

# In the Whirlpool of Mercantile Anarchy

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## Introduction

The poetry of all epochs has sung the act that renews and perpetuates the life of the species: when the baby's mouth sucks food from the mother's tit, and we see an example of natural use value, which however the mercantile age also knew how to make this natural connection into an exchange value with the profession of nurse. It is therefore difficult to find an object useful for life that society has not managed to transform into a commodity. Where is the secret, the enigma, the fetish, the mystery of transformation, when it is so evident that a given need, in a given measure, is concretely satisfied by a given good, and the characteristics of the consumed object are easily understood but the effects of its consumption, it is up to revolutionary science to find out.

There are no exchange values for Robinson, it was clear. But the species, as it did not begin with an Adam, does not begin with a Robinson, but with the first groups still predominantly animal in character.

It is therefore an artifice that requires millennia and millennia of development to think of two Robinsons who work different objects, and that when they meet, each needs to use the object that the other set up. A fictitious society of independent producers, reduced to two components: now we know that there has never been a society of only artisans, and not even of exclusively free individual farmers: it would lead us to the original family; and we also know that this leads us to the original *clan* or *tribe*. The real historical series was not: Adam - monogamous family - patriarchal society; but the opposite: original and communist matriarchal group - isolated family - dirty selfish individual of the mercantile time.

Let us take, however, for the sake of clarity, the artificial example: the market of two Robinson artisans, their meeting and the contract: many flint axes against many lambs. Why did they agree on the "price" in this *simple form of equivalence*? If they disagree, will everyone "withdraw from the market"? But what if, as a result of the renunciation, they both died of hunger?

There is an alternative to failing to close the deal: battle. The vigorous shepherd can measure himself with the more agile armed with an ax, one of the two will remain master, for his consumption, of the lambs and the axes, since he does not know what to do with the adversary's spoil. The so clear equivalence for the constructor of theories of the "natural economy" becomes an *addition* for one, and a *subtraction* for the other.

The *secret* of exchange value is here. For the market to exist, a superior force must prevent the contracting parties from replacing the pact with a fight. A society that thrives on commodities must have organized and concentrated *power*. A society that has organized power is divided into classes; one of these holds power for his benefit. It automatically collects the "cost" of such a service on each exchange. The matter has begun to get complicated: Robinson A the farmer, Robinson B the flint cutter, the police officer C who eats and does not work.

The affair is said by Marx to be *fetishistic*, since the privilege of agent C was explained at the outset to the two simpletons as a mandate from the gods, or something like that.

Since then, the mercantile whirlpool has swallowed everything: from two muscular, but foolish Robinsons, to two billion men today, probably less muscular, but just as foolish.

Marx walked, in the famous paragraph of the fetish character, the very long road with strides of a giant. Suddenly he explained how a type of human society without exchange value was the medieval one.

The Italian translations in circulation (ed. *Avanti!*) give a completely mischievous formulation, and it must be reconstituted. It consists of a double *definition* of the economy of feudal times, the basis of a double *distinction* between that and the capitalist economy, of a double *imputation* to the latter of greater deceit and iniquity. One distinction reflects the type of production: personal and non-social extortion of unpaid work - the other of distribution: consumption of products within the limit of closed and autonomous territories instead of the general and international market.

Here is a literal version:

"Personal dependence characterizes the social relations of material production [*of the Middle Ages*] as well as [*characterizes them*] the spheres of life or circles of influence based on it."

We prefer to refer syntactically the *su of it* (auf ihr) not to the feminine *Produktion*, as it would also go, but to the preceding feminine *Abhängigkeit*, that is "addiction".

The German construction, which in the mouth or under the pen of the lavatives becomes a rinsing of endless repetitions, has in Marx an enormous power of synthesis and expression (in the non-German but Jewish Marx! In the *nationless* Marx!). The text provides two compound words of clarity and formidable power to the theme that occupies us: they are *Lebenssphären*, and immediately in the author's square bracket, *Wirkungskreise*, which we have translated as *spheres of life* and *circles of influence*.

In the foreshortening the description of medieval society is complete. We mentioned on another occasion that in that society founded on personal authority the lord was powerful not by reason of the territory but of the number of vassals.

In a certain *circle* or *sphere* a certain number of serfs, to whom the legal norm obviously denies to cross the boundary of the "brand" or "fief", are governed by the same noble small or large landowner, baron or prince, with all power. To the same they owe the *tithe*, the *commanded*, and the *corvée* for given days, hours or quantities of product. They have a house and a field which they cultivate and upon whose product they live, but they give the nobleman and the priest a share in the grain, the wine, the strength

of the arm and, they said, the sweetness of their daughter. Report, for a positive, evident, clear and "fair" economic science.

Therefore, within that closed circle, the *personal dependence* of all agricultural workers on the baron - within that same circle - the *production and consumption* of all that both of them need to consume, in varying quantities but still with little qualitative gap for simplicity. Producers and products never cross the circle: the gentleman with his armed court defends their integrity from invaders. Gradually, relations become complicated, and the feudal lord with his company will leave to follow the king or emperor into the war who is meddling with nothing else within the *Wirkungskreise*; the bourgeois craftsmen will be placed on the edge of the castle; from time to time merchants from afar will tickle the *castellana* with brocades and jewels from overseas, who still doesn't know what a bathroom is.

There is nothing fetishistic in the open subtraction of work. The mystical aspect of this society lies in the inexorable division between the *orders*: the quality of noble is just as hereditary by family as that of peasant, even if it comes from the fertilization of *jus primae noctis*. This was by the will of God who handed down the investiture of power to the dynasties of nobles and kings, blessed by parish priests and popes.

This seemed gloomy to the bourgeoisie, all taken by the need to enlighten, in the French style, in the philosophical, legal and ethical fields. It is therefore amusing, as a cure against the rhetoric that from the first encyclopedists (always, Marx would say, giants of thought) is cloyingly drained to the crooked midgets of today's electoral rallies, to refer to the quotations of the robust classical English economic writers who were able to see the phenomenon to its roots.

The limits of the feudal circles were broken and erased from the map of France and other countries, both with the blade of the Widow and with the thunderbolts of Austerlitz, and at the same time the legal limits between the traditional orders were broken, with the new codes. All the same, whatever their stature upon birth, men freed from closed feudal dependence had the freedom to go anywhere to employ their business.

While writers and poets saw in this the passage from the world of darkness to that of the light of civilization, the new economists who arose among factory captains and merchant expeditions wrote that the objects previously consumed by those who had worked there, or brought by themselves on the tray with the back bent on the elegant table, they had become *commodities*. The values *of use* had become values *of exchange*. Justice triumphs: no one will take away a use value from others, everyone will be able to sell and buy on a common market without closed circles. The *personal freedom* has taken the place of *dependence*.

If everything is a commodity, everything is the domain of the new fetish. Marx solves the enigma, but the masses are today more interested in those of Turandot. Addiction means you work for ten and take one away from you; the other nine tenths are for you however.

Freedom means that with all ten tenths having become *commodities*, you have none left. The world, O free man, is open before you in place of the original *gleba* and the rural hut. You can have everything against money: you just have to make the small sacrifice of renting the short circle of your arms and your hours of sunshine to others.

Freedom; exchange value: you are born. You are unleashed unto the world.

### Yesterday

We will take as a guiding thread some basic concepts of economics, which Marx explored and characterized them, while finding their often brilliant statements and intuitions in his predecessors, and we will use them for what we shall politely refer to as an archaeological walk. *Use value. Exchange value. Individual work*, by which we mean the work of a worker who by himself perfects the product ready for consumption. *Associated work*, by which we generally mean the work of many to form a mass of products or works that remain with a man or entity. Marx's term is *Kooperation*, but we have always feared the confusion with modern association bodies to buy or produce with funds drawn from small shares. *Division of labor in society*, which refers to the different productive tasks of different groups of members of society, and which occurs in the particular form as the *professional division of labor. Division of labor in the production company*, a process by which the same product is obtained from successive operational interventions by different workers. *Islands of consumption* we can call the spheres or circles that Marx talked about. Islands of production we could call the various forms of organization in which a central management directs the efforts of the workers of a territory.

Leaving in the background, but certainly not ignoring, the factor of force, power, and also of tradition, of propaganda, let us briefly compare the presence of such phenomena in the subsequent historical phases.

We didn't take Robinson or Adam seriously. They could have neither exchange of products nor division of labor being alone in that one island which was the Eden of the Bible or the Unknown of the shipwreck, the first one from idleness and consumption, the second from work and consumption. It was certainly not an exchange, if the very vapid Eve in order to bite a simple knob signed a bill that we are all paying, but a real devilry. As for Crusoe, the second man he met was Friday, and having saved that dagger, with which Engels endlessly mocked Mr. Dühring, he hastened to establish a non-exchange relationship (since he was naked like Adam, and moreover of the same sex) but of open slavery, after explanation on the faith of the Bible that he was outside the Christian rights of the human person.

Less adventurously we could start from an evolved zoological species, and we find them living individually, in families, and in colonies. We will not say that they work, that they produce, let alone that they exchange, nevertheless we must admit that the animal, while reducing its use value to food, at least finds it in nature ready-made and sets out to research to be able to collect it; sometimes it preys on it by force to the brute of another or the same species, and in some cases deposits it in stock; there is no need to follow Maeterlinck or Kropotkin among his libertarian bees, not being able to deny that there is a division of labor and a social hierarchy, together with the construction industry.

A fundamental fact for Marx and Engels on the basis of the studies relating to primitive communities is that the human species just emerged from the animal state lives, in all

climates, grouped into communities. We will not recall once more the principal phases of the savage state, and of the lower and upper stages of barbarism.

Although at the beginning these groups live only on foods that they collect and consume in the natural state, and although the men are few in number and the territories immense, so that generally they easily move to more fertile areas for spontaneous vegetation when they have exhausted the resources of that who inhabited, as soon as we have the first forms of activity: hunting, fishing, rudimentary vegetable cultivation, rudimentary tool making, which hunting itself requires, we must recognize the existence of organized social forms. Food and objects take on a use value, and the members of the community perform functions that are real work activities.

We have the use value, but not the *exchange* value. We have associated work, but not *individual* work. We have no companies, but the *clan* community, that is the whole society, is the only company. Within it there is a division of simple tasks, which Marx calls physiological, immediate, natural, since it is practically evident what the child, the woman, the adult man, the old man is capable or willing to do. There is not yet a technical "manufacturing" division of labor, but there is a full *social* division of work, regulated not irrationally, not left to chance or arbitrariness. These ancestors of ours know only one circle of production and consumption, they do not distinguish between effort and the need for one or the other. Here the foundations of the building are laid without the banal pillars of the scholastic construction of the economists, who take the regime they want to arrive at for earthly paradise, and which would be based on insurmountable individual interests and their immanent contradiction. I care for you not to be screwed by you. After all, the old mocked myths of Eden that Satan took from us, and of *the golden age*, are nothing but the naive version of this initial life so far away from us and our convulsions.

It is logical that the bourgeoisie praises Satan, since in order to unroll the film we too know that it had to put a smoky tail on it. But the bourgeois theory is bestial, that its diabolical influence is inseparable from the men of the past millennia and of those to come.

Let's take a moment to measure the *azimuth* of some point on the coast, to see that we don't lose the right course.

Chapter XII of Marx has the fundamental paragraph 4 on the "Division of labor within manufacturing and division of labor within society" which is another main cornerstone.

"Within the same tribe, a natural and spontaneous division of labor originates ... on a *purely physiological basis* ..., the exchange of products begins in the points in the asses, different families, tribes, communities come into contact, because, at the first dawn of civilization, not private persons, but families, tribes, etc. confront each other as independent entities".

Therefore, not from Robinson, but from two *clans*, the exchange was born. Marx also recalls that the subjugation of the weakest tribe could have taken place in an armed struggle: Morgan, Engels and Bebel reminded us that in the society of the *phratries*, if there is war, one mostly exterminates and does not subjugate the conquered group, economically logical solution because it leaves the monopoly of the *circle* to a few, and does not force them to divide, as will be further on, between lords and slaves.

In one way or another: trade, or subjugation, division of labor will also appear within the tribe. First you had

"the exchange between spheres of production [we had not invented them] *originally different, but mutually independent*".

And then the workers of the same tribe, who were dependent on each other and communists for everything, begin to make themselves *independent*, and exchange the products of their work. Since then, communism and freedom have been mugged: and what did it take to get this into your head!

At the end of this paragraph, Marx returns to the primitive community, and makes a moving description of those of India (which still exist in some places despite the vulgar *demoborgo* Pandit Nehru), noting that in their ambit there is no trace of "anarchy of social division of labor "proper to capitalist mercantilism, nor to political despotism, Marx demonstrates how much balance, harmony, fraternity and wisdom there is in this" planned and authoritarian organization of social work ". With just a dozen "officials", who go as far as the poet!

It would be truly poetic to believe that the history of humanity could stop at the coexistence of these sparse oases of good little men. The human animal, if it had all the defects that philosophers and economists attribute to it, would seriously be the worst of beasts, but that of proliferating has it for granted, and the developed ability to chat and therefore to think leads straight to that of resist the environment, and not only survive its dangers, but embark on the triumphal march of population growth and the most worrying crowding.

The society of the tribes is succeeded by that of the great powers of warrior leaders and even theocrats, typical of Asia, the cradle of the most advanced race. In this much more complex society, the various aspects overlap. We will find in the ancient empires in limited numbers the self-employed artisan workers, the self-employed farmers, the merchants who travel the first water and land routes. But above all we have extensive use of collective labor, in large masses, by the great powers.

"The effect of simple cooperation appears gigantic, that is without the technical division of the work phases in the colossal works of the ancient Asians, Egyptians, Etruscans, etc."

When Alexander of Macedon conquered Babylon, they say he paused to read the inscription on the tomb of Queen Semiramis. "I forced the immense rivers into their bed and with the waters and silt of them I fertilized exterminated provinces. The Assyrians, who did not know what the sea was, led on four shores [Mediterranean, Persian, Caspian, Black]. I founded the immense cities with the hanging gardens and the seven walls, not defeated by any enemy. Nor did I lack time for joys and loves "

Alexander, and more than him the Roman conquerors, represented social forms founded on a solid military state network, on connecting roads, on fleets and systems of equipped ports. The basis of production was stable agriculture, both with the work of masses of slaves and with free farmers, ready to become legionaries for new conquests. In the context of the slave estates or small farms, consumption on the spot and for separate production islands prevails, but, especially in the political capitals and on the coasts or in the stop towns of the great land itineraries, there is undoubtedly a more advanced division

of labor and an exchange market. Therefore classical antiquity in the maximum of its state units based on the fixity of agricultural populations knew trade and exchange value, and even to a limited extent the work of paid free men; so that there was talk of a capitalism in Greece and Rome: above all there were the great works of the state, bridges, aqueducts, canals, embankments, forums, theaters, and building contractors.

"However, his ideal, even in material production, remained self-sufficiency, [the self-sufficient company, which produces for its own consumption] is opposed to the division of labor 'because in this there is well-being, in that also independence' ".

Thus in classical antiquity the closed islands of production-consumption dominate over the mercantilism of general exchange, and a connective tissue is more of a political and military nature. Ancient philosophers extol *use value*.

This unity of the empire fell with the barbarian invasions, of hordes that were not yet fixed and suitable for agricultural work, and had multiplied on sterile and cold lands: from the clash medieval society was born, of which we have given the various references, which it requires a new stability of the peoples, with a federalist rather than centralized order.

In the feudal organization, therefore, agricultural production rests on self-sufficient circles of production and subsistence, within which provisions do not yet take on the character of commodities. But already the needs of other articles, from clothing to tools, are so developed that the craftsman profession must provide for them. The thousand shackles of the organization by corporations are all aimed at curbing commercialism.

"The merchant could buy all goods, only not work as a commodity. He was only tolerated as an agent for the placement of artisan products on the market."

However, artisan products are distributed as exchange values on a market, albeit fragmented by continuous barriers, including municipal ones, and a social division of labor, as in previous times, but much more particular, is already underway. But the technical (manufacturing) division of labor is missing: master and apprentice end up knowing how to finish the same object; shoe or sword. We can't talk about associated work yet.

## **Today**

We live in the height of capitalist production and commodity distribution, and it is certainly not possible to summarize the description of its stormy course.

Less than in a few oases of family agricultural production, and less than in the heart of countries inhabited by the colored races, every human endowment now appears as a "heap of commodities", and there are no use-values that are not transformed into values of exchange. *Individual* artisan work survives almost everywhere for certain items, but it is the *associated* work that dominates the field. The transformation that took place in the way of producing the artifacts, made possible the rise of the national and then world market, and accompanied the *social* division of work between class and class, city and countryside, category and professional category, the business division for which each worker no longer knows what to do in a single phase of processing and, also for this

reason, does not have any product. The islands of consumption have melted into the general sea, and so the islands of production have grouped into ever larger blocks.

Here has come the step at which our dialectical vision of those conditions which were necessary to increase the productivity of labor, and which we therefore see *accelerating* as *useful* conditions, and of those characteristics of the commodity society which we intend to *overcome* in the revolutionary process, has to be understood.

It is necessary that all the values of *use* pass into the furnace of *exchange* values, but the communist organization in the meantime will build on this necessary condition, since it will lead back to pure *collective values*, common as in the first *fratria*, the large stocks and social facilities.

That *individual* work yields to *associated* work is such a factor of exalted performance that it constitutes another pillar of a new organization. But the general associated work for a short time, in a collectivist production, given the new characteristics of the assignment of work, will leave very high margins for the most varied ranges of individual non-mercantile activities.

The *corporate division* of labor, after having given its results, must fall, and with it in a broad sense the same *professional* and *social* division, precisely to the extent that the scientific direction of every function in the sectors of productive work will be unique and central. In fact, every commercial and corporate system cannot be separated from the *despotism* of the division of company functions and from the anarchic *disorder* of production in society.

This anarchy leads to decompensation and economic crisis, and therefore to the collapse of the mercantile system. But another is the class planning that modern capitalism implements to ward off the consequences of this inherent anarchy, and which is planning for the repression of antagonisms, and general calculation for the purposes of the maximum commercial yields of the company, another is *our* planning of work and of general consumption, calculation of use values in physical units, and not of mercantile values.

The disappearance of the *islands of consumption* is an acquired result, but the concentration of *production* in large corporate units of associated labor remains *capitalist* until, as the consumer market is already unique in capitalist time, the "territory of production" is unique. It must be that all peoples stand, or at least of all the most advanced, with international plans valid everywhere, for wheat, or for steel, or for oil.

It remains to report some stages of this journey (which is already happening before our eyes as to the overwhelming of the ancient "spheres of life" in the only mercantile whirlpool in the world, and which will be completed when the slave characters already defined in the capitalist organization fall) to the fundamental passages of Marx; so that the communist organization for which the proletariat fights and will fight is not confused with the situation of the countries of great monopoly imperialism, and worse still with that of today's Russia and its Eurasian sphere.

Chapter XI. *Cooperation:*

"Capitalist production, as we have seen, really begins only when the same individual capital [the usual translator-traitor: the same master] simultaneously employs a fairly large number of workers, and therefore the labor process extends its area by supplying products on a scale *quantitative* relevant. a large number of workers who are working at the same time in the same space (or, if you will, in the same field of work), to produce the same kind of goods and under the command of the same capitalist form is historically that conceptually the *starting point of capitalist production*".

Therefore accepted the association of efforts and in fact:

"In collaborating with others according to a plan, the worker sheds his individual limitations and develops his own faculties of the species".

But capital uses this association for the purpose of producing commodities and extorting *profit*; and this we reject; in the sense that at the end of the cycle the working association remains, the mercantile character and the surplus value fall.

"First of all, the motivating motive and the determining purpose of the capitalist productive process is ... the greatest possible exploitation of the labor force ... Finally, the cooperation of wage workers is a simple effect of the capital employing them at the same time. the link between their functions, and their unity as a global productive body [communist claim], reside *outside* of them, in the capital that brings them together and holds them together".

And therefore, for Marxists, whenever there is production of *commodities*, and a system of wages and *salaries*,

"As cooperating individuals [the workers], as members of a single acting organism [which we would like!], they are but a particular mode of existence of capital. Therefore the productive force that the worker develops *as a social worker is force productive of capital*".

Chap. XIII. *Division of labor and manufacturing*. (We note that the social concepts discussed here are the same in simple manufacturing, organic manufacturing, machinism, large industry). Cited paragraph 4, from which we took the steps relating to pre-capitalist phases.

"Since the production and circulation of commodities are the general presupposition of the capitalist mode of production, the manufacturing division of labor requires a division of labor within the society which has already matured to a certain degree of development".

"Rich material for the division of labor within society then provides the manufacturing period with the expansion of the world market and the colonial system, which belong to the specific circle of its general conditions of existence. This is not the place to show more copying details of how it takes hold, as well as the economic sphere, of every other sphere of society, and everywhere lays the foundations, of that development of specializations and of that fragmentation of man, which already snatched from A. Ferguson, the master by A. Smith, the cry: 'We create a nation of helots, and there are no free men among us'".

The corporate division of labor, professional specialization, the very social division of labor, *are fought* in the vision of a communist organization.

"The manufacturing division of labor presupposes the unconditional authority of the capitalist over men who form pure and simple cogs of a collective mechanism of his own".

Further on, Marx speaks of corporate despotism, of idiotic automata.

"... the same individual is divided, transforming it into an automatic device of a partial work, and the absurd fable of Menenio Agrippa is realized, which represented man as a pure and simple fragment of his body". Workers like arms, exploiters like stomachs. "Just as it was written on the forehead of the chosen people that it was the property of Jehovah, so the division of labor gives the factory worker a brand name, which marks him as the property of capital."

"The social division of labor opposes one to another independent producers of goods, [in false futurist conceptions they would be independent companies] who recognize no other authority than that of *competition*, that is, the constraint exerted on them by the pressure of their mutual interests in the way that, in the animal kingdom, the *bellum omnium contra omnes* more or less safeguards the conditions of existence of all species".

The *anarchy of the social division of labor* and *despotism in the corporate division of labor* characterize bourgeois society .

The critique of the division of human functions leads to the condemnation of the city-country antithesis, as well as to the condemnation of that between the work of the arm and the mind. And when in the Chapter on big industry Marx looks directly to the future and to the

"Inevitable conquest of political power by the working class"

He states that

"The *capitalist form of production*, and the economic situation of the worker which corresponds to it, stand at the antipodes with those revolutionary ferments and with the direction in which they go: the *suppression of the old division of labor*. But the development of the antagonisms of a historical form of production is the only historical way to its dissolution and its metamorphosis".

If Russia is all an orgy of specialization, of despotic division of labor in the company and society, even of forced labor with deportation of associated workers to the processing fields, this is not because Stalin is a rogue, but because nothing else is to be done to establish capitalist production, in a time in which the secular stages from the first semi-artisan manufacturing to the very large mechanized industry have now *burned out*. There is nothing else to be done to combat corporate anarchy, a struggle that transpires from the very balance sheets of the USSR at every step.

State capitalism tries to fight against the anarchy of production, but since it produces *commodities* and worries about production *costs*, it can only do so by exasperating the corporate *despotism* on the wage-earner.

It is not this *socialist administration*. Socialism will free the worker, and thus man, from social anarchy and corporate oppression, from the division of labor and from specializations at the same time. This long struggle will start from the moment and the sectors in which monetary mercantilism emerges.

From *bellum omnium contra omnes* we will pass to communism only when every act of *emulatory* stimulus is excluded from the organization of life.

It is therefore that the wretch who began to test the maximum quantity of coal that can be removed with a pickaxe from the walls of the gallery in a day's work, and that every Marxist would yearn to kick in his ass, has become a national hero.

But there is also logic in this. National heroes are needed for capitalist society. Communism abolishes heroes.