence of the human body and the multi-dimensional concretion of its being in the world--, abandon, as does written speech, all the modes of its functioning, which are not perceived as rational in the sense of exclusively instrumental efficiency. By taking this technical structure, consciously or unconsciously, as its guide, the process of production and consumption of things ratifies and substantiates the hegemonic position of writing within speech and within modern semiotics in general. The pragmatically technified praxis awakens in writing an overwhelming "will of power". It thus extends the reach of the new logocracy: to signify, "to say something to somebody about something with a given intention and in a certain manner", ought to consist, primarily and fundamentally, of turning the communicative act into "an instrument of cognitive appropriation" of this "something", of "the real". All the rest is secondary.

Thesis 12

Pre-modernity, Semi-modernity and Post-modernity.

Post-modernity is the characteristic of certain phenomena of a general order which appear with necessity and as a permanent feature on the border line between established modernity and its negative double (*doppelgänger*). (It is not merely the recent trait peculiar to a certain affluent group that needs a new ennui --this time on account of the monotony of modernity-- to lend a transcendent, and thus aristocratic, touch to its image reflected in the mirror.) Post-modernity is one of the three principal patterns on the bordering zone in which the validity or adaptability of "really existing" modernity shows signs of exhaustion.

Modernity is a mode of civilizational totalization. As such, it possesses differing degrees of dominance over social life in historical and geographical terms. Wherever its dominance is vulnerable, hybrid phenomena appear in which other principles of totalization fight for the "matter" that is being shaped by it. Post-modern phenomena emerge in the border zone, which looks to a possible future. Pre-modern phenomena appear in the zone that looks to the remaining past. Semi-modern phenomena arise in the zone that opens/closes the door to those strange worlds still to be conquered.

The dynamics of the grounds of modernity constantly generate new constellations of possibilities for human life, which challenge capitalist modernity's ability to synthesize "from the future". Wherever capitalist modernity momentarily or permanently proves that it is not equal to this challenge, because it would be putting itself at risk, wherever,

that is, its attempt to expand itself remains as an attempt to go beyond its boundaries but without re-constructing itself, the new possibilities, which cannot be constituted autonomously, become deformations of "really existing" modernity. In this sense, the centennial phenomena of modern economic politics would be a paradigm in that it is engaged in the task of accounting for the real need for a democratic plan concerning the production and consumption of goods, using the inadequate resource of partially sacrificing its liberal economic structure and its cosmopolitan vocation and of interfering, in a somewhat authoritarian and protectionist manner (paternalistic on some occasions and totalitarian on others) with the "state" in the "economy".

Another challenge to which capitalist modernity finds difficult to be equal is that created by certain realities from its own past, whether these figures are prior to modernity or come from the pre-Christian history of the West. Although uprooted from the context of the totalization of the society of the past, which was granted political autonomy and historical vitality, a number of civilizational elements from the past (objects, modes of conduct, values) have persisted in the world constructed by dominant modernity; they may be re-functionalized by modernity, but so insufficiently that they can still maintain its effectiveness. They are, to a greater or lesser degree, indispensable to modernity in that it has shown its inability to provide more suitable substitutes, but they remain "foreign bodies", which, though placed within a logic compatible with that of the present day, are now out-of-date and are thus reproduced as pre-modern phenomena.

Unlike these, the semi-modern phenomena are elements (fragments, ruins) of civilizations or non-western constructions of social worlds, which claim their right to exist in a world of European modernity despite the fact that the technological grounds on which they are based succumb to the intergrating effects of modern civilization. The vitality they have and reproduce --although they are integrated in exteriority and used without respect for the principles of their own design-- is the most convincing proof of the Eurocentric limitation that affects the project of dominant modernity. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the fundamental dynamics of modernity, which tends to question every traditional particularism, the capitalist solution seeks refuge within the tested margins of the "civilizational choice" taken by Western Europe.

As reactions on the part of capitalist modernity against its own limitations, these three phenomena may overlap and be combined. They are thus the components in the picture of great historical cataclysms, as have been the two cases of "socialist" failure in the

twentieth century: the “socialist nationalist” counter-revolution in Germany and the “socialist collectivist” pseudo-revolution in Russia.

There is a crisis in "really existing" modernity whenever the absolutism of its form is on the verge of overpowering the substance that permits it to be so; whenever, within its mediation of the two basic emancipatory promises inherent to the grounds of modernity, the first element, the opening of new economic possibilities of going beyond the "history of scarcity" comes in contradiction with the second, that is with the repression of any emancipatory trend of social life, of any behavior that is not functional to capitalism: its commitment to the past, its openness to the future, its fascination by "the Other".

Thesis 13

Endogenous Modernization and Adopted Modernization

Every form of adopted or exogenous modernization proceeds from a process of conquest and thus implies, to a certain degree, imposing the cultural identity of a society and the particular goals of the historical enterprise in which it is engaged on the identity and historical goals of another.

Whereas endogenous modernization is affirmed as the consolidation and involution of the respective identity through every act of resistance on the part of the society in which it occurs, exogenous modernization always entails, in by no means a moderate manner, a disruption of social identity, a severing or duplicating effect. The modernity that arrives is marked by the identity of its place of origin; its transplantation is an episode in the assertion of this mark, a sign of its ability to conquer --coerce and capture-- the prevalent mark in autochthonous productive forces. For this reason, a society that is modernized from outside is caught in the trap in which simply by defending its identity it divides it: the most gullible half applies itself to the task of integrating "the profitable part" of the foreign identity into its own, while the mistrustful half adopts the contrary line of approach: that of conquering the foreign identity from within while being absorbed by it.

Whenever exogenous modernization occurs in western societies, this process of conquest presents a relatively low degree of conflict of interests, especially if these are European societies and have, moreover, been transformed by a capitalist modernity prior to that which tends to predominate historically. Older forms of modernity (the Mediterranean, for example) manage to negotiate their constructive subordination to the

new modernity (North European) in exchange for toleration of their own "logic", that is, for their mark of origin and for the cultivation of their social identity.

Modernization by conquest becomes conflictive and virulent when it takes place in the situation of decidedly non-western societies. Two particular technological options of two "civilizational choices" and two historicities, which are not only divergent but openly opposed and incompatible, ideally should, nevertheless, "encounter" each other, combine, and engage in a process of hybridization (*mestizaje*). For this reason, any attempt on the part of western civilizational forms, which are inherent to capitalist modernity, to assimilate oriental civilizational forms has necessarily to be peripheral or superficial, that is to say, potentially destructive for the oriental forms as decisive principles of the configuration of the world of life. Any assimilation of these forms as such might disrupt the European character of its "westernness" or submit it to a radical transformation --as was, at an early stage, the case of the Mediterranean (Spanish) forms of modernity, which were forced, in the seventeenth century, to integrate the remnants of the pre-Columbian civilizations, on the one hand, and of the African civilizations, on the other.

In the present-day processes of exogenous modernization, if European modernity is to be accepted, it has to rarify its concrete historical identity as much as possible by schematizing and erasing its internal conflicts and blurring its outlines until it becomes unrecognizable; only by confining it to the most productivistic traits of its capitalist project can it hope to find or improvise a identifying anchorage different from that which has served it in its place of origin. Similarly, the acceptance of capitalist modernity in non-western societies that ought to adopt it depends on their ability to regress culturally, on the extent to which they are prepared (without fear of absurdity or ridicule) to translate the ingrained conflicts of their identity or civilizational strategy, elaborated and perfected culturally throughout the centuries, into primitive terms.

It would appear that the site of confrontation, of reciprocal negation, that is the common denominator of capitalist exigency --the voracity of production/consumption-- is the only site where the West can encounter the rest of the world. As far as one can see, however respectful of the past and of the non-European world an alternative modernity might be, it could not depend on them to provide a reliable antidote against capitalism.

Mercantile socialization is a basic element of the grounds of modernity; capitalist-mercantile socialization is only a basic element of the peculiar modernity that prevails until today.

The expansion of the religious or socializing function of Christian identity depended during the Middle Ages on its ability to convince human beings of its existence as ecclesia or a real assembly or community, as "the body of God". But the place where believers could find the empirical proof of this was not the church but the market, in which efficiency in the mercantile circulation of goods produced permitted social individuals, working with the common denominator of "private owners", to be recognized and accepted as real people. There was no doubt about the existence of God because arbitrary violence (the Devil) --that arose in post-communitary social life-- was defeated by the peaceful order of those who toiled with the sweat of their brow to produce their own food. Only the presence of an invisible Judge could explain the reward those received who worked hardest and the punishment those received who prayed but not sweated.

However, just as it might be true to say that mercantile strategy was useful by the consolidation of Christianity, so it is true to say that it eventually overthrew Christianity. From being the "language of things", which ratified the re-binding (re-ligare) truth of mythical Christian discourse in practical deeds, the mechanism of the mercantile metamorphosis of objective wealth itself (which takes it from its state as product to its state as good, neutralizing it first as money) gradually but firmly and irrevocably became the only real re-socializing entity. The market occupied the place of myth; Christianity abandoned its presence as ecclesia and was converted into a system of moral imperatives that idealized, as a mere apologetic echo, the submission of human life to the "magic" action of the "world of commodities" acting as a re-socializing fetish.

But what mercantile strategy did to religion, capitalist strategy did to it. In order to assert (expand and consolidate) itself against the prepotency of public and private monopoly --first principally of the land and then of technology--, mercantile strategy had to invade a zone, where, in order to gain access, it would have to change its sign and become a negation of what it sought to assert. It had to merchandize the sphere which, by its essence, can not be merchandized; to treat as an object (convert in bestand) what can only be a subject; to treat as a mere mercantile value what can only be the source of value: the work force of human individuals. It had to cease being an

instrument of the universalization of private property and had to put itself at the service of a re-newed restriction of the free market; it had to betray its mercantile essence and put itself into operation as a mere appearance of capitalist appropriation of wealth. The mercantile strategy could only overthrow the resistance of monopoly by unleashing the forces of the capitalist golem. It strived to be served by it, but, in the end, it became its servant.

The distinction between mercantile and capitalist strategies seems irrelevant and abstruse nowadays or simply a thing of the past; the mercantile system seems to have adapted its essence to this monstrous configuration of itself in the mercantile capitalist system. However, this is not so.

There is a radical difference between capitalist profits in the sphere of mercantile circulation and those in that of mercantile-capitalist circulation. The former is the outcome of a will to exchange between independent economic worlds, which imposes itself despite the factual incommensurability of their respective mercantile values, thanks to the invention of fleeting charts of comparison and equivalence. The latter is the outcome of a compulsion to exchange which exists between the two dimensions of the reproduction of social wealth, despite the essential incommensurability of the respective goods produced: the work force and the rest of the commodities. What is, in the former case, the result of "inequality", which spontaneously favors exterior commerce, is, in the latter, the consequence of the artificial establishment of this "inequality" in "inner commerce". Contingent and sporadic in the former case, capitalist profits becomes obligatory and permanent in the latter.

From a purely mercantile perspective, the entire modern market, as a concrete reality, appears as a monstrous, parasitic development of the mercantile reality itself. Capitalism would be only a distorted and arbitrary front behind which the indeterminate victory of the pure process of circulation by equivalence is repeated in a classical and necessary manner. The concrete "impurities" (pre-modern, semi-modern and post-modern) which turn it into a intervened process --whether spontaneously by the "blind" power of capitalist monopoly or artificially by the "visionary" imposition of distributive planning-- could not destroy mercantile life in so far as it is the structure that sustains them.

The possibility of completely letting go of the "invisible hand" of the market --which "with many small egoisms constructs one great altruism"-- of leaving it up to Fortune to direct the mechanism of circulation by equivalence, lays in the very grounds of

modernity. However its realization in the capitalist modernity, that seemed to protect it against the traditional parasites (lords and states) have led to a new impasse. What predominated during the capitalist inauguration of the age of abundance was the spontaneous imposition of a mercantile conduct that disowned itself and sought "to abolish Fortune" by means of a treacherous, always repeated, coup de dèc that assures capital against any risk in the investment game.

Thesis 15

"Real Socialism" and Capitalist Modernity

Regarded as an economic totality or "economy-world", the "socialist world" is the historical outcome of a frustrated attempt of the Russian economic empire to rebuild itself; an attempt to take distance from the economic totality of "capitalist world" and to compete with him on the basis of a state centered correction of the capitalist functioning of economic life. Since there was never any real prospect of its being the alternative to the "capitalist world" and to capitalist civilization; since --as the history of the Bolshevik revolution so dramatically clear demonstrated-- it could not develop a technical structure able to sustain a revolutionary reconstruction of such a magnitude, the "socialist world" could not go beyond the stage of being a deformed recomposition, a faulty repetition of the same social order and the same civilization; a recomposition which, while isolating it from the "capitalist world", made it dependent upon it. Paradoxically, what distinguishes soviet "communism" and its modernity is not that there is any partial or total eradication of capitalism but that its Europeaness is peripheral and its "state capitalism" is dependent.

A collectivization of capitalist property over the means of production --like the transformation that took place in this "communism"-- that goes not further than a concentration of its capitalist property by the state obviously does not eliminate the capitalist nature of this form of property. For this reason, if one compares the two imperial totalities of the "socialist" economy-world (Russia, the Soviet Union and the "central-eastern" European block) and the "capitalist" economy-world (the central triangle, but also its "Third World" periphery), the undeniable differences between the two concerning the conditions of "civil society" --repressed but respected in the former, free but double-crossed in the latter-- are no more important than their undeniable similarities concerning the most elementary structure and meaning of modernization in their everyday lives. The subordination of the "logic" of concrete production of social

wealth to the “logic” of capitalist accumulation; the definition of the humanity of human life centered in its existence as work force, to name only these two essential features of capitalist modernity, are also two basic characteristics of “socialist” modernity, which claims to be an alternative to it.

The elemental project of capitalist modernity has not disappeared in the modernity of "real socialism"; it has simply been weaker and has had less opportunity to disguise its contradictions.

1985

(1) I would like to thank Nattie Golubov for her help with part of this translation.

(2) Why then the string,

 If the air is so simple?

 And why the chain, if iron

 Exists of its own?

(3) Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, London, Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1928, p. 713

(4) Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, p. 502: “macht seine eigene Entwicklung zu einer Naturnotwendigkeit”.

(5) Karl Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 139-140.

(6) Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit: Addressed to Working Men*, London, Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1899, p.63