

# Between sharing and antagonism

## The invention of communism in the early Marx

**Antonia Birnbaum**

### London calling

Why talk about communism today?\* A first point everybody will be agreed upon: the spectre of communism is not haunting Europe, nor for that matter any other region of the world. The only place where ‘communism’ is a positive name for anything is China, where it designates the ruling party of one of the most powerful capitalist nations of the world. In the immediate conjuncture, there are no real forces or conflicts that directly call for a reappraisal of communism. However, certain questions linked to its reappraisal do appear to be at stake in conflicts that are taking place.

For example, is it not the case that violence of the oppressed is a strategic political means? Is it not time to question its permanent disqualification, which goes hand in hand with the aggravated monopoly of state violence? This is a question raised by Slavoj Žižek in a recent article in *Le Monde diplomatique*. How can social conflicts once again become conflicts outside of the realm of law? This question was raised by Jacques Rancière a few months ago. Speaking on the radio about the USA, he argued that conflicts take legal form so rapidly there that they are immediately deactivated as politics. We need to situate politics back within social struggle. I would like to add another question: how do we deal with the prescribed logic of compromise, of ruse, of deferral, that implicates us in the very capitalist dismantling and competition we strive to deflect? In the 2009 university strike in France, the students of Paris 8 wrote in a leaflet: ‘We don’t want a supposedly reformed future, we want a real present, now.’ To that I can only add: me too.

Such remarks indicate little more than the possibility of looking at the present through the prism of some experiences of the 1970s, now that the capitalist ‘bubbles’ of the 1980s and 1990s have burst. However, such reappraisal has to deal both with the economic and conjunctural aftermath of those bubbles and, more generally, with the aporia of an extensive, global capitalism. This aporia is both trivial – everybody remarks upon it – and self-defeating. Let me put it in the most general terms. The more certain diagnostic moments of Marx’s theory of the contradictions of capital continue to be operative, the less politically actual they seem to become. For Marx, the privilege of antagonism hinged upon the supposedly necessary unfolding of capitalism towards its violent end. We, on the contrary, are caught in a strange limbo of contingent temporality. Knowing that capitalism is neither an inevitable horizon nor a historical stage that will necessarily end, we are constantly thrown back on the lack of an alternative power. Even in the struggles that do take place, there is an enormous, almost insurmountable difficulty in subjectively stepping out of the capitalist framework. So, another symptom: the more frenetically we search for the place-holders of communist aspirations, the more these aspirations seem to fall back into formal, purely potential, even speculative modes.

If we turn to the communist tradition, the idea of communism immediately evokes two moments: the moment of class struggle and the moment of a common human capacity shared by all. They answer two different questions. Are we set upon defeating capitalism on the basis of a movement actualizing its contradictions,

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preferably in a revolution? (This means that we involve our lives in the struggle against servitude imposed by the market; struggle focuses on opposition.) And are we set upon living that part of our lives which is irreducible to this servitude, on sharing without delay what we have in common, here and now, disregarding the 'icy waters of selfish calculation'? This pertains to the common, associative moment of communism. It focuses on sharing.

Generally, the associative moment is linked to the utopians – Saint-Simon, Fourier, Cabet – whilst the antagonistic moment is linked to Marx. Rancière, for example, takes up this classical divide in his text 'Communists without Communism', presented at the 2009 London conference on the idea of communism. I propose to work on a different assumption. Might it not be relevant for us today to reinstate the *mixed* logic of Marx's inaugural encounter with communism? Wasn't Marx simultaneously confronted with both the violence and the sharing inherent to communist aspirations? And might not this simultaneity at least give us a 'lame foot to walk on'? (The expression comes from Bataille.) Of course, this inaugural encounter with communism took place in a hopeful period of struggle, before the defeats of 1848, whereas our situation seems devoid of any forceful perspective. Nevertheless, reaching back to this moment may be relevant in so far as it refers to an unconsolidated period of Marx's thought. By asking how Marx brings different elements into play, we may be able to apprehend some possibilities in our own situation.

My questions, then, are the following. How does the dominant feature in Marx's communism – class antagonism – connect with the associative, fraternal moment? How does this connection come about within his texts? In what ways does this connection take effect, both in the element of struggle and in that of sharing? I will restrict my inquiry by concentrating on the brief sequence that encompasses the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, the articles in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* and *Vorwärts*.

With regard to the coherence of Marx's theory, the predominant angle is dialectical class contradiction. Not only does Marx apprehend it as 'the father of all things' but he also posits the principled struggle against capital as its basis of intelligibility. Hence his concept of critique, in which the analysis of capitalist conditions is intrinsically linked to their destruction and transformation. Such is the formula of praxis. Nevertheless, in his own thinking the difference between contradiction and sharing does not simply amount to an opposition. Likewise, there is a

gap between destruction and transformation. The difference is asymmetrical, the gap is to be bridged. In Marx's early texts, the predominance of the theory of contradiction is in contact with a different experience, with a wider, irregular field of praxis. If one looks closely, it seems that moments of shared enthusiasm and moments of anger communicate, without their being a clear determination of their relation. Marx presents them together: he presents us with the enigma of their assembly.

## Other people's discoveries

Let us take a short view forward: in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written in 1848, Marx conceives the communist idea in the perspective of class contradiction. This idea, along with the party, reveals itself through the struggle of the working class, as the most advanced point of thinking in this struggle, which grasps its meaning and its goal. The contradictions between the bourgeois class and the proletariat will lead to a final conflict, a surpassing of capitalist antagonism and the disappearance of all classes in a harmonious organization of society. The communist project points to a final term, an end of all alienation and all domination, humanity delivered of its contradictions and its divisions, without being able to determine this finality in its real content. In this intrigue, the initiative seems mostly to fall on the side of the bourgeoisie, which, in the opening pages, ceaselessly produces the upheaval, the destruction, the constant revolutionizing of all means of production, pushing the proletariat further and further into the realm of negation: the proletariat is nothing; it is this nothing contracted into the fury of negation.

Now let us now take a step back again. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, personal notes written before the popular uprisings of 1848, the approach to communism is different. Marx qualifies man as a being whose very existence is immediately a common existence, or a generic existence. He dissociates this social being from any historical teleology that orders it to a project. What is the 'social being' – not the communist project – that aspires to such a project? How do we ascertain such a being?

For all that he links the communist aspiration to a generic being, Marx never loses sight of workers' struggles. In his reflections in the *Manuscripts*, in the articles of the *Jahrbücher*, Marx pays attention to that dimension of social being that reveals itself in the procedures of struggle, without being part of any programmatic intention. This communist aspiration of our lives – such is Marx's intuition – points to a

quasi-synonymy of individual being and social being. What is at stake is to grasp the unstable agitation of this common being, both through the figure of class struggle and through the figure of a common being.

To grasp this articulation, we will turn to the peopling of the young Marx's texts, rather than to his rearrangement of anthropology. Let us put aside the function of knowledge (it has already been analysed to death) and focus on the function of speech in this text. To reach it, the first task is to break with the chronological dimension. Linear readings (Althusser notably) have repeatedly stated that the young Marx does not yet have at his disposal the theoretical elements he will develop after 1848, mainly surplus value. These elements are necessary; they alone will allow him to assess the operations of capitalism, to produce its critical science. On this view, the *Manuscripts* are considered as operating by default, on a 'humanist' basis borrowed from Feuerbach.

Can the 1844 *Manuscripts* be thus described as a simple prelude for a science yet to come, a science in which the vital activity of humans and the mutilation of salaried work can at last become coherent in one and the same contradiction? This way of dealing with the young Marx ignores Marx's own remark that it is not enough that thought compels its accomplishment; reality itself must compel thought. Following this remark, theoretical discontinuity is not a 'lack of science'; it addresses the reality that jostles theory, especially the reality of conflicts. The statements, aspirations, experiences of proletarian struggle are immediately present in Marx's text; they impel the cutting edge of his effort.

The first statement of the *Manuscripts* is a conclusion: 'Wages are determined by the fierce struggle between capitalist and worker. The capitalist inevitably wins.'<sup>1</sup> Defeat is assumed before the book has even started, before any arguments can be deployed. Defeat is the loathsome fate that befalls workers in capitalist work production. Defeat is also the cynicism of the discourse of political economy that justifies such relations.<sup>2</sup>

Against this defeat, Marx's unfinished text appears as a strange *Kampfschrift* (polemical writing). He starts the conflict anew, at exactly the point where he signals defeat. Interspersing his remarks between long quotations from Ricardo and Smith, Marx dwells on what counters their discourses, breaks up their framework. Inquiries, contacts with workers, writings of French and German socialists (the League of the Just, Weitling), Schultz Bodmer's analysis of the ideological content of national economy, natural and positive

critique of humanity by Feuerbach. The articulation of a communist trait, of the violent struggles in which the workers are implicated, of the polemic against national economy, all this is amenable to the mix of theory with 'other people's discoveries',<sup>3</sup> with the multiple gaps of perception expressed in the voices of these and others.

'Other people's discoveries': the expression is first used by Marx in the opening pages, which also refer to Feuerbach. Unless we want to consider these 'exterior discoveries' simply as illustrations of a theoretical construction, it is clear that the counter-position non-alienated activity and the mutilation of wage-labour is not merely an 'error' of the young Marx (waiting to be corrected by the Marx of *Capital*), but the specific energy, the springing point, of his remarks. These encounters and events, the relation between concurring and heterogeneous elements, are the very impulse of Marx's undertaking. In his effort to counter national economy and its fiction of cupidity as the originary state of humanity, the philosopher proposes to come back to 'the fact of national economy' taken in all its complexity: he works simultaneously with the facts and the refusal of these facts. This complexity produces a 'giddiness of causality' that the philosopher first discovers not in the 'social being' conceptualized by Feuerbach, not in the pages of a book, but in a workers' meeting.

When communist workers gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda etc. But at the same time they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means has become an end. This practical development can be most strikingly observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers. ... Company, association, conversation which in turn has society as its goal is enough for them. The brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their work-worn figures.<sup>4</sup>

On the occasion of the organization of struggle, the goal ceases to be the end, the means cease being subordinated to such an end. The goal is transferred into propaganda, doctrine, association, to the point of becoming one with them. This strange oneness does not produce an identity between the worker's life and a life of combat; quite the contrary, it introduces a double take. A new relation appears *between* workers that begins during their struggle *against* the capitalists. Thus what Marx calls the brotherhood dimension first appears in a struggle, but is not identical with struggle. These workers are not fated either to be 'nothing' or to fight. Their existence is lodged in an unalienable excess that coincides neither with their condition of

exploitation nor with the imperatives of struggle. In this excess, they have already emancipated themselves from servility and hate for the master, two characteristics of the same world. This excess communicates the transformation of gestures and thoughts that give body to an emancipated life.

The French workers discover in their political meetings and associations the first gestures of a life irreducible to the waged conditions of reproduction. Marx discovers in the humanity of these French workers a gap between the communication through which they break with isolation and the struggle they conduct against capitalist alienation. The communist feature does not derive from oppression; it indicates what remains in excess, an indetermination that is out of reach of negation. If we look at the quotation, this feature of brotherhood is not, at least not directly, a feature of combat, of 'class hate' as it will later be called, nor even of a discipline, but the real anticipation of a different manner of association, a manner that already, here and now, outreaches the oppression of work and competition. But if this is so, how does class struggle relate to this excess? Is there even any relation, in the sense of a necessary relation?

### Struggle and the excess

Let us recall what Marx underlines: in the logic opposing workers and capitalists, the starting point is the negation or, worse, the defeat of the worker, his intolerable oppression.

But the worker has the misfortune of being a living capital, and hence a capital with needs, which forfeits its interest and hence its existence each moment it is not working. As capital, the value of the worker rises or falls in accordance with supply and demand, and even in a physical sense, his [or her] existence, life was and is treated as a supply of commodity like any other commodity.<sup>5</sup>

The worker's own body is private property – live capital – that must be sold at all costs to feed it, clothe it, rest it, in brief to reproduce it. In so far as man is labour-power, man is opposed to its own humanity, wears out life to reproduce it. In return, struggle is the negation of this suffered exploitation.

In the scene of struggle describing the French workers, humanity is won back through a struggle and a transformation. These moments intersect without coinciding. They are distinct, but not separate. Their heterogeneity is literally packed together in a single knot. Compelled by a strong case of revolt, Marx risks thinking out this knot. He does so in regard to the insurrection of the Silesian weavers in 1844.

Unfolding his position in the debates raging around this event, Marx relays the communist aspiration of the workers, against those who only see in it an uprising without conscience. His analysis appears in *Vorwärts* under the title 'Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and social reform. By a Prussian"'. It is a virulent, caustic, wildly audacious reply to the anonymous article by Arnold Ruge. Marx was furious about this anonymity, fearing the article might be attributed to him.

The revolt is restricted, but explosive. The weavers are in a state of extreme poverty, on the edge of famine. Whilst their relations of production are still often those of the workshop, whilst they finance their own looms, they are already subjected to an extensive capitalist market. The introduction of machines, the competition with England, the illegal agreements between bosses to lower salaries aggravate the situation: working fifteen to sixteen hours a day, the weavers cannot live. The revolt starts on 3 June 1844 after the arrest of a weaver of Peterwaldsau, an arrest requested by the *Gebrüder Zwanziger*. Faced with contempt – they are told to eat grass when they say they have no means to eat – the weavers destroy their houses, their workshops, their titles: they attack the bank, so to speak. They hold bosses prisoner, destroy their workshops. Prussia sends in the army: resisting in face of the order to fire, the insurgents meet the army with stones and axes, obliging them to flee, even though they experience severe losses. They are repressed in a bloodbath the next day. In their song 'Spottlied Blutgericht' they propose to transform all men into poor men.

Hunger revolt, revolt against the machine, against certain loathsome bosses, for a 'just salary': such arguments were trotted out to play down the uprising. Marx, on the contrary, stresses the communist energy of the event.

We have seen: a social revolution possesses a *total* point of view because – even if it is confined to only one factory district – it represents a protest by man against a dehumanized life, because it proceeds from the point of view of the *particular, real individual*, because the *community* against whose separation from himself the individual is reacting, is the true community of man, human nature. In contrast the *political soul* of revolution consists in the tendency of the classes with no political power to put an end to their *isolation from the state* and power.<sup>6</sup>

In the situation of heightened European agitation, these remarks are directed against Ruge and his position: that the German poor (the revolting weavers) are only 'poor Germans', captives of their interests, provincial, without any relation to politics. For Marx,

on the contrary, the direct attack of capitalist property – that does not seek a mediation with the power of aristocracy – attests a strong conscience of communism.

Marx's starting point is his confidence in those who enter the struggle. What holds his attention, what is important, is the process of radicalization that unfolds in the revolt. 'Hence, however limited an industrial revolt may be, it contains within itself a *universal* soul: and however universal a political revolt may be, its *colossal* form conceals a *narrow* spirit.'<sup>7</sup> Here Marx is already working out the untimely dialectics of a revolution that he locates within several countries. The German bourgeoisie has not participated in revolutionary freedom; it has known nothing of it but restoration and defeat. The new proletariat knows nothing of an allegiance to the *citoyen*; it starts out where the French and English workers left off, with a social revolution. Marx stresses that, contrary to the revolutionary opposition of the French bourgeoisie to aristocracy and clergy, this workers' revolt is no longer determined by a workers' will putting itself in tow of the proprietors, nor even by a will to appropriate power for their own class. The weavers protest against exploitation in the name of their common humanity. This unprecedented universal feature detaches itself during the revolt.

They start with a refusal of the extreme degradation of their life conditions, of the dispossession of their work tools caused by capital. They go on to designate wage-labour itself as an abomination. All men are poor. Poverty is not the matter of a community of need, but of this: nothing can belong to some more than to others. In this sense, the 'real human community' that

the weavers declare in their revolt ceases being that of a certain category of workers (weavers of linen, of cotton) at the same time that it is already without any link to the perpetuation of their existence as a class opposed to the class of proprietors. Their militancy reclaims a principle of 'any equality whatsoever': they are placeholders of a 'for all' that is not identical with any effective group of workers, nor with any particular propriety of the human.

What Marx deciphers is an agency linked to dazzling speed: as soon as the proletariat appears, there appears also its most extreme interruption, the dissolution of the proletarian condition itself: force of anger – dissociation with power – excess over the logic of need. In the brief, explosive sequence of this struggle, the anger first focused by the enemy, the demands compelled by the needs of reproduction alter themselves, projecting themselves towards their own extremity. The violent energy of class struggle produces an exteriority beyond class opposition. In this sequence, the communist feature of sharing does not present itself as a matter of a structural linkage to class contradiction. It rather presents itself as a case of acceleration; an acceleration gathering momentum in the process of contradiction, but immediately detaching itself from this process.

The '*particular, real individual*' and the real worker are co-originary and co-originally distinct. The excess carries itself beyond the constraint that gives rise to it, becomes consistent in a dimension that Marx will posit as ontological. Heeding the point of intensity of this struggle, Marx rediscovers this dimension in the



proletarian experience. The refusal of the workers to be robbed of their lives crystallizes a refusal upheld in the name of the fact that we are all commonly human. Marx is confronted with an initial generosity, a communist 'trace of immediacy' that relates our very being to a common existence. This tendency compels him to put the negative logic of conflict into parentheses, to set out for a more uncertain region, where the need to survive or to reproduce life ceases to be the given of 'humanity'. Of course, this does not mean that needs are not essential to human life. It means that these needs are not a material necessity, as opposed to the superfluous. Their relation is the unstable hinge of a life for which nothing is reduced to nature. Marx explores the irreducibly common element of this life, an element set outside of alienation and the opposition to alienation. He tries to distinguish between a non-alienated 'vital human activity' and its division with itself, its reduction to waged labour-power. Here, then, Marx borrows from Feuerbach.

### An art of contingent contacts

Contrary to struggles that proceed from their opposition to exploitation, vital praxis precedes out of a strange antecedence. Not being anything given, it is subtracted from alienation. It is not a negation of an oppression, but the affirmation of an untamable part of our common being. In the *Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx does two things. On the one hand, he locates this common being outside of the dialectics of contradiction. On the other hand, community becomes a question of being only in so far as ontology becomes unrecognizable to itself, a praxis. This generic existence is called by Marx an 'objectified being'. 'Objectified being' is opposed to 'spiritual being': human being is a nature, a sensibility in the grasp of the material reality of the world. It belongs immediately to this being that it is in relation to others and to nature. Humans only live by giving expression to this being, by elaborating it, objectifying it (which is different from alienating it). Vital human activity is not a means in view of satisfying needs, it is not ordered by a goal beyond this expression. Far from being instrumental, this activity itself is a vital need.

In this activity, or praxis, gestures of immediate survival are not opposed to what takes form as art or science, since generic being is nothing other than being in nature.<sup>8</sup> Marx stresses that what opposes the function of need and that of superfluity is the wage situation, not the essence of vital activity:

The result is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions – eating,

drinking and procreating, or at most in dwelling and adornment – while in his human functions he is nothing more than an animal.... It is true that eating, drinking and procreating are also genuine human functions. However, when abstracted from other aspects of human activity and turned into final and exclusive ends, they are animal.<sup>9</sup>

In vital activity, the articulation between animality and humanity is not founded on an organic necessity, as a supposedly final point of reality. It pertains to the exteriority of the relations that make for our bodily being: 'The practical creation of an *objective* world, the fashioning of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being, i.e. a being which treats the species as its own essential being or itself a species-being.'<sup>10</sup> Marx stresses the 'disunity' of our life reality: 'the whole of nature is the inorganic body of man.'<sup>11</sup>

So far as it is inorganic, human naturalness has no given form that can simply be fixed in its physical existence. The human body possesses no stable determination, its reality is intrinsically decentred: human life expresses itself and gives itself consistency through conscious transformation of the world and the relation to others. This means that the being of the world and of man are not hostile *a priori*. Their perpetual adjustment is a sign of their common naturalness. Man being seized by the power of praxis in bodily existence, vital human activity is an articulation of senses and thought that all humans partake in. Together, they partake in the non-evident, unpredictable risk of this fashioning. Marx stresses the conscious moment in the fashioning, the objectifying, of our generic being. If, however, we are to account for the displacement of ontology through praxis, then there is no longer any reason per se to privilege this conscious moment.<sup>12</sup> The non-evident aspect of our lives does not only concern its consciousness, it concerns the relation between its bodily and its intellectual moments: they connect in unpredictable ways.

Marx wants to consider our lives outside of alienation, to express an objectifying that no longer pertains to an accomplishment of self through negation, but to a tension between selves, to collective universal being. The difficulty is to conceive of a fashioning of our lives that is heterogeneous to the total dominance of one function by another, that does not reinstate a regular, necessary form. This is what Bataille attempts when he invokes the connections of all elements of our lives through 'chance' and 'play'. Though Marx declines to explore this difficulty, there are a few intuitions in his text. Let us quote another passage from the *Manuscripts*.

All his *human* relations to the world [of the integral man] – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving – in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their *objective* approach or in their *approach to the object* the appropriation of that object. This appropriation of *human* reality, their approach to the object, is the confirmation of human reality. It is human *effectiveness* and human *suffering*, for suffering, humanly conceived, is an enjoyment of the self for man. Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when we directly possess, eat, drink, wear, inhabit it, etc., in short, when we *use* it.... Therefore *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of *all* these senses – the sense of having.<sup>13</sup>

Non-alienated vital activity includes both passivity (or suffering) in the eminent sense – outside of consumption – and activity in the eminent sense, outside of an instrumentalizing of nature.

In this list of our vital activities, Marx's text does not privilege production of nature and self as the essence of the human. It does not privilege any one sense or orientation. It deploys a horizontal, combinatory logic. What is thus heterogeneous to wage-labour is also heterogeneous to the negative – Hegelian – dialectic of labour. Vital human activity runs through indetermination, subsistence, superfluity. Rather than praxis in the limited sense, it is a play of life itself objectified in a play with the world and others. This play is also the moment of its distance. For this vital human activity does not proceed out of antagonism; nor does it derive from the sphere of work; and we can see a more obvious affinity of the activity with literary, artistic, or scientific communities, and the community of love, than with the activity of proletarian struggle.

Once again, the question of the relation between this praxis and class struggle compels us, but this time in the reverse direction, from the generic perspective itself. Let us be clear: the impetus of praxis can occur in any of us, through any human act or passivity. It can occur outside of any scene of struggle. However, this common generosity can only break with the isolation imposed by wage-labour if it does not in turn isolate itself from the struggles against oppression. Its affirmation coincides with the incompleteness by which it maintains itself open to the contradictions of the situation it has ripped itself out of. There can be no completed figure of non-alienated praxis. In short: if the 'for nothing' of being, its unconstrained, impertinent groundlessness, can distend its relation to struggle, it cannot ignore it. Otherwise its freedom

simply becomes a 'spiritual supplement' or a place of evasion, an 'oasis in the desert' that is incapable of making a world. This means that, notwithstanding their affinity, this ontological dimension does not pertain to the community of love, of literature, art or science, any more than it does to that of proletarian struggle. The relation between generosity of being and struggle has no necessary form: both exist only in the contingent forms of their vicinity.

Assuredly, class antagonism for Marx proceeds out of an oppositional, dual logic. In this sense, the 'we' of the proletariat possesses a trait of oneness, that of struggle, but without fixing itself in this trait. For what the proletarians cannot tolerate, what they strive to emancipate themselves from, is precisely the condition of wages. Thus there is a connection between non-alienated praxis and struggle, which operates in various ways – from the closest to the most distant – between class struggle and the dissolution of all classes. The connection between opposition to capital and a generosity outside of general equivalence is displayed in an art of improper, contingent contacts, which borrow from action, possibility, division and play, without ever becoming one with any of these registers.

## A lame walk

In the prism of the connection of sharing and struggle, Marxist communism decentres itself from itself. If we consider the chronology, this decentring is inaugural, whilst its exclusive centring on antagonism is a later development. The decentring envelops both the contradictions of struggle and the free agencies of praxis. An inextricable, highly unstable mix, or, in Bataille's words, a 'lame walk', experimented within the contingencies of its own improvisations. To become what it is – a manner subtracted from oppression – excess must articulate its vicinity to the negation of this oppression. To become what it is – a destruction of capitalist power – opposition must exceed itself towards the possibilities of a generic life. To hold on to the untimeliness that produces the oneness of these two moments: this might give at least an indication for a political praxis.

Of course Marx put the stress on the contradictory, dialectical unfolding of struggle, especially after the workers' defeat in 1848. However, nothing obliges us to do the same, nor for that matter to reduce Marx to his major expression. After all, for Marx himself, this figure hinges on the idea of a necessary destruction of capitalism; its strategies are laid out in regard to a final cut. After the defeat of 'real' or 'historical' communism, it is no longer relevant to refer to such a cut, and strategy no longer has a fixed horizon: it has to

make the path it walks. Reconsidering the 'lame walk' of the mix between antagonism and sharing might be one way of spelling out strategies in which the intuition of a communist future is always itself a present.

## Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Karl Marx Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 282.
2. On this point of defeat and on many others, see the excellent book by Anne-James Chaton, *L'Effacé. Capitalisme et effacement dans les Manuscrits de 44 de Karl Marx*, Éditions Sens & Tonka, Paris, 2005.
3. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 282.
4. Ibid., p. 365.
5. Ibid., p. 335.
6. Karl Marx, 'Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and social reform. By a Prussian"', in *Karl Marx Early Writings*, p. 419.
7. Ibid.
8. What is translated here as 'generic being' (*Gattungswesen*) is translated as 'species-being' by Rodney Livingstone.
9. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 327.
10. Ibid., pp. 328–9.
11. Ibid., p. 328.
12. In a very classical metaphysical gesture, Marx distinguishes our fashioning of our lives from that of animals, who are without conscience.
13. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 351, emphasis added.

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