

Against labour, against capital

Robert Kurz

*In this 2006 interview, Robert Kurz offers a succinct definition the “radical critique of value”, and discusses the nature of the commodity and markets, the “ontologization of value”, abstract labor, the unsavory side of Enlightenment ideology, “the liberation of the abstract individual” as a result of the current global crisis, the “double Marx”, fetishism, Anselm Jappe’s book *The Adventures of the Commodity*, the continuing relevance of Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle, and other topics, in an interview for a Brazilian online publication. (Published at libcom.org)*

In English : Krisis, [Manifesto against labour](#) (1999) ; Anselm Jappe, *GuyDebord* (University of California Press, 1999) ; Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown (edited by.), [Marxism and the critique of Value](#) (MCM’, Chicago, 2014) ; Anselm Jappe, [“Toward a History of Critique of Value”](#) (*Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, n°25, 2014) ; Robert Kurz, [“Grey is the golden tree of life, green is theory”](#) (Libcom, 2014) ; Anselm Jappe with Alastair Hemmens, [“We Gotta Get Out of This Place”](#) (*The Brooklyn Rail*, 2015) ; **Robert Kurz, *The Substance of Capital* (Chronos Publications, 2016)** ; Anselm Jappe, *The Writing on the Wall. On the Decomposition of Capitalism and Its Critics* (Zero Book, 2017).

An Interview with Robert Kurz – Sonia Montaña

1. What do you mean by “radical critique of value”?

As you know, the traditional Marxists of the workers movement only accused capitalism of depriving the wage workers of the famous surplus-value, which the owners of the means of production appropriate as if it were a “power of disposition”. This is a truncated critique of capitalism, which neglects and ontologizes the social form of value. Thus, according to this way of thinking, post-capitalist socialist society must continue to be based on the value form and to function as a “planned” system of commodity production. As a concept of social transformation, this concept is a failure. The problem can be explained historically: the workers movement and state socialism were merely part of the history of the “mode of production based on value” (Marx). What it amounted to was a “struggle for recognition” within the framework of that form of society, which was not questioned. But surplus-value can only be eliminated together with value, not by means of planning and the “fair distribution” of value. This is not a merely theoretical question. In the recent crisis of the unified system on a planetary level, value itself is being devalorized by the third industrial revolution, insofar as “abstract labor” is melting away as its substance. In these conditions, we have to criticize and abolish value as a basic form and therefore also commodity production as such.

2. What characterizes a market society? What is a “commodity”? What specific relations are established by commodities ?

The term, market society, only refers to buying and selling. A market society cannot even exist. Capitalism is essentially a mode of production and not a simple mode of circulation. That is why the expression, “market economy”, leads people astray. Marx had already demonstrated that the reduction of the modern world to the circulation of commodities constitutes the El Dorado of capitalist ideology, because in the market only “free” and “equal” owners of commodities and money are present. The commodity, however, must first be the object of production, before it can become the object of circulation. The market is not the place where “free” subjects meet one another, but essentially the sphere of the “realization” of surplus-value, and therefore of the reconversion of the commodity form into the money form. This is the movement of value, of the “automatic subject” (Marx), from one state of congelment to another. The commodity does not subsist on its own, but is a stage of valorization. And the subjects of the market are not the agents of this movement. Generalized production of commodities, however, is only possible by way of the transformation of human labor power into a sui generis commodity, and a generalized form of value is only possible by way of surplus-value as an irrational end-in-itself. It is precisely this point that shows that the “negative socialization” of capital does not consist in the subjective “appropriation” of surplus-value by the legal owners, but in the form of value itself, which only becomes generalized by way of the systematic postulate of surplus-value. Behind the formal “freedom” of circulation, we find the (originally violent) subjugation of human beings by “abstract labor”. This is the genuine basic relation of the system of commodity production. And this relation is brought to an absurd pitch in the third industrial revolution. And it is not just a problem of unemployment and mass poverty, but also a problem of capital itself, which is beginning to lose the “substance” of its valorization, as a result of its own dynamic.

3. How does “radical critique” address the fundamental categories of capitalism, such as value, labor, commodity, money, State, politics, democracy and nation ?

The critique of capitalism, until now, was not a categorical critique, that is, the fundamental categories of the modern system of commodity production were viewed positively, rather than critically. The ontologization of value led to the ontologization of its categorical forms of appearance and representation. The State, politics, democracy and the nation were not deciphered as the “other side” of negative socialization by value and as integral parts of that value, but were misunderstood as categories by means of which the evils of capitalism could be overcome. But homo politicus is merely the alter ego of homo oeconomicus; along with value, its political-democratic sphere must also be eliminated. A categorical critique, however, goes further, because capitalism is not merely a mode of production and a state system of regulation (which, together with value, is presently coming up against its limits in globalization), but also a mode of reproduction and of life. Thus, modern gender relations play a decisive role, for all the moments of social reproduction that are not absorbed by “abstract labor”, value and the State or politics, are dissociated from official social status and delegated to women (housework, childcare, etc., but also—and this applies to all sectors—the socio-psychiatric functions of “empathy” and the female-associated “realm of love”, without which social existence is not possible in a context of universal competition). The relation of value and “abstract labor” is therefore at the same time a relation of dissociation of the sexes, which is just as essential and categorical as value itself. This relation of dissociation between the sexes is also decaying under the current crisis conditions, as is demonstrated by the “blurring of borders between the sexes” and the ongoing processes of the barbarization of everyday life.

The goal of the radical critique of value is therefore a society beyond “abstract labor”, value, the market, the State, and the dissociation between the sexes. Naturally, the achievement of this goal poses enormous problems, because human beings have been “socialized within” these categories, and have internalized them, for centuries. That is why there is no single road that leads directly out of the existing order; instead, a process of historical mediation is required. Mediation means that it is necessary to find a new relation between immanent struggles for money, state services, etc., and social resistance against capitalist crisis management, on the one hand, and the goals of the categorical critique, on the other. It involves, in a way, the old problem of the relation between “journey and destination”, but under new conditions and with an entirely different, and more profound, modus of critique.

Here, the categorical critique also includes the perception that it is no longer a matter of simple opposition to an enemy conceived in a merely external manner (“capital”), but rather that all of us, even with regard to our most private existence, are “capital”. This means that even within the social movements, there will be contradictions that have to be resolved, not ignored. Thus, the dissociation between the sexes still exists in the social movements, too, and it must be criticized there; for example, when the onus of the crisis is, “naturally”, placed upon women and the conquests of the feminist movement are rolled back. Ideologies such as nationalism, racism and anti-semitism also permeate social contradictions and are widespread among the “humble and downtrodden” of this world, either openly or in a disguised form. The necessary critique of ideology must not retreat behind the abstract predominance of the “social question”; just as the contrasting material social situations of various groups (migrants, for example, on the one hand, and native workers who live under precarious conditions, on the other) must not be subsumed under the generality of this “social question”. To the contrary, tensions and differences must be critically endured and digested. A social movement in common does not arise as an abstract postulate, but only as a result of this confrontation.

The theory of the radical critique of value and of dissociation can offer, in the process of mediation, a new historical goal, and analyze the terrain of the global crisis, in order, by way of the two distinct movements, social struggles, and tensions and differences, not to lose sight of the negative totality and to provide some orientation for the “great whirlwind”. It cannot, however, furnish convenient “instructions for use” as a plan of action; such an idea would be “false immediacy” (Adorno). What constitutes the weakness of today’s social movements is precisely the fact that they are still completely attached to anachronistic concepts and are mired in “false immediacy”.

4. Is this radical critique also a critique of the real metaphysics of modernity, of the foundations of Enlightenment ideology, of everyday life? If so, in what way ?

Commodity-producing modernity itself developed the idea that was supposed to have eliminated metaphysics. Value itself, however, constitutes a “real metaphysics”, an “empty form” that cannot be apprehended by the senses, which is transcendent in relation to social needs and qualitative contents. The superficial universalism of this form is at the same time structurally male (androcentric), and the modern subject is, originally and by virtue of his essence, a western, white, male subject. Value and its subject did not arise from an exclusively “objective” historical process, but rather, at the same time, by way of ideological affirmation and the conditioning of social consciousness. The basis of all modern theories and ideologies is the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which, as the “mother of all affirmative

reflection” (even in traditional Marxism), substantially contributed to the formation of the global system of commodity production. Thus, the radical critique of value and of dissociation must also include a radical critique of Enlightenment thinking. This is not, however, a conservative anti-Enlightenment and irrational anti-modernity type of critique, but a critique of the roots of modern thought, which are entrenched in the real metaphysics of value.

The Enlightenment tradition contributed in various ways to help instill human beings with the logic of value and of dissociation. Thus, it not only helped to spread an external “discipline” for the demands of “abstract labor”, but also laid the foundations of a program for the internal “self-discipline” of individuals, which is still in effect today. At the same time, it produced that ideological fixation on circulation (in the market and among its subjects), which even today still informs a false understanding of “freedom” and “equality”, even on the left. Finally, it provided ideological support for the androcentric character of modern universalism; its philosophy is structurally “male” and conceals the dissociated moments both conceptually and theoretically. In the works of Foucault one can find abundant material and critical reflections on “disciplinary machines” that were based Enlightenment concepts. Foucault, however, stopped halfway in his critique of the Enlightenment. In his legitimate revulsion towards the mechanistic party Marxism of the sixties and seventies, he mistakenly perceived any questioning of the social form as “economism”. Thus, his critique of Enlightenment values only leads to a positive concept of the mechanisms of a contingent “production of truth”, which no longer has any relation to the logic of value and of dissociation between the sexes as a historical social formation.

Naturally, the critique of value is also a critique of the kind of everyday life that value creates. The social “real abstraction” affected, during the process of capitalist modernization, all the spheres of life, architecture, esthetics and culture and even eating habits (agrobusiness, fast food) and personal relations. The most recent global crisis is accelerating the liberation of the “abstract individual”, in whom, however, the dissociation between the sexes still prevails. Value and the universal competition associated with it penetrate even the most intimate aspects of personal life and destroy all human bonds. People are becoming more vulnerable and self-oriented; the narcissistic and hysterical social and personal character has spread throughout all social situations. The hystericization of the society of crisis does not respect the boundaries of politics, science, or groups devoted to critical theory, or even love and friendship. Personal vituperation and avoidance are everywhere replacing substantive discussions. Feelings of competition, fear of human bonds and of “commitment”, an abstract psychodynamic that is always ready for conflict in every sense of the word and anxious for personal “validation”, threaten to submerge all content and even radical critique itself. Theoretical contents themselves, and even feelings towards other people, are no more than interchangeable poker chips in the “struggle for positions”. Individuals are becoming as unpredictable as the climate and the financial markets. This socio-psychological tendency is socially conditioned and can only be done away with in the process of the social revolution, not by pedagogy, or by means of any coercive social controls, in the furnace of neo-utopian projects of the “reform of life”. It is nonetheless necessary to discover how to effectively resist this tendency of the internal crisis of the subject within social movements and groups devoted to theoretical reflection, in order to maintain the capacity for action in theoretical critique and in the practice of relations in general.

5. What should we take from Marx, and why is it necessary to go beyond him ?

Marx's analysis and explanation of the immanent laws of motion of value, of the "automatic subject" of the modern world, still constitute the unsurpassed basis and starting point for our critique. In the present world crisis, Marx is more relevant now than ever before. What we need to take from him, however, are precisely those aspects of his theory that were neglected, bowdlerized or silenced by the traditional Marxism of the workers movement. Naturally, such treatment was aimed especially at the critique of value, which is effectively present in Marx's thought, and also at the aspect of his theory of crisis that is related to the critique of value, which went much deeper than the later Marxist debates on the concept of crisis. Even in Marx's own works, however, we can also find points of intersection with the traditional interpretations. That is why the new value critique speaks of the "double Marx". Marx was, on the one hand, a radical critic of the modern system of commodity production and, on the other hand, he was a positive theoretician of modernization, which he understood as "necessary progress". That is why we must not set ourselves the task, in the neo-orthodox style, of discovering the "real Marx".

Like any theory, the Marxian theory, too, has its "temporal nucleus" (Adorno). Marx's reflections were often far ahead of his time, yet they were nonetheless simultaneously caught in that same time. This captivity can be identified mainly with respect to four points, which constitute an internal nexus. First of all, Marx supported the Enlightenment paradigm of the philosophy of history and its metaphysics of "progress", although, on the other hand, he had criticized the Enlightenment ideology of the "free" and "equal" subjects of circulation, as well as the illusion, associated with the latter ideology, of politics (this was for the most part expressed by the young Marx). Secondly, Marx criticized, unlike most Marxists, "abstract labor", but remained ambiguous with regard to this critique and moreover persisted in using a universalist, transhistorical, general and abstract concept of "labor"; in this sense, as well, he displays the still unsurpassed legacy of the Enlightenment and of Protestantism. Thirdly, it was precisely the "positive" Marx, the theoretician of modernization, who had a mistaken understanding of the "working class", and of the "class struggle" as a lever of social liberation, conceiving them in the framework of an "ontology of labor", whereas, in reality, they were merely the self-legitimization of the bearers of "abstract labor" within value, whose "struggle for recognition", as juridical and civil subjects in capitalism, was a movement for integration into the "iron cage" (Max Weber) of modernity, which excludes any categorical critique. Marx, as the "double Marx", sought to associate the "class struggle" with the categorical critique, with a basis in universal ontologized "labor"; but this could not succeed, as was practically demonstrated by the historical evolution of social-democracy and the workers movement. And finally, our fourth point, as a "man of the 19th century" Marx could not perceive the dissociation between the sexes as an essential moment of negative socialization by way of value; with regard to this point, as well, his theory did not advance beyond the androcentric universalism of the Enlightenment. It is therefore necessary to go beyond Marx, not in order to reject his critical theory, but in order to transform it and to develop a new theory, which goes further and measures up to the challenge of the current planetary crisis.

6. In what sense can it be said that we are prisoners of fetishism ?

The concept of fetishism is an indispensable part of the aspects of the Marxian theory that are assumed and further developed by the radical critique of value. It is not by chance that traditional Marxism doesn't quite know what to do with the Marxian concept of fetishism, because this concept refers to the tacit "a priori" of social relations, beyond the reach of any

positivist reflection, the transcendent character of the “automatic subject”, which permeates all social classes and filters in advance everything they say and do. The fetishistic character of social reproduction means that human beings do not consciously direct their own social relations and do not use their own resources and abilities by means of free agreement; to the contrary, they are subjected to a means which they have themselves produced, but which has become autonomous in relation to them. This means, which in the modern world is known as value and its outer form, money, command social reproduction as a blind self-regulation (“second nature”). The modern understanding of reason that was produced by the Enlightenment tradition is totally in thrall to this self-regulation of the means-fetish; it contains only a historically specific reason, tailored for the commodity form and destructive in its very essence. The modern irrationalism defended by the currents of bourgeois counter-Enlightenment merely constitutes the other side of the coin of this reason and is itself derived from the legacy of the Enlightenment. A categorical critique such as the critique of modern fetishism is a critique of the internal nexus between modern reason and modern irrationalism; it must lead to “another reason”, and therefore develop a “counter-reason”, against the fetishistically-constituted reason of the system of commodity production.

We are only prisoners of fetishism insofar as, under the dominant conditions, the reproduction of our entire practical life is at the mercy of the “irrational reason” of the fetish of the commodity and of capital. The blind robot of the “automatic subject” forces us to “work” for our own destruction. The rationality of the entrepreneurial economy undermines the foundations of human life by permanently “externalizing” costs, thus destroying the biosphere at an accelerating rate. In accordance with the standards of this same reason, human and material resources are de-activated, regardless of material and social needs, once they cease to satisfy the fetishist criterion of the profitability of capital. Although there is more than enough human ability, means of production and knowledge, they cannot be utilized freely, but are subject to the restrictions of the fetishist social form. The production of “abstract wealth” (Marx) leads to mass impoverishment. This process, however, is not an external clash of interests, but even the poor also work for their own impoverishment, by articulating their social and material needs exclusively in the social form of value, and therefore in the form of fetishism. This contradiction, which has already undergone successive periods of exacerbation in the periodic crises of capitalism and was later relatively overshadowed by new outbursts of capital accumulation, is acquiring an existential dimension in the global crisis of the third industrial revolution, because there will no longer be any real sustainable accumulation of capital. Either we break with the fetishism of the social form or the life of society will be “de-activated” in an increasingly more catastrophic manner.

7. In your opinion, what is essentially new about Anselm Jappe’s book, *The Adventures of the Commodity : For a New Critique of Value*, recently published in Portuguese?

In his book, Anselm Jappe systematically summarizes for the first time the results of the radical critique of value up to the end of the 1990s, which had been disseminated in many separate publications; and he produces a his own synthesis that strictly conforms to the process according to which the critique of value was originally elaborated, on the basis of the Marxian tradition. One could therefore say that it is an “introduction to the critique of value for Marxists”, which makes it easier for all those people who are still trapped in the traditional paradigm of the critique of capitalism to obtain a better understanding of the relevance of the arguments of the critique of value and to embrace them. For this process does not take place just once, then coming to an end, but is repeated in the cases of many individuals interested in

the radical critique of society, and in always new ways, in new constellations, carrying on their own critique of value and of dissociation and always developing them. In the meantime, this systematic exposition is also useful for the younger generations, which do not have any knowledge of the Marxism of the 1970s. His book provides an opportunity for these younger people to read Marx's theory, but now through the new lenses of value critique and, so to speak, to bypass the traditional understanding that has now become obsolete. Thus, the concepts of value as "real abstraction", of fetishism and of "abstract wealth", the critique of the false universalism of "labor", the new theory of crisis elaborated by value critique and the "real metaphysics" of the modern system of commodity production are set forth and explained with the greatest clarity. The theory of the dissociation of the sexes, the critique of the western, white, male subject and the critique of the legacy of the Enlightenment are only briefly touched upon in the book; but these aspects are presented and explained in greater detail in his forthcoming book, provisionally entitled, *The Adventures of the Subject*.

The last chapter of Anselm Jappe's book is also very important, in which he confronts "false friends". In this chapter, Jappe criticizes the truncated critique of existing capitalism that is characteristic of the antiglobalization movement and its "social forums", which reduces the relation of capital to its current "neoliberal" phenomenology and which ultimately only seeks to return to Keynesian forms of regulation (or to traditional socialist ideas). He also addresses the neo-utopian concepts of "moneyless exchange" that are being disseminated (partly with reference to the works of Marcel Mauss on the "gift" in pre-modern societies) via ideas about "free cooperatives" and in the "free software" movement. These tendencies once again have an erroneous understanding of capitalism, which they perceive as a simple mode of circulation or "market economy"; they conceive inadequate ideas of a kind of circulation without the commodity form, which could even be appropriated as instruments for crisis management, along the lines of the encouragement of the spread of economic subsistence in the form of niches of the "informal economy". Finally, Jappe also criticizes the post-modernist ideology of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, which has become quite popular over the last few years and which, with its concepts of "immaterial labor" and "multitude", falls far short of any kind of categorical critique and appears in post-modern garb as "the last masquerade of traditional Marxism" (Jappe). These critiques are necessary because, just as the radical critique of value and of dissociation do not arise in the ivory tower of theory, but, in a manner of speaking, in the "hand to hand" theoretical struggle for a new understanding of the critique, so, too, must it constantly find its self-verification and always once again engage in this "hand to hand" struggle; the process of the formation of theory can only advance in confrontation (as well as polemic).

8. The book calls upon its readers to "search the chamber in which the secrets upon which all of humanity depends are stored". What secrets are these and, finally, what chamber is he talking about ?

Anselm Jappe chose the excellent metaphor of the "forbidden chamber" of the world of the fairy tales where the "secrets" that must never be disclosed are stored. This chamber is none other than the place where critical reflection occurs, which is found outside of the everyday thinking and action in the prefabricated world of capitalism. And the secrets consist in the constitution of this world, in the "tacit a priori" of relations, and thus in the presuppositions, which over the course of a historical process were internalized as if they were "obvious" and seem to be given by nature, even though they have been created by human beings themselves—human beings who are, in a way, however, blind and without consciousness

“about” this creation. It thus refers, in other words, to that fetishism that determines thought and action and which no longer appears as the result of a development which can also be once again supplanted, but rather as an unsurpassable ontology. So that one could say that traditional social critique has not yet even dared to penetrate the “forbidden chamber” and meddle with these secrets.

This is also the case with respect to the theory of history, because pre-modern (agrarian) societies did not have, any more than modern societies, a conscious and direct relation with themselves, with their own possibilities and resources. They, too, were ruled by fetishistically constituted mediations, only by other mediations and in a different way than modern societies. The role played by value in modern societies was played by God in pre-modern societies; the role of the “objectivized” and metaphysically charged mediation of the commodity and of money in modern societies was performed in pre-modern societies by persons who were metaphysically invested with the responsibility of serving as God’s representatives. Value is not the same as God, and capitalism is not the continuation of religion by other means, as Walter Benjamin claims, for example, but is instead a totally new historical constitution. An abyss separates these two worlds, subsequent to a profound historical rupture. Nonetheless, radical critique successfully perceives a negative moment of continuity, that is, unconsciousness with relation to a “*tacit a priori*” (which is quite different in each case) of social life and of reproduction, which, in a general way, we generally designate as a fetishistic relation. The radical critique of value therefore speaks of a “history of fetishistic relations”.

Naturally, this concept of the theory of history is itself inevitably a modern concept, because we cannot jump outside of our place in history. This is, however, a necessary aporia to which all thinking about the theory of history is necessarily subject. However, unlike the classical modern philosophy of history after Hegel, of which Marxist “historical materialism” still forms a part, the theory of history of value critique and of dissociation is no longer a positive theory within the framework of a metaphysics of an ontologically anchored “progress”, which unilaterally accentuates the moment “of universal history” of continuity, but a negative theory, which makes possible a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. We inexorably view history with modern eyes, but with the eyes of the critique of this history rather than with the eyes of affirmation. This critique extends beyond the traditional Marxist theory of history, which merely presupposes the existence of a positive continuum of “labor” and “progress” and, as such, only serves as the continuation of the bourgeois philosophy of history. The negative concept of a “history of fetishistic relations” implies, to the contrary, an “ontological break” with all previous history, because with the elimination of the modern relation of value and dissociation, fetishism in general is also eliminated. Only thus is it possible to prove the accuracy of the Marxian claim that the end of capitalism is simultaneously the “end of pre-history”.

The theory of history of the critique of value and dissociation thus contains a “critical excess” that produces the necessary impulse for the break with the false ontology of modernity. Although the bourgeois theory of history, which is extended into post-modernity, has in the meantime itself embraced the critique of the continuum of a positive “universal history of progress”, it has only done so within a process of theoretical decay, in which discontinuity is accentuated in a way that is just as unilateral and non-dialectical as the way that the previous theory of history accentuated continuity. The “metaphysics of progress” was merely replaced by a “metaphysics of contingency” (and of mere discontinuity), and was turned inside-out, as it were, which, of course, is effectively the result of the modern world-view and is completely

affirmative. This affirmation, however, takes place under the point of view of the crisis, and is no longer carried out under the point of view of the historical rise of modernity. What lies behind this apparent “metaphysics of contingency” is a rigid and ahistorical ontology, for example, the ontology of “power” in the thinking of Foucault, taken from the “German ideology” of Nietzsche and Heidegger. It therefore does not attain the “critical excess” in the sense of an “ontological break”, and thus also loses sight in the final analysis of the specific fetishistic relation of the history of modernity.

9. Are Guy Debord’s ideas about the society of the spectacle still relevant today ?

They are more relevant than ever. Debord, in his time, was mainly thinking about the “spectacular” medium of television, and witnessed a development of modern fetishism that came very close to attaining a “degree of accumulation of capital” in which it “was transformed into an image” and entirely replaced the “sensory world” with a “selection of images”. Naturally, he was not referring exclusively to the mere technology of the communications media, but to a new quality of “real domination of capital” (Marx), a domination not only of the processes of production, but of the totality of life and the totality of experience, a fetishization of all relations, even the most intimate aspects of private life, to which we have already alluded above, as the subordination of all the spheres of life to the “real abstraction” of value and as the liberation of the “abstract individual”. This also corresponds with a “mediatization of everyday life” in which the technical communications media do not become autonomous per se, but in their inscribed character as commodities and, in a way, duplicate the fetishism of the form of the commodity. This development is dramatically intensified with the new communications technologies of the third industrial revolution. Now it is no longer a matter of merely a crude technical development, but rather of a general “virtualization” of the world of life, as may be confirmed by the ubiquitous mobile phones, SMS, etc., and especially by the Internet. And this virtualization goes hand in hand with the virtuality of the new financial capitalism, which has decoupled from the real accumulation of capital, as a phenomenon of crisis. In the “virtualism” of post-modern thought, this entire process was ideologized and, in part, even erroneously understood as emancipation. It is, however, nothing but an expression of the crisis of the subject, in which the immanent limits of the modern system of commodity production are reproduced as phenomena of consciousness. One may, for example, observe how, in communications by way of email in groups of all kinds, conflicts are “cooked up” in an unbelievably rapid and thoughtless way, and with ever increasing frequency, because conversations are merely simulated and there are not even any real interlocutors with whom people could engage. All conversations are now merely soliloquies. Individualization, mediatization and virtualization in the fetishized form of value thus constitute a negative unity, in which the spread of the systems of communication contribute to the self-referential isolation of individuals.

10. Is there any connection between the society of the spectacle and the adventures of the commodity?

The society of the spectacle “is” the adventure of the commodity in the stage of its historical obsolescence. In Debord, who may be considered to be the precursor of the radical critique of value, one does not yet find, when all is said and done, a new concept of crisis, which only appears with the outbreak of the third industrial revolution. He misunderstood mediatization and virtualization as that “new degree of accumulation”, whereas in actuality they go hand in hand with the real “desubstantialization” and devalorization of value. This is associated with

the crisis of the relation of dissociation between the sexes and of the traditional “class struggle”; concerning these things, as well, Debord had scarcely any idea. What constitutes the paradoxical dialectic of the society of value and of dissociation that is transmitted in the spectacle is the fact that the consummation and liberation of abstract individuality are identical with the deflation of value and the absolute limit of accumulation. Individuals are all the more firmly shackled as subjects of value as they cease to be capable of being subjects of “labor”. This leads to an enormous degree of tension, which is discharged in destructive forms of behavior that increasingly poison everyday life. The radical critique of value and dissociation between the sexes must learn to address this tension to avoid being shipwrecked in the maelstrom of the spectacular crisis.

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