

## Editorial

In this issue, conceptualized and co-edited jointly, we have gathered contributions in response to a troubled and troubling moment. Under the sign “re-projecting radical futures,” we ask what categories and concepts can orient both an adequate understanding of this moment, in which the crisis of capitalism now imposes itself as an undeniable reality, and an adequate artistic practice in response to it. We began with the shared premise that the logics of capitalist (Western, Northern) modernity have produced a form of global domination that has been extremely effective in pulverizing alternative social forms and models, on both the material and ideological levels. And yet, the persistence and growth of social misery within this global system of exploitation and control indicates that, despite all their promises, the reality of so-called free markets, liberal democracies, and commodified abundance have failed to deliver emancipation or even dignity, let alone to release the radical autonomy of generalized free creation.

While the current crisis suffices to re-establish the relevance and urgency of the critique of capitalism, the problem of how to move beyond capitalist relations – beyond, that is, the current globalized organization of exploitation and control – remains, as a constraining inherited impasse. We wanted to contribute to the critical reflection on contemporary capitalism now underway. But we also wished to repose, perhaps more directly and provocatively than usual, the practical question: what to do? And here, we are sure, the problems involved in developing an adequate cultural and artistic practice can hardly be separated from global questions of social and political form: what, globally and collectively, are our aims, visions, demands and exigencies – and how can we organize them into a renewed collective project?

In this regard, the histories, experiences and inventive reserves of the so-called transitional countries of Eastern Europe are extremely relevant and carry a special authority within reflections about possible future alternatives to capitalism. While we have doubts about the much-used category of “post-socialist” in this context (where, we would ask, have socialism and classless society ever yet been realized?), it is clear that the critical processing of both the old Eastern regimes and the neo-liberal ones that have replaced them must be central to any attempt to renew radical theory and practice today.

Accordingly, we invited our contributors to consider the following set of questions: The problems of social transformation are once again urgent, but organized opposition and resistance to the given order seem to be missing. What to do? What alternative global visions and values can orient social movements and struggles and radical cultural practices in the coming period? What have we learned from the last century and the post-1989 “transitional” period? What strategies are still viable for organizing collective agency for effective social struggle today? Are there any thinkable pathways beyond capitalism, and if there are, what might they be? Is it still possible to organize around renewed or reinvented notions of “socialism” or “communism”? What forms of artistic and cultural practices could contribute to movements and struggles aiming beyond capitalism?

Again, the problems of art – questions about its use-values and critico-emancipatory potentials – for us are fully intelligible only within this more global and radical problematic. And in this moment of crisis and increasing social misery, of wars of enforcement and the politics of fear, and of looming climate change and other ecological calamities, urgency is indeed the word for the force with which this problem is reasserting itself.

Reflection in these directions offers few reassurances. The main conclusions toward which critical thought leads are hardly comforting. Our permanent emergencies are evidently generated by the globally operating logics of capitalist modernity itself, by processes that unfold continuously from antagonistic social relations. If this is so, then the way to a future liberated from destructive and unsustainable logics of exploitation and domination only passes through a successful global struggle against capitalist power and the dominant nation-states that ultimately enforce it. The major problems to be solved, then, pertain to the forms and politics of struggle and are above all strategic. They involve collective decisions about ends and the means required to reach them, about praxis and the probable consequences of actions.

The questions multiply: How can the obvious common ground of shared interest in emancipation from capitalist relations be developed into agreement around a clear alternative social vision to aim for? And given the realities of repressive state terror and all the other constraints of the here and now, how can the coordinated collective agency needed to attain this aim be organized and deployed – without undoing this aim in the process? So far, we know, all organized attempts to supersede capitalism have been defeated at a terrible cost. Despite this we do not share the view held by many, that such a staggeringly immoderate and emphatically humanist goal is, as such, impossible. There are no certainties to justify the conclusion that the more than 6.7 billion exploited, dominated, and oppressed people who reproduce our world every day are by nature or invariable essence incapable of radically changing the social form of their activity in this way.

One concept that is very visible and influential among social movements today is autonomy. From Cornelius Castoriadis and Guy Debord to Antonio Negri and John Holloway, this concept, a legacy of Enlightenment culture with roots in ancient Greek democracy and philosophy, has been developed into a new stream of radical theory. While autonomist theory contains much that stimulates and inspires us, it also contains tendencies that are problematic and contradictory. While this is not the place to elucidate these problems in detail, the operative conceptions of power, organization, and instrumentality in some versions of autonomist theory include antinomies that set up insuperable practical double-binds. Ultimately, these problems point both to the real impasses blocking revolutionary social processes and the challenge of radically and durably democratizing institutions, including state and party forms. They are not likely to be solved except in and by means of renewed social struggle – a renewal which will of course not happen automatically but would have to be organized.

Radical autonomy is undoubtedly a revolutionary category. Possibly, it is the best one we have. Its ideal of self-realization in free socialized creation is substantially the same content that the young Marx elaborated luminously as “true communism”: that real education of our socialized senses and human potentials that releases development in all directions and

produces people who are not painters but “sometimes engage in painting among other activities”. Such a vision would be conditioned on a revolutionary process, but one that so far has not appeared in an adequate form anywhere in history. For, according to this theory, the revolutionary process that resolves the social antagonism and supersedes class relations would be the same one that dissolves the division of labor and makes the state wither away. The political practice that would prove this true has yet to be found. But if it were, the problems of art as a specialized activity would resolve themselves.

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